

The Introduction of Female Education: A Study with Reference to Garo Hills of Meghalaya



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Abstract

This paper intended to highlights and traces the beginning of female education in Garo Hills. Besides, this paper will also examine the contributions of the American Baptist Missionaries towards female education. Education of Girls is a task beset with difficulties in India, even where women have liberty and personal right. It was not easy to convince them of the advantages of education from the beginning. However, the girls have been urged to study in the village schools along with boys.

David Scott, the first Civil Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General, was the first who had proposed for setting up a School for Garo Girls. He wrote to the Government suggesting the clearing of the summit of Ranggira Hills and established a Station but it was unsuccessful. It was till the arrival of Dr. Miles Bronson, an American Baptist Missionary that a school was opened at Raja Simla (North Garo Hills) and he appointed Fokira W. Momin as teacher. There were 20 girls studying with boys and it has increased to 34 girls in 1872. Mariam Russell another missionary felt the great need for education of the Garo girls. She arrived at Tura and started a school and one of the students who joined that school was Dobaki Momin who went for further study. Two lady missionaries, Miss Stella Mason and Miss Ella Bond had arrived at Tura for improvement female education in Garo Hills

Henceforth, the proportion of girls at school was considerably higher. There were gradual improvements in the attitudes of girls and parents towards the matter of female education

Keywords: Beginning, Female, Difficult, School.

Introduction

In Indian context, female education was very important, since several socio- economic and cultural factors hindered women education. The attitude of parents was such that often they did not see any value or necessity in educating girls. In financially weaker sections of the society, it was not an investment from where return was expected. Conservative parents hesitated to send their daughters to schools, if some exclusively women's educational institutes were not available nearby. However, the Garos, the indigenous tribe of Garo Hills, since the introduction of modern education by the Missionaries, the boys and girls had been urged to study together in the village Schools. In fact, there were no restrictions for girls to study in co-educational institutions.

The Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the beginning of female education in Garo Hills of Meghalaya.
2. To analyze female educational scenario since its introduction till date.

The Introduction of Female Education

Before the beginning of Missionary education in Garo Hills, Bengali and Garo were the mediums of instruction in all schools. Bengali script was used for teaching in educational institutions. Nevertheless in 1901, Bengali was finally dropped from the lower primary course of studies. The withdrawal of Bengali from the lower primary course helped the Garo students both boys and girls to devote their energies more to studies in their mother tongue and achieve greater efficiency. In the mean time Roman Script was also introduced for the Garo students and it proved to be more successful and viable. The British Government gave grants for the printing of Books in Roman script. David Scott, the first Commissioner, an Agent to the Governor General of India was the first British official to initiate

and propose a School exclusively for Garo Girls. He instructed the American Baptist Missionaries to establish a school and a mission centre at Ranggira Hills about 1800 ft high but his idea was not accepted due to difficult terrains.

Nevertheless, the year 1867 was a memorable year in the history of the American Baptist Missionaries and the Garo as well. In that year, the first Missionary, Dr. Miles Bronson visited Garo areas and opened a School at Rajasimla exclusively for the Garos. He also appointed Fokira W. Momin as Teacher. A few boys and girls were enrolled in that school. In 1868, there were about 20 Garo Boys and Girls and in 1872 it had increased to 34.

In 1874, Miss Keith opened a School for Garo girls at Goalpara. The Garo girls studied there were from Rajasimla. With the departure of Mrs. Keith due to illness, the school was closed as a result Garo girls were disadvantage and had to discontinue their study.

In 1881-1885, the missionaries felt the need to continue in imparting and educating the Garo girls. Subsequently an appeal was sent to Home Board to designate a Lady Missionary to take over the female education. In response to an appeal, Miss Mariam Russel arrived at Tura in 1879. She personally visited Garo villages requesting them to study in her school at Tura. About 12 girls responded to her request, out of them 10 girls were orphans. Again she moved to Nishangram and opened a School there. As many as 38 Garo girls were interested to study and she returned to Tura with 21 girls to re-start the school. One of the girls was Dobaki W. Momin. Unfortunately, Miss Russel's School was short-lived as she married and moved to Guwahati.

To continue with a mission school for girls, Miss Ella Bond and Miss Stella Mason have arrived at Tura in 1886 and restarted a school at Nishangram and returned to Tura with 15 Garo girls. They reopened the school at Tura in 1887, and the school was successful in giving education especially for Garo girls.

There were gradual improvement in the attitudes of girls and parents towards the matter of education. In Tura Mission Compound, Dormitory for girls was built. The number of girls in boarding was 36 (Thirty six). As the result the proportion of Garo girls increased at school.

Another American Missionary, Miss Lemine Holbrook came to Tura and took charge over the activities of female education. Miss Ella Bond returned from America in 1909. In 1911, there were some Garo girls who have proceeded till higher education. In 1920, Miss Holbrook opened a Mission School specifically for Garo girls. That school was known as '**Mission Girls' English School**'. The total enrolment of the students was 60. In the same year there were about 230 Garo girls who had studied in Tura.

After the departure of Miss Holbrook, Miss Wright came and took charge of the school in 1922. Miss Witherbee came to help Miss Wright in running the Mission. Miss Fern Rold arrived at Tura in 1930 and stayed till 1962. In 1932, the new building was completed and shifted all the classes in 1933 to have better facilities and atmosphere. In 1961, English High School was started and the construction of the school building was completed in 1964 to accommodate all the classes. It was one of the reputed schools in Garo Hills till today.

American Baptist Missionaries left Garo Hills in April 1970 due to foreign National issue in India. However, it is undeniable fact that till these days, they are in touch with the people of Garo Hills. They still concerned and used to visit whenever they get an opportunity like A.chik Baptist Convention. American Baptist Missionaries had done a lot in Garo Hills and they were the pioneers in bringing about female education in Garo Hills. Had there been no American Missionaries, Garo female education would not be at this level these days. Today, the Tura Christian Girls' School is the only school run by the Garo Baptist Convention. At present women's enrolment as total literacy consistently increased during the period of 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011.

Table 1- The Literacy Rate in two Districts of Garo Hills of Meghalaya as per gender-wise:

Districts	Year									
	1971		1981		1991		2001		2011	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
East Garo Hills	-	-	39.01	27.66	54.70	41.70	66.12	54.84	79.56	71.32
West Garo Hills	-	-	32.04	19.55	48.93	31.32	57.04	44.05	73.31	63.34
Meghalaya	40.44	29.31	37.39	30.08	53.12	44.08	65.43	59.61	77.17	73.78

Source: Census of India, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011.

As per reports from 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 census, the gender gap in literacy rates between Males and Females in Garo Hills can be observed as higher. However there is clear reduction in gender gap in 2011.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that the female education in Garo Hills was initiated by the American Baptist Missionaries. They are the pioneers in introducing modern education among the Garos. As we know the Garos did not have their own script, it was the American Baptist Missionaries who had

introduced Roman Script for the Garos. It was till their arrival that Garos could read and write and modern education started from that period. As mentioned above, the Missionaries were responsible for educating Garo girls since the beginning of education in Garo Hills. As a result education scenario in Garo Hills especially girls' education is comparatively better when we compare with the counter parts in the country.

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