Chapter IV
PRIVATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

Private agencies played some role in promoting the cause of educational progress in Assam. Broadly speaking, there were two categories of such agencies in Assam, viz., foreign missionary enterprise, and Indian private enterprise. The missionaries worked mainly in the hilly places and the backward areas. Though their main concern was with the spread of Christianity, their choice of education as the medium proved to be a boon to the people as far as it helped them in the sphere of education.

Beginning of missionary activities in Assam

The missionaries began working in Assam in March 1859 when they arrived at Sadiya in response to the invitation of Assam’s Commissioner General of the time, Captain Jenkins. Rev. Nethon Brown and A.T. Cutter with their families began their educational work at Sadiya by starting two primary schools, one for the boys and the other for the girls. They were joined by Dr Miles Bronson and others who started work among the tribal people in Jaipur and Khumti. During the course of their educational work, the missionaries faced many a hardship but, never daunted and never despaired, they continued their work with a true spirit of dedication.

The revolt of the Khimti tribes against the British and frequent strife among the tribes themselves undoubtedly disturbed the work of the missionaries. Now they could extend their sphere of work to the plains districts also. Thus they started their work in Sibsagar, Nowgong, Tezpur and Gauhati. Further, they extended their work in the hill areas by covering the Garo, Meng, and Tikir Hills. By 1921, the missionaries succeeded in establishing schools in the interior parts of the hills areas.
Missionary contribution to Assamese literature

At an early stage of their work in Assam, the missionaries paid great attention to the improvement of Assamese literature besides founding schools. It will be recalled that the foreign administrators introduced Bengali as the court language and the medium of instruction in schools in 1836. The rulers wanted interpreters to serve as a link with the people while implementing administrative policies, and Bengali clerks, in the main, served as a link between the rulers and the ruled. But what was advantageous to the rulers proved to be highly detrimental to the interests of the ruled. Introduction of Bengali in Assam resulted in a setback to the development of language, education and culture of the local people. It was in such a situation that the missionaries, although for their own purpose, were the first to give open expression to the demand for recognition of Assamese as the medium of instruction. Rev. Bronson wrote: 'always and everywhere the language used is Assamese, not Bangallee; in our humble opinion, the only way to render any plan of education popular in this Province, is to give it to them in their own mother tongue ....' 3 Mills in his Report also emphasised the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction in schools. The Assamese on their part also agitated for a rightful status for their language and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was the leader of this movement. All this led to declaration of Assamese by the Government as the medium of instruction in 1871.

To the American Baptist Mission goes the credit of publishing the first ever magazine in Assamese, ARONODOI. 4 The missionaries established their own press and made Sibsagar the centre of their activities. ARONODOI served, in a very real sense, as the mouthpiece of Assamese language and literature. Within a very short time
ARONODOI could establish itself as a popular journal dealing with matters relating to news and views, history, literature, science, religion, etc. Dr Miles Bronson laboured for years together to publish an Anglo-Assamese dictionary of 14,000 words. Eliza Brown, Dr Nethon Brown, and Nidhi Farwell published a number of text-books dealing with Arithmetic, language, and different subjects. The educational activities of the missionaries brought them closer to the people of the plains areas also.

As far as the hills areas were concerned, the missionaries already had achieved remarkable success due mainly to their innate capacity for hard work. It was this quality which enabled them to penetrate the backward areas and the generally inaccessible hilly places. Wherever they went, the Christian missionaries mixed with the local people, and tried to be one with them by learning their language, culture and traditions. In the hands of the missionaries local dialects in the hills areas blossomed into languages with Roman script. Grammar and dictionary were prepared, and English books were translated into local languages. Thus the missionaries were able to found stable missions in places like the Khasi, Garo and Naga Hills.

Establishment of schools

Missionaries and schools went together. At least one school was established wherever they went. The aim of the elementary schools they established was to eradicate illiteracy and also to impart religious instruction. The Welsh Methodists started schools in the hilly areas of Sylhet in 1841 and established 66 stations and 110 schools where about 2866 students were educated during a brief period of time. Schools were opened in the hilly areas by missionaries drawn from the American Baptist Mission, the Lutheran Mission, the Roman Catholic Mission and the German Education
Mission. But a number of schools had to be closed down due to the wandering character of these hill tribes, which necessitates constant change of schools, accompanied by the loss of pupils. The missionaries moved with the wandering tribes and compensated the loss of schools by establishing new ones. The additional responsibility of maintaining several government schools in the interior parts of the Goalpara district was thus taken over by the missionaries. Missionary intervention in educational activities led to a noticeable increase in the number of pupils in the schools. This can be seen from the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Pupils at Secondary Schools</th>
<th>Pupils at Primary Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>1936-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasi &amp; Jaintia</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>4256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10,494</td>
<td>15,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naga Hills</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>1120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,279</td>
<td>8,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lushai Hills</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,114</td>
<td>7,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo Hills</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4,769</td>
<td>6,199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zenana Classes

The wives of the missionaries took the initiative in opening Zenana classes for educating young women. Such classes were opened at Gauhati, Golaghat, Sibsagar, North Lakhimpur, Shillong, and other places. It was quite a job for the women to attract girls for the new classes from conservative homes. The classes could not continue for long due to the decline in the number of those for whom the classes were opened. In spite of the failure, the missionaries must receive plaudits for having made a noble attempt to spread the light of education among girls at that period of prejudice against girls.
Training Schools

Normal Schools were opened by the missionaries for the purpose of training primary school teachers. Such schools came to be established, one in each district, in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Nowrong and Goalpara. The Government supported the efforts of the missionaries by giving grants-in-aid to these schools. These schools produced trained teachers who were engaged generally in missionary schools.

Government Attitude Towards the Missionaries

The missionaries in Assam enjoyed the patronage of the Government. They secured government grants and served as the virtual liaison between the Government and the tribal people. But, following Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858, the rule of strict religious neutrality came to be enforced in the Government schools. The Proclamation clearly stated that no interference with the religion of the people, or with their habits and usages, was to take place. Such a policy appeared to militate against the interests of the missionaries and, therefore, strained relations developed between the Government and the missionaries. But happily for the missionaries in Assam, the new policy of the Government could not be adequately enforced in the hills areas due to the lack of any direct administrative machinery of the Government in those areas. Frequent revolts against authority, strife among the tribal people themselves and the absence of any local bodies in the usual acceptation of the term in the case of organised governments—all these helped maintain a situation in which the missionaries came to work among the hills people with sympathy and understanding. This happy balance the Government did not want to disturb and, therefore, the
old relationship based on Government patronage of missionary activities was maintained with certain limitations. In 1854, a grant of Rs 50 was made to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills mission for the salary of teachers and purchase of books; this grant was increased to Rs 150 in 1860. In the same way grants to other missions were increased.

In 1882, the Indian Education Commission placed more importance on the role of non-missionary private enterprise for the spread of education. It expressed the view that withdrawal of direct departmental agency should not take place in favour of missionary bodies and that departmental institutions of higher order should not be transferred in favour of missionary management. Yet it did not deny the good role the missionaries were playing. It suggested a compromise allowing the missionaries to follow their own independent course under the general supervision of the State. It recommended that so long as there was scope for every variety of agency in the field of educational expansion, it should receive all the aid and encouragement that it could legitimately claim. Further, it agreed that liberal grant-in-aid should be given to those who were willing to establish and maintain schools in backward districts or less advanced areas. Thus the missionaries came to concentrate on the establishment of schools in the backward and the hills areas while the local bodies were responsible for the maintenance of schools in the plains areas.

GOVERNMENT POLICY UNDER DYARCHY

Education under dyarchy witnessed the development of a new approach towards the hills areas. The general policy in the educational field was 'to take over the responsibility for education from the mission as early as possible'. In practice, however, the
Government had to compromise with this policy with the result that missionaries continued their educational activities without any tangible interference on the part of the Government. The main objection against missionary-directed education had been that such education was promoted 'solely with the object of Christianising the children' and that sections of some of the hill tribes refused to have instruction because it brought Christianity with it. G.A. Small, Director of Public Instruction, Assam, suggested the withdrawal of Rs 20,000 granted to the Welsh Calvinistic Mission, and recommended the utilisation of the sum thus released for opening primary schools in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. But this proposal was not accepted by the Government as it would have led to the closure of existing schools run by the missionaries.

Thus, the only action taken by way of transferring responsibility from the Missions to the Government was to increase the number of Government schools by opening several new ones. The Government also increased grants to the Missions which enabled them to spend a larger amount on their schools. In 1902-03, the Welsh Mission spent Rs 60,098 and the American Mission Rs 5,068 in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills; in the Naga Hills they respectively spent Rs 950 and Rs 1,378 respectively.

At the end of dyarchy, the expenditure increased in such a way that the Government spent almost double the amount spent by the missionaries. The following chart would serve to show the amounts of money spent on education both from Government and Mission sources. The amounts coming from tuition fees and local funds are excluded as these sources represented sums smaller by far than the major sources.
Statement showing expenditure on Education in various Hills Districts during 1936-37 exclusive of Colleges and European Schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Government funds (In Rupees)</th>
<th>Mission and other sources (In Rupees)</th>
<th>Total (In Rupees)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khasi and Jaintia Hills</td>
<td>1,10,374</td>
<td>1,40,445</td>
<td>2,50,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo Hills</td>
<td>71,470</td>
<td>10,806</td>
<td>82,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lushai Hills</td>
<td>9,405</td>
<td>30,578</td>
<td>39,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naga Hills</td>
<td>26,285</td>
<td>9,805</td>
<td>36,090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikir Hills (Sibsagar)</td>
<td>2,033</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>2,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikir Hills (Nowgong)</td>
<td>5,348</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>6,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Cachar Hills</td>
<td>5,479</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>7,762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expenditure from Mission funds particularly in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Lushai Hills shows the extent of Government's dependence on the Missions for carrying on educational work among the Hills people. Total Government expenditure on education in the hills was Rs 2,30,394 against Mission expenditure of Rs 1,95,757.

LOCAL PRIVATE ENTERPRISE AS AN AGENCY FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

Private agency played a very minor role in Assam at the beginning of British occupation because English education was considered as foreign education suitable to the upper classes only. Local private agency concentrated its attention on the maintenance of indigenous schools which were in a moribund state between 1826 and 1882.

At the beginning of the present century, several benevolent
zemindars and enlightened gentlemen contributed several thousands of rupees for the opening of primary and secondary schools:

- Gauripur Zemindar .......... Rs 10,628
- Bijni " .......... Rs 3,230
- Raja Girish Chandra Roy ................. Rs 10,480
- Subscriptions and donations .............. Rs 46,396

Ventures of this kind related mainly to the opening of schools. Raja Girish Chandra Roy went a step further and he founded the Murarichand College at Silchar. This College was later on provincialised as its financial conditions became deplorable.

Expenditure made by private bodies on education was very naturally smaller than that made by other sources. It was 14.1% of the total expenditure on education in 1882, 18.1% in 1901-12, 9.4% in 1921-22 and 12.2% in 1936-37.

A type of school that came into existence under private agency of the type under review was the private school. These schools either did not seek official aid or were refused such aid because they failed to come up to the standard prescribed by the Education Department. As Lord Curzon wanted the recognition of secondary schools both by the University and the Education Department for the purpose of entitling them to send boys for the Matriculation Examination, besides the purpose of securing grants, recognition became a condition of existence for them. Recognition depended on the fulfilment of minimum requirements as to building, staff and equipments. Thus, non-recognised schools became the private schools. Schools maintained by the Hindus and Muslims, such as Tols, Noktabs and Madrassas, were also known as private schools because they did not follow the prescribed curriculum; these institutions also did not secure any government aid.
In 1902-03, there were 199 private elementary institutions with 4,365 pupils and 95 private advanced institutions with 2,427 pupils. In 1936-37, there were 783 unrecognised schools for 33,197 male pupils and 87 schools for 3,610 female pupils. Thus, private institutions also formed part of the general educational system and they did make their contributions for the cause of educational progress.

Sometimes the rich men came forward to establish schools. At Goalpara the zamindari system prevailed and there the zamindars established four high schools and several primary schools for the education of the children of the district. The zamindars maintained the schools. The Raja of Gauripur donated Rs 1,500 for the establishment of one high school at South Salmora in the Goalpara district. The zamindar of Kairabari contributed funds for the improvement of schools within his estate.

Philanthropic Assamese gentlemen also started schools during this period. G. Bezbaruah, an educationist, established one high school each at Golaghat, Jorhat and Sibsagar. A.C. Pathak donated Rs 10,000 for the purpose of founding a high school and a girls' Middle English school at Barpeta. Another gentleman, G.H. Bora, donated a building for the Chaygaon Middle Vernacular School.

More donations in the form of houses, land and money came from certain rich gentlemen of the Surma Valley. Under their patronage, schools of different types were established at Sunamganj, Sylhet, Karimganj, Kulaura, Habiganj, Hailakandi, etc. Bipin Chandra Paul donated Rs 3,000 for a public high school at Sunamganj, Malini Mohan Kar donated Rs 3,000, another gentleman donated Rs 4,000, and the zamindar of Bishgaon in Habiganj donated Rs 1,000 for the
establishment and maintenance of high schools at different places. Donations and subscriptions constituted a common feature there in the Surma Valley and these were made available for the spread of education. The result was that schools under private venture grew at a rapid rate.

Men coming from Rajasthan to Assam for business purposes came to be known as the Marwaris. This community also paid attention for the education of their children. Men from this community donated money for the establishment of high schools at Moran, Selenghat, Bokakhat, etc. One Marwari gentleman, S. Agarwalla, Tinsukia, donated money for the efficient management of the girls' high school at Tinsukia.

Thus, the period under review witnessed conscious efforts on the part of public-spirited affluent individuals for the spread of education. With the advance of British rule in the country as a whole and the spread of its administrative machinery, the need for English education was increasingly in evidence. Gradually the old prejudice against English appeared to die down and this explains the establishment of High Schools in different parts of the province.

**Conclusion**

The Missions acted as the chief agency in the hills areas of Assam for the expansion of education. By 1937, the Government came as another agency mainly with the purpose of bringing the two parts—the hills and the plains—together insofar as it was possible through the medium of education. True it is that the main purpose of the missionaries was to convert people to Christianity. But their method of doing it entitles them to be ranked as agents of necessary progress and no progress could be better than educational progress. The Missions found in the hills a fertile ground for
the process of conversion to the Christian faith. This apart, there is no denying the fact that the Missions acted as the harbingers of educational advancement in the hills particularly at the beginning of the British Raj. This role they continued to play with great effect till generally 1937. Further, the Missions maintained some High English Schools in different towns of Assam and these schools deservedly earned the reputation as efficient schools maintaining good standard.

Private enterprise other than the Missions also did their part in promoting the cause of education in the province. Philanthropy and benevolence apart, there was another aspect of the matter. The non-co-operation movements in their wake brought about a great awakening about the need for national education, and it was in this background that national schools came to be founded for pupils who chose to boycott the government and aided schools as a protest against the Cunningham circular. If such a movement were in existence at an early date, it is possible to think that it would have hastened the cause of expansion of education in Assam. Be that as it might be, for the period under review missionaries, zamindars and some highly enlightened and benevolent gentlemen acted as the unofficial agency for the educational progress of the province.