CHAPTER III
CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES TO EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH EAST
CHAPTER III
CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES TO EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH EAST

3.0 CHRISTIANITY AND EDUCATION IN INDIA

The European Christian Missionaries were the pioneers who laid foundation for the modern educational system in India. They played a vital and indispensable role in the field of education. They made far-reaching contributions through the establishments of schools, colleges, hostel and orphanages, hospital, printing press and other educational services in various important centers of India.

3.1 BIRD'S EYE-VIEW OF THE WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN INDIA FROM 1489-1826

A Portuguese seafarer, Vasco Da Game discovered the sea route to India in 1488 and arrived at Calicut. Since that event, groups of Portuguese, Dutch, French and English colonists made their way to India primarily for the purpose of trade and commerce. Together with these colonists came the Christian missionaries who set up schools for elementary education in religion, local language, arithmetic, crafts and other useful skills.

The first formal Christian educational enterprise anywhere outside Europe was the Santa Fe School in Goa, founded in 1540 by the Franciscans. Soon more missionary schools appeared in other parts of India: at Bassein in 1546, in Cochin in 1549, at Punaicayil in Tamil Nadu in 1567, and in Madurai in 1595. In 1713 a school was started in Pondicherry and in 1731 a School of High Tamil was started at Ellacurichi in Tamil Nadu. It may be mentioned that the Catholic Church opened a Sanskrit school in 1846 at Mannanam, Kerala. Colleges were also established, the first being the Jesuit College at Goa in 1575.
From 1835 till the end of the century, a considerable number of Christian educational institutions were founded all over India, many of which were affiliated to the first universities started in the country in 1857. Several of these institutions - St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata (1835), Madras Christian College (1839), St. Joseph’s College at Tiruchirapalli (1844), St. John’s College at Agra (1858) are highly reputed to this day.

Till the end of the 18th Century, the main thrust of Christian educational activities were confined to centers like Goa, Daman, Diu, Bombay, Mahi, Yaman, Travancore, Calicut, Cochin, Pondicherry and Madras. The arrival of missionaries under the leadership of William Carey, Marshman and Wards at Calcutta in 1793 brought Bengal into the Christian educational programmes and the establishment of a college at Serampore became a landmark.

3.2 THE CHURCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Collegiate education based on the Western pattern was introduced by the Christian Missionaries at the Serampore College, West Bengal. The Catholic venture into higher education began in 1835 with the founding of St. Xavier’s College in Calcutta. At the time of independence in 1947, the number of Christian colleges was 62 out of a total of 450. As per the UGC Annual Report 2003-2004 the total number of Colleges in the country was 16,885. The number of Catholic Colleges today is 359.

3.3 CHURCH AND EDUCATION IN INDIA: AFTER INDEPENDENCE

At the time of Independence (1947), the educational system in India was not only quantitatively inadequate, but also characterized by great regional, gender and caste imbalances. Only 14% of the population was literate and only one out of three children were enrolled in primary schools. It was only after independence, that the importance of taking education to the masses began to be appreciated. After independence there has been a massive involvement of the Church in Education.

Catholic educational institutions have always been rated high for the quality of education they impart. They are esteemed not only for the high academic standards.
but also for the sound moral and spiritual values they inculcate and the open and secular outlook they foster. 59% of these institutions are in rural areas serving the poor and the marginalized sections of society.

3.4 CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The credit for introducing technical and vocational education in the country goes to the Church. Before the 19th Century there were no schools for training people in any technical or industrial skills. Aware of the limitations of purely academic education, the missionaries constantly looked for opportunities to vocationalise education so as to equip students with the skills necessary for gainful employment. Hence they started schools exclusively for imparting technical training.

3.5 CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The missionaries were the first to promote education of girls in India. The first ever Girls' school in India was opened by the missionaries in 1819 at Kottayam. A year later, another Girls' School was established in Alapuzha. These initiatives gathered great momentum in the years to follow and girls' schools came into being in different parts of Kerala.

When the missionaries reached the North East India, education of women was practically unknown, especially in the plains of Assam. The first attempts towards the education of women in the North East India were made at the turn of the twentieth century. Today, female literacy level in the North Eastern States compares favourably with that in the rest of India.

The beginning of education of women was a major breakthrough in the transformation of society in India. The importance the Church attached to women's education has led to the enlightenment of Indian women of all religions, castes and
regions in modern times.\textsuperscript{79} (Card T. Toppo, Report 27\textsuperscript{th} General Meeting, Catholic Bishops Conference of India, Bangalore 2006)

\section*{3.5.1 CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN GENERAL TO EDUCATION IN THE NORTH EAST}

The first contact of the North East's with Christianity dates back to the 16\textsuperscript{th} century when Amar Manikya (1577-1585), king of Tripura invited the Portuguese soldiers from Chittagong to his kingdom. They settled down at Udaipur.\textsuperscript{80}

The next recorded contact of Christian missionaries with the North East took place in 1627 when two Jesuit missionaries, Stephen Casella and John Cabral visited parts of Goalpara and Kamrup on their way to Tibet. The missionaries made several and risky attempts to enter China, but were encountered with strong opposition by the Chinese king.\textsuperscript{81}

Serious mission activities began on a serious note in 1813 when William Carey founder of the Serampore Mission sent Krishna Chandra Pal of the Serampore Baptist Mission to Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

\section*{3.5.2 CHRISTIAN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN THE NORTH EAST FROM 1826 ONWARDS}

The Christian educational activities in the North East were quite insignificant till 1926 the year when Assam came under the British rule.

In 1829, a branch of the Serampore mission came to Gauhati when Carey sent James Rae to Gauhati to open a center at the request of David Scott. Rae opened a school at Gauhati to which the children of the hills were also admitted. Among the pupils were three Khasi princesses one of whom was the brother of Tirot Sing the Syiem (king) of Nongkhlaw. The Baptist missionaries faced many impediments.

\textsuperscript{79} Report, Card Toppo T. 27\textsuperscript{th} Meeting, Catholic Bishop Conference of India, (CBCI) Bangalore February 2006.
\textsuperscript{80} Conf. Alucka J., History of the Catholic Church in North East India, 12.
\textsuperscript{81} Kottupallil G., A Historical Survey of the Catholic Church in NorthEast India, Centenary of the Catholic Church in NorthEast India 1890-1990.
Unable to make any real progress in their mission work, the Baptist missionaries closed down their schools in 1838 and left the Khasi Hills. However, a remarkable achievement of the Serampore Baptist Mission was the translation of the New Testament to Khasi. In 1824 the first Khasi New Testament was printed. The language was the Shella dialect and the script was in Bengali characters. Lish published a revised version of the Acts if the apostles and also prepared a vocabulary and grammar of the Khasi language.

In 1845 the first Baptist Church was established at Gauhati and other branches at Nowgong and Sibsagar. The years that followed saw the commencement of educational activities among the Nagas by Dr. Bronson, the establishment of a press at Sadiya in 1866, the printing of the first book the New Testament in Assamese in 1819, the Bible in Assamese in 1833, the first Assamese newspaper (Arundai), the first Assamese Grammar and dictionary.

The earliest Christian denominations to work in the North East were the British Baptists and the Presbyterians. Innumerable difficulties forced the British Baptists to withdraw from their mission centres and American Baptist Missionaries came to Assam in 1930s at the request of Captain Francis Jenkins. The first to arrive were Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter.

Alexander Lish came to Cherrapunjee in 1832 and set up three schools one each at Cherrapunjee, Mawsmai and Mawmluh. These schools were closed due to financial problems lack of success and Lish's retirement due to illness.

When Thomas Jones arrived in Cherrapunjee on 22nd June in 1841 the three schools were reopened. U Larshai was the teacher at Mawsmai, U Nising at Mawmluh and U Jon at Cherrapunji. From this humble beginning, education spread slowly but steadily to over parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The pioneering missionaries realized the importance of education for the welfare of the tribal people. Every time a new station was opened the first thing done after preliminary study of language was to establish a school.

---

82 Maliekal G. History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis, quoting P.N. Dutta, Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias, 184
Thomas Jones learned the Khasi language and put it to the Roman Script. He produced the first books in Khasi in Roman Script, ‘Ka Kot Banyngkong’, the First Khasi Reader and ‘Ka Jingai I Mei’, My Mother’s Gift83 which earned him the title of ‘The Father of Khasi Literature’.

In successive years various publications in the Khasi language, both of religious and educational paved the way for the beginning and development of the Khasi literature.84 Another missionary Rev. Jone Roberts put Khasi literature on a solid foundation.

In the 1850s more schools were established in several important villages of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills – Shella, Lamin, Mairang, Laitkynsew, Nongthymmai, Jowai, Nongstoin, Mawphlang, Mawlai, Laitumkhrah and so on. Around 1865 it was estimated that with the exception of Nongkrem Syiemship all other syiemships in the Khasi Hills had at least one school in its territory. The government also aided the missionary by periodic grants for establishing schools.

In 1858 the total number of Mission schools in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills number 10 and the attendance in the schools added up to 132 pupils.

In 1866 there were 65 day-schools in Khasi and Jaintia Hills administered by the Presbyterian Synod. By 1910 the number of these schools had grown to one thousand.85

In subsequent years in order to tackle the problem of qualified teachers the Nongsawlia School was converted into a Normal Training School in 1964. In 1861 it became part of the Cherrapunjee Theological College.

3.5.3 THE CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION FROM 1890 ONWARDS

The Catholic Missionaries have given the greatest impact on the educational development of the North East even though they began their activities 50 years later than other Christian missionary groups.

83 Dhar E. Weston., Primary Education in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, 52.
84 MalieckaI G., History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis, 69.
The arrival of the first Catholic missionaries, the Salvatorians Missionaries from Germany March 1890 under the leadership of Otto Hopfenmueller and Marianus Schumm marked the beginning of the Catholic mission in the whole of the Northeast. They were followed by other groups of missionaries. With the advent of the Catholic Church in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the education that the earlier missionaries had started received further impetus.

Upper most in their mind was Christian formation of their faithful particularly the young. It was considered imperative to have catholic schools in order to instruct them in school and educate them in their faith.

In 1891 the first Catholic school was set up in Shillong. Schools were also set up in Raliang in 1892 and at Shella in 1893. The setting up of these schools called for a considerable outlay by the mission and in the early years no grants were forthcoming.

In 1907 the Catholic schools were re-organized to fall in line with the government Syllabus and recognition was made available so that by 1910 the Catholic Mission could count 12 schools that had been recognized by the government, majority of them located in the Khasi Hills.

In the same year a school for domestic science in Shillong was started with government grant towards the building. Special rooms and furniture were provided for training girls in cooking, washing and ironing. Similar practical subjects had already started at Raliang such as stitching, knitting, darning and embroidery. A weaving school as well was set up in that locale.

It was soon realized that in order to benefit local boys it was not enough to have four-year primary schools. Middle English Schools were needed. St Anthony’s Middle English school was thus, opened on 18th May 1908 under the guidance of Fr. Herbert Winkler. On 15th August 1911, a bigger school was inaugurated which soon became an important center of education for boys. Official recognition to the school was granted on 1st August 1911 and Grants were given. At that time it had 120 boys and girls.

82 C. Becker SDS, History of the Catholic Church in Northeast India, 261.
The Mission administer 26 Elementary Schools in 1912. There were a total of 547 students (325 boys and 222 girls).86

In the mean time requests came from various quarters for starting a high School for the children of the Europeans working in the region. Under the direction of Mother Clotilda Mechtilda Costelloe, the first English High School in the region with a boarding attached was officially opened on 8th May 1909. There were 23 day-scholars and three boarders at the time.

On 3rd June 1913 the first primary school established for local girls according to government norms. Lady Earle, wife of the British Commissioner, inaugurated the school. An orphanage was also attached to the school.

In 1914, another group of sisters, the Cathechist Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception opened an Assamese school for boys and girls. Since society of that time did not easily favour education of girls, the school filled a much-felt need.

According to the review given by the Salvatorian missionaries, by September 1914 they had established two English High Schools, with boarding houses in Shillong. They also had a higher elementary school for local boys in Shillong. There were 27 primary schools for local students with 356 boys and girls in these schools. The sisters of the Divine Savior also conducted a Girls’ School for Khasi children in Shillong and two home-science schools in Shillong and Raliang. The boys were also provided with vocational training in the Trade School at Shillong and the farm at Umlyngka.

Meanwhile, World War I broke out in August 1914 and the Salvatorians, being German nationals were ordered to leave. The men left Shillong in June 1915 and the ladies on 15th November 1915.

The Salvatorians had laboured for 25 years in the North East till the beginning of the First World War and by that time they had laid a strong foundation for the educational needs of the Khasis and the Jaintias with premier schools at Shillong.

86 Maliskal G., History of the Catholic church among the Khasis, 106
3.5.4 EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE NORTH EAST AFTER 1914

After the departure of the Salvatorians, the Jesuits and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions carried on the educational activities. They faced great difficulties due to lack of personnel, shortage of resources and other reasons that many projects either lagged behind or could not be quickly realized.

When the sisters of Our Lady of the Missions (RNDM) took over the school in Shillong from the Salvatorians Sisters on 15th November 1915 there were 90 pupils and 42 orphans. The school has developed into the present St. Mary’s Complex which today comprises St. Mary’s Primary School, St. Mary’s Montessori School, St. Mary’s English School, St. Mary’s Secondary School, St. Mary’s Higher Secondary School, St. Mary’s College and St. Mary’s College of Teacher Education. The complex also includes an orphanage, a hostel for college girls from rural areas and WISE (Women for Integrated-Self-Empowerment) an NGO for underprivileged women and girl dropouts.

In 1922 the Salesian missionaries arrived in the North East and inherited a rich and promising legacy of the hard work and sacrifice of their predecessors. They began to undertake numerous educational projects in the Region. The missionaries possessed a special capacity to educate youth as well as financial and human resources. Their personnel were equipped to give academic and technical education in various trades and skills. Numerous schools – primary, middle high school and hostels for boys and girls were opened. In due time colleges and technical schools were established.

Thereafter, there was rapid progress in the educational sphere. Within a decade of the arrival of the Salesian Missionaries, the number of Primary School rose to 280 with about 5000 students and 150 teachers. They started several Middle schools and High Schools and the trade school in Shillong became Don Bosco Technical School the first of its kind in the North East.
3.5.5 EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE MID-THIRTIES AND AFTER

The mid-thirties saw the development in field of third level education. St. Anthony’s College was affiliated to Calcutta University for B.A., B.Sc. courses, St. Edmund’s for the I.Sc., B.A., and B.T., and St. Mary’s for the B.A., B.T., for girls. There were few colleges offering the B.T. degree and those attending in Shillong came from as far afield as Madras and Kashmir. St. Mary’s also had an L.T. Centre which provided teacher training for girls who had completed high school. This was an excellent service, which provided school with highly competent teachers. Similarly they made a great impact with the school in Haflong which was started in 1914.

The post Independence period saw the opening of more schools in other important centres of the North East like Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Gauhati, Imphal, Kohima, Tura and others. Measures were taken to facilitate educational services to the people in rural areas by founding indigenous sisters.

3.5.6 THE EDUCATIONAL PATTERN OF THE MISSIONARIES FROM 1947 ONWARDS

The educational pattern initiated by the pioneers has been consistently followed in the North East. Mission and school go hand in hand and wherever possible high schools have been established. The process was made easier after independence. Consequently more and more schools were opened for which generous help from the government was obtained. In Assam this was not so easy because educational institutions were already under the government control.

An ecclesiastical administrative unit in the Catholic Church is a Diocese. The Diocese ensures a planned and coordinated programme of its various services. At present there are 13 dioceses in the North East.

According to the statistics of the Catholic Church in the North East 1988, there were 5 colleges, 87 high schools, 161 Middle English Schools, 1192 primary and KG

---

87 C. Curran, A Century of Catholic Educational endeavour in Northeast India, The Catholic Church in Northeast India, 344
schools and 56 vocational and non-vocational training in the Dioceses of Shillong, Dipchu, Kohima, Silchar and Tura for which data are available.

Statistics available from the Shillong Archdiocese for 2005 show that there were 938 lower primary schools with a total enrolment of 48,770 pupils. There were 163 Upper Primary schools with a total enrolment of 22,410 pupils. 1920 teachers were employed in the Lower primary schools and 907 in the Upper Primary schools.

Looking at the educational scenario in the Khasi Hills and in the Region one can note that the work of education was a patient one, but it was an investment worth a cause.88

3.5.7 EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN THE GARO HILLS

Long before their contact with Western Education the Garos had their own system of indigenous education, which they imparted to the young men in the ‘Nokpante’ meaning ‘House of Bachelors’. With the introduction of Western Education the Nokpante education gradually became obsolete.

In the Garo Hills education preceded Christianity. Education was introduced among them by David Scott ‘to redeem them from their utter backwardness’. In 1826 he set up a school at Singimari and Valentine William Hurley was the headmaster. Hurley faced great difficulties in coping with his new environment. Unable to bear the hardships he resigned and James Fermie succeeded him in July 1828. The school was closed due to his sudden death in November of the same year and no one was available to replace him.

Though short-lived the school at Singimari produced fruit. In 1846, Major Jenkins met three Garos who were employed as interpreters at the frontier markets and at the Goalpara Court with the knowledge of the Bengali language that they had learned in the school.89

The next school for the Garos was opened in Gauhati in 1829. In 1847 another school was set up at Goalpara. As the British Baptist were unable to carry on with their educational activities, Captain Francis Jenkins entrusted the education of the Garos to the American Baptist Missionaries. They were involved in the education

88 Maliekal G. History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis, 277
89 Milton S. Singma History of Education in Garo Hills, 16.
of the Garos from Goalpara centre. Omed Momin and his cousin Ramke Momin, the first Garo converts to Christianity received education here.

Ramke Momin opened a school at Damra soon after his conversion to Christianity. A school was started in Tura in 1870s. By 1875 there were 9 schools in Garo Hills run by the missionaries. By 1886 the number rose to 36 with schools being started in important villages. The Government financed 3/4th of the expenses of the schools with the rest being contributed by the people. In 1880 the Normal Training School in Tura was started. Thangan Sangma became its Headmaster from 1882 to 1884.

In 1917 Garo Hills had 71 Mission schools with nearly 4000 students. The report at the Jorhat Missionary Conference in 1926 revealed that there were 74 Mission schools with a total enrollment of 1,899 pupils out of which 169 were girls.

In 1934 the Government decided to take over education from the missionaries in Garo Hills and with that the number of schools under the American Baptist missionaries became fewer.

A unique aspect of education among the Garos is community involvement. The community set up schools and maintained them because they felt the need for schools for their children. Many school were supported by the village durbar, Church Associations or from the ‘Women Rice Fund.

The Roman Catholics entered Garo Hills in 1930s and opened its first school at Dalu in 1933. In 1938 a Lower Primary School was opened at Tura. The school was upgraded to the Middle English School in 1957 and finally elevated to a High School in 1964. It now bears the name of Don Bosco High School.

In 1952 a separate Middle English School for girls was opened which was upgraded to St. Xavier’s Girls’ High School.

According Statistics available at the Bishops House, Tura the Catholic Church runs 69 Lower Primary Schools, 35 Upper Primary Schools, 15 High Schools, 1 College, 1 Teacher College of Education for Special Education and 1 College of
Teacher Education. Other institutions include 35 hostels for boys, 31 hostels for girls, 34 Dispensaries, 1 Nursing Home, 1 Hospital, 2 Old age Homes, 1 Leprosarium and 1 institute for the Physically Handicapped.

3.6 ESTIMATE OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES TO THE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH EAST

3.6.1 SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE NORTH EAST

More than 100 years have passed now since 1891 when the German Salvatorian missionaries began their works in the N.E. Had it not been for the missionaries N.E. would have been left far behind in the progressive march of development made by India especially after her Independence in 1947. Their efforts in furthering the educational and literacy condition of the people of the N.E. have brought about a socio-cultural transformation in the area. The people came to possess a new outlook on the world; they were helped to keep contact with the outside world and to keep pace with the development in other parts of our globe. This truth can be borne out by the fact that there are a large number of persons who have accomplished higher education and are rendering valuable services in different walks of life (politicians, teachers, doctors, etc.) not only in the N.E. region but also in other parts of the country and even abroad.

3.6.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF NUMEROUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR SERVICES TO THE PEOPLE

Within a very short period of time the various missionary organizations set up numerous schools at the primary, middle and high school levels in suitable mediums (English, Assamese, and other local languages) in important centres, as well as colleges, trade schools, technical schools and other vocational training centres.

These institutions provided educational facilities of the highest order for every one, and maintained that tradition always. Together with academic excellence,
attention was also given to the enhancement of other human values in the moral, social and cultural aspects. The numerous educational institutions set up were immensely popular, and the system and method of education used very effective.

The educational institutions played a big role for the uplift of the people of N.E. especially of the tribal people. And the educational facilities were made available for all, the rich as well as the poor and under-privileged, irrespective of caste, language, religion and sex. Even the remotest rural areas benefited.

3.6.3 BENEFITS TO THE PEOPLE FROM THE EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS OF THE MISSIONARIES

Manifold benefits were bestowed upon the people of the N.E. through the educational endeavours of the Christian missionaries. The relevant and excellent education served as solid foundation for the building up of the modern N.E. Indian society. It helped the people of the N.E. share the fruits of the development of India after her independence in 1947. It taught the people to assert themselves for their just social rights and duties and to understand their roles in the society even on a world wide level. It helped to preserve the cultural identity of the area in spite of various social pressures exerted by modern civilisational changes. It helped to preserve, spread and develop the various local languages and their literary wealth through scientific studies, printing and publishing of books, periodicals and newspapers. It helped the N.E. region produce a good number of social and political leaders, scholars and experts in various fields, and thus contribute to the construction of modern India.

The Khasi Hills of Meghalaya benefited the most since the first educational thrust by the missionaries was at Shillong. In fact, Shillong has developed as an educational developmental “Metropolis” in the whole of N.E. India. And it still enjoys that preeminence.

Due to various reasons chiefly political the Christian missionaries could not enter into certain areas of N.E. eg. Arunachal Pradesh. As a result these areas could not be brought on a par with other parts of N.E. in the educational developmental programme. Compared to other states of India, these areas have the lowest literacy rate. Wherever the state government has supported the efforts of the Christian
missionaries, the educational developments were phenomenally vast and fast, as seen in Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland.

The 1988 statistics show more than 5 colleges, 87 high schools, 161 middle English schools, 1192 primary schools and 56 centres for vocational and non-formal training in different trades.

The present day educational structures, methods, and plans have to meet not only the needs of higher level of education, but also other pressing problems such as: education of drug addicts, the physically handicapped (the blind, the deaf, the dumb and the spastics) stepping the literacy rate, checking the rate of school drop-outs and unemployed youth, and other highly specialised educational tasks.

3.7 CONCLUSION

The Christian missionaries were people with a vision who helped the people of the N.E. prepare themselves through education and be ready for the present day modern technological world conditions. They have given very praiseworthy and invaluable contribution to the educational development of North East India.
Urban School Buildings

Urban School Classroom

School Staff Room

School Sports Activities