CHAPTER – IV

EDUCATION IN GARO HILLS BEFORE INDEPENDENCE
CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION IN GARO HILLS BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

4.0 ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

In Garo Hills education preceded Christianity. Long before Christianity was brought to the Garo Hills by the American Baptist Missionaries, education had been introduced among them. It was David Scott who first conceived the idea of educating the Garos. Ever since December 1812, when he was appointed the Judge and Magistrate of Rangpur, Scott had been deeply involved in Garo affairs and their relation with the neighbouring zamindars. Therefore, in view of his familiarity with Garo affairs, he was subsequently deputed in 1816 to deal with the troubles on the Garo frontiers. He made extensive tours in the Garo Hills after which he urged upon the authorities to make every possible effort to redeem the Garos from their “utter backwardness” by introducing education and Christianity among the Garos.

The present set up of the educational system in Garo Hills is exclusively the consequence of the works of Christian Missionaries who had deep faith in spreading literacy among Garos besides proselytising them into Christian religion.

David Scott wrote an application to H. Shakespeare, Secretary to the Government of India, suggesting the following measures to attain his objects:

(xi) That a Missionary and an Apothecary be stationed at Singimari, a market on the Garo Rangpur border which was the occasional
headquarters of Scott as the Commissioner of North East Rangpur, or some other convenient place in their neighbourhood,

(xii) That a school be established upon principles suggested by the Lord Bishop, and

(xiii) That the surplus net collections derivable from the Garo markets after deducting the recurring charges, be appropriated to the purpose of the Mission

On October 12, 1826, Government made a favourable reply to Scott’s application, and a grant was made for a Garo school establishment, in accordance with what had been asked. The following was the grant made by the government:

- A School Master: Rs 200 per mensem
- A Native Assistant Master: Rs 50 per mensem
- Forty Boarders at Rs 4 each: Rs 160 per mensem
- Servant and other contingencies: Rs 40 per mensem

\[
\text{Total: } \text{Rs } 450 \text{ per mensem} \\
\times 12 \text{ months} \\
\text{Rs } 5400 \text{ per annum}
\]

Thus the Government Missionary School established at Singimari, a village located at the western extremity of the Garo Hills district, though short-lived, was the product of David Scott’s sympathy, energy and solicitude. It was the place where the first Bengali medium school in the whole of north-east India was established. The Singmari Bengali medium school did not have much impact on the life of the Garos. This was so because firstly, it was too short-lived, secondly, it came too early, and
thirdly, it was not well implemented because of the absence of teachers with missionary zeal

On March 23, 1846, Major Jerkins submitted an estimate for the first establishment of the school for the Garos as follows

- 2 Missionary School Master Rs 100 each Rs 200 per mensem
- 2 Native Assistant Masters Rs 25 each Rs 50 per mensem
- 2 Under Native Assistants Rs 10 each Rs 20 per mensem
- For the support of sons of chiefs who might come from a distance Rs 50 per mensem
- Stationary, Books, etc Rs 30 per mensem

Rs 350 per mensem

\[ \text{x 12 months} \]

Rs 4200 per annum

Thus, a school was started at Goalpara in 1847 under the care of Major Jerkins. Four Garo boys were admitted in this school. They were Omed W Momin, with his nephew Reban W Momin and two others, Ramsing and Jongrin and there were 13 Garo boys – Omed’s another nephew called Ramke W Momin came and joined. The education was imparted through the Bengali language. Dalton recommended that a few books be translated into Garo and printed in Bengali script.

Next to the Goalpara school, another school was opened at Rongjuli in 1856. Rongjuli was one of the oldest and the biggest Garo villages situated in the plains of Assam. Ramke was sent as a teacher to teach in Rongjuli school while he was still studying in Goalpara school. Later on Ramke went to Gauhati and was admitted in Gauhati Normal School where he pursued his studies for a year or two.
The Damra School was founded by Ramke W Momin in 1864 with the purpose of teaching how to read and write so as to enable the reading of the scriptures. Damra is situated at a distance of one km from the north-eastern part of Garo Hills, at the foot of the hills inside Assam. But later on, the Damra Normal School was removed to Goalpara permanently in 1875, and then to Tura in 1878, where the permanent Mission station was finally established.

In April 1867, on the occasion of the visit of Dr Bronson to Rajasimla when he founded the first Garo Church, he also founded a school with Forika W Momin, brother of Ramke and one of the first pupils of Damra school, as its teacher. There were 17 young Garo men, a class of 13 small boys. In 1868, there were 20 Garo girls studying with the boys. In 1872, there were 34 girls studying at Rajasimla Girls' School.

The same year in 1867, the first American Baptist Missionaries who arrived at Goalpara also opened up their own school to meet the constant demand of the Garo boys and girls at their mission station at Goalpara.

On January 15, 1872, Rev and Mrs Keith, the second missionaries designated for the Garos, arrived at Goalpara and in 1874 Mrs Keith opened a school for Garo girls at Goalpara and called it the Boarding School. 12 girls came from Rajasimla school to Mrs Keith's school. This school continued only for one year because of ill health of Mrs Keith. In the school, they were taught both Garo and Bengali along with other regular subjects, such as sewing and the principles of Christianity.

In 1868 Missionary schools sponsored by the government were established at Nibari, Rongjuli, Rajasimla, Bangabkata and Tura, but the Headquarters of the
Mission continued to be at Goalpara till 1878, as the climate of the hills did not suit the missionaries.

In 1872, there was one Normal School and 14 village schools in Garo Hills. Captain W J Williamson, the first Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills personally visited in January 1873, the schools at Nibari, Rajasimla, Rongjuli and Damra where he found 13, 26, 34 and 24 students respectively. The boys were taught Bengali texts, Arithmetic and Geography through Bengali medium, and simple Garo texts written in Bengali script, while the girls read only Bengali texts.

In 1873, the whole Garo Hills was annexed by the British Government. At last, the American Baptist Mission was strengthened by the arrival of Rev and Mrs E G Phillips and Rev and Mrs M C Mason on December 19, 1874. At the end of 1875–76, there were 9 schools in Garo Hills directly under the control of the Deputy Commissioner, attended by 181 boys. There were 9 other schools in the district under the American Baptist Mission, opened during the year. Four schools were temporarily closed on March 31, 1876. The number of pupils attending the Mission school on that date was 63.

In 1876 a school for the Garos was opened at Chotcholja village and in 1877, the Mission sent another teacher to Derek and the surrounding villages to start a school. There were six school boys and three women converted and baptised.

The new teacher felt that he had to work hard besides teaching in leading the people to Christianity. As a result, in 1880, 78 were baptised in 1881, 58 and in 1882, 30 and in 1886 the Church supported their own pastor with their own funds.
Thus the school established by the Missions were effective instruments in bringing the people to Christianity. The Mission School teachers received Rs 2 to Rs 10 per month, only one, however receiving the latter.

The schools with grants were given into the hands of the Mission, as whole to be administered as they saw fit, provided that the Rs 4,000 be expended on education.

In 1877, the Mission opened schools at Sham Nagar, Chokpotgiri and Atisbanri and at Adokgiri in 1878. In 1879, a school was opened at Baghmara village at the south-eastern part of Garo Hills.

The number of pupils under instruction in 1880 - 1881 was 458.

In 1883, the Deputy Commissioner chose to start and maintain 3 or 4 village schools independent of the Mission and to maintain in the Mission station school from boys in preparation for teachers in such schools, but with this exception the educational work of the district was in the hands of the Mission.

Mr. Bundette came in December, 1883 and helped in Training School, turning out some better teachers than there had been. After he was transferred to Gauhati in November, 1885, Thangkam Sangma who had studied for two years in America during 1882 - 1884, became the Headmaster of the school for two years.

In 1886, the schools for the non-Garos in the plains section came under the immediate care of the government and the Garo schools under the management of the Mission. At the close of 1886, there were 44 schools with 766 pupils, and one Station school at Tura of which Rev. Phillips says, “237 have been in the school since it began, of whom but 14 left unconverted, and six of these were Hindú. Of the 237, 103 have been engaged in teaching or in religious work by the Mission.”
At first, being wholly ignorant of meaning of schools and education, and having a strong prejudice against men of other clans coming among them, the Garos made slow progress in education until its advantages began to become apparent to themselves. As the value of schools began to be realised, villages began to ask for schools and were more ready to build houses, both for the school and for the teacher, also to contribute food toward the teacher’s support.

The number of schools increased and scattered among the heathen, while the Christian villages, increasing their efforts for themselves, tried to raise the grade of some of their schools, and also to relieve the mission of some of its cares. In 1892, one such school was started at Nisangram.

The number of pupils attending the schools in 1890 – 1901 was 593. Mrs Phillips gave much time to teaching in the station school for many years. Miss Rood joined the mission in December, 1894, and during her stay of 4 years at Tura did good work for the girls’ school. At this time, Modhunath G. Momin, who had studied in America for over three years (1891 – 1894) returned and taught in the Station Normal School.

In 1895, Government had instituted six L P Scholarships for Garo pupils, not exceeding 14 years of age to be awarded at a government examination.

In the Normal Department, there were 4 classes representing the 4 years’ work. There was also a primary Department with 4 years course. When a boy completes these courses, he is supposed to have had 8 years of Garo reading, writing, grammar and scriptures, 7 years of Bengali reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic and geography and three years of English reading, writing and grammar.
4.1 DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

The number of pupils in 1900 – 01 was 1,538. Although the number of pupils rose so high compared to 1890 – 1901, yet at the census of 1901, the literacy percentage was only 0.8 percent of the total population, i.e., 1.5 male and 0.2 females. Primary education which was still largely in the hands of the mission, had made considerable progress in recent years. There were no Secondary Schools yet.

In 1902 – 03, there were 3 Upper Primary and 86 Lower Primary schools. In addition to these, there was also one Station Normal School at Tura in which the Garos were trained to serve as teachers.

In 1903 – 04, there were altogether 94 primary schools in the Garo Hills and one Training School. There were 276 girls studying in those primary schools. The expenditure on education was Rs 11,000 of which only Rs 98 was derived from fees. In 1905, there were no less than 109 schools in the whole Garo Hills.

From 1902 onwards, the progress of the schools and the peace of district was greatly disturbed because of the law suit filed by the Garos under the leadership of Sonaram R. Sangma, against the Bijni Zamindar and the British government. The law suit had not ended till 1911.

In 1904, 29 men left the Upper Primary School which was then known as the Graduate School. Of them 15 became teachers in the L.P Schools while others were employed in Government service and some others were employed in Mission.

The Missionary buildings including the school buildings at Tura were destroyed by fire in 1905 which was followed by the scourge of dysentery and Beriberi and soaring prices compelled them to close the Normal School from October, 1905 to December, 1906. In 1905 – 1906, the Normal school or the Teachers’
Training School was raised to the grade of Middle English School. The sales of literature for the six months of the same year amounted to Rs 1,000 and for this growing department, the family of Mrs Walter Mason donated a building – “The Lucy Smith Memorial Library”

During these years, the Garos took more and more interest in education of their children and demands for teachers were far in excess of the supply.

Regarding the schools during 1907 – 1908, Mr Sharp, DPI of Eastern Bengal and Assam reported that in the Garo Hills, education is partly State and partly in the hands of American Baptist Mission.

The Mission maintained a Middle English School at Tura itself, two Upper Primary and 77 Lower Primary schools. They received a lump-sum grant of Rs 7,810 a year. There was one newly established Training School for village teachers. The three numbers of schools had been declined by the number of pupils had risen to 2,395, that is, by 408 pupils or 20.5 percent. It was further reported that education in all the hill districts indicated signs of slow but steady progress. The medium of instruction in the lower classes was in their own mother tongue. In some schools Bengali and Assamese were introduced as medium of instruction. The Central Text Book Committee and Sub-Committees for any district had been formed.

The Teachers’ Training School run by the Government which the Mission was asked to supply teachers and pupils, was taught by a Khasi Christian gentleman. In 1908, the Government also appointed a Khasi Christian gentleman as the Deputy Inspector Schools for all the Garo schools.
In 1908, 12 Garo boys went to study in the Shillong High School after finishing the course at Tura. Eight of them got Mission Scholarships for the first time for higher education and 4 were supported by themselves.

In 1905 one young man by the name of Jobang D. Marak went to USA and studied at Denison University until 1911. He paid his own journey fare to the USA and as he returned to Tura in February, 1911 he taught in the school at Tura. One Garo young woman, Alice W. Momin had gone to the Girls' School at Shillong on a Government scholarship.

In 1910, the government further began to give scholarships to boys of Middle English School who passed the required examination that they might take a High school education in some other schools which gave new encouragement to Garo boys to work for a further education and as a result they had competed and studied in different places like Calcutta, Guwahati, Shillong, Dibrugarh and Serampore.

The Tura Middle English School became the centre of higher learning among the Garos, the number of pupils varying from 250 to over 300 mostly living in the Mission compound. During the three years 1909–1911, 82 boys passed out from this school, of whom 40 taught in the village schools, 26 went for higher studies on the High schools and one studied in the industrial school.

In 1912, Jimison S. Sangma passed the Matriculation Examination in the second division, so he was the first Garo boy to have passed the Matriculation Examination.

In 1913, Harrison W. Momin and Rangam G. Momin passed the Matriculation Examination and hence became the second batch to attain that standard among the Garos.

76
In 1915, there were 232 boys in Upper Primary schools, the number of L P schools was 84 with 1,729 pupils.

In 1916, the Teachers' Training School at Tura faired much better than previous years due to the supervision of Miss Holbrook and Bosin G Momin, the second teacher who returned from America in 1914.

Kandura W Momin was the first Garo to study in the B A and appeared in the B A Examination in 1921 but could not succeed Phoebe, his sister was the Garo woman to have passed Matriculation Examination and the first to have studied in College, in the Scottish Church College, Calcutta.

By this time, the grade of teachers gradually rose as L P and Upper Primary graduates (as they were known) and were replaced by Middle English graduates. The difference between Upper Primary and M E stages was that there were 3 classes in the former and 4 classes in the latter, after the L P stage. The government also began to open more and more schools so that there was about an equal number of government and Mission schools.

In the following years, there were 251 Garos boys in the Garo Primary and 37 pupils in the Bengali department at Tura. There were altogether 84 L P schools under Mission and about the same number of government schools. Twelve more schools were opened by the villagers themselves. The total number of pupils in all the Mission schools came to 2,950.

Pupils in the Upper Primary Schools were 118 boys.

Pupils in the L P Schools were 1,503 boys and 633 girls.
4.1.1 TRANSFER OF MISSION SCHOOLS TO GOVERNMENT

The accepted policy was to transfer the Mission schools to government management. Of 150 Primary in 1917, 79 were government schools and 71 Mission schools. On March 31, 1921, the numbers were 155, 101 and 54. The number of pupils fell during the interval from 4,252 to 3,920. The Boys' department of the Mission Middle English School, Tura was taken over by the government and established in new premises. A new curriculum was also introduced on the same line as the Khasi Hills curriculum. The training school for teachers was reorganised, a very liberal scheme was sanctioned and the preparation of a new series of text books was put in hand. The commissioner was in agreement with the executive authorities in view that the money now spent on education might be spent more advantageously. Therefore, he urged upon the District authorities to do what was possible to bring about an important with limited funds and with indifferent agents and instructed the Inspector of Schools recently appointed to visit the Hills at least once in the year and on his first visit to advise in regard to such action as may be practicable.

With regard to the production of textbooks, there was a Provincial Text Book Committee in Assam and four local Committees. The Provincial Committee dealt with books in English and in the classical languages. The local Committees, viz., the Surma Valley Committee, the Assam Valley Committee, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Committee and the Garo Hills Committee dealt with publications in Bengali, Urdu, Assamese, Khasi and Garo respectively. The production of a series of text books adopted to the curriculum in force in the Garo Hills was undertaken under departmental auspices.
In 1930 two Garo boys passed their B.A. for the first time from Gauhati Cotton College, and the first Garo to pass M.A. was Howard Denison W. Momin who passed in 1936.

In 1926, two new Boys' Hostels were opened in the Mission Compound, Tura where about 100 Christian boys were admitted in that year.

4.1.1 THE SOBHA SCHOOL OR THE FIRST HIGH SCHOOL, 1934

The need for an Institute of higher learning had been greatly felt by the Garo elite of that time and various appeals were made both to the government and to the Missionaries for the opening of such an Institute. However, neither the government nor the mission felt so strongly about it and so on one excuse or the other, no such Institute was opened. This issue was brought before the annual session of the Garo Baptist Convention held in 1934, and it was decided there that the Garos themselves would open a High School to be called "The Sobha School" at Tura. One of the prime-movers for this school was Ramsing Sangma, an evangelist employed by the Garo Sobha or Garo Baptist Convention.

The first teachers of this Sobha school were Rongmitu and Jackso S. Momin and some of the first batch students were Rev. G. Marak, Mrs. Heroine Bangshall, Mrs. Probinballa W. Momin, etc. This was taken over by the government in 1939 and Kanduna W. Momin was its first Headmaster. This was raised to the level of government multi-purpose school in 1958 and it was brought down again as the Government Boys' High School in 1980.

4.1.2 THE DECLINE IN MISSION SCHOOL.

Since the educational policy in the Garo Hills was to transfer the Mission or private schools to the government, there was an annual decline in the number of
government schools. In pursuance of this policy, the government took over 29 Mission schools in 1940 and stopped the monthly grant of Rs 192 to the Mission. In this year, there were only 3 Mission schools in the Garo Hills, 15 were in the Goalpara district and another 15 were supported by individual Churches but under the Mission supervision. There were altogether 108 private schools in the district and an enrolment of 2,229. These were wholly supported by the local churches.

In 1941, the Tura Government High School had attained the full status of a High School. In 1950, the Assam Baptist Mission had been renamed “Council of Baptist Churches in North-East India” when Mission handed over most of the responsibilities in the management of churches and schools to the local Christians. Except very few L P schools opened and run by the individual churches or Associations of churches, in the interior villages, all the L P Schools have been taken over either by the State Government or by the Garo Hills District Council.

4.1.3 THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH SCHOOLS

The Roman Catholic Church Mission having come to Garo Hills in 1933 opened one Middle English School at Dalu in that year.

One L P School was started at Tura in 1938 and 40 boys were admitted into the school. This was raised to Middle English School in 1957 and to High English School in 1964 which was named “Don Bosco High School.”

The Sisters of the Roman Catholic Church Mission also opened a separate M E School in their own compound in 1952 and called it “St Xavier’s Girls’ High School.”

In 1961, the Roman Catholic Mission maintained 56 L P Schools in the villages and three H E Schools. Today, they are expanding their missionary activities.
much faster than any other church body and their educational activities are also expanding by leaps and bounds \(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) Milton S. Sangma, History of Education in Garo Hills, 1985, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, India