

Primary Education in Assam after Independence

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Abstract

Primary education is considered as a basic requirement for all around development of an underdeveloped state like Assam. It also plays a significant role in the process of human resource development in an economy. It is also a basic requirement for increasing overall productivity. The state of Assam is well known for its systematic system of education since time immemorial. There was indigenous system of education in medieval period of Assam. It was made universal under the British Government in the state. After the independence government has taken various schemes for development of primary education in the state time to time. Primary education is free and available to all children in the age group six to fourteen in the state. In spite of making different efforts, the demand for universalization of primary education is not fulfilled in Assam. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the status of primary education in Assam after independence.

Key words : *Primary education, Primary school, Enrolment, Government of Assam, Dropout, Infrastructural facility.*

Introduction :

Primary education is considered as an important element which can play a significant role for the overall development of a country. Primary education deserves the highest priority not only on ground of social justice but also for increasing overall national productivity of a country. It has the power to meet basic learning needs for a sustained improvement of quality of life. There has been significant positive impact of the access and quality of primary education on aggregate social and economic growth. The primary education had been accepted as the starting point for promoting gender equality and empowering women in a society. The basic purpose of primary education is to offer children a pure foundation in the basics of

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a curriculum.. It is a basic requirement for economic development, modernization of the social system and the smooth functioning of modern democratic institution. The quality of life of a person depends on the primary education and one gets from the state (Konwar, 2007). All developed nations provide public primary education for the young children in the world. Primary education is free in aided primary schools where children below the age of 11 taught in India. It also used the term lower primary stage or school where includes classes I to V. Primary schools have been established for fulfilling the obligation to provide for free and compulsory education to all children as stipulated under Article 45 of the Constitution of India.

Like many parts of the India, ancient Assam was famous for teaching and 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 the year 643 in Kamrup for studying the different branches of learning. The Ahoms came to Assam in 1228 and they were the rulers of Assam for about six hundred years. Although Assamese society in Ahom periods was essentially feudal in nature but, the Ahom kings encouraged and supported of education for political, economic and administrative objectives. Before the British rule, there was a purely indigenous system of education. Since time immemorial, these indigenous institutions had been there as part and parcel of cultural, social and religious aspects in Assam. 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. It is seen that Wood's Dispatch laid the foundation of modern system of primary education in Assam. After the recommendations of the Wood's Dispatch of 1854, indigenous primary schools received grants-in-aid. Side by side, with these activities of the company, the Christian missionaries also started primary schools in their religious interests. 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 British government made Assamese the language of the court and the schools in 1873. The numbers of primary schools rose from 204 in 1871-72 to 1351 with an enrolment of 38182 in 1882-83 in Assam (Barpujari, 2007). 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. For the spread of primary education the colonial rulers were motivated by a political and official objective in Assam. The government has taken various steps for the expansion of primary education after 1947 in Assam.

Objectives :

The broad objectives of the paper are :

1. To study the developmental planes and programmes of primary education in Assam.
2. To discuss the status of enrolment and teacher of primary education in Assam.
3. To analyses the infrastructural facility of primary education in Assam.

Methodology :

Primary education is selected for our study as the primary education is more valuable for the society and economy. The paper is based on secondary data. The secondary data were collected from both government and non-government sources. In addition to secondary data, a large number of discussions were held with knowledgeable persons regarding the primary education in Assam.

Findings and Discussion :**a. Developmental Plans and Programmes :**

After independence of the country, 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. In 1947-48, there were 7374 primary schools with 3932478 pupils in Assam. 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. The Sixth Scheduled of the Constitution was passed forming a District Council for each autonomous district in the tribal areas in the state after in 1947. Accordingly, "In 1960, the Government of Assam required that each District Council had to constitute a Primary Education Board and the same was to be notified in the Assam Gazetteer. The District Primary Education Board was made responsible for the preparation and use of the curricular, syllabus, text books, etc in the line with the policy of the State Primary Education"(Passah, 2007).

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 (OBB). The centrally sponsored scheme OBB was primarily an effort to standardize minimum acceptable level of infrastructure. This scheme also contributed for the development of primary education in Assam. The Millennium Development Goals (MDMs) is a centrally sponsored scheme and this scheme has been successfully implementing in the state. The scheme is playing a role to increase enrolment, attendance and retention in primary education. The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) scheme is going on in nine districts of Assam. The scheme is regarded as one of the important scheme to improve the standard of primary education in Assam. In order to make the universalisation of primary education the government has introduced the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (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 the beginning of SSA. The 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. All schemes for primary education are implemented through SSA in Assam. To achieve the goal of universal of primary education, various educational programmes of SSA along with different innovative scheme are being implemented for the age group of 6 to 14 years in the state. The total plan size of SSA Mission, Assam for the year 2003-04 was Rs. 41859.24

lakh. About 6925 core 13 lakh has been expended for state level SSA activities from 2007-08 to 2014-15 which amount was granted by central government. The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBVS) also playing an important role for providing quality education in primary level in Assam. The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 is considered as one of the major landmarks to provide free and compulsory education for all children in our country. The Act was introduced in the Parliament in 2002, but the modified RTE Act bill was ultimately introduced in the parliament in 2009. The Act of parliament received the assent of the President on the 26th August, 2009. Finally this Act has come into force from April, 2010. This is a historic 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. Keeping the view of importance of primary education to all children up to the age of 14 years the state government is implementing the "Right to Education Act 2009" as "The Assam Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2011" in Assam. As expected, the RTE Act was unanimously approved by State Cabinet for the implementation of the legislation on 6th July, 2011 in Assam. Assam was the 19th state in India to have implemented the RTE Act since it was passed in 2009. After almost two hours of discussion, the RTE Act was approved during the State Cabinet meeting which would helped to every child between the ages of 6 to 14 years the right to free and compulsory education in the state. Accordingly, a student would be entitled not only to free education but also free of cost textbooks, uniform and other important learning materials. It was added from the government side that maintaining 30:1 student teacher ratio in all the schools would be must and every school would have at least two teachers in the state. The state would have at least one government lower primary school in every one kilometer distance and more schools will be set up after assessing the requirement through satellite mapping and household survey in Assam. There were 35,000 lower primary schools in the time of state cabinet approve of the RTE Act in Assam. After about seven decades of economic planning the number of primary schools were increased significantly in the state. Interestingly, the Kerala achieves almost universal primary education, the situation in Assam is still far from the perfect.

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 Teacher Eligibility Test (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 RTE Act in Assam(Konwar, 2014). It is feel that this decision is very right and appreciate for improvement of education system in the state of Assam. The Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE), Assam is functioning under the RTE Act to provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years in the state. The DEE, Assam has taken many steps to provide quality education and to attract children of all social groups and also implement different central government schemes which can be noted as :

- Mid-day meal for students of primary schools.
- Teaching learning material to government and provincialised schools.
- Free text books up to class V to all categories of schools
- Scholarship to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, disabled children and meritorious students.
- Uniform to students up to class V.
- Other incentives such as bicycles and umbrella.
- Special scholarship to students.

The government of Assam has made some new arrangement as per the mandate of the RTE 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(Sarkar and Baruah, 2011). The state education department will assess the quality and award grades the primary schools in Assam. 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.

b. Enrolment and Teacher :

The development in educational attainment means increase in enrolment level. It is an important indicator for development of education. It is known from the Sixth All India School Education Survey (SAISES) 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 total enrolment of children in primary schools were 3286215 in 2009-10 in Assam. Out of total enrolment of children, about 85 percent were studying in government schools. Class-wise enrolments in the primary schools of Assam are shown in Table-1.

Table-1

Class-wise Enrolment in the Primary Schools of Assam.

Classes	2002-03			2013-14		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Class-I	467939	440382	908321	487115	471152	958267
Class-II	293216	274466	567682	423594	413222	836816
Class-III	253493	234506	487999	398832	396082	794914
Class-VI	207409	192532	399941	369059	368099	737158
Class-V	260091	243014	503105	341990	344561	686551
Total	1482148	1384900	2867848	2020590	1993116	4013706

Source : Statistical Hand Book Assam (2004 & 2014): Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati , P, 180& 278.

Enrolment information is an important for social development. The enrolment rate at primary level has gone up several folds in Assam. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary level schools in Assam is 98.8 and 92.2 respectively. The data regarding GNR and NER in the state are presented in Table- 2.

Table -2
GER and NER in primary level schools in Assam, As on 2013-14.

Sl.No.	District	GER	NER
1.	Kokrajha	98.4	90.6
2.	Dhubri	98.6	91.7
3.	Goalpara	99.0	92.9
4.	Barpeta	99.3	93.9
5.	Morigaon	99.4	97.9
6.	Nagaon	98.8	94.3
7.	Sonitpur	99.1	91.9
8.	Lakhimpur	99.1	94.9
9.	Dhemaji	99.3	92.0
10.	Tinsukia	98.4	88.3
11.	Dibrugarah	98.7	92.7
12.	Sibsagar	98.3	96
13.	Jorhat	98.9	94.1
14.	Goalpara	99.5	95.4
15.	Karbi angling	96.5	94.8
16.	Dima Hasao	99.0	79.5
17.	Cachar	98.8	91.9
18.	Karimganj	98.5	89.5
19.	Hailakandi	99.4	90.0
20.	Bongaigaon	99.3	89.3
21.	Chirang	98.6	89.1
22.	Kamrup	99.1	89.3
23.	Kamrup Metro	96.7	88.8
24.	Nalbari	99.5	95.2
25.	Baksa	98.9	96.6
26.	Darrang	98.2	94.6
27.	Udalguri	98.5	95.2
Assam	-	98.8	92.2

Source : Statistical Hand Book Assam (2014): Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati , P, 279.

It should be clearly noted that the trend of rising teacher will have far reaching consequences which may lead to development of a state. There has been rapid growth of expenditure including enrolment and teacher in every district in primary level education in Assam. It is also observed that there is some noticeable disparity in development of primary level education among the districts in Assam. As we know that the literacy rate is the highest in Kamrup Metro (88.71%0 and lowest in Dhubri (58.34%) in 2011 census. As we know that the children enrolled in class one in our country as well as our state dropout before completing five years of schooling. Dropout is one of major problem in national and state level. The District Information System for Education (DISE) report 2013-14 indicates that the average annual dropout rate at primary level in Assam was 6.24 which were higher as compared to 4.67 in India during 2012-13. The average annual dropout in primary level for girls and boys are 4.66 and 4.68 respectively 2012-13. 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 primary level education system in Assam District wise enrolment and Teacher in primary schools are presented in Table-3.

Table -3

District wise Teacher and Enrolment in Primary Schools in Assam, As on 2013-14.

Sl. No.	District	Teacher	Enrolment			Dropout (%)
			Boys	Girls	Total	
1.	Kokrajhar	4015		56437	113046	6.3
2.	Dhubri	5627		1452231	285346	12.8
3.	Goalpara	4263		67076	133446	10.7
4.	Barpeta	5834		100946	196428	2.8
5.	Morigaon	3913		59590	118058	5.8
6.	Nagaon	10102		164895	326765	7.8
7.	Sonitpur	6350		94126	187849	9.0
8.	Lakhimpur	5455		61810	123227	4.1
9.	Demaji	3151		37118	73164	4.9
10.	Tinsukia	3190		58717	117363	5.4
11.	Dibrugarah	3672		55948	112026	4.9
12.	Sivasagar	9176		48107	96570	5.6
13.	Jorhat	3980		41184	81411	1.8
14.	Golaghat	3383		46781	92027	6.8

Sl. No.	District	Teacher	Enrolment			Dropout (%)
			Boys	Girls	Total	
15.	Karbi angling	3782		54890	106250	9.7
16.	Dima Hasao	2631		11734	22627	7.8
17.	Cachar	4567		92636	186114	9.3
18.	Karimganj	4035		78562	158272	6.5
19.	Hailakandi	3175		41885	84811	5.5
20.	Bongaigaon	2517		43063	85403	5.2
21.	Chirang	2406		29243	57305	7.6
22.	Kamrup	4888		68066	133888	4.3
23.	Kamrup Metro	2043		29607	57630	0.8
24.	Nalbari	3087		32973	65400	10.3
25.	Baksa	3346		47127	92229	7.6
26.	Darrang	3613		60020	116294	12.3
27.	Udalguri	3017		40275	78893	8.3
Assam	-	115218		1668047	3301842	6.3

Source : Statistical Hand Book Assam (2014): Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati, P,273.

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 SAISES 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. In pupil - teacher ratio front, the state position was 25 which is lower in compared to 33 of the national average in 2009-10. The total number of primary school in the state is increasing after the independence of the country. As per the information made by DISE developed by the National University for Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA), 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 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.

c. Infrastructural Facility :

In order to implement development schemes meant for educational upliftment of an area, it is essential to take into account the infrastructural facilities. The government also emphasised to provide proper infrastructural facilities for primary education development. 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. It is to be noted that after 1987-88 the central government realized the significance of primary 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 primary education in India. Education as a form of investment has to be emphasized, needs to be expanded in the changing times. The central government has granted large amount of money for infrastructure development of primary level schools in Assam. The status of infrastructure at primary level education in Assam is not satisfactory in Assam as compared to the other states of the country. It is observed that except teacher-pupil ratio, in all other parameters the achievement of the state is lower than other states of the country. 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. The SAISES recorded 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. 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. The data regarding educational infrastructure in Assam are presented in Table-4.

Table -4
Infrastructural Facility of Primary Schools in Assam, 2013-14.

Sl.No.	District	No. of Primary Schools	Average No. of Classroom	Drinking water	Boys Toilet	Girls Toilet
1.	Kokrajhar	1762	4.7	1318	912	1330
2.	Dhubri	2176	5.0	1705	1059	1627
3.	Goalpara	1501	3.9	1390	1488	1462
4.	Barpeta	1953	4.5	1871	1318	1617
5.	Morigaon	1244	5.1	1192	1032	1140
6.	Nagaon	2654	4.7	2551	1568	2308
7.	Sonitpur	1937	5.7	1732	1631	1601
8.	Lakhimpur	1826	3.7	1642	755	1485
9.	Dhemaji	1305	4.7	1207	780	1132
10.	Tinsukia	1133	6.5	1102	967	1024
11.	Dibrugarah	1484	4.6	1438	1084	1326
12.	Sivasagar	1925	4.2	1867	1464	1885
13.	Jorhat	1753	4.3	1699	1338	1683
14.	Golaghat	1333	4.4	1291	985	1084
15.	Karbi- Anglong	1783	4.2	1030	1338	1775
16.	Dima- Hasao	751	3.4	276	265	748
17.	Cachar	2068	4.5	1443	1178	1764
18.	Kaimganj	1634	4.3	1032	1127	1378
19.	Hailakandi	1236	3.2	532	494	965
20.	Bongaigaon	844	4.4	725	447	529
21.	Chirang	837	5.0	760	419	723
22.	Kamrup	1941	4.7	1756	1499	1812
23.	Kamrup-Merto	534	4.4	469	387	502
24.	Nalbari	996	4.6	970	646	872
25.	Baksa	1482	4.4	1307	1018	1231
26.	Darrang	1097	5.1	1023	713	8908
27.	Udalguri	1166	5.1	1021	1156	1166
Total	Assam	40355	4.5	34349	27128	35067

Source: Statistical Hand Book Assam (2014): Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, Guwahati , P, 279

Infrastructures like economic, social and financial are major elements over all development of a state. It is observed that educational infrastructure in Assam is worse as compared to the national average. P.P.Buragohain and A.J.Mahanta mentioned as "the poor status of educational infrastructure might be a factor causing poor performance of education at primary level in Assam"(Buragohain and Mahanta, 2013). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Global Monitoring Report, 2010 compared the "Education for All Development Index (EDI)"in the international level for different nations where India figures at 105th position among 127 nations (Zutshi and Ramakant,2013). There have been different efforts in this line to construct Education Development Indices within India and Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) supported in this regard. The NUEPA and the MHRD have computed the Education Development Index (EDI) for primary and upper primary and composite index for the entire elementary education which has been based on DISE in India. Regarding the EDI in Assam, the DISE -2013-14, Flash Statistics indicated that "the state is ranked 32 at primary level, 32 at upper primary level and 30 at composite level with EDI 0.490, 0.557 and 0.524 respectively. The all India ranking of the State as per EDI 2013-14 for access to primary schools is 7, for infrastructure is 32, for teacher is 34 and is placed at the top for outcome. The EDI rank of the State in respect of access, infrastructure, teacher and outcome at upper primary level is 33, 34, 29 and 5 respectively" (Economic Survey, Assam,2014-15). In spite of sizeable increase in educational expenditure , about 34,653 teachers post was laying vacant in the year 2015-16 in primary level education in Assam.

Concluding Remarks :

It is quite clear that after independence there is a great progress in the field of primary education in Assam. It is also equally true that in spite of the different measures undertaken by both the central and state government, the demand for UPE is not fulfilled even after sixty seven of independence 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 remodelled to extend its reach widely to all those who have right to education in the state of Assam.

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