

A Study of the Developmental Plans and Programmes of Primary Education in Assam

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Abstract

Primary education is considered as an important element for all around development of a country. It also plays an important role in the process of human resource development in a society. It is also a basic requirement for increasing overall national productivity. Assam is well known for its systematic system of education from ancient time. Primary education was made universal under the British Government in the state of Assam. In the British period Christian Missionaries also played an important role for the development of primary education. After the independence government has taken different policies and programmes for development of primary education in Assam time to time. In spite of making positive efforts, the demand for universalization of primary education was not fulfilled in Assam. In this work an attempt has been made to discuss the developmental plan and programmes of primary education in Assam.

Key Words : *Primary education, Government policies, Universalization, State government, Wastage of primary education.*

Introduction :

Primary education is considered as the most essential for bringing out an all round development of the society. Primary education plays an important role in the process of human resources development. It is also considered as central to all development in the education sector. Primary education is

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considered an important factor which can play significant role for overall development of a society and economy. The primary education constitutes a very significant part of the entire structure of education of a person. The term "Primary Education" is understood as a basic stage of education which is either a self contained phase or which forms a part of a longer cycle of general education of a person. The primary education which he receives there provides the foundation of his physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, social and economic development. The sound primary education may lead to sound secondary and higher education. Primary education deserved the highest priority not only ground of social justice but also for increasing overall national productivity of a country. It is to be noted that the primary education is a basic requirement for economic development, modernization of the social system and the smooth functioning of modern democratic institution.

Primary education have been defined in different ways. Primary education provided by a primary school or elementary school (Anmol Dictionary of Education, 1998). Primary school education is most often referred to as elementary school, which is usually composed of grades one through six. The main purpose of primary education is to give children a strong foundation in the basics of a general curriculum (Sarkar and Baruah, 2011). Primary education usually ends after 6 or 8 years of schooling, depending on the organization of the local school system. From there children go to middle schools and junior high schools, or the high school (Grolier Encyclopedia of knowledge, 1999).

The common age for education for child at the first level is six years in most of the countries in the world. The Kothari Commission mentioned that the primary education covers pre-primary, pre-basic kindergarten, lower primary, primary and junior basic schools. M. K. Gandhi noted that the course of primary education should be extended at least to seven years and should include the general knowledge gained up to the matriculation standards less English plus a substantial vocation. The primary schooling starts at 6 years of age in Europe and the United States. The Indian constitution has provided

free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years within 10 years of adoption of the constitution of our country.

This paper is an attempt to discuss the development plans and programmes of primary education in Assam, using secondary level data. The remaining part of the paper is organized as follows. Section II provides national background on the primary education. Section III presents an outline of the primary education in Assam. Finally, section IV provides the conclusion of the paper.

II. National Background :

India is known for its systematic system of education. The universities of Nalanda and Takshasila were world renowned institutions in ancient days. Local kings also supported and advocated for the development of education. Education was made universal under the British rule in India. Before the advent of British people in India, no formal system of primary education existed in India. It does not mean that no education was being given, it was there but it was given in makhtabs and pathshalas. These was a purely indigenous system of education. These indigenous system of education had been there since time immemorial and a part and parcel of Indian cultural, traditional and serial scene. The vernacular education system was arranged by the local kings to the people.

It is seen that before the British rule in India, the Christian Missionaries first came to our country. It was another thing that the activities of these early missionaries were to spread of Christianity in India. The East India Company also gave them all encouragement to the propagation of Christianity among the people of India. In the early periods of the East India Company primary education remained a neglected matter in our country. After the Charter Act of 1813, it felt obliged official responsibility for the primary education to the masses in India. In spite of this new proposals, not much was done by the government in the field of primary education. After the Wood Despatch in 1854, the elementary schools and the number of pupils

went up in India.

The Hunter Commission was appointed in 1882 to suggest measures for the expansion of primary education as well as other stages of education. The Hunter Commission greatly advocated to the development of primary education in the country in 1882. In its report in the year 1882, the commission abolished the distinction between English primary schools and vernacular schools (Rao, 1998). It is also mentioned that primary education should be entrusted to the newly established municipal and district boards and fund for primary education should be set aside by the local bodies. According to Hunter Commission, the indigenous schools should be developed and encouraged in the country. In spite of these recommendations, nothing could be done in the field of primary education. There were only 97854 primary schools in the country in 1901 - 02. It is seen that during this period from 1813 - 1902 compulsory education did not make much progress due to various mistake policies (Kochhar,1993). In the year 1904, Lord Curzon was keen that something solid was done in the direction of primary education in India.

Gopalkrishna Gokhale, a member of the imperial legislative council made efforts to realize the dream of making available primary education within the reach of everybody. He had introduced two bills during 1910 and 1911 in the imperial legislative council to introduce compulsory primary education. In the Gokhale's resolution contained certain measures. Accordingly, an act on lines of the English Education Act of 1870 should be passed in India. By this act the local bodies should be empowered to introduce compulsory elementary education in respective areas. The period of compulsion should be between 6 - 10 years. Compulsory education should be free and it should apply to boys only. The financial responsibilities should be shared by the local bodies. The government should take up define measures for the expansion of primary education in India. Compulsory primary education should be introduced in those areas where thirty three percent of boys and girls were already under instruction.

It is seen that the resolution was discussed, but the government were not prepared to give efforts to the demand of the resolution. Therefore, Gokhale introduced another bill in 1911 with some objective. The main provision of the bill was that before introducing compulsory primary education by a local authority a certain percentage of students must have attended school. The compulsory primary education will not be free but guardians with a monthly income of ten rupees need not pay fees. The bill may be applied in case of girls and a particular individual or a tribe may be exempted from the operation of the act. It was also called that there is enough scope for the expansion of primary education on voluntary lines. In respect of elementary education field, Gokhale did not succeed. It is also noted that primary education gradually become free in most of the provinces after the attempt of Gokhale in the imperial legislative council.

After the Government of India Act of 1919, Indian Ministers took charge of primary education in 1921 and they tried to introduce compulsory primary education by passing compulsory primary education act in the country. The provincial authority was introduced and the states increased their education budgets including primary education in 1937. M. K. Gandhi came up with his idea of basic education in 1937. After the 1947, the national government had taken positive measures for the development of primary education in India. The Kothari Commission (1964 - 66) also consider primary education as a lightly significant stage in national reconstruction in India. The national policy on education, 1986 was adopted by the Lok Sabha on May 8, 1986 and the Rajya Sabha on May 12, 1986. This policy provides direction on almost all facets of education. It shall be ensured that all children who attain the age of about eleven years by 1990 will have had five years of schooling. Likewise, by 1995 all children will be provided free and compulsory education upto fourteen years of age.

In the year 1993, the government of India has undertaken the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). This policy is an effort to decentralize

educational planning at the district level. The DPEP scheme was in operation in 44 districts spread over eight states in 1994. At present it is followed in 273 districts in India. The government of India decided to implement throughout the country the programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS) is introduced for compulsory elementary education, specially for girls in India. The programme aims at establishing residential schools for girls in all districts of our country which have a particularly low female literacy rate (Manorama Year Book, 2013).

It may be mentioned here that the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in 2000) also emphasised gender equality, women empowerment and universal primary education in the society. We can say that strong political will and necessary fundings are very necessary for making this vision come true in the world. We have already mentioned that government of India have taken many policies and programmes for the development of primary stages of education from time to time. The Right to Education Act, 2009 is considered one of the major landmark to provide free and compulsory education for all children in our country. This important Act was passed on 16th August, 2009. Finally this Act has come into force from April, 2010. This is the important day for all the citizens of India as from this day the right to education will be accorded the same legal status in India after independence. This legal status is provided by Article 21 A of the Indian Constitution. This Act makes every child between the ages of 6 to 14 years has the right for free and compulsory education in India. It is a historic task on the part of the central government to ensure that all children in the ages of 6 to 14 receive education. Both central and state government has got full responsibility for providing funds for well function this Act, 2009. According to census 2001, the total population of the age group of 6 - 11 were 12.30 crores in India. Total number Primary schools were 767520 with 2160666 teachers in our country as per census 2001.

The country has enacted this Act which makes right to education of

every Indian child a fundamental right after independence.

III. Assam Context :

If we look the history of primary education in Assam then we find that the history of modern primary education started in the state after 1826 when British people occupied the state. Ancient Assam was famous for learning. As a matter of fact, the standard of education in ancient days was much more glorious than what we have today. This is evident from the fact that ancient Assam attracted many foreign scholars including Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsiang who visited the capital of Bhaskara Varman in about 643 AD in Kamrup for studying different branches of learning. The Ahom came to Assam in 1228 and they were the rulers of Assam for about six hundred years. The Ahom kings encouraged and supported for education. The Ahom kings patronized a system of education known as the Gurukula system. The indigenous institutions like Pathsalas for Hindus, Maktabas and Madrassahs for Muslims, Tols for Brahmins and Satras for Vaisnavas were found in this period.

Assam came under the British people after the treaty of Yandabo in 1826. David Scott, the first agent of the East India Company, tried to improve and develop the indigenous system of education soon after his arrival in 1826 in Assam. Scott got the sanction of the government of West Bengal to set up primary school in Assam. After the recommendations of the Wood's Despatch of 1854, indigenous primary schools received grants-in-aid. This grant-in-aid system also helped the development of primary education in Assam. Side by side, with this activities of the company, the Christian Missionaries also started primary schools in their religious interests. The American Baptist Missionaries under Rev. Cutter established nearly fourteen schools in Sivasagar in 1844 (Barpujari, 1996). The Welsh Missionaries started many primary schools in hill areas. The first primary school for girls was started in upper Assam by Utsabananda Goswami, Deputy Inspector of School. The education for girls in

Assam was sadly neglected. The Assamese language was used in the primary schools only from 1873. It is seen that at the end of the century the numbers of primary schools rose from 204 in 1871-72 to 1351 with an enrolment of 38182 in 1882-83 in Assam. It is another fact that the missionary schools imparted instruction through the Assamese language or the mother-tongue to the pupils in Assam. The recommendation of Hunter Commission also affected the growth of primary education in Assam. This attempt also helped the further expansion of primary education in Assam (Saikia, 1998). After the government of India Act. of 1919, the government of Assam wanted to make primary education compulsory in the state. The government of Assam passed the Primary Education Act in 1926. This Act was the first primary education act for making primary education compulsory in Assam.

After independence the state government has taken positive measure for the development of primary education in Assam. Just after independence, to make primary education compulsory an act was passed in 1947 in Assam. This act was proposed to make primary education compulsory and it was enforced in some selected areas. The Assam Basic Education Act 1954, was introduced according to recommendation of the Zakir Hussain Committee Report. This act was proposed to have free universal primary education in the state. On the basis of this act, the names of many primary school were converted to basic pattern. The real concept and spirit of basic education, as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi, was not very successful in Assam. Therefore, another attempt was made in 1962 to introduce universal, compulsory and free elementary education in Assam. Accordingly, the Assam Elementary Education Act, 1962 was passed in the state. This act made the Gaon Panchayat responsible for the management and control of primary education in Assam. It is observed that the act is an improvement on the earlier act in that it makes the state government responsible on certain matters relating to primary education. By this act government of Assam made vigorous attempt to provide primary education free and compulsory in the state. It is to be

noted that for implementation of the national policy on education, 1986 for expansion and improvement of primary education was made under the Operation Black Board scheme.

The centrally sponsored scheme Operation Blackboard was primarily an effort to standardize minimum acceptable level of infrastructure (Mukhopadhyay, 1999). This scheme also contributed for the development of primary education in Assam. The DPEP scheme is going on in nine districts of Assam. In order to make the universalisation of primary education the government has introduced the SSA in Assam. Planned efforts have been made in the state to popularize primary education in both rural and urban areas and a huge amount of money has been spent for primary education from 2000-2001 to 2011-2012. The Assam Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was started in Assam in the later part of 2001-02 and by the first part of 2002-03. It can be noted that SSA is an opportunity for promoting social justice through basic education in Assam. The KGBS is also playing an important role to provide elementary level quality and life skill educational facility to girl children of the age group 10 to 14 years belonging to SC, ST, OBC and Minority Communities in Assam. In the Educational Backward Blocks (EBBs), towns and minority concentrated areas, residential school and hostel facilities for girls are established under this scheme. The KGBVS are operationalised in 2008 in the state. In the financial year 2008-09, 11 numbers of KGBVS are sanctioned where 700 numbers of girl children in the age group of 10 to 14 years are covered in the state. It is observed that after independence there is a great progress in the field of primary education in Assam. We have already noted that in 1947-48, there were 7374 primary schools in Assam. After five decades of economic planning the number of primary schools were increased significantly. According to Statistical Hand Book Assam, total number of primary schools were 30068 in 2002-2003 (Statistical Hand Book Assam, 2004).

It is seen that every state today finds it very difficult to cope up with the construction of programme for the school building. The primary school

building is a very serious problem and unless it is taken upon top priority, it would adversely affect not only enrolment in the backward areas, but also the initiative improvement of the schools in a state. It is seen from 7th All India School Education Survey that out of total 30045 primary schools, total 11154 school structure are pucca, 4838 primary schools structure are kuchcha in Assam. In respect of upper primary school it is seen that out of total 7704 upper primary schools, total 2101 school structure are pucca and 1716 are kuchcha. In the earlier Vedic times, single-teacher schools have existed. The old tradition of single teacher schools have been changed in times. It is observed that most of the primary schools are found more than one teacher in Assam. The survey reveals that total full time teachers are 83848 in primary schools in Assam. Out of total teachers, 55468 are male and 28380 are female. Total number of part time teachers are 718 in the primary schools. On the other hand it is seen that the total number of full time teachers in upper primary schools were 57486 in the state. It is also observed that the majority of teachers are male in compared to female in Assam. It is known from the survey that the total enrolment in primary schools are 2557239 and in upper primary schools are 943248 in the state. It is also observed that out of total enrolment 1319189 are boys and 1238050 are girls in primary schools in Assam.

The National Policy on Education 1986, had laid down that investment on education be gradually increased to reach a level of expenditure of six percent of national income as early as possible. There has been rapid growth of expenditure on primary in Assam. It is to be noted that after 1987-88 the central government realized the significance of elementary education and its contribution rose to about 19 percent to further rise to about 21 percent in 1993-94. Also, over the period, the state government have been meeting a little less than half the expenditure on elementary education in India. Education as a form of investment has to be emphasized, needs to be expanded in the changing times. The total plan size of Sarva Sikshya Abhiyan, Assam for the

year 2003-04 was Rs. 41859.24 Lakh Rs. 18719.13 Lakh has been spent during the financial year Rs. 690.73 Lakh has been earmarked for state level activities. In spite of sizeable increase in educational expenditure, it is difficult to vouchsafe the adequacy of educational investment for the maintenance and development of primary education in Assam.

It is to be noted that government of Assam has made some new arrangement as per the mandate of the Act, 2009, which provided for the inclusion of the classes between I and VIII in the elementary stage of education. It is come to know that government of Assam has decided to introduce the NAAC, Bangalur style gradation for the primary school in Assam. Accordingly, School which get 'A+' will be given awards by the government while those securing 'A' grade will be awarded by the education department. Schools getting 'B' grade will be asked to improve while the rest will face censure.

It is come to know that government of Assam has decided to introduce the class - VIII in the upper primary level and Class - V in the lower primary level. It is hoped that the introduction of eight year education cycle in the elementary stage will help overall development of primary education system in the state. The state government has already decided to have one primary school in a radius of one kilometer and an upper primary school in a radius of three kilometers in Assam. The Directorate of Elementary Education, Assam is mainly responsible for administration control, expansion, inspection, supervisions, monitoring and evaluation of elementary education in the state.

The total number of primary school in the state is increasing after the independence of the country. There were 53338 primary schools in the 23 district of Assam in 2009-10. Out of total 53383 primary schools, 44,518 (83%) schools were government school. The total enrolment of children in primary schools were 3286215 in 2009-10. Out of total enrolment of children, about 85 percent were studying in government schools. The state has got 13 primary schools per 1000 child in 2009-10. In 2009-10, the ratio of primary school to

upper primary schools in Assam recorded at 2.85:1 which was higher in compared to 2.23:1 of national average. The average student classroom ratio in Assam and national average was 28 and 32 in 2009-10. The state has an average 3 teachers per primary school in 2009-10. In pupil – teacher ratio front, the state position was 25 which is lower in compared to 33 of the national average in 2009-10. This situation needs to be improved in both state and national level. It is to be noted that the main challenge lies in bringing the never enrolled and drop out children into the school education system in Assam.

Primary education has been under the control of a number of agencies in Assam as well as in India. The government of Assam is increasing taking the responsibility of providing free and compulsory primary education to all citizen. In addition to this primary education is still under the management of some private agencies. These agencies also are playing an important role for providing of quality education in the state. It may be mentioned here that the government of Assam has decided to introduce TET to bring in eligible and competent teachers for quality education in the elementary level in the state in 2011. A person must clear the TET to become a teacher for both lower primary and upper primary level of schools. This decision was taken to proper implement the Right to Education Act in Assam. We feel that this decision is very right and appreciate for improvement of education system in the state of Assam.

IV. Conclusion:

From the preceding analysis, it is clear that in spite of the different measures undertaken by both the central and state government, the demand for universalization of primary education was not fulfilled in the state. In spite of making positive efforts, a large number of girls and boys in the rural areas and in the urban slums drop out of primary education before completing even primary level. Therefore, there is a great need to increase meaningful

and interesting programmes for the development of primary education in Assam. It is only primary education, which can lead a person for the achievement of a better and higher quality of life. Therefore, primary education structure must be remodeled to extend its reach widely to all those who have right to education in the state. The future development of primary education in the state will be governed by the extent of basic infrastructural facilities and their proper utilization, appropriate government policy and positive attitude of the government officials. It is sincerely hoped that the present study will draw the attention of planners and policy makers in the state. It is further hoped that our study will open a door to the researchers to pursue research at the micro level, covering all the aspect of primary education. We hope that promotional steps will be taken by all concerned to develop the primary education in the state of Assam.

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