

Historical Development of Elementary Education in Assam:

The information below offers an understanding of the Assam Education system tracing the evolution pattern from pre-colonial period to present time.

1.1: Development of Elementary Education in Assam Pre-Independence:

The accounts of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsung threw much light on the ancient system of education prevalent during the rule of King Bhaskar Varmana of 7th century who took keen interest in spreading education among the people in Kamrup. Major part of the teaching and learning in ancient Assam took place via the "Gurukula" system where students learnt about Vedas, Vedangas, Smritis or other religious scriptures. The system of writing books in Sanchipat was started in Assam. It is crucial to mention here that prior to the introduction of scripts; education was imparted orally.

Assam when invaded and ruled by Ahom kings for 600 years since 1228 AD 'education' was given due importance and recordings of the historical accounts in books were maintained.

Nevertheless, Assam has had her indigenous system of imparting education through formal institutions like:

- Pathsalas for Hindus
- Tols for Brahmins and upper class Hindu
- Muktab for Muslims and
- Satras for the Vaishnavas.

The above indigenous institutions in Assam, although not very organized, played a crucial role in imparting education to the mass.

1.2 Development of Education System in Assam during the British Era:

Assam came under the control of East India Company after the "Treat of Yandaboo" in 1826. In particular, Mr. David Scott the first agent of the East India Company took interest in the promotion of the indigenous system of imparting education. He opened eleven schools, mostly in lower Assam. Students passing out from these schools were offered jobs under the Government. Also, he opened a school in Garo hills for the expansion of primary education among the hill tribes. Scott's principle was to retain the old system as far as possible and implement new rules as little as possible. As a result, the old 'Paik' and 'Khel' system were retained in Upper Assam. However, these were replaced by modern education system by the Company in subsequent years.

After the revolt of 1857, the power of administration was transferred to the Crown. In this context, the Hunter Commission, in 1882, laid emphasis on the importance of local bodies in the matter of expansion of primary education. This resolution empowered the local boards to

establish aid, manage and control the primary schools. Furthermore, general supervision and funding were determined based on the performance of the schools (Govt. Resolution, 17th November 1882). This immensely affected the growth of primary education in Assam.

It was only after the liberal policy of Lord Curzon in the early period part of 20th century that primary education received renewed attention. 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 first compulsory primary education Act was passed in 1926.

Provisions of Assam Primary Education Act, 1926 are:

- It extends to the whole of Assam.
- Any local authority with a majority of two-thirds of the members present in a meeting may resolve to introduce compulsory primary education within its jurisdiction for children between 6-11 years of age.
- The local authority shall submit the resolution to the Government for consideration.
- The local authority shall submit the government a statement showing all particulars concerning the total existing expenditure incurred by the local authority and by the government and the additional cost required for introduction of compulsory primary education.
- Local authority of any area shall provide one-third of the additional cost without diminishing the current expenditure and shall levy an education cess for this purpose.
- In the event of the proposal being sanctioned the government shall provide the local authority the remaining two-third of the additional cost.
- If any local authority fails to submit a scheme, the Government may call upon to do so.
- The Government may by notification make rules regarding the education cess, the manner in which the education funds shall be maintained.
- No fees shall be charged from any students.
- Poor children will be provided books and other writing materials if education committee recommended.
- The local authority and the education committee concerned shall be responsible for enforcement of the provisions of the Act.

The primary education, however, made slow progress in Assam during this period. The wrong policy of the Government in giving grant-in-aid, the inefficiency of the local boards to control primary education and indifferent attitude of the people contributed to this slow progress.

Due to limited achievements, the Act was revised in 1930. This revision brought elementary education into limelight, with imperial grants being released to Assam for the promotion of elementary education. The educational organisation that emerged gradually got graded into primary education (vernacular), high/secondary education and college/ higher education. Nevertheless, education was also imparted through Tols and Madrasses. There were around 162 tols and 120 public madrasas in 1935.

1.3 Contribution of Christian Missionaries:

The beginning of modern education and the promotion of language and literature in Assam can be attributed to the efforts of the Christian Missionaries. The Christian Missionaries rendered unique service towards the promotion of vernacular and for the upliftment of the tribal areas of Assam. The American Baptist Missionaries under Rev Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter came to Assam and setup nearly 14 schools in Sibsagar. The first Assamese newspaper "Arunodoi" was published by Nathan Brown in 1846. They went into the interior places of the hills and plains and established schools in Garo hills, Khasi-Jaintia hills, Nagaland, Darang, Nowgaon, Guwahati etc. They wrote several books in Assamese language. Another American Baptist missionary, Miles Bronson edited the first Assamese Dictionary in Assamese and English in 1867.

The chief contribution of the Christian missionaries in the field of education were:

- Starting of charity school
- Establishment of printing press
- Importance on the development of vernacular language
- Education of orphans
- Printing and publication of text books.
- Publication of newspapers
- Translation of books to Assamese language.

1.4 Development of Elementary Education in Post-Independent Assam:

After independence Basic Education was accepted as the national pattern of education at the elementary level. The Government of Assam also accepted Basic Education as its future pattern of elementary education and passed the Assam Basic Education Act, 1954.

The Act provided for: -

- The Constitution of a state Board for Basic education to advise the government on matters such as making grants to schools, control and management, recruitment and service condition of teachers, selection of text books, training of teachers etc.
- The State Advisory Board will maintain a fund of which the D.P.I. will be in charge.
- Following types of schools shall be recognized as basic school under this Act.
 - All Government M.V. School
 - All M.V. schools managed by private bodies
 - All primary schools
 - All basic schools
 - Any private elementary schools
- The state government may impose an educational tax in any area for the purpose of this Act and can make rules regarding the age of a child, the curriculum, duration and standard etc. This Act introduced certain changes in the administration by entrusting more power on the Govt.

In spite of all these measures the system of Basic education failed in Assam as in other parts of the country. It was considered to be impractical and insufficient to meet the demands of the modern society.

The Assam Elementary Education Act, 1962 was passed to make provisions for the management and control of elementary education and to provide for free and compulsory education in Assam in gradual stages.

The major provisions of the Act were as follows:

- It extends to the whole of Assam with exception to the autonomous districts, provided the Governor may, with the consent of the District council concerned, extend all or any of the provisions of the Act to all or any of the Autonomous districts on such date may be notified on his behalf.
- Definition: Elementary Education means education up to such class or standard not beyond the eighth class, as may be prescribed.
- 'Local authority' means, a Municipal Board, or a Town committee or a Gaon Panchayat established under the Municipal Act and Assam Panchayat Act, 1959".
- Constitution of a State Board for elementary education was made to advise the Government for the development, expansion, management and control of elementary education in the state with the Minister of Education as its Chairman and other members. The members of the Board will hold office for five years.
- The State Board will lay down principle on the allocation of grants to local authorities for the purpose of this Act, lay down procedure for recruitment of teachers and the conditions of their service, lay down condition for recognition, expansion, amalgamation and opening of new schools.
- The State Government may make rules for carrying out the purpose of this Act.
- This Act is an improvement on the earlier Acts as it makes the State Government responsible on certain matters relating to elementary education. This Act entrusted the responsibilities for management of elementary education on the local authorities of the area concerned.

The Assam Elementary Education Act, 1962 provided guidelines for the constitution of the State Board of Elementary Education for management, improvement and expansion of primary education to advise the State Government on all matters relating to elementary education.

In 1977, with the establishment of a new Government new policy for primary education was declared. A separate Directorate of Elementary Education was constituted in Assam. Under the provision of this Act rules were framed in 1977 called, the Assam Elementary Education (Provincialisation) Rules 1977. These rules prescribe the qualifications for appointment of teachers for elementary schools and the conditions for taking over of schools by the State.

A. Age & Qualifications of Teachers:

1. **Age:** - (a) A candidate shall be within the age limit of 18 to 36 years on 1st January of the year of advertisement; (b) the upper age limit shall be relaxed in favour of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as per rules made by the Government.

2. **Qualifications:** -

(a) **Assistant Teacher:** minimum qualification is Higher Secondary or any other examination of equivalent standard having 45% marks in any one of the qualifying examination (HS / HSLC) for General Categories and minimum 40% for reserved categories for the post of Assistant Teacher in Lower Primary and Upper Primary schools;

(b) **Hindi Teacher:** HSLC Examination passed along with Hindi Visharad of Assam Rastrabhasa Prachar Samiti or Higher Secondary (HS) Examination passed with Hindi as one of the subjects or equivalent thereof;

(c) **Arabic Teacher:** Intermediate Examination passed under Madrassa Education Board, Assam, or Higher Secondary Examination passed with Arabic as one of the subjects or equivalent thereof;

(d) **Language Teacher:** Higher Secondary Examination passed with certificate of Language examination from competent authority and Board Examination at the HS Level;

(e) **Science Graduate Teacher:** Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) from any recognized university, (preference will be given to the trained candidates).

3) Character: A candidate shall furnish the certificate of character from- (1) The Principal / Academic Officer of the school / college last attended by the candidate, and (2) a respectable person who is well acquainted with (not related to) the candidate.

4) Selection Committee: there shall be a Selection Committee in each Educational District constituted as follows: (1) An eminent educationist / social worker as Chairman/ Chairperson; (2) 7 educationists and social workers to be nominated by State Government as Members, at least two each should be from women and parents and at least one should be from the weaker section to be nominated by the Government; (3) The Deputy Inspectors of Schools of the District (all) under the District Elementary Education Officer concerned as Members; (4) The District Elementary Education Officer of the District concerned as Member Secretary of the Committee. The term of the Committee is generally one year, but can be extended by the Government if necessary.

B. Conditions for taking over Elementary schools:

(1) Every inhabited village shall have at least one Elementary School. In a village where there are more than one schools the minimum distance from one to other should be [1.1.

K.M.] provided there are more than two hundred populations in case of L.P. School and Junior Basic Schools and [3 K.M.] in case of M.E., M.V. and Senior Basic Schools.

(2) The enrolment in each of the School shall not be less than 40 in case of Lower Primary Schools and Junior Basic Schools and 90 in case of M.E., M.V. and Senior Basic Schools, provided that the enrolment may be relaxed by the Government in suitable cases.

(3) The teachers of venture school may be retained at the time of taking over if they possess the minimum qualifications and age for recruitment provided that such teachers have put in at least two years' continuous service immediately preceding the taking over of the school and provided further that the prescribed ratio of students and teacher is maintained in the school.

(4) A venture school should possess at least 2 bighas of land in the rural areas and 1/2 bigha of land in the urban area.

(5) Immediately after the Assam Elementary Education (Provincialization) Act, 1974 comes in to force all liabilities of the Regional Boards and State Board for Elementary Education including liabilities incurred by various authorities constituted under the provision of the Assam Elementary Education Act, 1968 shall vest in the state.

School fund- a fund shall be created and operated by the Managing Committee for maintenance of the school buildings, supply of furniture, equipment and teaching aids and maintenance of school garden. The fund shall be raised from donation, subscription and grant received from the Government. All money shall be deposited in Savings Bank Accounts in the nearest Post Office or Bank and shall be operated jointly in by the Secretary and Treasurer.

Under these rules, the government guarantees the payment of salaries of teachers and other staff as also scholarships and stipends for students under different schemes of the government. Occasionally grants may be provided for expanding the infrastructure of the school, but that is not guaranteed.

1.5: District Primary Education Programme (DPEP):

The constitutional provision in "Article 45" and the subsequent legislative provisions made way for expansion and improvement of elementary education in Assam. Accordingly, the Government of India formulated the "District Primary Education Programme" (DPEP) scheme in 1993. DPEP is an effort to decentralise educational planning at the district level. It is planned in such a way that it suits the educational needs and demands of the district concerned.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched in Assam in the year 1994-95 to achieve the goal of universalisation and to work for quality improvement of Elementary

education. Initially the programme was launched in 4 districts. Later it was extended to 5 more districts. These districts were: Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigoan, Barpeta, Darrang, Sonitpur, Morigaon, and KarbiAnglong.

The teacher training programme of DPEP aimed at increasing the awareness and motivation of teachers leading to activity-based and learner-centric teaching for achieving MLL.

Teacher training programmes and other academic activities of DPEP were carried out at the following level:

1. State Level (SCERT and DPEP)
2. District level (DIETS)
3. Block level (BRC)
4. Cluster level (CRC)

1.6: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA):

Efforts have been made to extend the opportunity of Elementary Education to a large number of children through Operation Black Board, Non-Formal Education, Mahila Samakhya, Nutrition programme, Total Literacy Campaign, DPEP, etc. But, in spite of implementation of all these programmes a large section of children of the country continue to be deprived of the opportunity of Elementary education. On the other hand, the Supreme Court in 1993 has proclaimed the right of education of children up to the age of 14 years as a fundamental right. Now that the 93rd amendment bill of the Constitution has sought to give Constitutional status to the right of education as a fundamental right, it has become imperative for all of us to work unitedly in achieving the goal of education for all. To ensure this fundamental right of children, new efforts have been made through decentralized planning process. All the ongoing programmes for development of Elementary education in the district level have been sought to be taken up under one organization/programme, named as **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**. Now through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan the aims of UEE is sought to be attained by need based and decentralized planning, enhanced community participation, and by involving the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) in matters of school management and supervision.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a people's movement for education for all, attempts to provide useful and relevant Elementary education of satisfactory quality for all, bridging all social and gender gaps with the active participation of the community in the affairs of the school.

The SSA is an integrated effort to enhance the efficiency of the schooling system, and to ensure building of community ownership for quality Elementary education. The challenge now is to convert this Abhiyan into a mass movement.