

Role of Catholic Church in Skills Training of Youth in Karbi Anglong District of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Northeast India witnessed significant changes in the latter part of the 19th Century with the arrival of the Catholic Missionaries to this region. The primary focus of these missionaries was that of evangelization and education of the people of this place. However, their services were not confined only to providing formal education to the people but also empowering them through skill-building, personality development and career training through their non-formal, technical, and skills training institutions. The holistic education provided by the missionaries thus brought in a new perspective and understanding to the people of this region. Northeast thus far considered backward became a region with great prospects and potential for growth and development. The skills provided by the missionaries empowered and equipped the youth and made them fit for various jobs in society. Moreover, it enabled them to discover for themselves their identity, competence, and skills in the administration and governance of their lives. Perhaps the story of Northeast would have been quite different today, had it not been for the missionaries who played a pivotal role in its transformation. The following article reflects the role played by the Catholic Church in providing skills training to the youth of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. A survey conducted among both the beneficiaries and others through Google Form has shown clearly the unique role played by the Catholic Church in providing skills training to the youth of this district. Certainly, this study is an attempt to understand and assess what has been accomplished in this field so far and at the same time, it's also a wake-up call to decision-makers and policy framers to study the gap in this field and do the needful to create jobs and opportunities to provide a better future to the youth of this district.

The Key Words: Assam, Karbi Anglong District, Karbi, Catholic Church, Skills Training

1. Introduction

Human development has always been one of the priorities of the Catholic Church and it has been very much a part and parcel of its mission at all times. It is for this reason the church lays much emphasis on education, skills training of youth, and promotion of health. Northeast India has been fortunate to have the catholic missionaries who provided these possibilities to the people almost simultaneously right from the beginning of their mission in the region. While encouraging and promoting formal education for all, the church was no less concerned or on the contrary was generous in providing vocational

and skills training to young people who were drop-outs and others who chose to follow a different career path in their lives. This has made the mission of the church not only very attractive and appealing to the people of the place but also a key player in the progress and development of the region. [1]

One of the great advantages of the Catholic Church was that it never concentrated its establishments in a particular place but spread out largely in the rural areas of the region. Thus it served as a backbone of support to the rural population. Had it not been for the Church, the rural poor would not have had the privilege of having such formal and non-

formal, technical training establishments in such places. These facilities offered the best of training to youth who could not cope up with their formal educational pursuits. There is no doubt that the church had invested a lot of her time, energy, resources, and personnel in these areas, offering youth the best of training, making them competent, self-confident, and future-ready so as to face any challenges they might encounter or take up any task that was assigned to them in order to succeed in life. It is true that where missionary influence has been more, there has also been a consequent increase and improvement in employment generation, increase in production and income generation. Unfortunately, this is an area where very little research has been conducted and very little data is available. It is because of this reason that I thought of researching in this area. In this paper, I wish to make an attempt to understand better the role played by the Catholic Church in providing vocational-skills training to the youth of this district and how it has brought about great transformation to the people of this region [1]

2. Origin and the geographical features of Assam

There are several views regarding the origin of the name Assam. It seems the name Assam is of recent origin. According to scholars, the name 'Aham' or 'Asom' was probably given by the Ahoms who came to Assam in 1228 A.D. Asom is derived from a word in the now extinct Ahom language called 'asama' which means 'peerless'. The Ahom called Assam as Moun-dunshoun-kham meaning the 'land of golden gardens'. Assam was also known by other names like 'Pragjyotishpura', "Kamarupa" in ancient times.[2]

Since the British days, the name Assam came to be used till 27 February 2006, when the Government of Assam decided to change the name of Assam into 'Asom' meaning 'uneven' bringing down thus the curtain to the 180-year-old name 'Assam'. [3]

Assam occupies an area of 78,438 sq km and it has a population of more than 31,169,272. Internationally bordering with Bangladesh and Bhutan Kingdom and surrounded by Indian states like West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam occupies both strategically and geographically a very important position in the region. [4]

3. Karbi Anglong District of Assam

Situated at the very center of the state of Assam is Karbi Anglong district which is naturally bound partly by the state of Meghalaya and Morigaon district of Assam in the west, Golaghat district in the east, Nagaon and Golaghat district in the North and NC Hills, and the state of Nagaland in the south. Karbi Anglong is rich with dense tropical forest-covered hills and plains. The population of the district is predominantly tribal and it is an agricultural district although minerals like lime-stone, coal, China-clay, etc are very much found in this district.[5] Originally known as Mikir Hills District Council, the district was combined with North Cachar Hills and came to be called United Mikir and North Cachar Hill District in 1951. Later on, the newly created district was divided into two sub-divisions, namely North-Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills. These two sub-divisions were made two full-fledged districts by 2 February 1970. A few years later, by October 1976, the Mikir Hills district came to be called Karbi Anglong district. The present district has a total area of 10,332 sq. km. [6]

4. Presence of Catholic Church in Karbi Anglong

A vibrant and organized beginning of the catholic mission in Assam can be dated back to 1890 when the Salvatorian missionaries arrived here for the first time. Even though there are historical pieces of evidence for the presence of Catholics in some pockets of Assam much before the arrival of the Salvatorians, they could not make any headway as they lacked leadership, organization, and patronage. It was the Salvatorian missionaries who came to Guwahati under the leadership of Otto Hopfenmueller and Marianus Schumm in February 1890 who laid the foundation of the catholic mission in Northeast India. These missionaries were quick to open schools to provide education to the poor youth of this region. Almost simultaneously they opened up also vocational and technical centers to teach trades to young people who could not fit into any formal schooling. Thus vocational and formal education co-existed almost simultaneously in most of these centers providing holistic education for all. In most cases, while completing formal education,

young people were also equipped with skills required for starting a trade or getting employed by others in some industries. Education being one of the fundamental priorities of the catholic missionaries, they left no stone unturned to offer the very best to the most deprived youth of the times. Although the missionaries had to undergo immense hardships due to lack of finance and other inconveniences, they did not give up on their dreams of making the youth of the region empowered and skilled to give them a bright future.[7]

The creation of the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam in 1889 gave these missionaries the much-needed boost in their mission works. With its headquarters in Shillong, the missionaries had the added advantage of getting the much-needed ecclesiastical approval for whatever they intended to do and whatever initiatives they had in mind. The starting of a school in Shillong in 1891 and the opening of a series of schools in different parts of the region soon made them both acceptable and popular among the people. However, their hopes were shattered with the outbreak of World War 1 in 1915. Being Germans, there was no way that they could stay on in the region but had to leave the Assam Missions quickly with whatever was planned and implemented by them till then.[7]

The Salesians who took charge of the Assam Missions after the Salvatorians were no less passionate or enthusiastic about their mission. Determined as they were, Salesians continued with the pioneering works of their predecessors even more vigorously and enthusiastically by opening up new centers and reaching out to new groups in many rural areas of the region. Archbishop Louis Mathias who led the second missionary expedition to Assam was entrusted with the reins of Assam Prefecture at Shillong at his arrival. Salesians were quick enough to start educational establishments, formal, non-formal, and technical institutions to help the poor and deprived youth. Providing quality education and technical skills to youth were typical characteristic marks of the Salesians. [7]

Salesians had practically no contact at all with the people who lived in the so called Mikir Hills. This name Mikirs was originally given to them because they lived in the Mikir hills.

Till about 1950; the Mikirs lived very isolated lives and hardly had any contact with the outside world. During this period, no direct missionary contacts were ever possible with them. A contact with them was possible only in the later years when Mikirs started coming down to the plains and got in touch with the catholic missionaries. However, these early associations with the missionaries gradually lead to the establishment of many catholic institutions in different parts of Karbi Anglong. To a great extent, Karbi Anglong is what it is today is because of the hard work and commitment of the Christian missionaries who offered their life and service to the people of Kabi Anglong that brought about the much-needed changes in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam.[1]

5. Vocational Education & Skills Training of Youth in Karbi Anglong

The beginning of the catholic faith in Karbi Anglong can be dated back to as early as 1914 when a few Karbis started frequenting the catholic missions in the border areas of Khasi hills came in touch with the Catholic missionaries. Since then, indirect contact with the Karbis has continued. But it was not until 1964, the establishment of a catholic centre at Sojong in Karbi Anglong came into existence. This led to the starting of many other catholic establishments in Karbi Anglong.[1]

Education being one of the priorities of the Catholic Church, the establishment of educational institutions such as schools and colleges took pride of place in the mission of the church. Equal importance was given to vocational and technical education to bring out the best potentialities of youth, to make them skilled and employable. The church took extreme care to establish non-formal, technical institutes to provide skills and technical expertise to youth, mostly the poor, deprived and financially backward to make them self-reliant in their lives. As a result of the training provided by the church, many thousands of youth were able to find a job and build a future for themselves.[1]

In many ways, the church was a pioneer in providing technical expertise and skills training to youth through their carpentries, tailoring, welding, motor-mechanics, saloons, printing press, masonry, painting, Embroidery,

Bee-keeping, vermin-compost, and a variety of similar type of training. No one was sent out or made to feel abandoned in a catholic institution however, incapable or useless one felt because everyone had a choice to pursue, one course or the other and to make themselves useful in society.[1]

6. Review of Literature

Catholic Church has played a stellar role in the development and progress of Northeast India. Although the missionaries came with the intention of evangelization of the people of the place, eventually it became a mission of total human development and well being of the people. The missionaries embraced every aspect of the life of the people and provided them with their services which were far beyond evangelization and education. Some of their services included education, health, social development, hostels for boys and girls, dispensaries, rural health centres, mobile clinics, vocational and technical training centres, agricultural and cooperative banks, rural development centres, children's home, old age homes, orphanages and a host of other services. These activities and services undertaken with a great sense of passion, devotion and commitment made the church an important player in the socio-cultural transformation of the region. [1]

Church's involvement in social affairs is not at all a new thing. Church has always been involved in socio-developmental activities ever since its existence here on earth. And its commitment towards the same is renewed and reaffirmed now and then through the various encyclicals of the popes. In 1967, Pope Paul VI in his "Populorum Progressio"[8] highlighted the various structural and international dimensions of the problems of development. In 1987, exactly twenty years later, Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" about the relevance and continuity of the theme of development.[9]

Catholic Church has always been in the vanguard of progress. During the past decades, the church has made a tremendous effort to empower youth through skills training to make them employable and fit for job in industries and the service sector. These youths mostly school dropouts and coming from financially

poor background, stood a great chance to improve their conditions through these jobs. The skill training that was offered to them in the vocational, non-formal, technical institutes run by the church adequately prepared them to get into the job quickly. As a result, thousands of marginalised youth managed to improve their economic conditions and live more happy and dignified lives. The youth became more confident, self-reliant and hard-working. They started earning and became productive members of the families. [10]

Our educational system, obsessed with academics, has not focused in any appreciable manner on imparting bread-earning skills to our youth. And it's showing! With the unimaginable pace of change that we have to put up with today, it would be naïve to think that the outdated skills of our young people are going to stand them in good stead in a future, which on the one hand, is vigorously changing, and on the other, is fast becoming more 'skill-based'.

The Government of India has made great efforts to upgrade the skills of youth by providing them with vocational education. The National Policy on Skill Development has set huge targets of skilling youth by 2022. Various stakeholders are involved in this process. The Catholic institutions across the country and in particular Don Bosco Vocational Training Institutes have played an important role in providing skills to youth through the central government and state government's projects and policies formulated from time to time. Millions of youth took advantage of this new initiative. Govt of India had even created a new ministry calling it Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship for providing training to millions of youth to take advantage of the demographic dividend.[11]

The church's predilection for youth is seen in the number of institutions that are dedicated exclusively to the development of youth. The number of services and training programmes organized for youth by the Church are eloquent examples of how the church is interested in youth; in the development of their potentials. Because the Church looks at today's youth as tomorrow's leaders. Knowing well the significance of skill-building in youth,

Church has made every possible effort to impart various skills to youth, making them thus empowered and equipped to be employed or start up some small-scale trades in their own lives. The church knows well that the growth and development of a society depend largely on its youth who are equipped and well trained. [1]

7. Objectives

1. To assess the role of the Catholic Church in providing skills training to the youth of Karbi Anglong District, Assam.
2. To know how the economic status of youth and their families have improved as a result of the training and job secured by youth in Anglong district of Assam.
3. To assess how the skill training provided by the Catholic Church has prepared the youth of Karbi Anglong district to be employable, skilled and job-ready.

8. Research Questions

1. What are the skills provided by the Catholic Church to the youth in the Karbi Anglong District of Assam?
2. Has the training given to youth by the Catholic Church been useful to the youth in obtaining a satisfactory job in their life?

10. Skills Training of Youth by Catholic Church - An Evaluation

The following is an analysis and evaluation of the survey conducted on young adults on the role of the Catholic Church in providing skills training to youth of Karbi Anglong district. The survey was conducted through Google

3. How has the skill development programmes of the Catholic Church helped the youth to improve their economic situation and thereby the overall development of Karbi Anglong.

9. Methodology

A Descriptive Research Methodology' will be the methodology applied for this research. A questionnaire containing a set of 18 questions will be used for the data collection. This will be administered to the respondents through Google Forms and the responses will be gathered and analysed. Therefore, the approach of this study will be one of the quantitative approaches. A clear picture of the role of the Catholic Church in skills training of the youth of Karbi Anglong district will emerge once an analysis of the responses collected is completed. A large number of youth are our beneficiaries either directly or indirectly because of the education or training that they have received in a catholic formal educational or technical institute. Therefore, their attitude and opinion will also reflect very much to get a better understanding of the role played by the Catholic Church in skills training of youth in the District.

Forms because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the situations are not so good, the responses were overwhelming. Fig.2, Out of a total number of 52 respondents, all of them were young adults between the age of 18-25 years and 26-30 years and a few of them 31years and above.

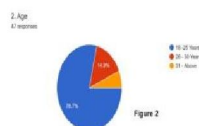
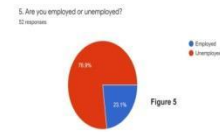
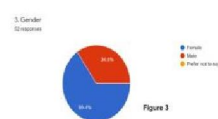


Fig.3 shows very clearly that the participation of young women more than the men. The female respondents were 65.4% while the male respondents were just about the half-34.6%.



In Fig.5, we have the ratio of the employed and unemployed youth. Out of the total, only 23,1% are employed even now while 78.9% is still without a job. Of course, a vast number of youth had lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

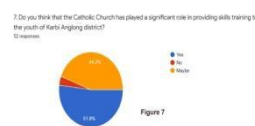


Fig.7 To a question if the Catholic Church has played a significant role in providing skill training to the youth of Karbi Anglong- the answer was 51.9% answered in the positive, while 44.2% were unsure and only a very small percentage which answered in the negative.

Fig.11 explains how the church managed to keep the youth away from negative influences and harmful activities by offering them employable skills through their institutions. Over 71.2% affirmed it in the positive while 23.1% was not sure of it and still a small percentage responded in the negative.

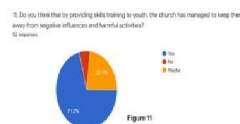


Fig.12 is a clear indicative of how the skills provided by the Church has helped youth to be more responsible, hardworking and committed to their job. 69.2% has answered in the positive; 25% of the respondents were not sure at all and another less than 6% has responded in the negative.

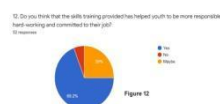


Fig.15 explains how the skills provided by the church has saved families from poverty and misery. A 65.4% has given a positive response, another 30.8% was unsure of the actual facts and an approx.4% responded in the negative.

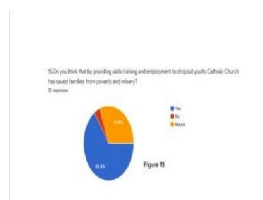
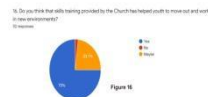
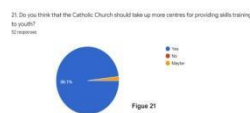


Fig.16 indicates that a 75% of the respondents agreed with the fact that the training provided by the church helped them to move out and work in new environments. Another 23.1% was not sure of the reality and a less than 2% answered in the negative.

Fig.21 An overwhelming 98.1% has responded stating that Catholic church should provide more training to youth and the remaining less than 2% answered 'not sure'.



11. Conclusion and Recommendations



It is quite evident from the survey and its findings that the Catholic Church has played a very significant role in imparting vocational and technical skills to the youth of Karbi Anglong District. Although skills training has become a major programme of the governments and other NGOs, the Church has been doing this ever since its inception in the region. The number of non-formal, technical institutions and youth centres and training institutes in the district and the region as a whole can vouch for this fact. Missionaries have always been ahead of their times and they always believed in giving the very best to their people. Much of what we see today in the region is because of the hard work and commitment of the missionaries. And their products, the past pupils, alumni and the beneficiaries of their education occupying significant positions in society today are the best proofs and examples of their hard work and sacrifice. Hence, there is no doubt at all that the missionaries have contributed much to the skill-building of the youth of Karbi Anglong District and the entire Northeast region.

As a result of the findings of this study, I would like to make the following recommendations for future action and direction.

1. There is an acute shortage of skills training institutes in the district and this needs to be rectified at the earliest.
2. In line with the new education policy, all educational institutions must be provided with infrastructure for providing basic skills to students.
3. The vast number of school-college dropouts and rural poor youth should be able to benefit from these skills training institutes.
4. All youth should be trained in employable skills to make them ready and fit for any given job.
5. Governments should invite industries and corporate houses to set up small scale industries in the region to employ the youth of this region.
6. Government outlay should be increased in building up infrastructural facilities for training of youth
7. Karbi Anglong youth are gifted and talented and they are a rich resource and great potential for the development and growth of this district and therefore, their talents must be harnessed to the maximum.

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