

# Evaluation of Education system in Assam: A review from colonial to post independent period

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## **1.0 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 policies. Its capital city; Guwahati is a key destination for higher education for students of the whole of north-eastern region. This chapter offers an understanding of Assam Education system tracing the evolution pattern from colonial period to present time. The chapter would also indicate the impact of Assam Education system on English language teaching policies, provisions and its status in Assam during post-independence era.

### **1.1 Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to discuss about the historical development of education system in Assam.

### **1.2 Methodology**

The paper is primarily based on secondary data collected from different books, journals, news papers, web sites, articles, etc and which is descriptive in nature.

## **2.0 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 institutions like Pathshalas for Hindus, Tols for

Brahmins and upper class Hindu, Madrassas for Muslims and Satras for the Vaisnavites. 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.

### **3.0 Development of Education under British Patronage**

During Oriental-Anglicized controversy, David Scott, agent of governor general of Eastern frontier favored the encouragement of oriental learning by improving the indigenous system of education. Gradually, the need for English education became apparent for administrative advantage. Mr. Jenking, commissioner of Assam (1834-61) urged the government to set up English school. As a result Gauhati Jila School opened up in 1835, which were the harbinger of modern educational advancement in Assam and the forerunner of the Cotton College, the Earl Law College, the Jorhat Normal school and Department of Mohammedan education. Effective British policy in the field of education had begun with the 149 Macaulay's (President of the committee of Public Instruction) downward filtration theory. Later, Educational Dispatch (1854) of Charles Wood opened a new era in the history of Indian education and provided a comprehensive plan of education covering all stages from primary school to the university. Accordingly government extended grant-in-aid to Assam (Resolution of 1882) and this brought in a considerable increase in primary and secondary schools. By 1880s there were around 1760 primary schools, 98 High schools and several Reading schools. Primary schools consisted of Government schools, aided schools and indigenous schools. Secondary education was imparted in three types of institutions, namely the High schools, Middle schools and Vernacular schools. Special schools consisted of Guru training classes, and schools devoted professional studies. Scholarships were given to the students for college studies.

### **4.0 Contribution of Missionaries in the Development of Modern Education**

The Christian missionaries also deserved credit for promoting the cause of educational progress in Assam. Rev. Nothton Brown and Rev. A.T. Cutter were the pioneers and started their work of founding schools to impart modern education through the mother tongue.

American Baptist mission, Roman Catholic mission & Welshmission set up several schools and they prepared text books and translated many articles in English language. They also published 150 the first ever magazine Aronodoin Assam. The wives of the missionaries established *Zenanas* schools for female education. They took the additional task of 'maintaining several government schools and at the same time normal schools were opened by missionaries for teachers trainings. Moreover, 'the Zamindars of different localities also donated money for the promotion of education. In 1902-03, there were 199 private elementary institutions and by 1937 there were 870 unrecognized schools for 33,197 male & 3,610 female pupils.

### **5.0 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 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. 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. 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 347 pupils. Side by side, education was also imparted through Tolls and Madrasahs. There were around 162 tolls and 120 public madrasahs 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.

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 number of schools were 19,595 and the number of teachers were 15,92,613. The growth rate of primary schools during the period 1975-76 to 1993-94 was 1.75. 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 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. School education in Assam after independence was imparted through a number of pre-primary, primary, middle, high and higher secondary schools. The Directive Principles contained in article 45 enjoin that 'the state shall endeavor to provide with a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years'. Article 29 (i) provides that any citizen having a distinct language, script, special care of all the economic and educational interests of the unprivileged sections, particularly, the Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes is laid down as an obligation of the state under article 46. Though education is in the concurrent list of the constitution, the state governments play a very important role in the development of education particularly in the primary and secondary education sectors. On the basis of the above constitutional right the Government of Assam framed its policy on education which focused on the board dimensions and magnitude of the structure, organization and progress in education. Further it also highlighted growth and priority areas and challenges ahead in the context of education in Assam. 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 by 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 Shiksha 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.

### **6.0 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. To remove these difficulties the post-basic education based on the principle of education through craft and multi-purpose 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.

### **7.0 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 established. Gradually Earl Law college (1915), Jorhat 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. 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 like the National Institute of Technology, Silchar; Indian Institute of Technology, Several other private institutions

helped to add stature to the higher education system of Assam. The state is also home to several elite higher education institutions which include nine universities, these are:

- Assam University
- Gauhati University
- Dibrugarh University
- Assam Medical College (Dibrugarh)
- Guwahati Medical College
- Assam Agricultural University (Jorhat)
- Assam Engineering College (Guwahati)
- K.K. Handique State Open University,
- Jorhat Engineering College (Jorhat)

Assam has one of the most extensive networks of higher educational institutions in the entire North-Eastern region of India. The Government of Assam introduces innovative education policies to create a center of attention for aspiring students all across the country. Assam's largest city, Guwahati is a major destination for students of the entire north-eastern region for higher-education. 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 student. Higher Education comprises universitylevelcourses offered by Universities and Academics (such asacademic of art, music, sports and others). They are providing atthe following academic levels: undergraduate (Bachelor) studies,and post-graduate studies.The total number of higher educational institution in Assam hasrisen significantly since 1974-75, with an annual growth rate of 3.4%.By this time there were three universities, one hundred nineteencolleges for general educational institutions and five professionaleducational institutions which considerably increased in numbersduring 1993-84, such as five universities, two hundred thirty-onecolleges for general educational institutions and twenty-oneprofessional educational institutions. The scheme of IntegratedEducation for Disabled Children(IEDC) was launched in 1986,providing full funding to schools to provide necessary equipment,including allowance for books and stationary, transport, uniforms,readers (for blind children), and hostel charges. This scheme waslaunched in Assam in 1999-92, there were about three lakhsbeneficiaries under this scheme in Assam.

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