

CHAPTER THREE
MISSIONARY WRITING AND THE NARRATIVES
OF ANTI-CONQUEST

Without doubt, textual representations of missionary work in India influenced both British imperial policy and missionary society practice. As Jane Haggis notes, 'the missionary account of India and its women was, if not the main, then undoubtedly a primary contributor to the public perceptions of India as an appropriate subject of British imperial rule.' (Anna Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire* 79)

The concentration of Protestant missionary activity in India in the early years of the nineteenth century coincided with a degree of intense religious interest in ministering to 'the heathen' among church and community groups within England, and these groups were eager for eye-witness accounts of colonial encounters. (Johnston 80)

They were not just women travellers, they were white women travellers. While patriarchy repressed them at home, racism facilitated these women's freedom in the Orient. (Joanne Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism* 46)

These lady travelers were not all commanding, they did not write in a distanced or scientific way, and they were not part of official expeditions sponsored by scientific societies or governments, so they tended to speak to ordinary members of the countries they visited rather than officials. (Sharp 46)

European aspirations must be represented as uncontested. Here the textual apartheid that separated landscape from people, accounts of inhabitants from accounts of their habitat, fulfills its logic. The European improving eye produces subsistence habitats as "empty" landscapes, meaningful only in terms of a capitalist future and of their potential for producing a marketable surplus. (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 61)

This chapter discusses the selected texts written by American Baptist missionaries and the representation of the indigenous 'other' in their narratives. It deals with issues that were imperative to the survival of the Mission in Assam and its relationship with the colonial government. It is argued in this chapter, qua Pratt, that missionary writings use the discourse of 'anti-conquest,' a paradoxical combination of innocence and imperialist ideology in the representation of the 'other.' The missionaries maintained a relationship with colonial governance that is as significant as intriguing in the sense that there was a

mutual understanding between the two amidst disavowal of colonial hegemony. The fact that they tried to assert the relevance of the Mission and the importance of Christian education as well as vernacularism in the colonialist project is an interesting example of 'anti-conquest' othering. This is available in the writings of Ward and Vickland, for instance, who emphasize the enlightenment brought about by the colonial government whereas Marston and Swanson highlight the misery of the indigenous people under colonial rule.

It is seen that missionary wives played as important a role as the men or women who were directly employed as missionaries amongst the people. The missionary societies preferred to engage couples, rather than single men, for the missionary enterprise. As a result, women were active alongside the men in their missionary activities. While women were not expected to preach, they took up the responsibility of teaching language and reading skills, apart from health concerns and other domestic skills, amongst the women in the places around their Mission. They played a public role rather than as just supportive wives as documented in their writings in the form of memoirs, diaries, travel and ethnographical accounts. Despite these missionary writers being American and independent of the colonial authorities in Assam, there appears to have been a tacit understanding which tied the missions with empire and the colonial state.

As pointed out by Midgley in *Feminism and Empire*, "the role of male missionary and missionary's wife in practice overlapped considerably":

Only men could gain the formal qualifications of a full missionary... and only men could perform that primary component of a missionary's role, namely preaching. However, despite these restrictions, women found ways of carving out a far greater space for female missionary agency...missionary wives developed their own particular spheres of expertise in the field and forged direct links with female supporters at home, ladies' associations targeted their funds at female education projects, and women-run societies were formed to promote the Christian education of 'native' girls by both missionary wives and single women.
(95)

From supporting their spouses, these women gradually gained recognition for their work which claimed a separate space for themselves. They gained access where men failed to

connect. This includes the women in the interiors of the colonies and such other regions, as well as the women in their home countries. As Johnston observes,

Missionary women in India... had a particular insight into the details of domestic arrangements and gender practices denied to their male partners and, as a result, they were encouraged to publish accounts of their experiences. (Johnston, *Missionary Writing and Empire* 8)

In fact, these women got more scope to mark their presence in the colonial spaces than at home where they had to live within patriarchal structures.

It follows that women in England and America started supporting the activities of their missionary counterparts through financial and other logistic support, and through sufficient publicity to make their contribution through their work to the colonial cause or to the society acceptable.

From 1820, several ladies' associations of the Baptist Missionary Society began to channel their funds into support for specific schools for 'native girls' set up by Baptist missionary wives in India....The public image of centralised male metropolitan control over missionary work in the field thus masked a more complex reality in which British women formed links with specific female missionary educators in the field. (Midgley 97)

Not only did these women missionaries gain support and recognition, their promoters also "articulated women's missionary duty as an imperial duty" (Midgley 111). This shows that missionaries might have worked independently alongside colonial authorities but they were seldom in conflict with each other. While British women missionaries were seen as an extension of their country's colonial agenda, American missionaries in Assam enjoyed a little more freedom in the sense that they were not directly under colonial control. However, they operated under colonial governance and were expected to comply with the Authorities like anybody else.

This study explores the political agencies working behind the Mission and the extent to which they influenced its writings. Apart from focusing on the Missionary authors' assertion of their religious hegemony and thereby colonial hegemony at large, this chapter examines the different political factors contributing to the shaping of the narratives. It studies the Mission's effort to establish its relevance and to justify its

conduct before the colonial government which was in fact an endeavour to put an end to all the conflicts that had taken place between the Mission and the government. At the same time, it examines the nuances in their writings in terms of the representation of both the indigenous people and the colonials. As observed by Johnston, “The usual breezy optimism expressed by the society's missionaries in public accounts is sometimes undermined by a sub-text of alternative and challenging narratives” (82). In fact, this chapter examines the politics of Missionary writing on Assam which on the surface assumes the rhetoric of the ‘anti-conquest.’ As Pratt explains, “in travel and exploration writings these strategies of innocence are constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era” (*Imperial* 7). It appears that missionary writing, especially British missionary writing was deliberately complicit with the colonial project.

As Johnston observes, Missionary writing threw light on the ethnographic, cultural and climatic as well as territorial differences in the colonies:

Missionary texts are crucial to understanding cross-cultural encounters under the aegis of empire because they illuminate the formation of a mode of *mutual imbrication* between white imperial subjects, white colonial subjects, and non-white colonial subjects. (*Missionary Writing and Empire*, 3)

She explains that “the ways in which colonial cultures enacted imperial philosophies were by no means straightforward,” that in fact, “colonial missionary writing changed the ways in which crucial facets of nineteenth-century culture could be represented” in Britain (3). While Missionaries were often presented as ‘benign’ and “generally divested of agency,” critics like Johnston (and Midgley) see them as “highly conscious of the nature of their evangelical projects and their potential effect, both in colonial cultures and back in the imperial metropolis”(2). Moreover, as Johnston points out, “British missionary commentators sought, by their 'zeal', to remake colonial projects in the image of religious conversion. In doing so, missionaries constructed an ambiguous, ambivalent position for themselves within colonial cultures, a position negotiated in the many texts they produced...”(2) The missionaries tried to explain the project of colonization and make it acceptable to the indigenous people of the colonies as well as their fellow Englishmen, back home in England. This kind of writing by British missionaries was common in different parts of India, especially by women who managed to reach out to the Indian women inside their homes.

In Assam, which was undivided at that time, as mentioned earlier, the British missions, the Welsh Presbyterian mission to be precise, did not achieve much and had to fold up. It was left to the American Baptist missionaries from 1836 onwards to work amongst the indigenous people of the region and at the same time act as intermediaries between the colonial British administrators and the people. While the American missionaries were invited to work in Assam by the then British administrator, Jenkins, and depended on the imperial government for their presence in the region, they did not work completely as agents of the crown. Rather, in their promotion of the vernacular language instead of Bengali as the medium of communication, the Americans contested British orders, as mentioned in the Introduction. Since their purpose was to reach out to the common people to spread their religious message, they realised the need for a language that the people would understand and at the same time be comfortable handling. In this they were proved right as the people responded to their efforts to promote the Assamese language through a grammar, a dictionary as well as creative writing based on biblical stories. After successfully reviving the language, they turned to address other areas like health and education as well as religion. Some of the missionary wives took to recording their observations in the shape of travel narratives where, despite their efforts to understand the indigenous people in Assam, they appeared as the cultural and racial other.

The hypotheses taken up in this chapter are:

- i. That the central focus of missionaries was to affirm the superiority of Christianity over other native faiths;
- ii. That the authors highlight the enlightenment project of the Mission as a part of the colonialist scheme;
- iii. That the authors aimed at justifying those activities of the mission which were apparently going astray from the colonial scheme;
- iv. That the social positions of the missionaries determined their subject positions in their narratives;
- v. That there is a kind of textual mediation in the continual recirculation of narrative structures, phrases, patterns, and source material (Johnston).

The texts selected for this chapter are written by American Baptist Missionaries as mentioned above and they are as follows: *A Glimpse of Assam* (1884) by Susan R. Ward,

Korno Siga, The Mountain Chief; or Life in Assam (1889) Mildred Marston, *Through Judy's Eyes* (1923) and *With Christ in Assam* (1925) by Ellen Elizabeth Vickland and *In Villages and Tea Gardens* (1944) by Oscar L. Swanson.

The Assam Mission, initially called the Shan Mission, was set up in 1836 at Sadiya in Upper Assam. Reverend Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter were the first Baptist missionaries to come to this region. Their arrival marks the beginning of a new era as they brought the printing press with them which was almost like a magical instrument to the people of Assam. Their contribution towards the formation of the standard Assamese language and modern Assamese literature was immense for which the Assamese community has been indebted to them till date. However, the arrival of the American Baptist missionaries in Assam was a deliberate step taken by the colonial Government as part of its colonialist policies. In *With Christ in Assam*, Elizabeth Vickland's statement explains this policy very well. She writes:

In the early days before law and order had been established in the province there was a great deal of *trouble* on the frontiers. The agents of Britain realized that there was a need of a great steadying influence, so the Commissioner of Assam sent an appeal to the Baptists in Calcutta for missionaries. This appeal was sent to the American Baptist Mission in Burma, and two missionaries were sent in answer. (*With Christ* 108-109) [Italic mine]

The government wanted to end that 'trouble' and they certainly found a way. As discussed in the previous chapter, in many colonial texts written by British administrators this aspect is evident; the authors are seen to offer suggestions to the missionaries regarding their work field.

Many administrative officers tried to highlight that the Mission would succeed if they put their efforts amongst the hill tribes. In his *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal*, Alexander Mackenzie records that the missionaries' opinion on the implementation of new government policies was considered important while dealing with the hill tribes. Similarly, in the missionaries' accounts there is always a positive attitude towards the British government and the writers hint at working together as one institution. As Johnston points out:

Their aim was variously to inculcate public support for missionary endeavours; to ensure an on-going supply of donated funds from individuals, institutions, and governments; to cultivate a community of like-minded British citizens who would stand up for missionary interests in the face of more aggressive mercantile, industrial, or territorial interests; and to encourage a community of potential missionary recruits. (*Missionary Writing* 7)

They maintained a relationship which was quite significant and intriguing as well. It was more of a mutual understanding between the two and the missionaries' efforts can aptly be interpreted as endeavours to establish colonial hegemony through cultural and religious hegemony. This agenda was always at work behind their religious activities as evident in their writings on Assam, especially the texts taken for discussion.

All these five texts were by American Baptist missionaries who came to Assam during different phases of British rule in Assam. They came with a common interest and their accounts can be called vignettes of their religious activities and accomplishments across the region. The Mission literature tried to establish the superiority of Christianity over other indigenous faiths. At the same time, both political and commercial motives influenced the narratives. In their attempts the authors tried the methods of either 'telling' or 'showing' at times whereas sometimes they sought help of both.

Susan R. Ward on Assam's Resources

Among the travel texts on Assam, Susan Ward's *A Glimpse of Assam* is significant as the narrative addresses many issues which have much relevance in postcolonial criticism. In the Preface, Ward declares that her "Glimpse" may be of use to those who are interested to invest in Assam. She aims at highlighting the future prospects in the country including commercial prospects, thereby inviting the colonial investors to come to this 'magnificent valley' (6). She gives a brief account of the industries in the region, focusing on the tea industry, with every possible bit of information on the profits to be made. As such, the narrative not only is informative about the resources in the country but at the same time it also throws new light on the facets of missionary writing. In fact, the book can aptly be called a joint venture for both colonialism and Christianization.

It can be regarded as one of the most political narratives dealing with the mercenary enterprise of colonialism. What distinguishes it from other texts of its kind is the way the narrator looks at the land and extols its virtues which was quite uncommon. The sight of

the landscape which is dull to many travellers' eyes is different to Ward. She introduces the region in the following manner:

Assam, in some respects, will not bear comparison with some of the more settled and civilized portions of India, but the territory of the soil, the salubrity of the climate, the number of rivers and streams, and in grandeur of hill scenery, we venture to say, Assam has scarcely a rival in any part of India of equal extent. (*Glimpse 2-3*)

Although the province was not yet a settled British colony, Ward believes that there was much scope for the colonial project. Her aim is to invite and encourage westerners to visit this place of beauty and fecundity.

The writer dons the mask of an innocent traveller narrating whatever meets her eye and ear. In fact, this supposed innocence on the part of the narrator traveller has been a common feature in colonial narratives which is but a part of the rhetorical strategy. Ward's tactics seem to be persuasive and can be taken in line with Pratt's anti-conquest. She seems to be very positive and appreciative while dealing with people and places. In fact, Ward is very tactical while handling this stratagem which adds a distinctive quality to her narrative. Calling the Brahmaputra "the great artery of Assam" (4) she informs that "the valley of Assam lies on each side of the river... for about 800 miles, terminating above Sadiya, where the river bends directly north to the Himalayas" (3, 4). Interestingly, Ward describes the river from the bottom end to its entry into Assam from the Himalayas, in line with her own awareness of it as she enters Assam by boat. However, she warns about the river's dangerous potential: "Destruction is its constant work, breaking away embankments and piling up sandbars that obstruct navigation" (5). That notwithstanding, Ward observes, "what would the province be without this great glorious river" (6)? She adds: "it is indeed the gift of god and a fountain of blessing to the people" (6). As far as she is concerned, Assam is a wonderful place to visit during the dry season covering autumn and winter.

She looks beyond the common complaint against the region and tries to convince her readers that the things were not as they had been represented by many people. For instance, it was quite usual on the part of most westerners to complain about the climate of the region as not favourable and conducive to their health. Ward's views on the climate are not so bad. Breaking away from narrow generalization she thinks that any

place can be unfriendly to a newly arrived person and therefore one needs to be careful while visiting a new place. According to her, this works the same way in case of the climate of Assam:

Some new-comers, ignorant or careless about the consequences, expose themselves unnecessarily to the hot sun of mid day or to be drenched in rain, and what is especially obnoxious to health, travel through the jungle in the rainy season; these should not find fault with the climate but with themselves when they fall ill. (9)

She blames the unwary visitors for not taking care in the tropical climate. Most of the colonial people considered the climate of the region deadly. That was the given reality. Instead of complaining, Ward looks for ways of negotiating these difficulties. She observes that “much has been done to improve the means of communications between the stations and tea estates...in a country where rivers and streams are so numerous and the annual rainfall an average of hundred inches” (8). Further, that “much yet remains to be done in the elevation of roads and in bridging rivers and ditches to make travelling safe and comfortable” (8). She notes that many Europeans have lived a healthy life in Assam and it is possible for the others too if only a few small precautions are taken. She sums up the situation with this comment:

However, braving some hardships on this core, a most enjoyable tour may be made through wild virgin forest, richly decked with ferns and flowers, now and then broken by the low level rice fields of the villagers whose thatched roofs are seen among the trees on its outer edge, and here and there a tea plantation with its bungalow, tea house and cooly lines, and all around rows of the dark green fragrant bush stretch away over plain, slope or hill. (8)

In the above lines, Ward captures the picturesque natural bounty of Assam, even as she documents the co-existence of the local people amidst their rice fields with the tea plantations, obviously managed by Europeans.

However, her views regarding the indigenous people and their affairs are quite the contrary. Ward does not show the same positive attitude in her description of the inhabitants of the country: she seems to be critical not about the place but about the inhabitants and their culture:

With regard to the character of the people not much can be said in praise. Among the high caste there is considerable intelligence and outward morality, but generally the people are ignorant, indolent, and wanting in moral principle or conduct. (26)

She is not particular in describing the people as she seems to share a similar opinion with her contemporary travellers in her description of the people and their affairs. Moreover, she appears to be critical of the indolence that she notices in the people failing to connect it with the climatic condition. Thus she calls the Assamese a sickly race suffering from different diseases.

Ward finds them very superstitious and extravagant in their ways. She further says:

Sincerity is foreign to the native character; self-interest is the ruling principle under a show of humility and regard. Falsehood is universal from the oldest to the youngest, in fact they are so much in the habit of lying, that they sometimes neglect to tell the truth when it would be for their interest to do so. (28)

Ward attributes the native with such characters which depict a typed image of the Oriental 'other.' She finds the low class people very corrupt and thinks that the only means of improving them is through the introduction of Christian education. Such descriptions of the indigenous people illustrate Memmi's contentions that "These images become excuses without which the presence and conduct of a colonizer, and that of a bourgeois, would seem shocking. But the favored image becomes a myth precisely because it suits them too well...(F)or the sake of this portrait and accusation, the often-cited trait of laziness...seems to receive unanimous approval of colonizers" (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* 123). He explains that this description "occupies an important place in the dialectics exalting the colonizer and humbling the colonized" because it justifies the colonizer's presence and also allows them to pay lower wages to the colonized workers (123). It follows that the "mythical portrait of the colonized includes an unbelievable laziness, and that of the colonizer, a virtuous taste for action" across the colonial discourse (123).

Her narrative offers what Pratt calls a 'naturalist's rhetoric of anti-conquest' for in *A Glimpse of Assam* Ward tries to show beautiful bare lands waiting for the colonizers to tap and utilize. Her rhetoric here is that these places need to be made livable through the

intervention of Christianity and colonialism. In sharp contrast with the progressive and superior nation it is necessary to see the natives stand to benefit from colonization. Ward observes: “the only hope of an improvement in the race is the diffusion of Christianized education” (43). She is no doubt aware that such an education and conversion to Christianity would only be possible under colonial rule.

It follows that Ward criticizes the religion of the indigenous people. For her, Hinduism, which was the dominant faith in Assam, made the people fatalists and superstitious. She says, “Dark and hopeless as such a religion is, they cling to it with a tenacity, similar to that with which they cling to their ploughshares” (35-36). In fact, the narrative begins with an idea of Hinduism in the region and Ward’s remarkable statement: “Over dark Assam the morning light is breaking, the darkness disappears” (2) indicative of the advent of colonialism. Colonization and Christianity have brought in changes to a region that had been suffering in darkness. A new religious faith and the technology brought about by the British government were showing the way to the people. It was in fact a common tendency in missionary writing to criticize the dominant faiths in the region and to highlight the superiority of Christianity.

However, Ward mentions a few appreciable things about the ‘native.’ Their attitude towards those whom the ‘native’ consider superior is remarkable to note:

The people are generally polite and respectful to their superiors: a native passing a European on the road closes his umbrella, or if riding, dismounts. Respect for superiors is carefully maintained among themselves; a low caste man may be seen bowing to the ground before a Brahmin. (27)

She is amazed by the sense of responsibility amongst the people towards their relatives, including the old and the helpless. She wonders at the concept of large families with many dependents on a single breadwinner. Nevertheless, Ward is suspicious of the respect shown to the European by the indigenous people: she calls it insincere and terms it as mere “oriental extravagance” (27). This shows that she was not able to take the people at face value.

She appreciates some of the hills people for their industrious and peaceful nature despite their ignorance. However, she describes the Nagas as bloodthirsty and gives instances of their attacks on Europeans. She believes that the people were in utter ignorance which

could be removed through Christianized education which is in fact, Ward's ultimate solution to every problem in the 'native' region.

An important observation made by Ward is regarding the language of the Assamese people. Many colonial people, particularly the administrators considered Assamese a derivative language from Bengali. But the missionaries were always against that and tried to establish Assamese as a completely different language. Ward says:

The Assamese language has been called by some a corruption of Bengalee, but not by anyone who has studied the languages critically. The best scholars in the language the province has ever had, among English officials and missionaries are of one opinion that it is a pure and copious language, rich in phraseology distinctively its own; like Bengalee and Hindustani, originating in ancient Sanskrit, there are many words common to all. (13)

To prove her point right, Ward gives a very simple logic that the Assamese people did not understand the Bengali language and vice versa. In this context, it would not be out of place to cite scholars like David Syiemlieh who observes that:

Missionaries contributed in no small measure to the shaping of tribal and Assamese identities. Were it not for the persistent efforts of American Baptist missionaries the Assamese might have had to accept the use of Bengali script for their language. The missionaries aided by their first convert, Nidhi Farwell developed the language....They stimulated...Assamese with...a modern literature and literary style, both through their own compositions and the publications of the Baptist Mission Press at Sibsagar. ("Colonialism and Christian Missions in North East India," *Indian Church History Review*, 2, 2013, 9)

He goes on to add that the missionaries through their enterprise ensured that "Grammars, dictionaries, school text books translations from Christian texts and reproductions of Assamese literary works including novels were printed in those early years" (9). The production of these texts was fortified by the first Assamese periodical:

The publication in 1842 of *Orunodoi*, a monthly periodical devoted to science, religion and general information gave the Assamese language a boost. All this prepared the Assamese, led by the Baptist missionaries, to agitate against the government decision to use Bengali in the law courts and schools of Assam. (9)

Thus through the agency of the American Baptist Missionaries, the Assamese language was revived, allowing the Assamese people to share the cultural space afforded by the *Orunodoi*.

Like many of her contemporary authors, Ward too does not deny the fact that the indigenous people had a glorious past. She says,

Although the country is now sparsely populated, evidences are numerous that the province in former times supported a large population, and kings and chiefs of great wealth. Goahati, Tezapore and many places in Upper Assam, are strewn with the debris of former grandeur...all these relics tell a sad story about depletion and devastation of the past. (*Glimpse* 18)

She describes some of the temples and other ruins that point to a different Assam. But there were no traces of that glory to be seen in the contemporary Assamese society. When the British came they discovered the natives in a deplorable state and in want of protection. Ward observes:

When the British took possession in 1827, the country had been distracted by internal feuds, devastated and partly depopulated by wars with neighbouring tribes, the new regime speedily changed this state of anarchy to one of continued peace and prosperity, such as had not been known in the province for generations.
(2)

She highlights the role of the colonial government in restoring order in the society. Ward's text appears to be more of a colonialist treatise than a simple vignette of missionary activities in Assam. She tries to present the place as a livable one which is in the process of development with the 'grace' of colonialism. She describes the development that the region had seen after it came under British rule; setting up of schools everywhere, medical facilities, postal arrangements, telegraphic communication etc. In fact, the inclination towards transforming the region in accordance with the colonial people's convenience and comfort is a motivating factor which has been emphasized the most in the narrative.

Ward describes the trouble taken by the postal system to deliver letters across the region from far off places like England. She asserts that Assam is by no means a disjunct but a developing place from where "a message can be sent to England in four hours from any

point” (25). She emphasizes that ‘telephone connections are becoming quite common in the Province’ (25) and that ‘letters from Calcutta reach Debrughur in eight days’ (23). She draws her readers’ attention towards the technology brought about by the colonial government which is transforming a hitherto backward place into a livable one for the common people as well as the Westerners.

Along with material progresses came an advanced education coupled with a superior religion, which are shown as part of colonial development. Ward seems to fit in with the existing discourse of philanthropy, that is, ‘the white man’s burden’ in the colonies. She tends to praise the picturesque beauty of the region but her main focus lies on the deplorable condition of the state and the efforts of the colonial government towards improving the situation. In this context, Ward points out:

If we consider what these people have been in the past, – nearly naked savages, filthy and barbarous in their habits and customs,—and observe the change that Christianity has wrought, we shall be constrained to praise the God of Missions. (217)

While some of the good work was done by the missionaries, some of it was facilitated by the colonial administrators and other secular agencies like tea planters and engineers, not to say doctors. The missionary women no doubt had access to the women inside their homes, but some infrastructural support came from the government personnel in Assam. That apart, Ward underlines the importance of a ‘benign Christian government’ (19). She calls the ‘natives’ inefficient as rulers. In her opinion, they are too unscrupulous to rule; she says, “give a native power and he is likely to be tyrannical, as native history proves” (126). However, Ward sees that the ‘natives’ have been much improved under the influence of Westerners.

Moreover, Ward is very hopeful about the tea industry. She describes the growth and development of the industry as well as life on the plantation. She finds that the planter had a lonely existence which was a ‘severe test of moral character’ (133). She calls the influence of the environment the greatest danger for a planter:

A planter’s greatest danger lies in the influence of his surroundings... he finds himself as free as the monkeys chattering among the trees to do as he pleases, restraint is gone, there is no one to notice his conduct for whom he cares “a rap”,

and the danger is he will ignore his knowledge of an All-seeing Eye, and sink into habits he would blush to own; (129)

It is interesting that Ward perceives a risk for Europeans from the wicked conduct of the 'natives.' This is but a very careful attempt on the part of the author to defend those European planters who might exhibit certain traits which she has attributed to the indigenous people. According to Ward, it is no wonder that in such a monotonous place, devoid of hope and company, people turn out to be 'perfect wrecks' (131). She sees the colonial people as superior with those exhibiting less worthy traits as succumbing to the sins of the colonized. This can be called an example of extreme prejudice against the 'other.' In order to avoid this, Ward suggests more people from the colonizer's country should come to make the region a livable and happy place.

Ward's focus on the importance of the British government and colonialism leads to the revelation of her narratorial 'self.' From the very beginning, in *A Glimpse of Assam*, it is a self-conscious traveller who is narrating the story of a region which has recently come under colonial rule. This consciousness is undoubtedly based on a binary vision asserting the status of two social groups. This self-assertive attitude is sustained throughout the narrative. What motivates the writing of the book is to justify the intervention of the British colonizers and at the same time, to encourage the coming of investors to Assam. With this in mind Ward describes the region as a vibrant, beautiful and fertile place. She does not however overlook the discomforts but switches back to the lively description of the scenic view so as to rhetorically compensate for the lack encountered by many of the outsiders in the region.

Ward goes on supporting the efforts of the colonial government endorsing its civilizing mission. She gives her logic—the natives are sickly and the colonial government is providing health services to them; they are ignorant and the government is providing education and setting up schools for them; the people are in darkness and the government is bringing light with them through the gospel of the Christ. It is indeed a strategy of the author to reduce the stature of the 'other' to such a degree so as to accentuate the advanced position and the superior status of the 'self.' And she believes that the superior collective 'self' through colonialism and Christianization will solve every problem in the region.

Mildred Marston's Framed Narrative

Mildred Marston's *Korno Siga, The Mountain Chief; or Life in Assam* can rather be called an account of the author's life as it covers the life of the missionary from a very early age. In fact, the genre of travel writing depicts this aspect of an individual which urges many critics to regard travel as the journey of the 'self.' In *Korno Siga*, Marston narrates the different happenings in her early life that prepared the ground for her visit to India. She informs that it was her childhood dream to come to India and to enlighten the suffering minds living in darkness and ignorance. This tells us about the presuppositions of the traveller about the people of India as ignorant and her desire to enlighten them. This points to the philanthropic nature that had been associated with the colonial people's activities in the colonized regions. So intense was this urge that Marston did not even hesitate to break her first engagement so that she could lead the life of a missionary in India. It is interesting to note that where Susan Ward is critical of the inhabitants of the travelled region in *A Glimpse of Assam*, Mildred Marston appears to be sympathetic towards the same in her account. Marston not only praises the beautiful and fertile land of Assam but seems to be fond of the people she had been working with. Nevertheless, like any other missionary she too thinks that the people were in darkness and it was her duty to illumine their minds with the help of the gospel.

Like many missionary writers, Marston in her narrative adopts the method of 'showing' rather than telling. She and her husband were sent to the hills of Assam and they worked amongst the tribes. Marston highlights the triumph of Christianity over other religions in Assam and to illustrate this she presents framed narratives. In fact, her use of these framed narratives with first person narrators can be called Marston's rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' in *Korno Siga*. At first, she gives extracts taken from her husband's notes and shows how he succeeded in his mission amongst the wild tribes with the help of his intellect. Mr. Marston narrates a conversation during his encounter with some people who were not very fond of the British government. Mr. Marston told them that he was not sent to them by the government and that he was not British but American. As per her husband's notes:

"Are you an Englishman?" They ask.

"No, I am an American, and have nothing to do with the setting up of a new government among you." (*Korno Siga* 61)

She reports that Mr. Marston conquered the wild tribe not only with words but also with his music. This again tells us the story behind the success of American Baptist missionaries in Assam against the failure of the English Mission. It was indeed a part of the whole design so as to make the natives accept the missionaries and their mission of conversion.

Marston then gives another framed account of a 'native' convert, Korno Siga who tells his story in a first person narrative. Korno Siga's narrative is very significant so far as Marston's rhetoric is concerned as the indigenous convert narrates how he has been disillusioned with different religious faiths before finally coming to embrace Christianity. Korno Siga was from a tribal community where people believed in spirits and considered diseases to be caused by evil spirits. He was born sickly and his people, as was unfamiliar with any kind of modern treatment, believed that the only way for the poor kid to get cured was to appease the evil spirits. Korno Siga worshipped the spirits of the trees but without any improvement. When his mother died he hoped to see the spirits and got disillusioned. Thus, Korno Siga lost faith in the community beliefs and approached a Hindu priest. That was a corrupt and cruel priest who sent Korno Siga on different Hindu pilgrimages and at home asked him to work for him. Korno Siga did not find any solace in that and then he approached a Mohammedan teacher only to get disappointed again. Finally, Korno Siga comes to the Marstons and finds peace in Christianity through conversion. This story is part of the persuasive rhetoric of the proselytizing project of missionaries.

Along with Korno Siga, Marston brings in other characters who had been through similar experiences. By portraying them Marston shows the superiority as well as the triumph of her religion over other faiths. She shows it through the characters' accounts of their own lives and faiths amidst the failure of the same in providing solace. There is an indication of cultural hegemony as the 'natives' are shown to be accepting this very fact of the superior status of the colonial religion. Marston believes that there is a longing in the indigenous people to emulate the people from that superior race and upgrade their own status. She shows it through the natives' behaviour and attitude as one of them says, "I want to learn to read and write, and become a white Christian" (100). Even the main protagonist of her story, Korno Siga shows similar longings and accepts the superiority of the Christian religion. It may be mentioned here that such behavior patterns fall in line with what Albert Memmi calls "the ambition of the colonized to become equal to the

splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him” (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* 164). This passion, however, has a negative side as Memmi explains:

The colonized does not seek merely to enrich himself with the colonizer’s virtues. In the name of what he hopes to become, he sets his mind on impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self. The crushing of the colonized is included among the colonizer’s values. As soon as the colonized adopts those values, he similarly adopts his own condemnation. In order to free himself... he agrees to destroy himself. (165)

Memmi compares this tendency in the indigenous people with that amongst the Jews to assimilate: “whether Negro, Jew or colonized, one must resemble the white man, the non-Jew, the colonizer” (166). At the extreme point “the colonized in the throes of assimilation hides his past, his traditions, in fact all his origins which have become ignominious” (166). However, after the colonized realizes that “he is becoming accustomed to looking at his own people through the eyes of their procurer,” he is forced to accept the colonizer’s rejection. Interestingly, missionary narratives take little cognizance of this complicated dynamic, and leave it to God and mutual goodwill among the people.

Marston’s ‘showing’ thus is an endeavour to establish what Jyotsna Singh calls Religious hegemony. It is not merely the traveller or the missionary who is preaching the superiority of their religion and culture but the acceptance of the same by the colonized people. As Nicholas Thomas points out:

The social process of conversion and development of a new Christian society in the native land is thus represented as dyadic affair: the missionaries on one side show the light and provide guidance, while on the other native respond to the dawn and happily learn to work within the new order. (*Colonialism* 139-40)

The missionaries’ self-projection as supervisors and caretakers of the colonized people was in fact their rhetoric in justification of their activities.

Marston brings in every major religion and shows the shortcomings in them. Having shown the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism, Islam and other indigenous religions, Marston moves on to an examination of Buddhism. She even creates a plot

where she could defend her religion against Buddhism, contending at the same time, the superiority of Christianity over Buddhism.

In Marston's narrative, thus, a superior missionary 'self' is presented which condemns and nullifies all religious faiths other than Christianity. Like those of Susan Ward and Elizabeth Vickland, the narratorial 'self' in Marston too is critical about the 'other' but in a mitigated way. She finds that "the people of Assam are naturally a religious people" (*Korno Siga* 96) despite their excessive superstitious beliefs.

She describes the hill tribes as "more peaceable than the others and never fought with their neighbors if they could escape it" (51). She observes that

These hill tribes were doubtless once the inhabitants of the beautiful Brahmapootra valley, and were driven thence by the invading Aryans, the forefathers of the Hindoos.

The barren mountains and the wild jungles were deemed good enough for these aboriginal inhabitants of Assam....A stronger and more cunning race decided that these aborigines must go and allow the conquerors to demonstrate the beauty of the "survival of the fittest." (50)

According to Marston, the Brahmaputra valley had been the site of colonization by earlier Asian races (other than the neighbouring Burmese), prior to the advent of the British. She feels that the once indigenous people of the Valley had been pushed to the mountains on the periphery. Those, according to her, are the tribals of Assam.

Interestingly, she draws a parallel between the indigenous people of America and Assam: "Very much after the same pattern have we Americans treated our aborigines. And we are far from...following the divine precepts of Christ, who taught us...the true brotherhood of man" (50). That notwithstanding, Marston observes that these tribals had been "outwitted by the crafty Hindoo" into losing their grip on the land (50). She goes on to observe that "In their native state, these mountain people are the most unkempt of all the Asiatic races....They are not idolaters...and are much less superstitious than the Hindoos" (53). By all accounts the Marstons found it easier to reach out to these people with little language and no learning. Mrs. Marston writes how she managed to persuade the families to allow their daughters to be instructed: "But by means of attractive music, bright colored jackets and a bottle of mustard oil I at last won my way into their hearts

and thus started my first girls' school" (57). This opened the way for colonial knowledge systems and Christianity amongst these people.

However, Marston seems to be honest in telling about the attractions of the new faith to the indigenous people. The scientifically far advanced western society was indeed a lure to the ignorant 'native' and they were sometimes mesmerized by the activities of the missionaries the way they would have felt had they seen some supernatural power. In fact, the scientific advancement and progress in the western society was really something that they could only equate with the mystic and thereby with God. Marston is honest enough to tell her readers how material gain and some amount of comfort tempted the natives towards conversion rather than their faith in the gospel. Marston says, "many a faithful native workers in India today owes his or her Christianization to a slipper" (64)! Her self-fashioning is done in a very subtle way if compared to other missionary writers of her time.

Like her contemporary writers Marston is critical of the indigenous people and their affairs, but in a subtle way. Although she expresses wonder at the difference between their ways and hers, she uses rhetorical devices to convey her point. These apparently soft but convincing tactics are seen even in the ways her husband dealt with the wild tribes. Thus the narratorial 'self' does not look opinionated although similar attitude is maintained while depicting the 'other.'

The same honesty is seen in discussions of the colonial government and its conduct in Assam. Marston praises the British government for eradicating certain ills from the society such as human sacrifices before the shrine of certain Hindu gods, the custom of throwing dead bodies of human beings into the river as was practiced by some natives and the consumption of opium. But at the same time, she also informs that the government was still monopolizing the opium trade in India.

Like Ward, Marston clearly states her opinion on the status of the Assamese language.

The Bengali language is common with the Assamese, borrows its religious and scientific terms from the Sanskrit, and on this account the two languages have been thought identical. But the grammars of these two dialects are quite different, and therefore they cannot be said to be one and the same language. (45)

Considering the role of Assamese as the lingua franca between the people of the hills and the plains Marston draws the attention of her reader to the importance of the language.

Like Ward, Marston is very hopeful about the tea industry. She calls the planters a blessing to Assam as well as to the tea drinking world. They lead a lonely life in remote places to produce this brew. However, she is not happy with the way the labourers from other parts of India were brought to work in the tea plantations. She describes the disturbing sight of the workers on board:

There are about five hundred of these Coolies crowded together in filth and wretchedness. The cholera is raging fearfully among them, and victim after victim is pushed off into the Ganges as soon as life is extinct. (36)

Although she does not speak much on the life of the planters and the garden workers she gives a hint on the life of the labourer. Moreover, some of these labour procurers and government servants appeared to violate all norms of health awareness as the bodies of those who died of cholera in transit were thrown into the river to add to the pollution.

However, the most significant part of Marston's account is the last part where the author decides to come back to Assam after her retirement and resume her work as a missionary. Like every other American missionary, Marston returned home after giving service to the Mission for a considerable period of time. But the interesting point to note is Marston's failure in acclimatizing with her own people in her native country. She was very touched and impressed to be home after a long period but was taken aback when she got there. She was surprised to see the busy and restless life in the United States of America.

She was surprised to see the influx of people from different countries which she could not accept easily. Marston had the feeling that her country 'was fast becoming a "pandemonium" of all nations' (193). She notes that a lot of names in labour organizations appeared to be "Teutonic or Hibernian," leading her to pose the question "Do our American people look upon manual labour as a disgrace" (193-94)? She observes that most of the manual work in industry and elsewhere like the railroads was performed by migrant workers.

She then decides to come back to Assam and resume her work as a missionary. The irony is that the gospel which the missionary was preaching in the world of the 'heathen,' that is Assam, was not able to reach the heart of the people in their own country. This

presents a helpless 'self' of the narrator who just failed in persuading her own people. While showing the hypocrisy of the people coming from 'inferior' religious faiths Marston points to realizing the hypocrisy of her own people amongst whom she finds herself a misfit. Thus, towards the end of her narrative, Marston explores the deflation of the very society she celebrated in the early part of her book.

It then celebrates a society and a religion that exists only in the imagination of the missionary and it was merely that assumed superiority which had been the base of their judging the natives of Assam. Marston puts some reasons for her return that she was needed in Assam and that her role in the province was very important but her failure of assimilation in her native country says that the case was actually the other way round; Marston needed the people of Assam more than the people actually needed her. Her sense of not belonging not only exposes the so-called superior western world but at the same time, reveals her own ambiguous 'self.' This undoubtedly overturns the whole premise on whose basis the colonial authors described the 'self' and the 'other.'

Elizabeth Vickland's Perspective

Ellen Elizabeth Vickland's *Through Judy's Eyes* and *With Christ in Assam* are two important missionary travel texts based on her experiences in the region. In *Through Judy's Eyes*, there is a first person narrator named Judy who is apparently the author herself. An interesting aspect of the book is that it includes the traveller's experience in some other Asian countries too—Japan, China and Singapore. A noticeable thing in her account is that there is a preconceived idea about the Oriental which is the exotic 'other.' She expresses her joy about visiting Japan:

“There is such a place as fairyland, and what's more, I'm there. Really I rub my eyes to make sure it isn't all a dream. We have come through “Picture-book land.” (*Through Judy's Eyes* 10)

The traveller seems to be attracted by the charm of the Oriental and the way she posits herself as a colonial traveller shows her rhetoric of anti-conquest. The places are charming, beautiful and worth living but the only problem with them is the indigenous inhabitant without any culture. Judy does not find this 'orientness' in China and observes: “Shanghai does not look nearly as Oriental as I thought it would. The only Oriental thing about it are the people” (24). Judy is seen to be guided by her preconceptions about the

orient and that is how she looks at the places. This brings in Pratt's contentions regarding imposition of the imperial gaze on the Orient.

Pratt points out how "European aspirations are represented as uncontested" (*Imperial* 61) in colonial discourse. She observes:

The European improving eye produces subsistence habitats as "empty" landscapes, meaningful only in terms of a capitalist future and of their potential for producing a marketable surplus." (61)

Whereas, from the viewpoint of the local people, these spaces are far from empty, "saturated with local history and meaning," and where everything is accounted for within the indigenous knowledge system, in the colonial gaze, they may be empty (61). In Vickland, this tendency is evident when the travel writer is highly fascinated by the landscape of the region and at the same time, repelled by the kind of life the natives were living.

In both narratives, Vickland uses the rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' in her narrative method of compare and contrast. In fact, this rhetoric of compare and contrast, basically in the field of religious beliefs is one of the key features of the narratives of Missionary literature. The authors attempt at focusing on the worst of the native's religion against the best of their own. In her accounts, Vickland depicts the native country as a place in the worst of conditions and in urgent need of redemption. She adopts the method of 'showing' rather than 'telling' in her rhetorical move.

She finds the whole country picturesque and the beautiful landscape had some sort of tranquility in it. She mentions the "strange and fascinating world...The beauty of the landscape" (*Through Judy's Eyes* 69). Further along her narrative, she describes an evening scene where "The whole valley was filled with a golden mist, and the Kamakhya was aflame with glory, reflecting itself again in the placid waters of the Brahmaputra" (89). Elsewhere she describes a dawn in Assam: "glorious day broke, revealing a world radiant with freshness and beauty. There was a riot of birdsong from the trees where the brilliantly plumaged songsters were greeting the new day" (94). The lovely morning scene is made more so through the chirping of the brightly coloured birds.

While Vickland finds the landscape appealing, she appears to be unhappy with the people and their affairs. There were so many things about their society that left an impression on her that she feels compelled to note some of them:

Another thing that impressed Judy was the extreme poverty on every hand. Even those who are supposed to be well-to-do live in cheerless homes. The houses are of bamboo with mud walls and floor and thatch roofs... there is little or no furniture inside; there is no sense of order or tidiness. (74-75)

The whole scenario was so full of disorder that everything got onto Judy's nerves. She becomes acquainted with the local women and describes that her understanding improves. Although initially there was some kind of strangeness, she soon found some affinity between the women and herself. Vickland observes: "Judy soon found out that there was much in common between her and the women of Assam. The difference is one of clothes and opportunity. At heart the folks out there are just like us" (144). Vickland tries to know the 'other' and finds that the local women are not different, she perceives the same othering look directed back at herself and the rest of the whites. The indigenous women are intrigued as well as awed by the strange culture and customs of the white people.

Vickland describes Judy's impression of their religion too. On a visit to Kamakhya temple she is struck by the filth and noise both inside and outside the premises, beggars everywhere and people engaging, with all seriousness, in rituals which looked like 'child's play' to her (78). About the faith of the Hindu people, Vickland has this to say:

The people of India are very religious. One is aware of that from the first. There is a religion of creed, crystallized into a system that kills initiative and paralyzes ambition. Religion requires so much of them, affecting every act of their life. (76)

Vickland observes that the religion of the indigenous people robs them of all sense of freedom and initiative. She looks at the Hindu religion as a burden on the people as they have to live with numerous prescriptions and restrictions all their lives. She is critical of the Muslim people too and calls their affairs full of oriental show.

There is always a comparison made between the customs and religion of the indigenous people and those of the colonial people. The market place with all its crowd, noise and colour is always contrasted with the serenity in the colonial people's corner. The picture of the 'native' religious shrines is contrasted with the piety of the Christian places of

worship. Judy's experience of visit to the Hindu temple was so disturbing that she could not even forget about it in her dreams. As Vickland informs:

All the night Judy's dreams were filled with temple bells and the wails of the religious beggars. The next morning she said that she believed she had no greater blessing in life than being just an American girl, with her heritage of Christian home and teaching. (207)

Judy's realization only confirms her belief that her religion is superior to all other indigenous faiths and that it is only the Christian God that keeps the mind in peace. Contrary to the disorder found in the native affairs, the Christian ways show a serene path where the mind always finds solace and Judy feels it is a blessing that she has faith in that true god. Apart from the strange religious practices, what Vickland points to is the alien culture of the colonized. Despite attempts to empathize with the indigenous people, the Westerner is at times bemused, even defeated by the strangeness of the culture.

In *Through Judy's Eyes*, Vickland's use of a mask or persona appears to be a strategy attuned to the 'anti-conquest' in the narrative. It is shown that Judy describes the bare fact but actually Vickland tactically distances herself from her narrative. Rather than commenting on the affairs of the indigenous people, she shows through Judy's experience how 'inferior' and 'degraded' they are. She includes conversations to show how ignorant and backward the people are as against the superiority of the narrator. A comparison between the repulsive religious faiths of others and the peacefulness one finds in the Christian church characterizes the narrative. Since Judy's critique of Hinduism in Assam as elsewhere in the country is based on her knowledge of Christianity, it may be seen as a case of the civilized Christian colonizer versus the 'savage' other, of genuine faith against heathenism. Despite the avowed spontaneity of her reactions, Judy's view may be seen to endorse Memmi's claim that:

Whenever the colonizer states, in his language, that the colonized is a weakling, he suggests thereby that this deficiency requires protection....whenever the colonizer adds...that the colonized is a wicked, backward person with evil, thievish, somewhat sadistic instincts, he thus justifies his polished and his legitimate severity. (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* 126)

Judy's comments suggest that in the religious sphere at least, the indigenous people require guidance from a church 'protectorate' to save them from sinking further into heathenish cults.

In the other book, *With Christ in Assam*, Vickland's rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' takes a critical tone. In contrast to the image of the innocent traveller of *Through Judy's Eyes*, this narrative presents a tactful maneuvering narrator who insists on 'showing' to fulfill her purpose. The picture is clear and the comparison sharp. In *With Christ in Assam*, Vickland presents two contrasting pictures of two different cultures: on one hand, Assam/India, and on the other, America/Europe which can be understood as brown/gold, ugly/beautiful, clamorous/serene, dirty/clean, heathenism/Christianity, ignorance/wisdom etc. to fit in with JanMohamed's Manichean allegory of mutually exclusive values. She feels that Christ brings the golden light to 'brown' India. Vickland even comments on the appearance of some of the 'native' gods and goddesses. She mentions the images of lord Jagannath and goddess Kali as a case in point. In her words, they worship an ugly goddess called Kali or Durga standing on the body of a demon" (73).

For Vickland, Hinduism appears to be an ignorant religion whereas Christianity provides wisdom. Calling Hinduism a 'non understandable philosophy' (*With Christ* 87) she holds that it is not suitable for the people. Citing the example of a Hindu poet, who calls himself too small to understand the grand mystery of the Creator Vickland confirms that in a religion where the great poets are 'ignorant' there can be no hope for the common people to acquire knowledge. This is an example of the Westerner deliberately choosing to take something at face value, to derive unfair advantage. There is no way she could have misunderstood the humility of the Hindu poet to brand him as ignorant. Vickland appears to have got caught up in a colonial cultural hegemony and was grabbing at straws to support her argument.

She depicts the Indian people as poor and helpless who are devoid of Christ's light. For her, the "Indian is an orphaned child – lonely, hungry, full of fear lifting its hands in prayer to the vast sky" (72). Vickland's patronizing attitude towards the 'native' of India is quite obviously meant as a call for missionary intervention.

Both the narratives, while projecting the native, reveals binarism. The inferior 'other' is exposed against the superior 'self.' But this superior 'self' is already assumed before any

kind of interaction or encounter takes place between the two. This self-assumed superiority gives authority to the narrator to judge, comment and give solution to any kind of subject related to the native's cultural and social affairs. As pointed out by Said, the Orient was not only discovered but made Oriental, an echo of the same can be seen in the way the people and places of the Asian countries have been treated in Vickland's narrative. Vickland takes the position of what Said would have called the 'average nineteenth century European' (*Orientalism* 6-7) and thus reveals her Occidental 'self' which is very much aware of itself while describing the Oriental 'other.'

Like Ward, Vickland believes that colonization coupled with Christian education is the only solution to every problem in the native region. In another context, she observes: "Everything Britain does she does well" (*Through Judy's Eyes* 26). Vickland's solution to the problems faced by the poor and an apparently uncultured people of Assam is their conversion to Christianity.

Vickland's writing gives rise to the question of fictionality in the narrative which travel writing is very often accused of. In *With Christ in Assam*, Vickland's selection of stories and cultural aspects taken from two different communities is noteworthy. The selection/rejection is done very cautiously which in fact is part of her strategy. Lack of reliable explanation and misinterpretation raises questions over the factuality of the narratives. In *Through Judy's Eyes* also a similar attitude in the narrator is perceived. Judy seems to describe the people of Assam as one community totally ignoring the differences or disparities in various communities. This hints at the preconceived ideas that the author/traveller has in mind about the people of Assam and their culture. It also points to a dismissive bracketing of the indigenous people as a single 'other.' Vickland also fails to see the difference between Assam and other parts of India in matters of religious practices. According to her, the social life of Assam is not at all different from life elsewhere in India. This is indicative of sweeping generalization which are a must in colonial discourse as Memmi points out: For all her 'showing' she appears intent on telling as she inscribes meaning and significance without proper evidence and understanding of the colonial subject.

Missionary Women's Narratives and the Discourse of Difference

Since three of these narratives are written by women and as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the women missionaries were trying to secure a space for themselves, it

would not be out of place here to examine some of the Gender issues in their writing as it posits a discourse of difference. They have been categorized as ‘feminine’ texts and criticized for being personal. The issue of gender in the author is a very critical question in colonial discourse. It may be worth finding out if the cultural limitations of women have influenced their literature at a time when they were fighting patriarchy along with other things or whether the narratorial voice has been successful in avoiding the a ‘feminine’ brand.

The most common forms of women’s writing in the nineteenth century were either diaries or epistolary with an apparent autobiographical ‘self’ in them. Further, while dealing with the colonial subject the women travellers were criticized for not being able to project the colonial ‘self’; rather they were against it. Moreover, the authors stick to what Pratt calls the landscape narrative where panorama of a region is emphasized rather than the traveller’s encounters with the native people. She explains:

The normalizing, generalizing voice of the ethnographic manners-and-customs portraits is distinct from, but complementary to, the landscape narrator. Both are authorized by the global project of natural history: one produces land as landscape and territory, scanning for prospects; the other produces the indigenous inhabitants as bodyscapes, scanned also for prospects. (*Imperial* 64)

In *The Discourses of Difference* (1991), Sara Mills analyses women’s travel writing in relation to colonialism. Women travellers could not be the colonial voice, Mills says,

firstly, because of their role in western society and the way this was structured by the discourses of femininity, secondly, because some of them had rejected this role by travelling unchaperoned, and thirdly, because they had few discursive places within western colonial institutions. (*Discourses* 105)

However, it is interesting to note that Susan Ward’s narrative cannot be categorized with those narratives as the text obviously speaks for the imperial project. Despite the narrator adopting the landscape narrative at times, it is clear that it was not done to avoid critical assessment of the travelled region but to draw the reader’s attention to the future prospects in Assam. It is indeed interesting to see that Ward is full of praise in her description of the ‘native’ place which is unlike her contemporaries. She says, “in grandeur of hill scenery, we venture to say, Assam has scarcely any rival in any part of

India of equal extent” (2-3). But as Pratt suggests, such narratives minimize not only the presence of the people that the traveller encounters but also the traveller herself.

According to her,

There [in the imperial frontier] Europeans confront not only unfamiliar others but unfamiliar selves; there they engage in not just the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production but the expansion through displacement of previously established modes. (“Scratches”121)

In Ward’s narrative too, we see that the panorama has become instrumental in viewing the region as a future colonized country. She is appreciative of the country but at the same time, gives a critical account of the inhabitants as ignorant, indolent and morally weak. That is not to say that she eschewed descriptions of the people. In fact there is mention of certain people she got to know in the course of her journey. What she tries to offer in her narrative, is a combination of landscape description as well as human interaction in society, to prove to her male counterparts that she was capable of operating on both male and female turf. In her, the ‘self’ we perceive is not the autobiographical one but the colonial ‘self’ which speaks for a community. Ward’s is a collective colonialist ‘self’ which represents colonial women as well as men although she keeps her gendered identity intact.

Contrary to Ward, Mrs. Marston and Vickland’s accounts are autobiographical in nature. Both use dramatic voices in their narratives. Unlike Ward, Marston is soft in her language and dependent upon her characters. To certify the authenticity of her account Marston takes help from a male acquaintance, James M. Hoyt who writes the Preface for her book. He certifies:

A personal acquaintance for many years with the author of this book, gives me full warrant to assure its readers that its recitals of missionary life and experience may be implicitly accepted as true. (*Korno Siga* 7)

Hoyt confirms that the only fictional part of the book is the altering of the real names of some of the characters as they were still alive. One of her reasons for not using the real names of the characters is that she prefers to retain a certain amount of artistic detachment.

In form also, Marston follows that of a ‘feminine’ text with her inclusion of letters and personal notes from her diaries. An assertive attitude is always missing and whenever

she wants to make a point, Marston takes help of others. She inclines towards the method of 'showing' for which she uses first person narrative techniques. In fact, her use of the framed narrative can be seen as a move in this direction. To show the way the missionaries conquered the native hearts, Marston takes help from her husband and directly extracts from his personal journal. In order to establish the triumph of her religion and her faith, Marston allows her protagonist to speak for himself. In the debate on religion where she shows the triumph of Christianity over other religious faiths, Marston uses the services of her husband whom she had engaged in a conversation with another man. Although Marston does not speak against the colonial government, she does not appear to promote colonialism as clearly as Ward. Her main focus lies on the religious field. However, she praises the government for abolishing evil practices of the Hindus. Marston positions herself in a secured spot wherefrom she delivers her message using a device rather than carrying it directly with a strong narratorial voice.

Vickland too seems to be personal in both her narratives. Like Marston, she relies on 'showing' rather than telling through an assertive narratorial 'self.' While at times she uses sarcasm, at others she resorts to obvious criticism. Vickland upholds the superiority of Christianity and therefore to every problem she finds a Christian solution. Sara Mills calls it the discourse of philanthropy which is more distinct in the women's texts. They highlight the moral and religious duties of the colonial people in bringing civilization to those regions which seemed primitive. Vickland projects the indigenous people of Assam as poor and helpless as they are devoid of Christ's light. They were living in darkness and it was considered the missionaries' moral duty to spread the light of Christianity. At the same time, Vickland shows her appreciation of the colonial government without showing any affinity towards it.

Women's travel writings are often described as reflecting a tension which is missing in men's narratives. They address the danger and difficulty of the places they travel through in detail. Sometimes it is an advantage on the part of the women travellers as they have access to the private space of the 'other.' For example, they could see the life inside the 'zenana' of the indigenous women and could go beyond the 'purdah.' Due to the limitations of the male author in this regard, the women's narratives have more details to address whereas the texts by male authors can give only an idea of the outer world. For the same reason, the women's texts can be more accurate sometimes so far as the cultural affairs, the degree of superstition and beliefs are concerned. For instance, both Marston

and Vickland describe the narrators' direct interaction with the native women which is rarely found in texts by the male writers. They are in that way more heterogeneous.

As they are autobiographical, the women's narratives are called confessional and far more self-revelatory than the men's texts. But as Pratt observes, "personal narrative is a conventional component of ethnographies....They play the crucial role of anchoring that description in the intense and authority-giving personal experience of fieldwork" (*Writing Culture* 31-32). This helps to explain the autobiographical element in these missionary women's narratives. While in Vickland, the personal 'self' is more revealing in Ward and Marston it is not very distinct. Given the fact that the main focus of missionary writing in Assam was to highlight the work of the Mission, the narratives used in this chapter show that there is more to writing about colonial domains than proselytization. The writers leave their stamp on their accounts, individualizing them even as they are imbricated in the discourse of colonialism.

A Male Missionary Perspective: Oscar L. Swanson

Oscar L. Swanson's *In Villages and Tea Gardens* is a very significant text so far as the different facets of Missionary writing are concerned. It records the author's forty three years of missionary service in Assam. Moreover it lends a male perspective to missionary life in Assam. In the Preface, Swanson clears his objectives: "My wish is to reach those who need encouragement in their missionary interest and to make all the readers acquainted with the work in Assam" (*Villages* 7). Like many other colonial people, in Swanson also one can find a presupposition regarding the indigenous people of Assam. It seems that he came to the region well equipped with his religious weapons to fight a battle with the 'heathens.'

Swanson is fascinated by the Assamese people. The first thing they did after arriving in Assam was to learn the language of the people. Swanson observes that Assamese is "a beautiful language, rich in words derived from venerable Sanskrit and spoken with a softness and a music seldom found in the tongues of western people" (51). He offers a pleasant picture of working amongst the indigenous people as well as his affection for them. Swanson finds the hill people very interesting as they were free from the clutches of dominant religions like Hinduism and Islam. However he feels that some of the hill

tribes had been neglected by the government and therefore, they were still at a very primitive stage. His observation on the tea garden workers is significant in the sense that they are in line with Memmi's contentions. Swanson writes that

these men were accustomed to having a white man do their thinking and give orders. In some ways they were much like the slaves on our southern plantations, except that they were sold or mistreated. They looked to their sahibs for everything. (56)

What he means is that these workers were not in a position to think or to make decisions. In Memmi's words, "It is in the colonized's own interest that he be excluded from management functions, and that those heavy responsibilities be reserved for the colonizer" (*The Colonizer and the Colonized* 126). There is a tendency to present the colonized as incapable of taking responsibility for anything, as happy-go-lucky people who do not want to be held responsible for decisions which would affect the lives of numerous people as well as the plantation itself. Swanson only repeats what has long been articulated by every colonizer.

While the tea garden workers were not physically enslaved as in America, there was sufficient control over their lives to suggest mental sublimation by the White tea planter. Like his contemporaries, Swanson too celebrates the triumph of his own religion. He assesses other religious faiths in a patronizing manner and gives detailed reports of some 'native' converts who had lost faith in their own gods.

An interesting aspect of Swanson's narrative is his overestimation of the English speaking world and their culture. Swanson, a Swedish by birth, was driven to America by poverty. His Swedish 'self' is always distinct in his narrative as he critically examines indigenous affairs. In his consciousness, the native Assamese is not the only 'other' but the Americans too are 'other' to him. There are two 'others' in the narrative, one superior and the other inferior, and he is apparently in between the two showing his admiration for the superior one. The way he self-fashions is indeed very significant. Swanson admits how he and his Swedish companions aspired to be like the white Americans. About the American students in the Chicago seminary he writes:

Our relations with the English speaking students of the regular seminary were always the most pleasant. We looked up to them as our superiors in every way,

and when sharing rooms with them or taking part in their activities we always felt overawed, and tried to be at our best. (29)

Such feeling generated some kind of inferiority complex in him and his fellows for which they were uncomfortable or felt apprehensive in the presence of the Americans, be it the other students of the seminary or the ‘proud’ waiters in a restaurant.

This realized inferior ‘self’ is revealed many times in the narrative and the author feels at home when he is with fellow Swedish missionaries. This sense of an othered ‘self’ gives a twist to the collective colonial ‘self’ as his narrative gives evidence of the existence of different selves in the Mission society itself. Moreover, Swanson hints at the intra-conflicts in the Mission. In this way, his narrative seems a bit more realistic than those by his contemporaries as it is devoid of the kind of religious sentiment that fills the other narratives. Thus, *In Villages and Tea Gardens* presents a realistic, confessional narratorial ‘self’ wedged between two different ‘others,’ one regarded as superior and the other inferior. This conscious inferior ‘self’ does not project the narrator as a colonialist the way the narrators in other narratives do.

As a missionary, Swanson too endeavours to establish the superiority of Christianity above other religions. His critical attitude differs from that of other missionaries and colonials in the sense that he does not rest his hopes only on the grand colonialist design regarding the colonies. In fact, one can see that Swanson, himself a marginalized figure, was closer to the colonized people than the westerners. There are times when he expresses his empathy for those people as well.

Swanson adopts a differing attitude as he does not seem to stick to one sole aim of establishing the superiority of Christianity. He discloses other things regarding the inside of the Mission society as well. A confessional tone distinguishes Swanson’s narrative from those discussed earlier in the chapter and thus reveals another important aspect for discussion—the nuances in missionary writing. Other missionary writers hardly mention the mission’s failure in their narratives. Their sole aim is to highlight the triumph of the Mission and in the process they select their success stories while rejecting those where they failed. But in Swanson, both sides are discussed.

It is important to note that the Christian Mission was successful mostly among the hill tribes and the socially marginalized sections of people in Assam. The Hindus and the

Muslims were not easily influenced by the missionaries. Swanson in his narrative mentions very clearly that his efforts did not work among the higher castes and the educated. He admits,

I mentioned my failure in reaching the Indian gentlemen, or Babus, as we usually call them. The shrewd lawyers, the unscrupulous traders, the proud Brahmins, the worldly minded Indians who served the British government, the young and impatient students eager to bring in reform but refusing to taste the power of Christ; to these and many others I had often spoken, but my words had not achieved any visible results. (175)

The Mission, therefore, concentrated on the people who were victims of both poverty and casteism. In fact, in the 1840s, there was Hindu opposition towards the activities of the missionaries for which the public officers of the colonial government were directed to abstain from supporting the missionary effort. Therefore, the missionaries had to work with the socially marginalized who were at the same time victims of illiteracy and poverty.

It will not be out of place to take stock of the general activities of most of the Christian Missions in Assam. The Mission's endeavour was to win the hearts of the people through charity. In fact, that was one of the persuasive methods of the missionaries. In many missionary accounts the authors admit that the poor natives converted to Christianity with the hope of improving their material condition. Marston's hero Korno Siga too was a feeble and diseased character who was marginalized in his own community where a man's social dignity to a large extent depended on his physical strength. When he was attacked by cholera and treated to recovery by the missionaries it was a new life for him. In a way, the missionaries did something which according to people like Korno Siga only the gods could do. Marston says, "After his recovery he was so grateful that he seemed unable to do enough for us" (93). In gratitude he turned to Christianity.

Ward brings out another very important point in this regard. She points out that many Hindus and Muslims converted to Christianity just to free themselves from various religious restrictions imposed upon them. After conversion the people lost their caste and were at liberty to eat beef and drink alcohol. Ward thinks that if these were the most important reasons, they would bring "disgrace to the entire Christian community" (*Glimpse* 33). In the other narratives too it is seen that the people who were willing to

convert were mostly the hill tribes. The technologically advanced Westerners with their scientific inventions were almost heavenly figures for the then socially marginalized illiterate people. Christianity gave them a new way of life and upgraded their living conditions. Therefore, it will not be wrong to say that most of the people converted not because of their faith in the gospels but because of the promise of a better life. Marston in her narrative gives a clear picture of this aspect through her portrayal of different native characters and their desire to lead a materially comfortable life.

Swanson's narrative, however, is distinct from other missionary writing because it discusses the drawbacks and weaknesses of the Mission too. When the other writers present before the readers one Mission consisting of white philanthropists who were disseminating light in the dark, Swanson's narrative provides information on the conflict between different sects and Churches within the Christian religious community—the German Mission, the English Mission, the Baptists, the Non-Baptists etc. As Swanson shows, there was always some rivalry between different Missions and Churches.

About the success of Wales Mission in Shillong Swanson says:

Their success was more marked than ours, and the Khasi people were fast becoming Christian and prominent in government work. I longed for the day when some of our converts would take a leading part in the affairs of their country. (*Villages* 74)

However, in Assam it was the Baptists who were more successful than any of the others. Swanson gives instances where they had clashes with the English church. He criticizes the padres of the Church of England who were not only drinkers themselves but also allowed the 'native' converts to continue to have alcohol. He also mentions the disputes amongst the missionaries regarding their views on the ways of doing their job. Swanson preferred to preach in the market place but another missionary Mr. Petrick objected to that as the latter considered that method undignified. Swanson calls Petrick's method autocratic although he was impressed by the latter's ways. Swanson continues reaching out to the public through unconventional methods like impromptu roadside meetings which endeared him and his wife to the people.

Swanson's account is interesting as it weaves into its framework the achievements of other missionaries as well. Right from Bronson's dictionary to P. H. Moore's work,

Swanson pays tribute to his predecessors as well as contemporaries and seniors. His efforts to learn Assamese were remarkable and painstaking. Some of this exercise is recorded in his narrative. While Swanson focused his work on the Assamese people his senior Mr. Petrick who showed little interest in the Assamese language and chose instead to concentrate on the 'Khol people'. He adds that those migrants

had come by the thousands into Assam to work in the many tea estates which had been opened by thrifty planters of Scotch descent. This group was more easily won for Christ as they had been in contact with Christianity back in their own country, and...they were...willing to throw away their charms and demon worship for the religion of the white man who gave them labor and provided for all their material needs. (54)

It is true that the Mission achieved success in the tea gardens which is mentioned by many missionaries in their narratives.

Swanson also records the efforts of his colleagues and his own in setting up missions in the North bank as well as in the South, namely Disangmukh and later Golaghat. He explains how house building was a major exercise in those days and required a lot of enterprise, including identifying trees in the forest which would later be hauled to the building site by elephants. There are descriptions of the landscape and the flora and fauna but he makes it clear that his interest lay in the people: "but I was not a hunter and wasted no time making explorations into the jungle. I was interested in people" (73). He asserts his commitment to the spreading of Christianity amongst the people of Assam.

Interestingly, Swanson provides historical details of Sibsagar with its layered history prior to the advent of the missionaries and how the old relics stood as testimony to past glory. He observes that the present had little to offer and the situation was convenient for reaching out to people and converting them to Christianity. While he makes no excuses about his mission, his narrative still has plenty to offer the reader in the shape of natural history and ethnography. His description of the Nagas in Nagaland is one such example. His breezy narrative style spiced with humour is quite a refreshing contrast to the more sedate style of missionary women writers. The long boat trip from Calcutta to Disangmukh, followed by the difficult journey by ox-cart to Sibsagar is recounted in buoyant spirit which makes their arrival such a happy event. It was the relief from the awful road trip which made their destination so eagerly awaited and his subsequent walk

through the town to the accompaniment of barking from pariah dogs reads like any other travel account. While he remains focused on his goal of spreading Christianity, he takes time off to notice Assam's landscape as well as its social fabric.

The other missionaries discussed in this chapter always give the impression that they are a part of the British colonial project. Ward, Marston and Vickland are seen to praise the government for bringing development and improvement. Swanton too thinks that it is very secure to work under the British authorities but at the same time he also reveals the conflicts that the Mission had with the government. In fact, the Mission had to go through a difficult time as the government curtailed its affiliation and funds to the Mission. Swanson describes the situation:

The Jorhat schools where most of the missionaries were working came to the place where government recognition was in danger of being withdrawn due to our failure to meet the government standard of education. (151)

The missionaries were asked to 're-evaluate' and it was indeed a challenge to the Mission. Some of the missionaries were given orders to leave their station and if they did not agree they had to continue without financial support.

There were other government sponsored threats as well. The foundation of educational institutions other than the missionary schools was another thing that made the missionaries unhappy. The foundation of the industrial school center where non-Christian teachers were to impart education that had nothing to do with religion was a matter of worry to the missionaries. Swanson expresses the missionaries' feelings:

Our pastors and evangelists, seeing how non-Christian men teaching in Jorhat were paid a salary four or five times as much as a preacher, for doing less work began to wonder if it were the intention of the mission to give up the idea of saving the lost for the pleasure of planning boards and driving nails. (119)

The Missionaries had genuine reasons to feel aggrieved as remuneration for services rendered was not just significant for its monetary value but also signified recognition of a job done to satisfaction.

According to Swanson, the Mission could not inspire confidence in the educated and the people belonging to the higher class in the society. Because of his identity as a Swedish

migrant who got shelter in the USA Swanson recognized himself as a marginalized only in the group of American missionaries. They were but distinguished, unofficially though, as the Swedish Baptist group in Assam. He admits that he had found it difficult to get assimilated with the carefree yet mechanical American society and this self-consciousness influences his writing too. His observations and acceptance of both the missionaries and their conduct vary from that of other American missionaries.

However, some of these nuances are evident in other narratives as well. If observed closely, the writings sometimes give contradictory ideas regarding the 'natives.' For example, Marston introduces the people of Assam as 'naturally a religious people' (96) whereas, Vickland criticizes the same for not having genuine respect for their gods. Vickland even is seen self-contradictory when she again calls the people great devotees. In their description of the nature of natives also there are differences. While other writers are seen criticizing the Oriental 'native' Marston projects them as peaceable and co-operating.

However, these differences are always there in the writings of the missionaries. According to Reverend P. H. Moore, the people of Assam have a 'monstrous and generally irreligious nature' (*Assam Mission* 11); Ward says that honesty is foreign in them; another important missionary author, Mary Mead Clark calls them simple people with honest hearts to help the missionaries despite her occasional common marking of them as Orientals. As already discussed, the Mission achieved success mostly among the marginalized and the hill tribes, one can see a tendency in the narrators to show a softer attitude towards the former. According to Ward, the hill-tribes are 'semi civilized' while Vickland and other narrators see simplicity and goodness in those that come for conversion. On one hand, they are criticizing the 'natives' and their affairs but at the same time, the same people are praised when they come to embrace their religion. They focus on the darkness in the region and criticize the natives for that but speak in soft tones while describing the native converts as they were the people who contributed towards the success of the Mission.

All these indicate the subjective representation of the native 'other' in the missionary literature which again brings in the question of reliability. They tend to describe the natives according to their own convenience: when they were appeased by the conduct of the natives, the colonial authors appreciate the natives but then they seem to be ever

ready to condemn the same when the case is otherwise. The representation thus was very much contingent as it had much to do with the success of the particular person's persuasion and triumph over the 'native.' This again shows the colonial prejudice working at the back of the narratorial voice which confirms only the subjectivity of the narratorial standpoint. And interestingly, the 'ignorance' of the people that the missionary writers try to focus in their writings has helped the latter in their attempt to establish their own superior status. Binarism works and it was necessary to accentuate this 'ignorance' of the indigenous people as it served as a consistent point to the missionaries in support of promoting Christian education. The missionaries had the impression that the mind of the 'native' was in darkness. Hinduism was rather creating confusion. They tried to convince the people that the only way to remove that darkness was through the light of Christ coupled with a Christian education.

A remarkable point to note is that in their discussion on the ignorance and the poor state of the 'natives' the missionaries never discussed education in general without bringing in religion. Ward observes that "the only hope of an improvement in the race is the diffusion of Christianized education" (*Glimpse* 43). Vickland too believed that "the people are in bondage; only Jesus can set them free" (*Through Judy's Eyes* 162). The missionaries have offered such statements or judgments without analyzing the socio-political factors that were to a great extent responsible for the people's condition rather than their 'dark and hopeless' (36) religion. While describing the condition of the 'natives,' they even tend to overlook the fact that the British came to Assam at such a time when the whole region was yet to overcome the disaster that had been brought to them by the Burmese invasions. At that time, it was a community whose spine was broken and which was suffering in penury, and the British administration was of no help in the betterment of the same. In fact, the peasant class was suffering more under the revenue and taxation levied by the new government. It was therefore the darkness of poverty and illiteracy rather than religion which were impeding progress in the society. The ignorance of the people that missionaries point out is in fact the characteristics of any poverty ridden society. However, the missionary focus was never on these issues, rather they interpreted it as a result of the absence of Christ in the region. They give emphasis on the need of the Christian faith or light rather than on the removal of illiteracy and poverty from the society. And if they had ever referred to these matters they always assured their readers and themselves that those weaknesses could be

removed from the society but with the help of Christian education only. Although they mention the technological development brought about by the British government they actually could not support it if there was any technical institution when there was no Bible teaching or preaching in the course. This is evident when Swanson says about the industrial school in Jorhat: “I had no objection to all these things if they might lead men to God, but I had my doubts” (119). It seems that the missionaries stood for only religious education and they believed that that could solve every problem of the people of Assam.

Their focus seems to be on the evils of Hinduism and the great role played by Christianity in removing them from the society. That was indeed a defense of the Christian religious education in the schools. The missionary mouthpiece, “Arunodoi Sambad Patra” (first appeared in 1846)—later known as “Arunodoi”—which was also the first newspaper/magazine in the Assamese language played a vital role in boosting such views. Although called a secular magazine, “Arunodoi” in reality ventured to show the importance of the Christian religion. The natives too had their share in that. The Mission Society had sent Assamese converts to America and published their experiences in “Arunodoi.” In August 1849, “Letter from Lucien Hayden” appeared in Arunodoi which informed a ‘native’ convert’s experiences in the New World. The letter was in fact a comparison between the vastness of the outside world which was far advanced and the smallness of the ‘native’ land focusing mainly on the ignorance of the people. The traveller, however, emphasizes the importance of English education as remedy. In the November issue of the same year, “Visit of two Assamese to America” was published which tells of two men from Nowgong –Dhaniram (known as Lucien Hayden after his conversion to Christianity) and Sivram— who visited America with some Baptist missionaries. Narrated in the first person and sometimes in the third person narrative (by the editor possibly) the letters conveyed similar message. These letters can be taken as attempts to establish the superiority of the Christian people and the importance of Christian education in Assam which the missionaries did with the help of their Assamese counterparts.

Along with Christian education the Missionary literature promoted a Christian government too. The missionaries praise the British government for eradicating ills from the society. In the writings of many missionaries, this colonialist standpoint is very clear. The papers presented and discussions that took place in the Jubilee Conference of Assam

Mission held in Nowgong clearly show that the Missionaries and their conducts were further than religious. They seemed to be more concerned and interested in the business field, the benefits that could be gained from the region, both political and commercial. That they were mostly colonialists at their hearts is evident in their describing the land and the people. Reverend E. G. Phillips' comment on the Garo field is pertinent to note in this context:

They are virgin soil, not waste land, full of the roots and seeds of Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Mohammedanism, land which must be first cleared, and in which you will expect to see the evil plants constantly reappearing. (*Assam Mission* 78)

The Colonialist voice is so apparent in these lines that one can hardly find any difference between the language of a missionary and a colonialist administrator. However, in order to achieve their goal, they applied different methods as preaching, persuasion and charity. It is an established fact that the Shan Mission or Assam Mission started as a Colonialist propaganda but eventually conflicts started taking place between the two on issues such as religion and language. As already discussed, Swanson too deals with this issue in his narrative. The missionaries had to move from station to station because of the ferocious aggression of the hill tribes and in the plains also they faced opposition from the dominant religious community. The complaint of the native Hindus against the religious activities of the missionaries in 1840 had already created a gap between the government and the Mission. The mutiny of 1857 made the matter worse as the government got the impression that the religious activities of the Mission to a great extent had fueled the mutiny. In 1858, Queen Victoria issued a Proclamation on the practice of neutrality in religious matters and the government stopped any kind of assistance to the missionaries.

A few years later, at the request of the Mission, the government loosened the rigidity and allowed some financial help to the missionaries but not by renouncing the British Policy of neutrality in religious matters. By this time the government had become a bit skeptical about the Mission's activities and its contribution to the colonial project. Later on, they were given financial support by the government but the bonding was no longer as strong as it used to be in the beginning. Lieutenant Phillips, the Officiating Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong wrote on the Government allowance to the Nowgong Mission School for the academic year 1967-68:

I have little doubt that this institution will prove useful in time as a means of diffusing a leaven of civilization among these barbarous people, and thus at the same time cementing a kind of bond between them and the British Government.”
(cited in Barkataki, 122)

Although the Mission was initially a colonial policy, during the course of time the government lost all hope in it.

Moreover, there were disputes between the missionaries and the government regarding their way of working too. The missionaries lived amongst the common people and they considered that the best way to win the latter's heart was by adopting their language. It was indeed a rhetoric used by the missionaries and therefore they gave utmost importance to learn the language of the people. It is noteworthy that in Assam also the pioneers in the formation of the Standard Assamese language were all American Baptist missionaries. It was through the missionary's initiative that the first magazine in the Assamese language, *Arunodoi*, was founded in 1846. Reverend Nathan Brown also translated the Bible into Assamese and Miles Bronson published the first Anglo-Assamese dictionary. The missionary's reason was that since their aim was to spread the message of the gospel it was necessary that they do it in the native's language for the latter's comprehension. But the problem was that it was a time when Bengali was the official language in Assam and that was enforced by the Colonial government. The Mission and the administration had differences of opinion regarding the vernacular issue of Assam and the missionary position was against the British policy which widened the distance between the two. These political happenings influenced the missionary literature of the later period and the authors seem to be defending their views on matters like vernacular language and the need of Christian religious education in the schools of Assam. The missionaries thought that in order to conquer the hearts of the indigenous people it was essential to preach the gospel in the latter's own native tongue.

The colonial government was against the idea of making Assamese the official language. Both Nathan Brown and Miles Bronson directed their efforts towards establishing the vernacular language of the Assamese against any other officially approved language. In 1848, Brown published *Grammatical Notes of the Assamese Language* which was but a defense of the language from being a varied dialect of Bengali. He argues with a historical reference that there was no migration of people from Bengali dominated states into Assam:

The option that the present language of Bengali is the parent of Assamese is irreconcilable with facts. It is well known that there had been no influx of Bengalis into this province, prior to the Mohamedan invasion; at which time the language was established in its present form. (*Grammatical* iv-v)

To show the differences between the two languages Brown discusses the peculiarity of the Assamese grammar and phonemes. He even goes on to discuss all the letters and pronunciation in Assamese language with illustrations. Brown tries to show that Assamese was closer to the Hindustani rather than to the Bengali which actually refers to its origin, Sanskrit. He says: “For beauty and softness, the Assamese language is much superior to Bengali; resembling in this respect to Hindustani” (vi). To make his description clearer to his European readers, Brown gives a comparative graphic of the English language as he discusses orthography. He extracts from the Bible to show the changes in the written form of the modern English language and states that the Assamese language too had its spelling variations before it came to attain its written standard form.

Both Brown and Bronson realized the need of books on Assamese language and grammar so as to justify their argument and therefore they engaged themselves in the process. Along with books on grammar it was necessary to have a dictionary in order to enrich a language and hence Bronson published *A Dictionary in Assamese and English* in 1867. In the Preface to his *Dictionary*, Bronson clearly states his position regarding the Assamese language. The missionaries’ job was to spread education and Bronson argued that making Bengali the official language was perilous to both the Mission and the masses. He says, “This has greatly retarded the cause of education and general progress of the masses” (*Dictionary* iii). Like Brown, Bronson too endeavoured to establish Assamese as a language independent of Bengali and draws attention towards the difference of grammar between the two. He compares the similarity between the two languages with that of French and Italian and concludes that it was merely because they too had a common origin.

Bronson emphasizes that his three decades of experience amidst the people of Assam has convinced him that to popularize education among the indigenous people, it was necessary to encourage the cultivation of Assamese language in them. He says:

After thirty years familiar acquaintance with the people, I am fully persuaded that

it is a mistake to ignore their language. It ought rather to be cultivated. If suitable encouragements were given, the educated Assamese would soon supply vernacular School Books, and a new impulse in favor of education would manifest itself among the masses. In no other way can education ever be popularized among them. (iv)

One of the many reasons for the British government's implementation of Bengali as the official language was the lack of school textbooks in Assamese. Assamese educated people like Padmanath Gohain Baruah were contributing to the enrichment of the language with new text books and missionaries like Bronson were encouraging them.

It was obvious that the missionaries were facing difficulty when they had to go to the common mass with a language foreign to the latter. In every region where they had their station, the missionaries first learned the native spoken language as they considered that to be the most important as well as effective way to win the people's heart. In Assam, this strategy led to a clash between the Mission and government but the missionaries were firm in their position. They stood for the vernacular against the government's implementation of Bengali as the official language. In many of the missionary accounts, while talking about the language and culture of the 'natives,' this defending attitude is seen. Authors like Ward and Marston echo Brown and Bronson as they tried to establish a strong difference between the Assamese and the Bengali language. According to Ward, those who have studied the two languages critically do not call Assamese a corruption of Bengali. Rather, "the languages are quite distinct, no better proof is needed than the fact that a Bengallee does not understand an Assamese and vice versa" (*Glimpse* 13-14). In her narrative, Marston too points out that the two languages seem identical just because both originated from Sanskrit but they are different in their grammatical construction. To underline her point, like Bronson, she observes: "We might as well consider the French and Italian languages identical, as they both spring from the Latin" (*Konro* 45). The missionaries believed that the success of the Mission lay in their promotion of the regional language, something which they tried to stress upon the government for successful handling of the indigenous people.

Because of their persuasive rhetoric, Missionary literature was in a way an endeavour to legitimize the activities of the Mission. There was a secondary purpose of drawing European attention to their work. There is in their narratives an attempt to appease the

colonial government. Although the Mission was no longer a direct part of the colonial policy still it was not altogether separate from the administration; or rather, the Mission did not consider itself to be a separate body independent of the colonial government. Therefore, it was a conscious and careful attempt on the part of the missionaries to justify their actions. It is not only the rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' but their narratives also reveal a double purpose of convincing the colonial government regarding the importance of using the vernacular and setting up schools in that medium.

It is noteworthy that this double purpose of the missionaries is more pronounced in the late nineteenth century narratives as the breach between the missionaries and the government was prominent at that time. In Marston or Ward, there is not a word against the language of the 'natives' as it was a time when the missionaries focused on the improvement of the people's language. But in the early twentieth century whether it is Vickland, Swanson or other missionary writers, the tone in the narrative is a bit different. There is an ease in the expression. The government even acknowledged and rewarded the missionaries for their work. Mrs. J. F. Moore, in *Stray Leaves from Assam*, mentions the financial help that they received from the government for the building of a school house for the girls. She also mentions that Mr. Moore was honored with the Kaiser-i-Hind silver award for his work and he was the first missionary in Assam to be conferred with that award by the British government. After him, Swanson too received that honour.

Thus the Missionary travel literature served as an apparatus used by the Missions to emphasize their relevance and to legitimize their activities. Adopting the method of compare and contrast it endeavored to establish the superiority of Christianity by bringing out the weaknesses in other religions, particularly Hinduism as that was the dominant religion in contemporary Assam and India, against the best in Christianity. By putting emphasis on the importance of the Mission and its stand on different political issues of that time it intended to bring back the lost hope of the British government in the Mission, and in a way, to get through with the conflicts between the two. The Missionary travel literature aimed at highlighting the contributions of the Mission to the indigenous society and thereby to justify the Mission's conduct before the colonial government, not as an independent entity but as a part of the greater colonialist project. At the same time, difference in the authors' attitudes and in their interpretations of subject matter depended on the time of publication, the authors' subjectivity as well as their social stratum. This

endows the narratives with different facets and layers, as implicit in all of them is the rhetoric of 'anti-conquest' seen throughout the chapter.

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