

ATUL GOSWAMI MEMORIAL LECTURE

Professor Dilip Kumar Barua

*Right to Education and the
North-east – the Economic Angle*

OMEO KUMAR DAS INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL
CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT
GUWAHATI

Atul Goswami Memorial Lecture No. 6

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**OMEK KUMAR DAS INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL
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Address

Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social
Change and Development
VIP Road, Upper Hengerabari
Six Mile, Guwahati-781036

e-mail : dkdscd@yahoo.co.in

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Preface

This Lecture Series was started in 2005 to commemorate Late Professor Atul Goswami who was the Director of the Institute from 1994-2000. The idea behind this has been to initiate a discussion on issues of contemporary economy among the intelligentsia as a mark of loving memory and remembrance of Late Professor Goswami who himself was a highly respected economist of the region. The First lecture in the Series was delivered by Professor Atul Sarma, former Director of the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi and the then Vice-Chancellor of Arunachal(now Rajiv Gandhi) University.

Professor Dilip Kumar Barua delivered the Sixth Atul Goswami Memorial Lecture on June 15, 2010 at the Vivekananda Institute of Culture Kendra, Uzanbazar, Guwahati. This lecture was sponsored by ICSSR under the ICSSR-NER programme.

Professor Barua emphasizes the importance of primary education for the proper development of the masses and refers back to the significance given to appropriate primary education by the political leaders in pre-independent India. He puts down the provisions in the *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009* that has been enforced with effect from April 1, 2010. Professor Barua points out that the Northeast is not scripting success in the educational field. It is a matter of great grief that despite the funds provided for expenditure on education there has been no visible progress. There are high drop-out rates and untrained teachers in elementary education schools in Assam. He highlights the fact that there is under utilization of the funds by the State. He suggests initiating to tone up the account and auditing procedure to remove the irregularities through monitoring mechanisms.

I take this opportunity to thank Professor Dilip Kumar Barua for kindly taking time out from his busy schedule to deliver the Lecture and hope that this will make an intriguingly pleasant reading.

Indranee Dutta

Professor and Director
OKD Institute of Social Change and Development
Guwahati

Right to Education and the North-east – the Economic Angle

“Priority of priorities”

The progress of a nation is as good as its progress in the educational front. When asked what factor contributed most to the spectacular success of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew replied, “Education.” President Mitterrand’s election manifesto asserted, “In future, the nation’s power will depend less on its financial wealth than on its grey matter.” To him, education is “the priority of priorities.” The National Commission for Excellence in Education, USA, describes the nation that ignores education as “a nation at risk.” To The Economist, what nationalization was to the 1940s and privatization to the 1980s, investment in education is to the 1990s. Economist Julian Simon regards human resource as “the ultimate resource.”¹

Importance of primary education

In education, it is primary education that merits top priority. And this is for three reasons. *First*, primary education encompasses the base of the population pyramid in the developing countries. It is a prime merit good. *Secondly*, a broad-based and quality primary education builds a strong foundation for the edifice of secondary and higher education. *Thirdly*, it is the light of education, basically the ability to read and write, that will make the masses, the socially and economically disadvantaged ones, aware of their rights and duties and facilitate their meaningful participation in the formulation and execution of the plans and programmes meant for them. This education-generated awareness will be an in-built mechanism that will improve the delivery system and the quality of governance. The First Education Commission Report, 1954, observed that one factor that could prevent violent

¹ Palkhivala, NA: We, the Nation (p 239-240)

revolution and chaos in the course of India's economic development is education. Demanding reforms in education is a healthy sign.²

Historical background

The famous Woods Despatch of July 19, 1854 is a significant milestone in the development of the educational system in India in as much as it marked the recognition of education in British India as a responsibility of the government. The Woods Despatch, inter alia, underlined the importance of local initiative and training of teachers in expanding the educational network in India. In 1870, Lord Mayo took the initiative to transfer the education department to the provinces. Based on the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission of 1882, the resolution of the Government of India in 1884 declared that primary education would be locally financed and a separate school fund would be created for municipal and local boards. The educational policy of 1904 admitted that the share of public funds received by primary education was inadequate and stated that primary education should be made "a leading charge upon provincial revenues." The system of submission of budget estimates by the local bodies to the education department was introduced for the sake of better supervision and control.³

Against the backdrop of the British Government's policy to promote primary, secondary and higher education in India, the nationalist leaders in India began to see the possibilities of attaining social justice and equity through expansion of education. Thus, in the year 1911, Gopal Krishna Gokhale presented his Universal Education Bill before Delhi's Imperial Legislative Council. Referring to the salt tax imposed by the British Government, he said, "It's a smaller evil that my countrymen should eat less salt, if that money could be spent on education."⁴ The educational policy of 1913 laid considerable stress on the establishment of a large number of primary schools in India.

However, the local bodies ran into financial difficulties and failed to meet the needs of primary education. Local Boards spent only 9.2 per cent of the total expenditure on education while Municipalities could spend only 4.3 per cent. For Assam, the figures were 11.1 per cent and 1.1 per cent, respectively. The World War II worsened the situation further as funds were diverted from education to meet the war requirements. The local bodies could have imposed educational cess but fearing public criticism, they did not dare to do it.

² Nilekani, Nandan: *Imagining India* (p 188)

³ Debi, Renu: *Progress of Education in Assam* (p 21-26)

⁴ Nilekani, Nandan: *Imagining India* (p 186-187)

The Compulsory Primary Education Act was passed in 1926 and the local authorities were required to submit estimates of additional expenditure to be incurred for the introduction of compulsory primary education. Under this Act, inter alia, the poor students were to be provided with necessary books and writing materials free of cost by the local authorities.

In Assam, as in other states, the Act failed to achieve the declared objectives as the local bodies failed to do the spade work necessary for its successful implementation.

Varieties of grants like grants-in-aid, payment-by-result system, the fixed period grant, conditional grants, lump-sum grants, building grants, equipment grants and special grants were given to the educational institutions to support their finances. During the period 1881-82 to 1936-37, government funds accounted for almost half of the total expenditure on education.

In the year 1936-37, the per capita expenditure in primary education in Assam was Rs 4 annas 8 and paise 5 for males and Rs 4 annas 12 paise nil for females.⁵

It is noteworthy that the tribal students in the hill areas were unfortunate in not being able to access education to develop a modern outlook. The teaching of the Mission schools was "biased towards religion and literature. The general standard of knowledge remained quite low. The hill students, even today, are generally weak in Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Abstract Philosophy."⁶

Post-Independence scenario

Article 45 of our Constitution states that, "the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years." In free India, the first target year to achieve this objective was 1959. Subsequently, the target year was pushed back to 1970 and further deferred by a decade over the period 1970-2005 until 2005 when on the strength of Article 21 A that enshrines the right to education, the 86th Amendment was brought about. Finally, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 received the assent of the President on August 26, 2009. The Act has been enforced with effect from April 1, 2010.

⁵ Debi, Renu: *Progress of Education in Assam* (p 179)

⁶ Hluna, JV: *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram* (p 229)

Main provisions of the Act

1. It confers the right to free and compulsory education to children between 6 and 14 years of age.
2. The Act is not applicable to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
3. No child shall be retained in the same class or made to sit in the Board examination till the completion of elementary education.
4. Class VIII shall be the terminal year of elementary education.
5. On the completion of the Class VIII courses, the child shall receive a certificate from the authorities.
6. In case a child above 6 years of age has not been admitted into any school or primary education of the child is not completed after admission, such a child shall be admitted into a class that suits his/her age. A child so admitted shall undergo special training for a definite period to come up to the level of others in that class. Such a child shall continue to receive primary education even if the age of the child crosses the fourteen-year limit.
7. The teacher-student ratio shall be 1:30 for Class I to Class V and 1:35 for Class VI to Class VIII.
8. In all the privately-run schools, 25 per cent seats shall be reserved for the economically and socially backward students of the neighbourhood. Guardians of children who are already in the private schools cannot demand compensation from the government.
9. Untrained teachers shall have to acquire the required qualifications within a period of five years. The Central Government shall lay down the norms and implement them and shall also prepare a national curriculum for the schools.
10. The government shall improve the infrastructure of the schools and monitor the admission process, attendance of the students and completion of studies.
11. For children below six years of age, the authorities shall arrange free pre-primary education.
12. No school shall accept donations for admission nor adopt any screening method for the guardians.
13. No child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment.
14. No school shall run without a letter of recognition from the government. In case a school continues to function even after the withdrawal of recognition, the concerned school shall have to pay a fine of Rupees one lakh and if the school chooses to continue even after that, a fine of Rs 10,000/- per day shall be imposed on the errant school.
15. Each school shall constitute a School Management Committee. Members of the local bodies and representatives of the guardians and teachers

shall form the committee. Three-fourth of the members shall have to be guardians of students of the school. 50 per cent of the members shall be women. The committee shall, inter alia, monitor the utilization of funds received by the school.

16. Not more than 10 per cent of the sanctioned posts of teachers in the school shall remain vacant at any point of time.
17. No teacher shall be allowed to take private tuition.
18. The medium of instruction shall be the mother tongue as far as practicable.
19. Advisory committees shall be formed at the Central and State levels.
20. The minimum effective time to be utilized by the teachers shall be 45 hours per week, including time for preparation.
21. The Central Government shall bear 65 per cent and the State Government 35 per cent of the expenditure. For the north-eastern states, it will be 90:10 basis.

The North-east scenario

In the development vision of the North-east, there is no alternative to capacity building of the local population and institutions. The reason why a region endowed with rich natural resources could register a per capita GSDP which is less than the national average by 31 per cent is precisely low capacity building down the line. The North-east is therefore, not exactly scripting success in the educational field but all the same, there are certain silver linings which cannot be ignored either.

Areas of hope

The Selected Education Statistics 2004-05 published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development shows that in general, the number of primary, upper primary and secondary schools per lakh population is higher in the North-east than the national average. While the national average is 71.12 primary schools, Mizoram tops the North-east with 160.28 primary schools.

The number of upper primary schools serving one lakh population at the national level is 25.46 whereas in Mizoram, it is 101.62.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio is also better in the North-east, being 154.41 in Manipur against the national average of 107.80.

The North-east is well within the norms set by the Act for the teacher-student ratio. The North Eastern Council (NEC) statistics released in respect of the primary school teacher-pupil ratio is shown below.

| State | Teacher-pupil ratio |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 27 |
| Manipur | 21 |
| Mizoram | 19 |
| Meghalaya | 22 |
| Nagaland | 12 |
| Sikkim | 12 |
| Tripura | 22 |

The areas of concern

The expenditure on education as a percentage of the total budgetary expenditure in the North-east is higher compared to the all-India average. Tripura tops the list with 25.63 per cent against the national average of 12.76 per cent.

However, a return to the quantum of expenditure incurred for the promotion of primary education in the North-east is not encouraging. The drop-out rate is much higher in the North-east, being as high as 48 per cent for the boys and 50 per cent for the girls in Arunachal Pradesh.

The inter-district and intra-district variations in the progress of education in the North-east are too glaring to be ignored. For instance, the composite north-eastern region district infrastructure index worked out by the Department of North Eastern Region (DONER) shows that in the entire North-east, Manipur's Imphal West is ranked first but Chandel district is ranked 78th. Kamrup is ranked 7th but Dhemaji is ranked 79th and so on.

In the study of the contrasting districts of Assam (Jorhat and Dhuburi) sponsored by the Administrative Reforms Commission, Government of India, it is seen that the highest drop-out rate is among the tea tribes in Jorhat district. Predominance of the first generation learners, low level of parental awareness, irregular appointment of teachers are some of the factors that explain the high drop-out rate among the tea tribes.

In Dhuburi, the high drop-out rate is due to early marriage, widespread poverty and high incidence of child labour.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development laments that 61 per

cent teachers in elementary schools in Assam are untrained and unqualified.

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2009 shows that in the rural areas of the North-east, primary education is being imparted mostly through the government-run schools. The big presence of the government-run schools is borne out by the data shown below:

| | |
|-------------------|-------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 86.2% |
| Assam | 77.9% |
| Manipur | 26.9% |
| Meghalaya | 65.1% |
| Nagaland | 62.3% |
| Sikkim | 69.3% |
| Tripura | 93.5% |

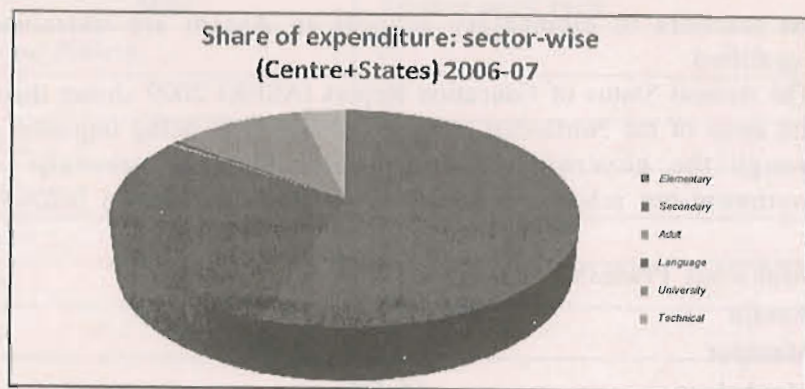
Obviously, any improvement in the management of the government-run schools in the North-east will have a tremendous impact on the quality of primary education in the region. The improvement will have to be brought about largely in the infrastructure of school system.

The following table shows facilities in the primary schools makes grim reading.

| State | No water facility | No toilet facility | No separate girls toilet |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Arunachal | 61.1 | 61.1 | 88.4 |
| Assam | 28.9 | 66.7 | 60.2 |
| Manipur | 90 | 36.4 | 93.1 |
| Meghalaya | 77.8 | 88.9 | 85.3 |
| Mizoram | 38.6 | 6.8 | 56.5 |
| Nagaland | 85.7 | 67.9 | 54.5 |
| Sikkim | 83.3 | 0 | 41.2 |
| Tripura | 0 | 0 | 52.3 |

(Figures are in percentage)

Quite an amount of investment will be necessary to remove these glaring infrastructural deficiencies at the primary school level in the North-east. Analysis of budgeted expenditure on education 2004-05 to 2006-07 brought out by the Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, gives the details of Plan and Non-Plan expenditure for various sub-sectors of education in the States and Union Territories.



(Source: *Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education 2004-05 to 2006-07, Govt of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development.*)

The analysis points out that various other departments, other than the department of Education, also invest in education and a total picture of public investment in education at different levels will emerge when all these expenditure are aggregated.

It is seen that 76.5 per cent of the total revenue expenditure on education is borne by the state and the rest 23.5 per cent by the Centre. Of the total expenditure on education in 2006-07, elementary education accounted for 53.41 per cent, secondary education 28.76 per cent, and University and higher education, 10.88 per cent and Technical Education, 3.72 per cent.

The relationship between budgeted expenditure on education and State Domestic Product in the North-east is shown in the following table.

| State | Percentage of total budget expenditure on education (revenue) to GSDP | Percentage of Plan and Non-Plan budgeted expenditure on elementary education (revenue account) to total expenditure on education |
|-----------|---|--|
| Arunachal | 6.47 | 59.27 |
| Assam | 5.71 | 61.38 |
| Manipur | 6.94 | 52.26 |
| Meghalaya | 4.49 | 51.13 |
| Mizoram | 7.75 | 54.76 |
| Nagaland | 4.6 | 64.70 |
| Sikkim | 9.52 | 47.57 |
| Tripura | 7.05 | 52.72 |

(Source: *Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education 2004-05 to 2006-07, Govt of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development.*)

It is to be noted that the fund released by DONER under Axom Sarba Siksha Abhijan in 2006-07 was Rs 10,053.67 lakh. There was no release prior to that and no release since then. In this connection, the observation made by Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia that the problem in the North-east is not lack of funds from the Centre but its under-utilisation merits serious attention. Presumably, it is under-utilisation of funds that accounts for the nil DONER cash flow.¹

Audit reports

- a) In most of the cases, the final utilisation certificate of school infrastructure and maintenance grant is not received for audit purpose.
- b) There are instances of mismatch of fund release and expenses incurred.
- c) Quotations were not invited by School Managing Committees (SMCs) before purchase of building material.
- d) Most of the SMCs do not maintain any cash book.
- e) The State Mission Office (SMO) releases fund towards the fag end of the financial year which is why fund utilisation is poor. In 2008, 76 per cent of the fund was released during November-March.
- f) The fixed assets register is not properly maintained.
- g) Attendance at the SMC meetings is not properly maintained and hence, the quorum for the meetings cannot be ascertained.
- h) Under the Mid-day Meal Scheme, each school is required to submit monthly reports and expenditure statements along with vouchers to the Panchayat. The Panchayat is required to reimburse the cost incurred by the school in the form of wages paid to the cook. The reimbursement of the conversion cost is not done promptly.

The government has initiated certain steps to tone up the account and auditing procedure to remove the irregularities, such as:

- 1) Members of the SMC are being given training in book and account keeping.
- 2) Annual maintenance grant, school infrastructure grant, teaching, learning, material grant and civil works fund are sent directly to the SMC's bank account.

¹ Axom Sarba Siksha Abhijan: Annual Report 2007-08 (p 52)

- 3) Tally 9 – the complete accountancy software – has been introduced in all District Mission Offices as well as the State Mission Office.

Urgent action agenda

- 1) In view of the predominance of the government-run schools, it has become imperative to improve the management system of such schools.
- 2) Proper appointment of teachers to improve the quality of primary education can hardly be overemphasized. Allocation of funds without proper appointment of teachers will not deliver the goods.
- 3) Training of teachers within a period of five years as envisaged in the Act is to be taken as an article of faith by the authorities.
- 4) The preparation of the national curriculum should take note of the proximate area studies as well.
- 5) Account and audit mechanism calls for tremendous improvement to ensure the proper utilisation of funds.

CONCLUSION

Education and training, which together make the social infrastructure, are of crucial importance to the North-east in as much as the low capacity building in the region is a powerful backward pulling factor. To the North-east, the Act transmits a bold message – to improve capacity building right from the grassroots level. At this moment, strict supervision and monitoring of the various programmes and sound financial management are two big challenges that the North-east must face.