

Development of Primary Education in Pre- Independent India: A Study in the Hills Areas of Assam with Special Reference to Karbi Anglong

Abstract

The Missionaries came to India with a view to look after the spiritual welfare to the officers of the East India Company. However, it was the work of the Missionaries who started their activities during the days of the East India Company, which contributed most in building up the present system of education in India. Like other parts of India, the Missionaries played a significant role in the development of education in the Hills areas of Assam in the pre-independent period. Karbi Anglong is one of the Hills districts of Assam and the present Karbi Anglong district was a part of Nagaon District up to 1951. In 1859, for the first time, the Karbi people came into contact with Baptist Missionaries. In this paper an attempt is being made to study the activities of the Missionaries and their contribution to the development of education in Karbi Anglong in the pre-independent period. The present study is based on theoretical approach. The data have been collected from government records, library resources, documentation cells, books, gazetteers, journals, thesis etc. to fulfil the objectives of the study.

Keywords: Missionaries, Contribution, Education, Karbi Anglong.

Introduction

East Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong are two hills districts of Assam, mainly dominated by the hills tribes. The total geographical area of these two districts is 10,434 square kilometres as per 2011 census which accounts for about 13.35% of the total area of Assam. East Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts are bounded by Nagaon and Golaghat districts in the North, Maghalaya and North Kachar Hills districts in the south, Golaghat district and the state of Nagaland are in the East and the state of Maghalaya and Nagaon district in the west.

Previously, Karbi Anglong was a sub- division of the united Mikir and North Cachar Hills district which was inaugurated on November 17, 1951 by curving out certain portions of Nagaon, Sibsagar and United Khasi and Jayantia Hill districts (Phangcho, Dr. P.C., 2001, "Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills: A Study on Geography and Culture", page-5). On February 2, 1970, the North Cachar sub-division was declared as a separate civil district while the Mikir Hills sub-division formed the Mikir Hills district. The Mikir Hills district was again renamed as Karbi Anglong in 1976 vide govt. notification no. TAD/R/115/74/47 dated 14.10.76. In accordance with para 2 of the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution, the Karbi Anglong district council came in to existence on June 23rd 1952. Again on 15th August, 2015 Karbi Anglong district was divided in to two separate civil districts. The West lobe was declared as West Karbi Anglong district and the East lobe remained as Karbi Anglong district.

The Christian Missionaries, who came to India with a view to look after the spiritual welfare to the officers of the East India Company, has a great contribution in the development of modern education system in India. It was the work of the Christian Missionaries who started their activities during the days of the East India Company, which contributed most in building up the present system of education in India. Like other parts of India, the Missionaries played a significant role in the development of education in Karbi Anglong in the pre-independent period. So, the investigators have an interest to know the trends and nature of development of education in Karbi Anglong in pre-independent period. What is the contribution of Missionaries in the field of education in Karbi



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Anglong in the pre-independent period ?When did the tribal people of Karbi Anglong get the opportunity to come in to contact with Missionaries? To find out the answers of such questions the present study has been taken up with the following objectives.

Objective of The Study

1. To study the trends and nature of development of education in Karbi Anglong in pre-independent period.
2. To study the activities of the Missionaries in the field of education before independence in Karbi Anglong.
3. To study the contribution of Missionaries to the development of education among tribal people in Karbi Anglong.

Methodology

The present study is based on theoretical approach. The data have been collected from government records, library resources, documentation cells, books, gazetteers, journals, thesis etc. to fulfil the objectives of the study.

Delimitation of the Study

In this paper, an attempt is being made to study the trends and nature of development of education in Karbi Anglong in pre-independent period, the activities of the Missionaries and their contribution to the field of education in the pre- independent India in undivided Karbi Anglong (Both the East and the West Karbi Anglong).

Trends and Development of Education in Karbi Anglong

The modern education system in Karbi Anglong was started before independence. The British Missionaries played significant role in establishing primary schools in Karbi Anglong in pre-independent period. In 1859, for the first time, the Karbi people came into contact with Baptist Missionaries. The Missionaries established a Baptist Mission centre at Krungjeng, near Kolonger. In 1863 Rev. Bronson and E. P. Scott of the Nagaon Mission applied to the government for financial assistance to establish a circle of schools in the populous villages surrounding the Sadar station and also for the support of a stipendiary moral class of Kachari, Lalung, Karbis and Naga boys willing to be educated and return as teachers to educate their ignorant and illiterate tribesmen.

Educational Activities of Missionaries in Karbi Anglong

The beginning of formal education in the Karbi Anglong district has been made by the Missionaries who came solely with the purpose of proselytization. The Karbis did not have a written language and possessed no books on Karbi language during that time. The primary object of the missionaries was to spread the teachings of Christian religion among the ignorant Karbi people, but along with it, they had a strong desire to bring the tribal people to the enlightenment of knowledge through education. When we make a careful study of the activities of the Missionaries, one is compelled to infer that Missionaries used education as a tool of proselytization. The Missionaries from their practical experience learnt that their religious activities could

not take a deep root in the mind of the people unless the people are first educated. Educational activities undertaken by the Christian Missionaries helped them largely to get an access to the people and rendered better opportunities for preaching them.

Those tribes who settled near the Assamese speaking people and who could express their feelings and thoughts through the medium of Assamese considered that preaching of Christianity could be done in the Assamese language. In the case of the Mikirs (Karbis), Miris (Misings), Kacharis and the Nagas instruction were imparted through the religious tenets of the Assamese language, in as much as these tribals of the ethnic group of Tibeto-Burmans had no alphabet and written literature of their own (Barpujari, H. K. 1983. "American Missionary Sakal Aru Unabingsha Satikar Asom", Assam Sahitya Sabha, page-40). It was decided in 1864 by the governor General in council that the tribes belonging to the then state of Assam would be imparted education through the medium of Roman scripts and if there was any demand from the public, Assamese or Bengali language would also continue side by side.

Practically no attempt was made during the British periods to educate the Karbi people. The British extended their administration to the Mikir Hills district in the year 1835 (Thakur, Pankaj, (Edited) "India's North-East", page-130). In the late 1850, the Missionary work had begun among the Karbis, a tribal people living in the hills near Nagaon district but the response was minimal (Downs, F. S, "Christianity in North East India", Calcutta, page-107). The Christian preaching among the Karbis in the beginning was not direct. The Tika Pahar School run by Missionaries was the only school of some importance. A number of Karbis who came in contact with the Christian Missionaries in the plains were converted to Christianity. The Missionaries working in the Tikapahar belong to the council of Baptist Churches for North East India. Cyrus F. Tolman and his wife Mary (Bronson) Tolman were the first Missionaries sent to work among the Karbis in 1859 (Gohain, B.K.,1984, "The Hill Karbis", Diphu, page-69). Unfortunately he could do little work for the Karbis because he was also in-charge of the Nagaon American Mission. After Tolman, E. P. Scott entered Karbi Anglong to take up the Tolman's half done work. But due to unhealthy climate of the district Scott fell ill and died of Cholera in 1868. In 1871 a missionary Rev. R. E. Neighbour Came down to Karbi Anglong and was able to some transaction work and established several schools. In 1878 he also wrote a "Vocabulary or Dictionary" and in the same year, he had to give up his service due to ill health. After him, Sardoka, a Karbi, who took up education under the supervision of the Missionary, wrote another dictionary (Rongpi, Jayanta (edited), April 1982, "Natun Banhi", Diphu, page-13). As the Assamese language had bloomed in the hands of the Missionaries so also the Karbi language began to glow by the mercy of the missionary publishing book, for the first time, written and printed in Karbi language. In 1886 there were only 41 Karbi Christian in the Nagaon Church and two in the Guwahati church

(Gohain, B.K., 1984, "The Hill Karbis", Diphu, page-69). The American Baptist Missionary, led by P. E. Moore and J. M. Carwell in 1889 entered in to the Karbi Anglong and they learned Karbi language and started their work in this region in 1891 (Neog, Maheswar, (Edited) 1960. "Pabitra Asom", Lawyers Book Stall, Panbazar, Gauhati, page-88).

In 1871, the present Karbi Anglong district was a part and parcel of the Nagaon district. There were 11(eleven) schools (Mission) in existence during that year in Nagaon and the entire 11 schools were situated within the present boundary of Karbi Anglong district. Most of those schools received aid from the government (Barpujari, H. K. 1983. "American Missionary Sakal Aru Unabingsha Satikar Asom", Assam Sahitya Sabha, page-29).

In 1894, Moore, though spent much of the cold season at Kolonga in the areas of Karbi Anglong, did not choose it as a permanent centre of his work (Neog, Maheswar, (Edited) 1960. "Pabitra Asom", Lawyers Book Stall, Panbazar, Gauhati, page-69). After extensive tours and observations Carwell decided in 1896 to locate the centre at Tika along (Neog, Maheswar, (Edited) 1960. "Pabitra Asom", Lawyers Book Stall, Panbazar, Gauhati, page-70), a hill nearby the Baithalangu market place by the side of the river Barapani. On the eve of the Missionaries annexation of the Tika Along, the Karbi believed that it was the seat of Tika Arnam, the God of the giant rocks. Gradually the place became inhabited. As soon as Carwell took up the responsibility of the work, he began to construct school buildings. Deobar, a Karbi Christian assisted the Missionaries to establish the new centre with its school. In 1906 the Tika Church had 27 member, most of them were the school students. Moore served until 1919 and Carwell served until he died in 1925 (Gohain, B.K., 1982, "The Hill Karbis", Diphu, page-70). With the death of Carwell Tika centre was abandoned.

The Missionaries establishing Church and primary schools endeavoured to attract and teach the Karbi children. The first Karbi newspaper 'Birta' was published and printed by the Missionary. 'Bitusu', 'Asomor', 'Akitap' etc. were the books written in Karbi language for the school students. They had a small printing press in which they printed 'Fli Fli'(butterfly), 'Kalakha' (arithmetic), the 'Pratham Mikir Path', 'Ditio Mikir Path', 'Tritiyo Mikir Path', 'Chaturtha Mikir Path', 'Ning Arjan', 'Chinning Purthem', 'Birejkeme', 'Thang Tam', a monthly magazine (Neog, Maheswar, (Edited) 1960. "Pabitra Asom", Lawyers Book Stall, Panbazar, Gauhati, page-88 & 89). Though at the inception, Assamese script was used, afterwards they had preferred to use the Roman script for those books. In this way the American Baptist Mission published many books and leaflets in Karbi and these were mostly meant for spreading Christianity among the Karbi people.

Mr. J. M. Carwell and P. E. Moore established a primary school and a primary health centre at Tika Pahar. The first teacher of this school was Thangkursing Ingti (Rongphar, B. 2005;"Karbi Anglongor Rajnoitik Itihas", Phu Phu Publication, Diphu, page-32). According to Missionary conference

report of William R. Hutton (1927) that village Churches and schools in the Tika Pahar area were most badly in need of trained, earnest teachers who would also be leaders in the Church. The short term training course that was inaugurated at Jorhat for village teachers had proved of great value when it could adjust itself to meet the need of the teachers. The Pandit (Teacher) who attended the training course and returned to the Tika Pahar side had shown that he received some good achievement and knowledge from the training. The purpose of education was spiritual. Methods of intellectual training follow a simple pattern of demonstration and memorisation. The teacher demonstrated how to read, write and draw pictures. There was memorisation and recitation of songs, poems and stories. Most of the students could not afford to own a text book and memorisation for the particular instance was imperative. Other methods included dictation and composition of sentences. Most of the teachers did not have the slightest idea how to teach the pupils to read. They took from six month to a year to teach the children the A, B, C 's and even then the pupils did not understand words and ideas (Hutton, Williams R., Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, Golaghat session, November 23, 1927, page-56). Sir Comfort Goldsmith also considered that rupees twenty (Rs. 20/-) is a minimum requirement to a village school to begin with. According to him, no school in the Mikir Hills had such magnificent equipment. Only four schools of Tika Pahar area purchased black-boards during the year. It was known that a little school for Mikir at Forkating was closed due to lack of funds. There were night schools with an enrolment of sixty four boys and twenty seven girls in the Tika Pahar areas (Hutton, Williams R., Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, Golaghat session, November 23, 1927, page-56). In Forkating area there were two government schools and other eleven schools where the enrolment was 95 boys and 17 girls, total was 112. The villages were small and attempts to recruit pupils by going from one village to another had so far not met with any success.

The work in Karbi Anglong had been restricted to the fringe areas adjoining the plains of Assam. Due to lack of trained personnel and the influence of Hinduism on this tribe, the work had progressed very slowly. Though at first the condition and standard of school of Tika Pahar was not satisfactory, yet the attendance in the four government schools and two other schools was satisfactory. The children were attending more constantly than ever before and were seen to have a better idea of what a school should accomplish. In the beginning, this school had enrolled seventy four pupils of whom 25 were girls (Hutton, Williams R., Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, Golaghat session, November 23, 1927, page-56). The girls did not attend school regularly but some of them, at least having begun to learn and continued the study. Out of the fifteen pupils in attendance, only three lived in the boarding house. Among the pupils, four children were from Gaonburah's (Village Headman) sons (Moore, P.

E., Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, Nagaon; 1916, 14th session, page-36).

Gradually in October 1916, seven girls were again on the school register and attended the school, but in December 1916 there were none. Of the eighty five reported under instruction in this field during the year 1927, more than twenty were girls, but they did not attend regularly as the boys did. In three outside schools, at least twelve girls reported. Mr. Hutton thus observed- "The association had started a Middle English school but is having a hard time to pay the teacher. Though the people had not asked for the Mission's help they may need it as they wanted a strictly Christian school. There were three other village schools with 130 boys and only thirty girls (Assam Missionary Conference Report, 42nd session, Jorhat-1945). Mrs. P. E. Moore reported about the Tika Kindergarten school in 1913 that- "At first, attendance of children was not satisfactory in the Tika Primary school. After sometime, perhaps in 1913, the Baptist Missionary tried their best to start a Kindergarten school with thirty pupils" (Moore, Mrs. P. E.- Assam Baptist Missionary Conference Report, 1913, 12th session). The station school pupils had asked to be allowed to attend the Kindergarten. However, children were attending more regularly than even before. They were interested in learning and happy in doing it. The last was not the least asset; the Baptist hoped that the school might serve as a training school for the older boys who wish to teach. In addition to it, there were five Mikir (Karbi) schools in the Mikir villages. The Karbi's on the Sibsagar side felt, they had lost considerably in a spiritual way because of the closing of the Mission school in Golaghat. They had another project to open a Middle English school at Deithor as a branch of the Jorhat Christian school. They had started to raise Rs. 5000/- for the school but whether it materialised or not, it was a fine thing to have them planning something and trying to stand on their own feet (Assam Baptist Missionary Conference report, 41 session, Nagaon, Assam, November 9 to 13, 1944). Gradually it was learnt that in 1965 the Puta Baptist Association had one special project in hand. They were running one Christian High School located at Tika Pahar, the old Mission Compound for which an amount of Rs. 7200/- was incurred annually (Council of Baptist Churches in North East India; page-38, 15th annual session, Resu, Garo Hills, January 6-10, 1965).

Conclusion

The introduction of education into the society of the hill tribes was a big step towards a change of their century long social structure. The confusion and hesitance born out of their habituated social behaviour could not make them fit into the framework of a new routine life easily. In spite of it, it is significant to note that the Missionaries were successful in inculcating a feeling among these backward communities that race and creed would not deprive them from getting a job or a comfortable life under new government like the other Aryan races, if they could meet the required educational qualifications.

In Assamese speaking plain areas Christianity made important contributions in the field

of education, literature and medicine, but very few non tribals became Christian. In the Hill areas where Sanskritization was well advanced before the advent of the British as among the Karbis, response to Christian evangelistic activities was very limited. Most of the Nagas, Khasis and Mizos, who profess Christianity are more literate and educated and they have been westernised in their dress and education, whereas Karbis, Kacharis, Bodos, Misings had adopted Hindu rituals and customs and have been sanskritized. In these tribes the percentage of literacy is comparatively low than the previous tribes and their way of life, economy and occupational structures were more traditional.

Karbi Anglong could not progress much in case of education before independence. Under the British rule the area of Karbi Anglong was completely neglected as it was a part of Nagaon and Sibsagar district. During the whole course of British rule Karbi Anglong area was inaccessible and unsought. The British only established some revenue Mouza under Mouzaders for revenue collections and the Mouzaders were the real guide and elite in this area. Due to the highly unhealthy and unhygienic climate and the frequent outbreak of epidemics in the district the Missionary actively could not progress as expected to be. Almost the whole population was outside the orbit of formal education yet it is a wonder that area of darkness gave birth to some brilliant and prominent persons.

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