



The Influence Of Missionary Endeavors On Contemporary Indian Education With Special Reference To Assam

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Abstract

The history of modern education in Assam is deeply intertwined with the work of Christian missionaries. Before their arrival, education in the region was largely traditional, centred around *tols* (Sanskrit schools) and *pathshalas* (village schools), which were often limited to upper castes and focused on religious and classical texts. The missionaries brought with them a new system of education, one that was more structured, used the vernacular language, and was open to all sections of society, including women and lower castes. Their efforts laid the foundation for the educational landscape of Assam as we see it today. The main objective of this paper is to identify the educational contributions of the Christian missionaries and its impact on modern education.

Key Words: Modern Education, Christian Missionaries, Assam, Society, Civilization.

Introduction

Assam is one of the North-Eastern states of India, which has its unique cultural values in Indian sub-continent. Both the modern education and English language has played vital role in modernizing Assamese people and enriching their culture. In terms of education, Assam has developed into a top educational destination at the state as well as at the national level. According to the Treaty of Yandabo, Assam came under the East India Company's rule in 1826. A branch of the Serampore Missionary was set up at Guwahati in 1829. The American Baptist Mission Foreign Society sent a mission under Reverends, Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter to Assam with a printing press, which reached Sadiya in 1866. Dr. Bronson another missionary came to Assam and commenced his work among the Nagas in a village near Jaipur. In 1845, the first Baptist Church was established at Guwahati, and its branches were opened in the same year at Nowgaon and Sibsagar districts respectively. Lateron, the missionaries started orphanage, schools and hospitals at Nowgaon.

The Christian Missionaries were the pioneers in the field of modern education in Assam and wrote books on different subjects. In this way, they developed the modern Assamese literature too. The missionaries translated the Bible into Assamese and this was the first Assamese book in print. After that the first Assamese newspaper 'Arunudoï', the first Assamese Grammar namely 'Grammar of the Assamese Language', and the first Assamese Dictionary were all written by the Christian missionaries. The development of modern education in Assam started with the emergence of British rule in 1826 in Assam. For long, Assam was having her indigenous system of imparting elementary education through formal institutions like Pathshalas for Hindus, Tols for Brahmins and upper class Hindu, Madrassas for Muslims and Satras for the Vaisnavites. These indigenous systems were largely replaced by modern education pattern under British company's patronage. Before 1833, there was no noticeable progress in the field of education in Assam, but after that both government and missionaries actively took part in educational field. The Christian missionaries did excellent work in whole North-Eastern region especially in Assam. They opened various schools and colleges in different parts of the state. To enhance the status of education in Assam, the government along with the help of missionaries introduced many innovative educational policies.

Objective of the study:

The main objectives of the present study are-

- i) To study the educational development in Assam tracing the evolution pattern.
- ii) To investigate the impact and contribution of the missionaries towards modern education in Assam.

Methodology

The study is mainly based on secondary sources like books, Journals and Missionary reports and internet etc.

Analysis of the study

i. Educational development in Assam tracing the evolution pattern:

During the Oriental-Anglicized Controversy, David Scott, agent of Governor general of Eastern frontier flavored the encouragement of oriental learning by improving the indigenous system of education. In 1826, soon after his arrival, he took interest in the promotion of indigenous system of education in Assam and started 11 schools mostly in the lower parts of Assam. He also opened a school in Garo Hills for the development of primary education among the hill tribes. Gradually, a need for English education was felt for administrative advantages. Adam White in 1831, established an English elementary school at Guwahati. The scheme of imparting useful education to the youth of Assam received serious consideration of Mr. Francis Jenking, Commissioner of Assam (1834-61) who urged the government to set up English schools and as a result 'Guwahati Jila school' opened in 1835, which was the pioneer of modern educational advancement in Assam.

Effective British policy in the field of education began with the Macaulay's 'Downward Filtration Theory'. After that, Wood's Despatch of 1854 opened a new era in the history of Indian education. Department of Education was created in each province as a recommendation of Wood's Despatch. In

Assam such Department of Education was created in 1874 and a Director of Public Instruction was appointed. Accordingly, government extended grant-in-aid to Assam and a considerable increase in primary and secondary schools took place. Till 1880, they had established around 1760 primary and 98 high schools.

The American Baptist Missionaries under Rev Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter came to Assam and setup nearly 14 new schools in Sivsagar district. Missionaries established the first printing press in the same place in 1836 and started using local Axomiya dialect for writing purposes. Thus, the first monthly periodical 'Arunodoi' was published by Nathan Brown in 1846. The missionaries also visited interior places of whole North-East India and established schools in Garo hills, Khasi Jaintia hills, Nagaland etc. as a result by the year 1875 the number of educational institutions for general education increased upto 1293.

The Hunter Commission 1882 laid emphasis on the importance of local bodies in the matter of expansion of primary education. This resolution of 1882 empowered local board to establish, aid, manage and control the primary schools. At the end of 1882 the number of government schools in Assam was 11. Educational policy under resolution of 1913 provided greater emphasis to the primary education. The 'Assam local self government Act' of 1915 gives wider power to local bodies to manage all affairs of primary and middle education.

In Assam, the first compulsory primary education act was passed in 1926. It introduced compulsory primary education for the children between 6-11 years of age. Again in 1947, the 'Assam Primary Education Act' was passed, which removed most of the defects of the act 1926.

In the field of education, the Christian Missions have played a great role in providing quality education. In Assam, secondary education was started in the year 1835. As per the recommendations of the General Committee of Public Instruction, the commissioner of Assam, Jenkins started an English school at Gauhati in 1835, which was known as 'Guwahati Seminari' and presently known as 'Cotton Collegiate School' in Panbazar. In 1841 another high school was established in Sivsagar known as 'Sivsagar Govt. Higher Secondary school'. In 1874, Assam was separated from Bengal and a separate Directorate of Public Instruction was created for Assam. Lord Curzon's policy in 1905 attached the administration in Assam. Thus, Secondary education in Assam received a great setback due to the policy of control adopted by Lord Curzon. The Govt. of India act of 1919, introduced the system of 'Diarchy' in the administrative field. Under this system, State government were given freedom in the field of Education. This administrative reform helped in the expansion of secondary education in Assam. Secondary education in Assam made considerable progress during 1912-1947. The number of Middle English schools and Middle Vernacular schools increased to 742, where High schools were increased upto 191 till the end of 1947.

Higher education in Assam also gets remarkable progress in the days of missionaries. Assam boasts of the widest ranging networks of higher educational institutions in the whole N.E. region. In 1901, Sir Henry Cotton established 'Cotton College' in Guwahati realizing the demand of higher education in Assam. This marked the beginning of higher education in Assam. Besides, Cotton College during the

period from 1914 to 1935, 'Earl Law College' in Gauhati (1914), 'Jagganath Barua College' at Jorhat (1913), and 'Lady Keane College' at Shillong (1935) were established.

ii. **Impact and contribution of the missionaries towards modern education in Assam:**

The missionaries contributed a lot in every aspect of Assam ranging from education to health. The gradual growth of education in Assam shows constructive and progressive development in the field of intellectual modernity. They had played a vital role in modernization of life and education of the local people of Assam. The major contributions of missionary activities are —

- i. The modern Assamese period began with the publication of the Bible in Assamese prose by the American Baptist Missionaries in 1819. The currently prevalent standard Asamiya has its roots in the Sibsagar dialect of Eastern Assam. The missionaries made Sibsagar the centre for their literary purposes. The American Baptist Missionaries were the first to use this dialect in translating the Bible in 1813.
- ii. Establishment of primary, secondary and higher educational institutions in the remote areas of N.E. India especially in Assam. For long, Assam was having her indigenous system of imparting elementary education through formal intuitions like Pathsalas for Hindus, Tols for Brahmins and upper-class Hindu, Madrassas for Muslims and Satras for the Vaisnavites. These indigenous systems were largely replaced by modern education pattern under British company's Patronage. 'Cotton Collegiate School', 'Sibsagar Govt. Higher Secondary school' are the secondary schools established by the missionaries in Assam. 'Cotton College', 'Earl Law College', 'Jorhat College', 'Edmund's College' and 'St. Anthony College' etc. played an important role in promoting higher education in Assam.
- iii. For the expansion of women education in Assam, several girls' schools were established. The first girls' school opened at Sibsagar in 1840. The 'Golaghat Mission Girls School', 'Nowgong Mission Girl's School' with residential facilities were the only schools for girls in the region and produced eminent women leaders. The wives of the missionaries laid importance on the establishment of girls' schools for the growth and development of women education. Gradually importance was also laid on higher education of women and as a result 'Dibrugarh Girls Model School' found in the year of 1929-30 to be appearing in the B.A examination. After that a separate college for women 'Lady Keane's college' was set up in 1936.
- iv. School and Industrial and vocational institutions were also established by the missionaries for the development of skills and capabilities of the youths. Students were taught carpentry, agriculture, cane work, blacksmith etc. The establishment of St. Anthony's orphanage and Industrial training school in 1901, which are today known as St. Anthony's Higher Secondary Don Bosco Technical School was a turning point in formal and technical education in Assam. In 1909, agriculture training was introduced which eventually paved the way for Industrial Training School in 1919. The present 'Industrial Training Institute' (ITI) near the Jorhat Mission Compound owes its origin to the American Baptist Mission.
- v. In 1903, the 'Assam Valley School' was started, and in 1906, the 'Bible School' was started and a normal department was added to teach English and other relevant subjects, which was turned to Middle English school by 1909. Within 40 years or so, the school became one of the leading institutions

for boys in the region. Its concern was not only the academic excellence but also holistic development of the boys.

vi. 'Gale Memorial Bible School' for Women was opened on 3rd January, 1925 at Jorhat after it was shifted from Golaghat, where it was started in 1918. The school contributed a lot in the area of women leadership development and paved way for gender sensitiveness in all spheres of life.

vii. The establishment of the mission at Nongsawlia in 1843 was the first attempt for co-education in Asom. This school was converted into a normal (Teachers Training) school by the government in 1867. After that 'Francis Memorial Primary School' was started on 25th January, 1926 at Jorhat. It was a co-educational primary school for all sections of children. The Primary school still continues to provide value-based education to many children.

viii. Christian Missionaries were the pioneer in establishment of a few Primary teacher training schools in Assam in 1888-89. To provide training to MV and ME level teachers of the state a few 'Normal Schools' were also established in the early part of 20th century. In 1936, the Irish Christian Brothers came forward to establish some training classes at the 'St. Edmund College' for B.T degree. The provision for providing training to them in service teachers teaching in Secondary level of school education was imparted at 'St Edmund's college' in Shillong which was later shifted to 'St. Mary's college'. At present, there are altogether 51 B. Ed. colleges in Assam (Sultana, 2013)

ix. The multipurpose schools with diversified courses are one another impact of the missionaries in the field of education. The basic aim of these schools is the all-round development of the students with diversified abilities and interests.

x. In the first part of 19th century missionaries came to Assam and established schools for the expansion of Christianity among the masses. They used 'Kindergarten method' of teaching for the education of small children. But in this effort of education, they became more successful in hilly areas then Brahmaputra valley of Assam. They developed the pre-school education in Khasi-Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, and Luchai hills etc. places through the successful expansion of Christian religion. In the first part of 20th century, 'Montessori system' of education also introduced in Assam. Maria Montessori in 1940, when she visited India and established Montessori school and teacher training centre at Madras subsequently in Assam also schools of English medium of this type were started in urban areas. In the 10th November of 1950, the first Assamese medium Montessori school 'Ballya Bhawan' was established in Assam by Mrs. Abala Gohain at Jorhat. She was a trained teacher passed from 'Madras Montessori Teacher Training Centre'. Besides, government two other agencies are engaged for this cause, Missionaries voluntary organizations. The schools started by the missionaries followed 'Kindergarten method' and the medium of instructions in these schools is English. Few voluntary organizations like the 'Asom Pradeshik Mahila samity' run such schools with the financial aids from the social welfare board, government department of social welfare and the department of education. In 1976, ICDS schemes were implemented in six community Block areas.

Conclusion:

The Britishers entered Assam and established their rule in the early years of the 19th century. Soon after, the different Christian denominations also gradually established their outposts and started their work. Their main objective, no doubt, was to spread their religion. But they also undertook to spread literacy, render medical aid, open schools and educational institutions, etc. Out of all denominations which worked in the North-Eastern region, the American Baptists were able to spread out in many parts. Therefore, finally we can say that missionaries have contributed a lot in every aspect of Assam especially in educational sector. They paved the way for modern education in Assam. The credit goes to missionaries for the considerable growth of modern education in Assam.

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