

## **Educational Policies in Assam**

By

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to identify the current status of educational policies in Assam. This is followed by progress of Primary, Secondary and Higher Education in Post Independence period in the light of national policies on education. Subsequent sections consider the status of women education, teacher education, teacher training institutes and medium of instruction issue in the state.*

**Key words:** *Educational policy, Status of education, Women education, Teacher education*

### **Introduction**

Assam is one of the northeastern states of India, which has its unique cultural values in Indian sub-continent. Both the modern education and English language has played vital role in modernizing Assamese people and enriching their culture. In terms of education, Assam has developed into a top educational destination at the state as well as at the national level. To enhance the status of Assam education, the state government has introduced many innovative educations and English language polices. It's capital city; Guwahati is a key destination for higher education for students of the whole of north-eastern region. This paper offers an understanding of Assam Education system tracing the evolution pattern from colonial period to present time. The paper would also indicate the impact of Assam Education system on English language teaching policies, provisions and its status in Assam during post-independence era.

### **Emergence of Modern Education in Assam**

The development of modern education in Assam started with the emergence of British rule in 1826 in Assam territory. For long, Assam was having her indigenous system of imparting elementary education through formal intuitions like Pathsalas for Hindus, Tols for Brahmins and upper class Hindu, Madrassas for Muslims and Satras for the Vaisnavites. Debi (1897:1-2) notes that 'these indigenous systems were largely replaced by modern education pattern under British company's patronage. With the expansion of British rule in India as a whole, knowledge of English became a historic necessity both for administration and increasing commercial intercourse. Before the charter act of 1833 there was no noticeable

progress in the field of education in Assam, but after that both government and missionaries actively took part in educational field'. It has been very aptly pointed out that the 'aim of the English to educate the Indians was either to produce caricatures of European characters who would be willing to accept the Gospel of Christ or to get a regular supply of cheap clerks to serve them in the business organization of the government of India and subsidiary undertakings of the British Subjects' (Bose, 1989:90).

### **Progress of Primary Education in Post Independence Period**

The school level education in Assam consists of primary, secondary and higher secondary schools and there are three different<sup>1</sup> boards to control and run the system. After the proposal of establishing local self government in India in 20<sup>th</sup> century a considerable development started in Assam education. A fixed amount of balance was provided for the promotion of primary and higher education. Assam naturally welcomed the all governmental helping hand in the direction of educational expansion. In this context, the resolution of 1882 made first attempt which laid emphasis on the importance of local bodies in the matter of expansion of primary education. This resolution of 1882 empowered the local board to establish aid, manage and control the primary schools. It also authorized the Boards to exercise general supervision and give grant-in-aid to the lower middle schools also (Govt. Resolution, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1882). Educational policy under resolution of 1913 provided greater emphasis on the primary education. The Assam local self government Act of 1915 gives wider power to local bodies to manage all affairs of primary and middle education. In Assam the relevant Act was passed in 1926, but it failed to achieve its primary objectives. Afterwards, this policy was changed and by 1930, compulsory primary education Acts were passed in all the provinces. By this time, government released imperial grants to Assam for the promotion of elementary education. As a result, by 1937 around 6795 primary schools were functioning along with 313,347 pupils. Side by side, education was also imparted through Tols and Madrasses. There were around 162 tols and 120 public madrasas in 1935. The Assam primary education Act was passed in 1947, which removed most of the defects of the 1926 Act. Compulsory education was not just to be implemented but enforced through various measures. Further repeals of this Act came through the Assam Basic Education Act of 1953 and the Assam Elementary Education Act of 1962 and 1968. As can be seen from the table below, the progress of compulsory primary education was not very satisfactory (Barpujari, 1980: 308-314).

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1. The Resolution of 1882 played an important role in developing education from primary to higher level.

**Table 1**

<b>Progress of Compulsory Primary Education in 1953-54 and 1966-67</b>			
Year	Number of town under compulsion	Number of villages under compulsion	Number of pupils attending schools
1953-54	11	4,082	2,74,337
1966-67	19	4,683	4,57,718

(Source: Baruah, 1980)

From 1950, there began planned development of primary education with the five-year plans. The government undertook development schemes in primary schools to provide basic facilities for children and salaries of teachers. The number of primary schools and teachers increased considerably. By '1973-74 total numbers of schools were 19,595 and the numbers of teachers were 15, 92, 613. The growth rate of primary schools during the period 1975-76 to 1993-94 was 1.75' (Lais, 2005: 173). The National Policy on Education (1986) recommended several schemes for improving the reach and quality of primary education all over India. One of these schemes was called 'Operation Blackboard. This policy was initiated in Assam in 1987 and it provided greater number of teachers to the teacher needy schools. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)<sup>2</sup> programme was initiated in Assam in 1994 to achieve the Universalization of Elementary Education with a view to improve the quality of education in the government school system.

The primary stages consist of classes I-IV. The minimum age for admission to class I of the primary stage is generally 5+ or 6+ years. In this stage, pupils are taught only compulsory subjects in their mother tongue, as defined in the General Curriculum approved by the respective board. The Government of Assam has implemented the free and compulsory education policy for students up to the age of 14. Schools in Assam are either state run or under the management of private organizations. The syllabus at primary schools is set up the Directorate of Elementary Education, Assam. While most schools are affiliated to state boards there are several schools in the state affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). Primary schools are divided into upper primary consisting of two classes and lower primary schools. These schools were established and maintained by the Education department, local bodies or private associations. The scheme of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched by the Govt. of India in 2001 with the objective of Education for All (EFA) and it gives special focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life. The World declaration on EFA paved the way for the basic education getting the international attention<sup>6</sup> (Ojha, 2009 : 312).

2. Assam was one of the 22 states covered under DPEP programme. The districts covered under DPEP are-Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Darrang, Sonitpur, Morigaon and KarbiAnglong.

### **Secondary Education in Post- Independence Period**

In general, the system of primary and secondary education is rather similar to the system of neighboring states in the country. In the context of secondary education the Hunter Commission (1882) and the resolutions of 1904 and 1913 provided greater impetus to the secondary education. The Sadler Commission of 1919 recommended for introduction of diversified courses at this level and asserted that university education, cannot improve without improving the secondary education. As its aftermath in 1935 there were 213 high schools including 28 government High schools and several aided, non-aided high schools were running along with various courses. Yet, there were weakest links in secondary education (See Zakir Hussain Committee Report of 1937, Radhakrishnan Commission Report of 1949). To remove these difficulties the post-basic education based on the principle of education through craft (schemed by Talim Sangh) and multi-propose schools were introduced. The primary 'aim of these courses is an all round development of the students both as an individual and as a useful member of the society and to provide varied types of courses for students with diversified abilities and interests' ( Debi, 1987:99).

So far as administration was concerned, Gauhati University was initially the supervisory authority for secondary school, although the Department of Public Instruction ran the administration, till 1962. In 1962, the Assam Secondary Education Act came into force. Henceforth, the High school Leaving Certificate Examination and Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination were conducted by a board, called the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA). The middle stage of education comprises Classes V-VII, and the Secondary stage consisted of classes VIII to X in Assam. The Senior Secondary stage consisted of classes from XI-XII.

### **Progress of Higher Education**

Assam boasts of the most wide-ranging networks of higher educational institutions in the whole of North-Eastern region of India. Progress of collegiate education in Assam accrued much later. By 1901, Cotton College and then Sylhet College established. Gradually Earl Law college (1915), Jorhat college, the Brindabun college, Edmund's college and the St Anthony college founded in Assam territory which played important role in promoting higher education before Indian independence. The Berry White Medical School was established at Dibrugarh in 1900. The Technical and Industrial education also developed in pre

independence period through Dibrugarh Railway workshop, Tezpur-Balipara railway workshop and many training institutions. Besides this the state has excellent English medium schools, arts and Science colleges. There has been a phenomenal expansion in Higher education (Government of India's resolution on Indian Education policy of 1913). The most recent development in this field is the establishment of IIT at Guwahati and two Central Universities, one at Tezpur and the other at Silchar.

Presence of institutions including the Indian Institute of Technology (Guwahati), National Institute of Technology (Silchar), Tezpur University (a Central University), Assam Central University (Silchar) and K.K. Handique State Open University, adds stature to the education system of Assam which already encompasses elite higher education institutions like the Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, Assam Medical College (Dibrugarh), Guwahati Medical College, Assam Agricultural University (Jorhat), Assam Engineering College (Guwahati) and Jorhat Engineering College (Jorhat). These on the whole, make Assam the top edu-destination both at the state level and national level. Today, the state of Assam is home to six universities, one deemed university, one institute of national importance and several reputed professional institutions.

The colleges of Assam (including medical, engineering and law colleges) are affiliated to Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, Assam University and the Assam Agricultural University. The demand of technical education in the state has been well understood by the State Government and due attention is being paid towards rapid development in this field. The institutions offering professional courses are rapidly growing along with the other institutions which mean the students of Assam will be exposed to newer areas of opportunities. Thus, the whole educational scenario of Assam is improving gradually.

In Assam around 81,458 enrolments figure in various Universities & Colleges in the region, out of which University Grants Commission (UGC) estimates states that there are 50% are women students (Report of UGC, 2002-03). Higher Education comprises university-level courses offered by Universities and Academics (such as academic of art, music, sports and others). They are providing at the following academic levels: undergraduate (Bachelor) studies, and post-graduate (Master & Doctoral) studies.

### **Women Education in Assam**

The Indian education commission made elaborate recommendation for the expansion of women education and the government came forward with somewhat larger grants for girls schools managed by private and public bodies. After 1950 in Assam, a notable development was noticed in women education. A number of higher and vocational institutions were opened in Assam for girls. (Directorate of Higher Education, Govt. of Assam, Report on Women

Education, 2000). Women Polytechnic Colleges were also established by both governmental as well as private institutions to provide a greater vocational network. By 1901, the percentage of women literary stood at only 0.59 which in 1939 it was below 2 percentages. It was only after independence that women's education made notable progress. By 1951 the literacy rate in Assam rose to 9.48. By 1961 and 1971 this percentage rose to 19.21 and 23.52 respectively (Debi, 1987:153-163, & Aggarwal, 2004:273-290 ). According to 2001 census, literacy in Assam rose to 56.03 %. Finally, the national policy on empowerment of women 2001 commits that equal access to education for women and girls will be ensured.

**Table 2**

<b>Percentage of Girls Enrolled in 1994-95</b>			
<b>Institution</b>	<b>Number of Schools</b>	<b>Number Enrolled</b>	<b>Percentage of Girls Enrolled to total</b>
Primary schools	28876	2996132	47.20
Middle schools	6729	1280255	41.00
High schools	3872	292862	49.34
Higher secondary schools	502	607336	36.06

(Source: Annual Report, Department of Education, Govt. of Assam.1994-95.)

### **Progress of Teacher Education in Assam**

Unlike other parts of India, educational expansion in the context of teacher education could not be started earlier in Assam. It was the Christian missionaries who were pioneers in establishment of a few Primary Teacher Training Schools in the state as early as 1888-89. To provide training to Middle Vernacular and Middle English level teachers of the state the then government had established a few Normal Schools in the early part of 20th century. The duration of these in-service Normal schools course was for the period of 3 years and policy was that teachers were appointed after completion of the training in Normal schools. In 1936, the Irish Christian Brothers came forward to establish some training classes at the St Edmund's college for B.T. degree. The provision for providing training to then in service teachers teaching in Secondary level of school education was imparted at St Edmund's college in Shillong which was later shifted to St. Mary's college. In the post independent Assam, as per the Basic Education Act of 1954, a number of Basic Training Centres were established throughout the state to train in-service teachers teaching in primary schools. Pre-service training along with in-service training for Middle School teachers was introduced in the state in the already established Normal Schools. But it was discontinued in 1970's because of problem related to jobs for such trained teachers. National Council for Teacher Education

(NCTE) has been established as a national level statutory body by the Government of India in 1995 with the objectives of achieving planned and co-ordinated development of teacher education system. Upon realization of the need for providing of pre service teacher education and also to clear the huge backlog of untrained teacher the Government of Assam re-introduced the pre service teacher training for elementary level School Teacher of 2 years duration in the year 2000 in the 15 DIETs. However, this course was discontinued from 2001 onwards. Since then no fresh enrolment in this course has been made. For training of secondary level teachers Gauhati University as well as Government established B.T. colleges under its direct management. At present, there are altogether 37 B. Ed. colleges out of which 8 are Colleges of Teacher Education which belongs to the government and the remaining belongs to private parties (Debi, 1987).

### **Existing Teacher Training Institutes of Assam**

1. Basic Training Centre (BTC): There are 19 BTCs which provide Primary (in-service) programme for 6 months duration having an annual intake of 4500. It was always a one-year course, reduced to 6 months in 1999 for greater coverage (*Ibid*: 147-157).
2. Pre-primary Training Centre (PPTC): There is 1 PPTC. Initially, it was meant for Pre-primary (pre-service and in-service) but now primary (in-service). Initially, Pre-primary Training Centre (1 year) now provides Junior Basic Training Course (JBTC) for 6 months duration with an intake of 100. At present, the institute is imparting JBT course for in-service primary School Teachers.
3. Normal School: There are 7 Normal schools which caters to teachers for Middle (in service) having duration of 1 year with an intake of 350. Pre-service training was provided for a few years along with in-service training but the former was discontinued sometime in the late 1970s. It is running JBT course of 6 months duration.
4. District Institute of Education and Training (DIET): There are 18 DIETs which provide (a) Primary (in-service) for 6 months duration with intake of 1500 and (b) D.E.Ed. (Pre-service) for duration of 2 years with intake of 600.
5. B Ed. College: There are 57 B.Ed. colleges that provide B.Ed. course of 1 year duration with an intake of 3420. Graduate teachers are deputed to selected B Ed. College /CTEs for in-service training. There are many private B. Ed. colleges of which some are recognized by NCTE but others are not.

6. College of Teacher Education (CTE): There are 7 CTEs which provide Secondary (pre-service and in-service) B Ed. of 1 year duration with intake of 800.
7. State Institute of Science Education (SISE), Assam, Guwahati : This institute provides (in service) short term course on subjects especially science, Mathematics and Environmental Science for teachers of Primary, Middle, Secondary schools (Assam Education Commission Report, 2000).
8. State Institute of Education, Assam, Jorhat: This institute provides (in-Service) short term courses on school subjects and teaching Methodology for teachers of Primary, Middle, Secondary schools.
9. English Language Teaching institute (ELTI) Assam Guwahati: This institute provides (in-Service) short term courses on English language teaching for teachers of Middle, Secondary and Higher Secondary stage.
10. Board of Secondary Education Council (BSEC), Guwahati: This Board provides short term training in school subjects for Middle and secondary level (in-service) teachers.
11. Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC) Guwahati: This Council provides summer institutes/short-term training courses in various +2 level subjects for higher secondary school teachers. Besides, there are number of NGOs which organize time to time subject based short term in service teacher training courses often by themselves or in collaboration with different teacher training institutes of the state. The SSA also provides short-term subject specific teacher training programme for primary and Upper Primary level teachers. The SCERT as a part of their extension service activity provides teacher training to various organizations and institutions in addition to AIR programmes for the Primary and Upper Primary level teachers on many academic issues related to approach, philosophy and pedagogy. Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University also conduct regular B. Ed and M.Ed. course (pre-service) for secondary level teachers (AECR, 2000 & Selected Educational Statistics, 2001, MHRD).

### **Medium of Instruction**

The Report on education in Assam in the year 1935-36 says that the medium of government schools would be Assamese (Assam Education Department Report, dated 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1936, para.1). Assamese as medium of instruction came to be introduced in all



high schools excepting for the Bengali schools. After Independence in early 1970, Gauhati University took a decision to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in all colleges affiliated to it, with effect from 1972-1973, in place of English. This decision would affect not just degree classes, but pre-university classes as well. English was to continue as the alternative unit of instruction. Academic Council of Guahati University made the following recommendations regarding the medium of instruction:

1. Assamese would be the medium of instruction in all colleges under the jurisdiction of Guahati University.
2. English shall continue as the alternative medium of instruction for need-based courses.
3. Students may write their university examinations either in Assamese or English.
4. Council withdrew the option of answering examination question papers in Bangali which earlier used for some regions.

At the higher educational level English is the medium of instruction. There are as few schools in the state that also use English as their medium of study at lower level. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) affiliated schools in the state use English as their medium of instruction. English is also used to teach at most higher educational institutions in Assam.

#### **Present Literacy rate in Assam**

Assam has an overall literacy rate of 64.28%. While male literacy rate is at 71.93%, the female literacy rate however is only at 56.03 % ( Statistical Handbook of Assa, 2000), a cause for concern for the State Government. The present educational status in the state is quite satisfactory in comparison to many of the states in the country. A comparative view of literacy rate in India and Assam can be displayed in the following table:

**Table 3**

<b>Census Results of Literacy Rate</b>							
1991	Total	Male	Female	2001	Total	Male	Female
Assam	52.89%	61.87%	43.03%	Assam	64.28%	71.93%	56.03%
India	52.21%	64.13%	39.29%	India	65.38%	75.85%	54.16%

(Source: Census of India, 2001 as cited in Assam Human Development Report, 2003)

#### **Limitation of Assam Education System**

India as a developing country acquired a prominent position in post modern period. In the field of education, India played a very important role in Third World Era of intellectual development. Assam as an integral part of the country has been producing highly fertile brains and personnel. Though Assam has constructs a proper channel of education system from primary level to university level in its own territory, yet a number of difficulties and problems are hampering present education system in the state. The administrative inefficiency and the lack of resources are the immediate problems in all stages of education.

After Indian independence the all India primary education mission could not achieve expected goals. In Assam, the children education faced two formidable difficulties in enrolling all the children. The major difficulties come from the resistance of the parents to send their girls to the school and the creation of infrastructure in the rural areas. Among the causes for failure to implement the only Directive Principles of state policy in education may be included, the large birth-rate and consequent population explosion, the inability of the government to raise the required financial resources, the apathy of the illiterate masses, the tradition resistance to the education of girls, the poverty of the parents which compel them to use the labour of children, small and scattered habitations etc. (Shekhawat, 2007:15).

In this context, the Kothari Commission recommends that the step should be taken to reduce wastage and stagnation by seeing that not less than 80 percent of children who enter class I reach class VII. Besides improving the general education of the teachers, steps should be taken to see that nobody is recruited who has not completed his matriculation, and also provision should be made to improve the professional training of the teachers which should be at least two years in duration. The commission also recommended ancillary services like midday meal, free supply for text books, school uniforms etc.

The secondary education system is not functioning properly and could not fulfil the national objectives. The two main defects are that it is academic, without taking into account either the variations in the interest of the students or need of the society, and that even the academic education that is given by the secondary schools is not satisfactory, as it does not enable the students to pursue higher education at university level. On the other hand, the secondary education is not geared to meet the needs of industrialization.

For the betterment of secondary education system the diversified curriculum has been introduced at this stage which inevitably implies development of a strong and effective guidance programme. Guidance involves the strategies of helping the boys and girls to plan by themselves their own future in the light of the personal factors of ability, aptitude, and interest and the availability of job opportunities. The Secondary Education Commission recommended that Educational Guidance Bureaus should be established in every state and

attempts should be made to broaden the pupil's understanding of the scope, nature and consequences of various occupations and industries. The Kothari Commission also recommends that and guidance and counselling should be regarded as an integral part of education assisting individual to make decision and adjustments (Aggarwal, 2004: 505-508).

## Conclusion

The above study identified that after 1950, notable development in primary, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary education appeared on the forefront, at the same time drawing attention to the challenges ahead in its further progress. The study also observed that the government as well as other educational bodies need to focus on the following major issues:

1. The growth and prospect of women education is something very essential since the administrative machinery, school administration should prepare them to face consequent challenges. Flexible curricula, improved school and college education, continuing education programs for girls need greater attention.
2. The major problem is the underrepresentation of the inadequacy of resources and competent teachers. Non-elitist private managed schools too suffer from the lack of informed supervision and monitoring whereas govt. Institutions suffer from red-tapism and unnecessary interventions. The shortage of teachers in this region can be addressed through a flexible approach: inviting visiting and adjunct teachers, partnership arrangements, contractual engagements of professionals and support institutions.

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