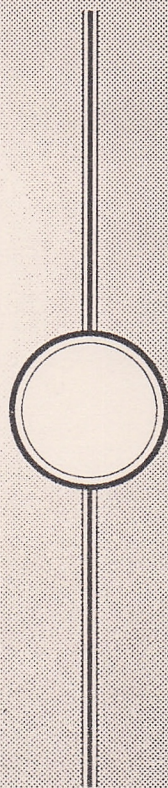




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Rev. Bro.

SAMUEL LAKRA

S.D.B.

Died on 24th May 1989

24th May is a day of special significance for all Salesians, being associated with Don Bosco's legacy: the devotion to Mary help of Christians. It was on this date, a Wednesday, in 1989 that Our Heavenly Mother came to call Brother Samuel Lakra to his heavenly abode, to enjoy eternal bliss with the Lord. He had completed 79 years. He was a great devotee of Our Lady and loved to pray the Rosary. It is not without meaning, therefore, that he was called away on the feast of Our Lady.

Brother Samuel had been suffering from heart ailments for some years. In March 1989 he was brought to Provincial House, Guwahati for medical treatment. He seemed to be responding to the medication. This was what made his death sudden and unexpected. In fact on 23rd May, he seemed to have looked exceptionally bright and more communicative than on other days.

During the early hours of May 24th, the confreres of the Provincial House got up on hearing painful groans coming from the room of Bro. Samuel. He had suffered a severe heart attack. He was now sweating profusely and writhing with pain. Realizing that his last moments were near, Fr. C.V. George, the Provincial Economist, gave him absolution. Fr. C.T. Lukose, the Rector and Parish Priest anointed him as he calmly breathed his last at 2.00 a.m.

Sam as he used to call himself, was born in 1910 at Tumdegi, Bhandar Tali, in Rengarih Parish, Ranchi. He was the second child of Gabriel Mangru Lakra and Sophia Dami Minj. Of his two brothers, Markus and Camil, and two sisters, Martha and Angela, only Camil was alive at the time of his death. His parents were simple farmers who gave Sam a very deep religious spirit and a winning simplicity of life.

He joined the aspirantate in Sonada in 1939. In 1943 he was admitted to the Novitiate of Tirupattur. He made

his first profession on 6th December, 1944 at Tirupattur. He renewed his triennial vows at Sonada in December 1947 and on 6th January, 1951, he made his perpetual vows at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai.

His Salesian life was spent as a *fac totum* in Mission stations of Assam. From 1950 to 1953 he worked at Barpeta Road. He was then transferred to North Lakhimpur where he remained till 1959. In 1960 we find him in Tezpur. From 1969 till the year of his death, for 20 faithful years, he was at Don Bosco Tangla.

Bro. Samuel was buried in the Shillong Salesian cemetery. On 24th May, itself, at 1.00 p.m. his mortal remains were taken to Shillong, accompanied by his confreres from Tangla and the sisters who worked in the mission there. His body was laid in state at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai. Later in the evening, due to the *rasta roko* which was suddenly announced, it was shifted to Salesian Training Centre, to facilitate movement to the cemetery. On Thursday, 25th May, many confreres, priests, religious, novices, postulants, aspirants, school boys and girls gathered together at the Laitumkhrach cemetery for the farewell Requiem Mass which was presided over by the Provincial, Fr. K.J. John. At the grave, one of the boys from Tangla read a touching farewell address in Hindi. It was with a heavy heart that the Salesian community bade farewell to Br. Sam.

What Brother Samuel was all through his religious life was well summed up in the farewell talk of Fr. Provincial on 25th May. He was simple, pious, dutiful, obedient. He loved boys. He had an ardent missionary zeal.

In the remarks put down when he was admitted to his first Religious Profession, Bro. Sam was described as **a man of simplicity**. Anyone who knew him even for a short period of time, will be able to vouch for the veracity of that

observation. He lived a simple life, practised a simple spirituality and attained the crown of glory. In childlike simplicity and humility, he rarely used the pronoun "I" in his correspondence with the Provincials. It would always be simply "Br. Sam".

His piety too was simple. He loved the simple prayer of the rosary which he did not leave especially during his last illness. Fr. Marengo (later Bishop), described his piety as "*very good and solid*". His letters to his superiors invariably ended with the simple phrase, "*Br. Sam is praying daily for your intentions.*" We can be sure he faithfully did this.

His sense of duty was never lessened all through his religious life which he spent as a *fac totum*. His superiors remarked at his admission to his first vows, "*He is a good worker.*" Speaking of his character, his superior at Sonada, Fr. Marengo wrote, "*obedient, humble, hard working.*"

When Br. Sam vowed obedience, he might not have known all the sacrifices it would demand of him. But he was ready for it. From his correspondence from North Lakhimpur, we gather that he had to suffer a great deal. He was in charge of the food for the boys. The boys made their complaints loud and clear in front of him and even told him it was better for him to be changed. His simple, even grammatically incorrect, remark in his letter to the Provincial was, "*Dear Rev. Father what can I do? As the Superior gives me order, Bro. Sam gives them to do*". He regularly refers to his willingness, especially in the midst of suffering and sickness, to do whatever the superiors would ask of him.

True to his Salesian calling, Bro. Sam loved boys. Wherever he worked, he was surrounded by the boarding boys for whom he took special care as an assistant

and a fac totum of the house. Writing to his Superior from Tezpur in 1961, he manifested his joy and satisfaction at the fact that he was able to work with boys. The whole letter speaks only about the boys of the boarding, their sodality, the transformation they were undergoing. *"Now they are expecting medals, flags and lives of the Saints and other holy books to read and satisfy the hunger and thirst of their souls... Let us work for Sodality. It will bring good fruits in the future."* He had an innate perception of the principles of good education of boys. In another letter he wrote, *"Dear Rev. Father Strictness and Kindness, both are good. But without measurement they are bitter."*

Brother Sam was not known for great intelligence or for learned discourses. But his missionary zeal could not be questioned. Wherever he worked, it was his joy to be able to teach catechism to young people. Writing to his Provincial, he made frequent references to his willingness and happiness to be able to work in the missions. *"Dear Rev. Father my health is poor. It is not yet strong. But yet, I prepare to work for the souls of the Missions..."*, he wrote in 1959. Ten years later, he recalled the promise made by Fr. A. Alessi, the then provincial that, with God's help, hopefully brothers will be sent to the missions to help in the work there.

Bishop Marengo noted one striking characteristic of Bro. Sam. His love for mortification. He was a man who was not averse to sacrifice of any sort, especially when that was the fruit of obedience. He once wrote to the Provincial, *"He (Br. Sam) is Happy to carry his little cross... He is not afraid to carry his little cross. He knows that without cross there is no merit, no heaven. For heaven we have to suffer and carry our daily crosses. I am happy with my little cross and to enjoy heaven."* Br. Sam had more than one little cross to bear, particularly during his long sickness.

One cannot forget the lasting impression of the picture of Bro. Sam. A man with a broad smile, greeting people with folded hands and a gentle "Jai Jisu". That was typical of him. That is also how people will remember him. It is the picture of a man who leaves us his parting message of simplicity of life. May the Lord whose praises Br. Sam incessantly sang on earth, and may Our Heavenly Mother to whom he was devoted lead him to sing the eternal praises of God.

Fr. Joseph Thelekkatt, SDB.

Provincial

Necrology

<i>Born</i>	: 24 . 03 . 1910
<i>Professed</i>	: 06 . 12 . 1944
<i>Died</i>	: 24 . 05 . 1989

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