



DEVELOPMENT AND ROLE OF EDUCATION: NORTH EAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The want and will to learn is observed throughout the past, which has transformed the history of mankind, from ground breaking inventions, that brought revolutionary changes facilitating and influencing our daily lives. The transition from a traditional system of education to the introduction of a formal system of education has further accelerated a progressive society in fields of science, social science, politics and many fields with inquisitive minds and critical thinkers, so much so that today education is looked upon as a requisite for a civilised society. Considering the difference in the experience of the introduction of a formal system of education worldwide, the impact of education thus differs, we have nations categorized as developed, developing, and underdeveloped based on its economic development, standard of living and industrialisation. Therefore, it becomes necessary to look into the development and role of education in international, national and regional levels which will help create an understanding and provide consciousness on the needs and changes. Hence this paper attempts to study the development and role of education in northeast India.

Keywords: *Education, Colonial, Development, Christianity, women, Indigenous education.*

Education in India

Today, education in India is one of the largest with more than 1.5 million schools established and managed at national and state levels (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2019). Education in India can be characterised and categorized into several periods which have contributed to the overall growth of education in India, from the Vedic and Buddhist periods, Medieval period, Colonial period, Postindependence, Modern era to the present. To understand the development of the education system in India it is necessary to look into the historical and philosophical transition of education, starting with the Vedas as the aim of ancient Indian education was initially laid down by the Vedas. According to the Vedas the aim of education is liberation, which derives from the Vedic world view, pervaded by divinity and liberation, with emphasis on the control of mind. The ancient Indian philosophy of knowledge laid down three steps to attain knowledge, *Shravana* or hearing, *Manan* or Meditation and *Nididhyasan* or realisation, which are further categorized and elaborated upon. *Gurukula*, *Parishad* and *Sammelan* were the three agencies of education. The concept and understanding of education from the ancient times to the contemporary period has witnessed several changes, whereby the objective and implication of education has also changed both on an individual and societal level. P.N. Prabhu said, "Education in ancient India was free from any external control like that of the state or Government or any party politics. It was one of the King's duties to see that the learned pundits pursued their studies and their duty of imparting knowledge without interference from any source

whatever. So education did not suffer from any communal interest or prejudices in India.” (Sharma & Sharma, 2004). The introduction of a formal system of education through institutions such as schools, colleges, universities can be traced back to the arrival of the colonial rule. In the Seventeenth century, education in India did not differ much from the educational processes in the rest of the world, involving private initiatives, local initiatives as well as institutions funded by the royal benefactions. In India, religion has been a dominating factor when it comes to the aspects of education from the ancient times, and under the colonial rule the introduction of Christianity played a major role in the introduction of education with the primary objective of proselytization, with the attempts made in translating and the emphasis on the reading and writing. Organized higher educational centres were mostly connected to religious institutions. The Eighteenth century marks a period of political disintegration and the dominance of the British rule, with the establishment of the colonial rule the traditional mode of education declined. It was through the influence of Macaulay and Raja Ram Mohan Roy that English education was made possible, a well articulated system of education from primary to the university stage was developed. In the primary stage the medium of instruction was through the child’s mother tongue, and at the secondary stage English as a language began and throughout the university, English remained the medium of learning and teaching, which is practiced in India even today (Mathai, 1956). It can also be said that the education system in India worked out by Macaulay during the British period was entirely aimed at fulfilling the British requirements, the system at large functioned towards producing an efficient native administration and acted to aid administrators. Although the education system introduced by British rule continued even after independence, the year 1966 reflected on changes and criticisms on imparting colonial education system. The Kothari commission in 1966 laid down the objectives of education for free India, “The most important and urgent reform needed in education is to transform it, to endeavour to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals, For this purpose education should be developed so as to increase productivity, achieve social and national integration, accelerate the process of modernization and cultivate social, moral and spiritual values”. (Kothari Commission). The Kothari commission was implemented in 1968, and in 1986, the National

Policy on Education was introduced with the role of education emphasising on the following;

1. In our national perception education is essentially for all. This is fundamental to our all-round development, material and spiritual.
2. Education has an acculturating role. It refines sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit- thus furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our constitution.
3. Education develops manpower for different levels of the economy. It is also the substratum on which research and development flourish, being the ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance.
4. In sum, education is a unique investment in the present and the future. This cardinal principle is the key to the National Policy on Education.

With the change in Government in 1989 a need of reviewing the 1986 education policy was felt, and in 1990, Ramamurti Commission was born. The recommendations of this report were:

1. Education must provide a techno-informative or a sound knowledge base, empowering the person through knowledge and on which one can build later on.
2. Education must also provide opportunities to acquire skills, through engaging the student in a variety of processes and situations. These skills would be basic like skills such as foundational skills in communication, computation, social skills and manual skills, which would enable the student to develop specific job oriented skills later.
3. Education must further provide a climate for the nurture of values, both as a personalized set of values forming one’s character and including necessarily social, cultural national values, so as to have a context and meaning for actions and divisions, and in order to enable the persons to act with conviction and commitment

4. Education must play an interventionist and catalytic role too for promoting national cohesion and unity by empowering the students to become agents of social change.

However, the Ramamurti Commission report could not be implemented as in 1991 the government changed again (Sen & Bhattacharya, 1991). The above mentioned objectives of both the reports are more or less the same. It is evident from the National Policy on Education that the need for change from the colonial education system was felt and the objective of education targeted the overall role of education in national planning.

Today through the changes amended over the years, education in India has entered a progressive stage with both central and state-run educational institutions with improvements in the quality and accessibility of education. Throughout the historical transformation in the education system, evolving from ancient “Gurukul” system to a modern system of education, India has undergone several changes equipping individuals morally, socially, economically, politically and professionally, which has also helped eradicate inequalities and brought in a mass consciousness on superstitions, caste, religion etc to a great extent compared to the social structure India had in the past. There has been improvement on the status and role of women as well, with many government schemes promoting free education for girl child, empowering women in many levels of the society.

Education in North East India

The North-Eastern region of the country comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, with every state richly diverse in identity, culture and language which has also influenced the history of education in the states. The North-Eastern states have more than sixty dialects, developing infrastructure and insurgency movements in certain parts, impacting the overall development of education in the region. The introduction of a formal education in the region sets its roots to the colonial rule. The indigenous system of education prevalent in Assam was similar to the other parts of the country with their Vedic system of education, which is evident through the dharma-sutras followed in Kamarupa. Besides the Vedic knowledge system, Tantric was also practiced in Assam, also the Buddhistic education also had its influence in the region, known as the monastic knowledge which had a greater spread in Arunachal Pradesh particularly the Tawang Monastery. The curriculum included the Vedas, ancillary branches, philosophy, literature (Sanskrit), astrology, art and craft, dancing (classical and folk), architecture, etc. Education in the region was patronised and maintained by the rulers or kings. In the hilly regions of north-east, informal education can be observed through the folk tales which involves the moral lessons adhering to the needs and lives of the society and the youths passed down through the interaction between the parents and children and discussions in fields. It can be said that education was not alien to the region, with the existence of the indigenous system of education (Bhattacharjee, 1989). The introduction of formal education in NorthEast India began with the colonial rule and the setting up of formal educational institutions. The British educational policy in India was initially carried out with the objective of facilitating a lettered manpower to serve the administration. In the hill areas of the region, the pioneers of education were the western missionaries, and the first missionary group to arrive in the region were the American Baptist Missionaries, which started with the main objective of proselytization, alongside the Christian missionaries, there were the Ramakrishna mission and Vivekananda society, both these groups actively worked among various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The missionaries introduced reading, writing, arts and crafts training to the hill areas. The translation of tribal dialect into written languages which significantly helped the establishment of primary schools through the tribal languages and later in English (Biswas, 2008).

The growth of education in North-east from the nineteenth century to the present has made considerable progress, and especially in the post-independence period, with hundreds of colleges, including legal, medical, technical, and teacher education, run by central and private bodies. Despite the late introduction of education in the region, the literacy rate is comparable with the national average with Mizoram securing the second highest in literacy rate in the country, although it was only in 1944 that the first school in Mizoram was established. The progress was due to the joined efforts

of the government and community participation with the Directorate of education established in the year 1972. It was during the British period, the coming of the Christian missionaries who introduced the Roman script in the state, they also opened schools in few villages, such as Khawrihim, Phulpui and Chhingchhip around 1901. In 1903 three more schools were opened and in the following year seven schools were open, in 1944 the first Middle school was started in Aizawl through public donations, the opening of the high school marked the beginning of educational progress in the state. Starting with the literacy rate of 0-9% in 1901 census, 88.80% in 2001, Mizoram has now achieved a literacy rate of 91.33% in 2011 census. Formal education in Nagaland began in the late 1880s, by the American Baptist missionaries. Miles Bronson opened a primary school in Namsang village in 1839. The primary objective of the mission schools was to teach the Nagas how to read and write so that they could read the bible and the hymnal. In the pre-colonial period, the Naga society imparted the indigenous education through dormitories known as *Morungs*, which focused on the youths, promoting customs, traditions, folk music, dance etc. The *Morungs*, was located at the village entrance, among the Aos and Konyaks, boys and girls had separate dorms. The introduction of Christianity transformed the concept and the medium of education among the tribals and in the post-Independence period there is substantial growth in the development of education in the state. Nagaland's literacy rate as per the 2011 census is 79.55%, the state education system is regulated by the Nagaland Board of School Education (NBSE) which manages secondary and higher secondary education, the Nagaland Education Mission Society regulates government programs and policies and the state has four universities, including one central university and three private universities (Kumar & Shobana, 2021).

In Manipur, western education started with the establishment of the Johnstone Middle English School 1885, by the then Political agent Sir James Johnstone (Administrative Report, 1878). It was also the American Baptist Missionaries who contributed the development of education in the state led by William Pettigrew. Higher education was not very progressive during the colonial rule, in 1945 first college the Dhananmanjuri College was established. During the colonial rule to pursue higher education students had to depend on institutions outside the state like Assam, Bengal, Benaras and Eastern Bengal (Mutuwa, 2019). In 1947, primary and secondary schools started expanding and in 1956, the Maharaja Bodhchandra Singh established the Manipur university, which today has turned into a hub of scientific, social and cultural studies. In 1946, the D. M. College of Arts and D. M. college of science were established and in 1980 the Manipur University was established as a central university providing higher education in fields of science, humanities, social sciences and engineering, education in the state since then has been making gradual progress. The history of education in Meghalaya shares a common history with the Christian missionaries who started formal education in the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills. Only a few elementary schools appeared in the colonial time, the first college was started in 1942 by Christian Brothers of Ireland. Meghalaya presently offers opportunities for higher education in institutions such as the North Eastern Hill University, which is a central university, the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health & Medical Science (NEIGRIMS), the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), National Institute of Fashion Design (NIFT), Indian Institute of Hotel Management, Central Institute of English & Foreign Languages (CIEFL) and various other prominent institutes. The literacy rate of the state has progressed from 26.92% in 1961 to 74.43% in 2011 (Arun & Kumar, 2020). Among the states in the northeast region, the state of Arunachal Pradesh was the latest to be ruled by the British, the state received a formal education only in the post-independence period, prior to this, the Tawang monastery since the ancient time worked as a body of imparting education, which was largely limited to theosophical knowledge. From the post-Independence period there has been significant growth in education in Arunachal Pradesh, with several degree colleges, universities, and regional institute of science and technology. The state government, and socio-cultural organisations like the Ramakrishna Mission and the Dony-Polo Mission have contributed largely to the growth of education in the state. (Biswas, 2008)

The idea or concept of education is invariably linked to development, as education is essentially the process of qualitative change through the development of the innate capacity of an individual. A planned education system is the basic foundation of social and economic growth. According to

Belshaw, development represents an increase in the capacities of a society to organize for its own objectives, and to carry out its programme more efficiently, he further emphasizes the impact of education on the society, and points out that education is both the goal and means. The role of education is more than merely to modernize, education forms the basis of transmission and creation of culture through the rise of human consciousness (Sen and Bhattacharya, 1991).

From the above discussions, it is evident from the development and establishment of central and state universities that the need to set up institutions for higher education has been felt in the region making significant progress in the North-eastern region, from the first established primary schools to colleges and universities in the post-Independence period, every state has experienced a change in its sociopolitical and economic structures which has not just influenced the characteristic of a civilised society but also shaped an individual identity. Considering the existing traditional or indigenous system of education in the pre-colonial period in the region, the coming of western education has facilitated at the same time challenged the traditional teachings and values, however the formal system of education has impacted more positively on a progressive end. Education has played a crucial role in empowering individuals especially women by providing employment opportunities, where there are no restrictions and men and women, education has provided a platform that bridges the gap between diverse tribal communities, geographical barriers, connecting states. A sense of social responsibility has brewed from the development of education both on state and national levels. With the progressing literacy rates, a need for preservation of respective culture and identity has been observed through the efforts of social reformers, political leaders, scholars working for the community welfare and works documenting the past. Considering the diversity of the country and the north-eastern region the development of education is an important area that still needs to be analysed to introduce qualitative measures, reconstructing the history of education and understanding the impact of education on people of different states, culture, and religion cannot be ignored in nation building. The Education system in North-East India still has much room for growth, in improving access to education and increasing the quality of education, as problems such as the lack of resources and technology, lack of connectivity still persists.

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