CHAPTER V

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
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The Bodo-Kacharis, a predominant tribe and one of the original inhabitants of Assam, are not educationally advanced, even today, compared to other groups of people of the State. Prior to the independence of the country, the Bodo-Kacharis were educationally more backward. We have collected data from the fields and gathered account from the leading persons living in the localities of the Bodo-Kachari people about their educational backwardness. From these data, we find a number of causes for the educational backwardness of the Bodo-Kacharis.

Firstly, the Bodo-Kacharis are predominantly agrarian people. They spend most of their time in agricultural work and hardly find any time to spare for acquiring knowledge through the process of learning and teaching. Secondly, they still live
in the primitive way. And, the primitive way of living kept them away from the path of progress and modern development through education. The modern way of living remained unknown to them. Even if a few of them knew about it, they appeared to be not enthusiastic in adopting modernism. Being conservative in nature, the Bodo-Kachari people tried to maintain their distinct social and cultural identity uninfluenced by the main currents of progress and development in the world outside their habitation. The Bodo-Kacharis, as the original inhabitants of Assam, could have proved their abilities in all fields of development even before the independence of the country. But because of their indifferent attitude towards the modern developments and achievements in the outside world, they are lagging behind.

The British Government in India also did not appear to have taken adequate measures for educating the Bodo-Kacharis during the period of their administration. The British Government did not provide for proper education of the Indian people as a whole. Whatever a little provisions for education they made, all those were aimed at producing some
local clerks and junior officers needed for manning and running their administration in India. In spite of this policy of the British Government in the matter of education, some eminent personalities of Indian people grew up through this system of education. In Assam also some enlightened and enthusiastic non-tribal people availed themselves of the educational facilities as provided by the British Government, and advanced themselves educationally.

But unfortunately enough, the Bodo-Kacharis did not try to avail themselves of the opportunities during the British Rule in Assam. One of the eminent political and social leaders of the Bodo-Kacharis, Shri D. Basumatari, Ex-M.P., told us in course of our interview with him that before independence, there were only two graduates among the Bodo-Kacharis throughout Assam. Not only the Bodo-Kachari people, but also the people belonging to other tribes of Assam lived in the reign of darkness and ignorance. Dr. J.H. Hutton, a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service, who made a deep study into the problems of the tribal people, wrote on the effects of the British Rule on them in the following words:

"Far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive tribes, the establishment of British Rule in
India did most of them much more harm than good. It may be said that the early days of British Administration did very great detriment to the economic position of tribes through ignorance and neglect of their rights and customs. Many changes have been caused incidentally by the penetration of the tribal country, the opening up of communications, the protection of forests and establishment of Schools, to say nothing of the openings given in this way to Christian Missions. Many of the results of these changes have caused acute discomfort to the tribes.1

The Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission, constituted by the Government of India on 28th April, 1960, under Article 339 of the Constitution of India assigning to it the task of investigating and reporting on the problems of the Scheduled Tribes, made some interesting observations and comments on the British Policy of isolation leading to exploitation of the scheduled tribes. According to the Report of the said Commission, "The British Policy of isolating the tribes resulted in exploitation. The technique was simple. Zamindars, land lords, money-lenders and contractors exploited the tribals to the maximum. These contacts with non-tribals were none too welcome to the tribes; they added to the strain of fighting a

lonesome battle against ruthless nature, soil erosion, denudation of hills and erratic rivers."  

The Bodo-Kacharis, who were at one time a predominant and powerful tribe in Assam, became slow in all developmental activities, specially in education. The East India Company was not interested at all for the education of the Indians. They established some educational institutions to get their children educated and desired some Indians to be prepared for clerical jobs. But, it needs to be mentioned that the Christian Missionaries played a vital role in the spread of education among the Indians though their aim was mainly to propagate Christianity. A number of educational activities were organised by these Missionaries in different places. These institutions were of great importance and significance in the history of education in India as the pioneers of private enterprise. It is also to be noted that during the period of British Rule in India, a good number of Bodo-Kacharis of Assam got themselves converted into Christianity. The SreeRampur Missionary set up its branch at Guwahati in 1829 to spread education through propagation of Christianity. The Missionaries established some schools at Guwahati, Nowgong, Jorhat,  

Sibsagar, North Lakhimpur, Naga Hills, and Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Bodo-Kacharis, in spite of having their own dialect, accepted Assamese language as the only medium of instruction in education and of communication with outside people. It would be worth-while to mention the influence of Bodo dialect on the Assamese language. It is well established by the fact that many principal rivers in Assam like Di-puta, Di-Karai, Di-hong, Di-bong, Di-baru, Di-hing, Di-sang, Di-khau, etc., are named with the prefixing syllable, "Di", which is a Kachari word meaning water or river.

There were, however, a very small number of enthusiastic Bodo-Kacharis, though living in the interior villages, who came out to the urban areas to take higher education. At that time, besides the two Government Colleges, namely, the Cotton College (Guwahati) and M.C. College (Sylhet), there were hardly any educational institutions catering to the needs of higher education in the whole of Assam and the North-East India.

The Kacharis were busy in cultivation. They were mainly agriculturists. They kept their children engaged in household works and when grown up, in cultivation. They were quite ignorant about the importance
of education. This was more so because of inadequate number of educational institutions in the locality before independence. Communications were also not satisfactory. "The few roads that were constructed were for security purposes and to enable contractors to exploit the forest produce."  

The Bodo-Kacharis are simple and straightforward by nature. One thing to be noticed in them is that they are too much addicted to drinking of rice-beer usually made at home. They are still in the habit of drinking it regularly. This habit caused, and is still causing, damage to their lives and prosperity. Some educated and conscientious Bodo-Kacharis admit that this indulgence in habitual drinking of rice-beer has been to some extent responsible for the backwardness of the tribe in the field of education.

Not to speak of the Bodo-Kacharis alone, the entire tribal population in the Brahmaputra Valley lived in darkness and ignorance. As mentioned earlier, literacy was very very low among the tribal people in India. The Census figures of 1931 disclosed that the percentage of literacy among the tribals was as low as 0.7%. Some of the States recorded even below 1% as the rate of literacy among the tribal population.

3. Ibid., p. 29.
of the state as shown in the following Table.

**TABLE I**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Tribal Population</th>
<th>Literate Tribals</th>
<th>Percentage of Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Assam</td>
<td>9,92,390</td>
<td>14,094</td>
<td>1.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bengal</td>
<td>5,28,037</td>
<td>3,874</td>
<td>0.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Bihar &amp; Orissa</td>
<td>20,48,809</td>
<td>11,834</td>
<td>0.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Central Provinces</td>
<td>13,51,615</td>
<td>6,769</td>
<td>0.5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As far as literacy was concerned, the condition of the tribal people was worse than that of the scheduled caste. In Assam, however, the position appears to be comparatively better with a literacy of 1.4 per cent as is evident from the Table given above. But this does not indicate that education of the tribal people in Assam was satisfactory.

A.V. Thakkar observed in 1941: "Educational grants to aboriginal areas have been meagre and inadequate hitherto. Middle school, higher school and
college education among the Adivasis is, of course, negligible, if not altogether zero. We can find a few aborigines who have received or are now receiving University education among the Khasis of Assam and the Mundas and Oraons of Chhota Nagpur. At present many Christian Mission Organisations and a few non-Christian Indian Bodies are conducting schools for aborigines with Government aid in most cases. Their work, commendable as it is, appears to be only a drop in the ocean."

The Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission pointed out the role of the Missionaries in the following words: "Missionary activity had already begun to undermine their traditional tribal institutions such as the dormitories in the areas the missions operated. This was bound to lead to a vacuum resulting in general frustration. Mr. J.P. Mills, I.C.S., in his book 'The Rengma Nagas' said that by preventing the converted Nagas from attending the dormitories, the Baptist Missionaries made them run the risk of cultural dis-integration. He felt that in the absence

of provision for extensive or intensive training at home, other types of training only helped in creating tensions between parent and the child."

It is found that the different tribes of India led a different way of life of their own in a very traditional and primitive form uninfluenced by the main currents of various developmental trends taking place outside their habitats.

Although it is generally admitted that education plays an important role as facilitator of social, economical and cultural development, some others seem to be rather sceptical even about the possibility of spread of literacy and education in an underdeveloped community where the poor people form the majority. And, it is sheer poverty for which they could not avail of the educational opportunities and facilities. The Bodo-Kacharis owing to their extreme poor economic conditions and social background remained indifferent towards education. Moreover, special educational facilities for the Bodo-Kacharis did not exist anywhere in the Brahmaputra Valley. And a number of local schools were quite inadequate to the requirement. But some Bodo-Kacharis who lived near the larger plains villages

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and towns with non-tribal people had the opportunity of attending the local schools. In these mixed villages they were on an inferior status due to the prevailing social order, and therefore, only a few could go to the schools. Most of them lived far away from any school, and as such, even primary education was beyond their reach. Some of the students had to travel long distances to attend schools as the villages were scattered and far off. This was a serious handicap to the spread of education among the Bodo-Kacharis in pre-independence period.

When the country was growing more and more education conscious, a few Bodo-Kacharis started the movement along with other tribal people for the development of the tribe. And it is a fact that development of any kind is possible only through the process of education.

Gradually, the Bodo-Kacharis came to understand and realise their problems and drawbacks in the field of education. And, with the help and unwearying effort of some elite and eminent tribal people, The Assam Tribal League came into existence. The first conference of The Assam Tribal League was held at Raha in the District of Nowgong in 1935 under the
Chairmanship of the late Jadav Chandra Khakhleri. The aim of this organisation was to bring about educational and economic development of the backward tribal people of Assam. A scheme was submitted to the then Chief Minister of Assam, Sir Mohammed Saadullah, which was accepted in principle. The Assam Tribal League entered into an agreement with the Assam Congress Party on 10th September, 1938 at Shillong, whereby it was agreed, among others, to prepare a scheme for spread of education among the tribal people of Assam, and for this purpose, sufficient funds were to be separately kept reserved in the Budget every year. The agreement further laid down that sufficient number of scholarships and stipends would have to be provided to the tribal students for general and professional education, and all the tribal students of Middle and High Schools would have to be given free studentships. These measures went a long way in the spread of education among the Bodo-Kacharis and other tribal people of Assam.

The Assam Tribal League maintained in their memorandum submitted later on to Sir Mohammed Saadullah, the then Premier of Assam, that the conditions of their agreement with the Assam Congress Party in 1938 would have to be implemented with sincerity and earnestness.
In pursuance of The Assam Tribal League's demands, the then Education Minister in the Sir Saadullah Ministry of Assam, the late Rohini Kumar Choudhury, convened a Tribal Education Conference on 8th and 9th November, 1940. This conference, which represented almost all the Plains Tribes of Assam, decided to adopt the following measures for the educational development of the tribal people of Assam. It was decided:

(1) To take over 100 Elementary Schools of the tribal people spread over the whole State, the Sub-divisional break-up of which was as follows:

(a) Dibrugarh .. 7 Nos.
(b) North Lakhimpur .. 14 Nos.
(c) Sibsagar .. 2 Nos.
(d) Jorhat .. 8 Nos.
(e) Golaghat .. 3 Nos.
(f) Nowgong .. 13 Nos.
(g) Tezpur .. 4 Nos.
(h) Mangaldai .. 8 Nos.
(i) Guwahati .. 15 Nos.
(j) Barpeta .. 7 Nos.
(k) Goalpara .. 4 Nos.
(l) Dhubri .. 15 Nos.

Total 100 Nos.
(2) Many Middle Vernacular and Middle English Schools of Assam having large number of tribal students would be given Government grants-in-aid.

(3) Sixty scholarships in the Elementary Schools would be kept reserved for the tribal students, and in every Sub-division, two scholarships for M.E. and two scholarships for M.V. Schools would be kept reserved.

(4) Nine scholarships for Matriculation and five free studentships in Cotton College for tribal students would be kept reserved.

(5) Fifty per cent of the total tribal students of the Government High Schools would be provided with free studentships.

(6) In the Government High Schools, seats would be kept reserved for the tribal students, the number of which were to be as follows:
Cotton Collegiate School, Guwahati .. .. .. 10 Nos.
Government High School, Nowgong .. .. .. 15 Nos.
Dibrugarh Govt. High School .. 15 Nos.
Jorhat Govt. High School .. .. 15 Nos.
Sibsagar Govt. High School .. 10 Nos.
Dhubri Govt. High School .. 20 Nos.
Mangaldai Govt. High School .. 10 Nos.
Barpeta Govt. High School .. 10 Nos.
Golaghat Govt. High School .. 10 Nos.
North Lakhimpur Govt. High School .. 20 Nos.
Goalpara Govt. High School .. 15 Nos.

Total 150 Nos.

(7) Hostel buildings for the tribal students would be constructed in all the towns of Assam. 6

In spite of the measures taken by various official and non-official organisations including those stated above, the educational development of the Bodo-Kacharis was far from satisfactory during the pre-independence period. The main causes of their educational backwardness have been discussed earlier in the foregoing paragraphs. We can, however, say that had the

6. 'Short History of Education of the Plains Tribal People of Assam' by Bandhu Ram Kachari, published in the Souvenir of the 20th Conference of the All Assam Tribal Sangha held at Gauhati in 1977.
British Government been a little sincere and purpose­ful, the education of the Bodo-Kacharis and the other tribal people of Assam would have considerably pro­gressed during the pre-independence period.