

# Achievement and Challenges of School Education in Assam: A Critical Study

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**ABSTRACT**--The government of India as well as State government of Assam has initiated a number of programmes for development of elementary education. Consequently, there has been considerable achievement of primary education in Assam since the launching of SSA in 2002-03. In spite of the achievement the elementary education in Assam is facing a number of challenges. This paper is an attempt to discuss the various achievement and challenges related to the improvement of school education in Assam. However, the discussion in this paper has been delimited to only the elementary school of Assam. The discussion is mainly based on the secondary information and personal observation.

**Key words**-- Elementary education, Right to education, Universalization, School, Dropout, Out of School Children.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Progress of a nation depends on its educational development. Indian education system has considerably developed after independence. However it has taken a new turn during the last two decades because of the worldwide wave of globalization, liberalization and international pressure. Development of education again depends on access, equity and quality. No doubt access to education at all levels in India has been considerably increased during the last few years, but expected results yet to achieve. However government of India as well as State government has initiated a number of programmes for development of education. Primary education is important because it encompasses the base of the population pyramid in the developing countries which is a prime merit good. Secondly, it builds a strong foundation for the edifice of secondary and higher education and thirdly, it gives stress on 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 paper is an attempt to discuss the various issues related to the improvement of school education in Assam. However the discussion in this paper has been delimited to only the elementary school of Assam.

## II. DEMOGRAPHY OF ASSAM: A BRIEF PICTURE

Although Assam has 2.4% of the total land area of the country but it provides shelter to about 2.6% of the total population of the country. Assam is the biggest and also highest populous state among the North Eastern States which represents about 72.25% of the total population of North Eastern Region of India. According to 2011 census the population of Assam is 3,12,05,576 of which 1,59,39,443 are male and 1,52,66,133 are female population. The Sex Ratio of the state shows improvement from 935 in 2001 to 958 per 1000 male in 2011 year census. The decadal

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growth of population is 17.07% during 2001-11 as against 17.68% for the country as a whole. The density of population is 398 in 2011 which was 340 during the year 2001. Most of the people of Assam live in rural areas. As per 2011 census year out of total population of Assam only 14.10% people live in urban area and 85.90% people live in rural area. The detail about the population of Assam is presented in the following table.

**Table 1:** Population of Assam at a Glance

Particulars	Unit	2001 census	2011 census
Population	Lakh	267	312
Decadal growth	Percent	18.92	17.1
Density	Per. Sq.kilometer	340	398
Sex Ratio	Female per 1000 male	935	958
Literacy	Percent	63.25	72.19
(a) Male literacy	Percent	71.28	77.85
(b) Female literacy	Percent	54.61	66.27
Urban Population	Percent	12.90	14.10
(a) Urban male	Percent	53.41	51.39.
(b) Female Urban	Percent	46.58	48.61
Rural Population	Percent	87.10	85.90
(a) Rural Male	Percent	51.43	51.03
(b) Rural female	Percent	48.57	48.97
SC Population	Percent	7.40	7.15
ST Population	Percent	12.83	12.45

*Source: Economic Survey of Assam 2013-14*

### **III. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

The objective of the present study is to critically discuss the present scenario of elementary education in Assam with special discussion on the achievement and various challenges of elementary education in Assam, India.

### **IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURE**

The study is based on only qualitative analysis of secondary data collected from different sources. The investigator has also discussed on the basis of personal observation.

### **V. SCHOOL EDUCATION IN ASSAM: RECENT POLICY INITIATIVE**

It is more than six decades ago that Indian embarked on the task of transforming the elitist system of education inherited from the colonial past into one that is based on mass based and built on the principles of equality and social justice. The Indian Constitution through its article 45 of the Directive Principle has directed to provide free and compulsory primary education for all children until they complete 14 years of age within 10 years from the date on which the constitution comes into force. But the dream is yet to be realized. The 86<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution that made education as a fundamental right was passed in the year 2002. The new article 21 A says “the State shall provide free and compulsory education through a law that it may determine.” But the State has failed miserably in fulfilling this obligation imposed upon them by the Constitution. One of the most defining moments in the journey of universal education is this constitutional amendment, making education a Fundamental Right and adopting the corresponding Right to Education Act by the Indian Parliament in 2009. The Right To Education is now being implemented all over India with effect from April 1, 2010 including Assam. The country has already launched SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) to make quality primary education for all. The country has also embarked on the ambitious path of making secondary education universal and ensuring equitable access to all. For this purpose Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan has been already launched all over the country. These achievements and policy measures have raised new expectations for the future.

SarvaShikshaAbhiya (SSA) has been started from 2002 with the objective to provide quality education for all children. No doubt after launching SSA there has been remarkable change in the primary education scenario in Assam. At the time of launching of SSA in 2002-03 enrolment in primary school was 41,54,077 and it has been increased to 5,704,044 in 2012-13 and 5,8,06,184 in the year 2013-14. Drop out is one of the major problems in education sector, however is has been reduced from 20.38% at Lower primary and 35.19% at Upper primary stage to about 11.94% to 7.20% during 2013-14 and 10.08% at LP and 5.36% at UP level in 2017-18 as per U- DISE data. Number of schools in Assam has increased from 61,689 in 2012-13 to 64,171 in the year 2013-14 and 68,967 during 2015-16. The government of Assam has brought a number of schools under provincialization during the year 2013 -14. Still several problems related to teachers are yet to be tackled, because of which teachers are compelled to agitate and thereby deteriorating the academic atmosphere in the state.

The government of India has made special emphasis on access, equity and quality aspects of secondary education sector in response to the high social demand and increased completion rate in elementary education.

Accordingly government of India launched Rastriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) in March 2009 all over the country. The objective of the Abhiyan is to provide universal access to secondary education by 2017 and achieve universal retention by 2020. Its objective is to achieve Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 75% for class IX to XII within five years duration by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance i.e. 5 to 7 kilometer of every habitation. As per Secondary Education Management Information System ( SEMIS) data 2010-11 the total number of secondary schools in Assam was 2,607 and higher secondary schools 645 while the government has targeted to increase the number of secondary schools upto 9887 and higher secondary schools upto 7,744 till 2017. It means that there is gap of 7,280 secondary schools and 7,099 higher secondary schools which need to be established within five years duration. Similarly 6.94 lakh students at the secondary level ( IX-X) and 2.25 lakh students at the higher secondary level ( Xi-XII) have been enrolled as per SEMIS data 2010-11. During the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan the Government of Assam has projected 15.82 lakh enrolment in secondary level and 12.39 lakh enrolment at higher secondary level till the end of the plan period 2017. It means that a gap of 8.88 lakh students at secondary level and 10.14 lakh students at higher secondary level will have to be filled up. However according to the MHRD Annual report 2015-16 the number of secondary schools in Assam has increased to 6947. During the 12<sup>th</sup> plan period the government of Assam has targeted to develop the secondary education infrastructure in the state. These include construction of 1755 girls common room (905 constructed during 11<sup>th</sup> plan), construction of 2527 boys common room ( 133 constructed during 11<sup>th</sup> plan), construction of 42,916 additional classroom , 891 boys toilet, 1396 separate toilet for girls, 2845 science laboratory and 1078 computer laboratory in the secondary schools.

## **VI. ACHIEVEMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ASSAM**

There has been considerable achievement of primary education in Assam since the launching of SSA in 2002-03. Consequently access to primary education has been increased. A picture of the achievement is presented in the following table-

**Table 2:** Progress towards universal access

Indicators	Inception of SSA  2002-03 (Age-5-14)	Initial Year of 11th Plan period 2007-08 (Age-6-14)	Final Year of 11th Plan period 2011-12 (Age-6-14)	2012-13  (Age-6-14)	2016  (Unicef data) <i>*data include age group 6-13 years</i>
Total Child Population	54,94,262	5437756	5879570	5712364	5345450
In-School Children	41,54,077	5098656	5760967	5609846	5247949
Out of School Children	13,40,185	339100	118603	102518	97501
% of Out of School Children	24.38%	6.2%	2.02%	1.79%	1.82%

Source: SSA Assam & Unicef 2017

It is seen from the table-2 that the number of in school children in Assam at primary schools has been considerably increased from 41,54,077 in 2002-03 to 56,09,846 in 2012-13. Similarly percentage of out of children which was quite alarming in 2002-03 with 24.38% has been decreased to only 1.79% in 2012-13. This achievement is no doubt because of launching SSA programme in 2002-03. Some of the indicators of the Achievement in Elementary education in Assam as per U-DISE report 2018 is presented in the Table-3.

**Table 3:** Indicators of Achievement

Indicators	2017-18
Enrolment (Elementary all management schools)	5379121
Gross Enrolment Ratio(GER)-LP	102.6%
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)-UP	98.9%
NER Enrolment Ratio(NER)-LP	96.9%

NER Enrolment Ratio(NER)- UP	83.9%
NER Enrolment Ratio(NER)- Elementary	96.3%
% of Drop out LP *	10.08%
% of Drop out UP *	5.36%
Gender Parity Index-LP	0.989
Gender Parity Index-UP	1.067
Gender Parity Index-Elementary	1.014
Transition Rate (LP to UP)	92.4%
Out of school(6-14)**	80175

Source: U-DISE-2017-18 and \*\* Out of schools-field source.

Note: \*Dropout rate is calculated based on U-DISE enrolment of two consecutive years.

## VII. CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

Although there has been remarkable progress of school education in Assam during the last few years and the government of Assam has initiated a number of steps to raise the quality, expansion and relevance of education, but desired result yet to be achieved. Assam is still remaining as an educationally backward states in the national context. But the position of Assam in National context is not up to the expected mark. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) through National University of Educational Planning and Administration(NUEPA) has developed an Educational Development Index (EDI) to track the progress of elementary education on the basis of four parameters like access, infrastructure, teacher related indicators and outcome. Unfortunately Assam has ranked only 30<sup>th</sup> out of 35 states with EDI value of 0.490, while Kerala ranked top in the list with EDI value of 0.708 followed by Delhi with EDI value 0.797. The school education in Assam is facing number of challenges.

## VIII. ALARMING DROPOUT RATE

The phenomenon of students discontinuing studies and repeating grades before completing elementary level of education is a major impediment in achieving Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE). Although various attempts have been made by the Assam government to remove the dropout rate and also achieved upto a certain level after launching SSA, but still the problem continues and becoming a major challenges to achieve universalelementary education in the state. Data of dropout rate for the present study have been collected from DISE which is shown in the following table.

**Table 4:** Dropout rate at Elementary school level in Assam

Indicators	Inception of SSA	Initial Year of 11th PI an	Final Year of 11th PI an	2012-13 (Age-6-14)	2017-18 ( Age 6-14

	2002-03 (Age-5-14)	Period 2007-08 (Age-6-14)	period 2011-12 (Age-6-14)		year)
% of Drop out LP	20.30%	10%	12.8%	9.7%	10.08%
% of Drop out UP	35.19%	16%	15.2%	10.9%	5.36%

Source: SSA, Assam

While the access to elementary education is increased as seen from the students enrolment but drop out rate is also still considerable. Even after implementation of RTE Act 2009 w.e.f. April 2010 the drop out rate at Lower Primary education remains 10,08% and in Upper Primary level it remains 5.36%.

## IX. IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

Availability of adequate and quality Infrastructure is one of the major challenges that the elementary schools of Assam is facing. Even after five years of implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, less than 20 percent schools across the country are RTE compliant. The RTE Act, which was implemented in April 2010, specified a time frame of three years for improving schools' infrastructure and hiring teachers. The deadline expires on March 31, 2013. But more than 80 percent schools still do not have enough classrooms, toilets, access to drinking water, play grounds and teachers. The school infrastructure in the state of Assam since 2009-10 to 2012-13 is presented below-

**Table 5:** School Infrastructure in Assam

Indicators	2009-10	2012-13
No of Elementary Schools	51,031	48,58
Student classroom Ratio	30	28
% of Lower Primary Schools with SCR > 35	43%	36%
% of Upper Primary Schools with SCR > 35	48%	38%
% of schools with drinking water facility	81%	88%
% of schools with Girls Toilet	38%	59%
% of schools with Ramp	43%	65%

% of schools with Playground	55%	52%
% of schools with boundary wall	28%	29%
% of schools with Kitchen shed	48%	64%

*Source: Department of School Education & Literacy, MHRD 2014*

The following table shows the Elementary schools of Assam with RTE compliance as per the U- DISE data 2018.

**Table 6: RTE Compliance 2017-18 (Elementary only)**

Category	Facilities	
	Number of Schools	In %
No of schools(Govt./ Provincialised only)	45753	45753
Status of schools with RTE compliance for PTR	34471	75.03
Schools with available classrooms as per RTE	31733	69.36
Head master room (HM+ excess room)	41520	90.75
Available Barrier free access	35543	77.68
Available Girls Toilet	44508	97.28
Available Boys Toilet	42419	92.71
Available Drinking Water	42658	93.24
Play Ground	25683	56.13
Boundary Wall/Fencing	15199	33.22
Library	30115	65.82

*Source: U-DISE-2017-18*

## **X. UNTRAINED AND UNDER QUALIFIED TEACHERS AND RATIONAL DEPLOYMENT**

Adequate availability of teachers certainly affects the quality of elementary education. The problems related to the availability of professionally qualified teachers are common in many states including Assam. There is a paradoxical picture of a number of schools with single teacher and also schools with excess number of teachers. According to DISE data there are 7474 number of single teacher (25% of the total) schools at the primary level in Assam, and 2301 number of schools having more than five teachers. Again out of these 7474 single teacher schools



99.40% are in the rural areas. As per available statistics 50% of the total strength of the State Government employees are engaged in teaching. This clearly brings the magnitude of the teaching force in the government system. Out of 2.40 lakh teachers in the state about 35.63% are employed in primary schools, 30.73% in Middle schools and 23.69% in High schools and remaining 8.82% in Higher secondary schools. However, the present scenario has been changed due to the appointment of about 56,000 TET qualified new teachers in the primary and upper primary schools in Assam. Again rational deployment of teachers is a serious issue all over the state. The RTE Act 2009 provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified teacher pupil ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the state or district or block. Thus ensuring that there is practically no urban-rural imbalance in teacher posting.

Academic qualification and professional training of teachers have been a serious issue in Assam. Although newly appointed teachers in Assam are TET qualified and also having adequate academic background but most of them are professionally untrained. But earlier, government did not have a state policy of teacher recruitment and consequently many teachers were appointed without any initial training and prescribed academic qualification. The 7<sup>th</sup> All India Educational Survey (NCERT 2007) revealed that 14% of the teachers in primary schools of Assam are not secondary school passed while only 6.69% are graduate. In June 2010 the Union Minister of Human Resource Development urged upon the Assam government to put in place the requirements mandated by the RTE 2009, especially with regard to closing the gaps in teacher recruitment and training in the state. Considering the large number of teachers are untrained the government also advised that teachers who do not possess academic qualification of Class XII will need to acquire the same either by national Institute of Open Schooling or State Open School. Thereafter they also need to acquire the 2-year Diploma in Elementary Education in the Distance mode of IGNOU or a state Open University or Institutions providing accredited teacher training programme of two years duration.

## **XI. HIGH ABSENTEEISM**

Although considerable enrolment in primary schools is seen, but real picture is different. Only enrolment rates do not illustrate what is actually happening. The challenge, however, remains is that the high enrolment rate has not translated into high attendance rates as well. According to the India Human Development Report, 2011, the national attendance rates during the year 2007- 2008 at primary and upper primary level were 82% and 60% respectively. Therefore, despite attaining high enrolment rates of 96% at the primary level, the attendance rates remain low. High absenteeism is seen among the students. Many children come to school only for mid-day meal and after getting the mid-day they found absent from school. In a survey conducted by Ed.CIL on Survey for Assessment of Dropout rates at Elementary level in 21 states 2013 revealed that in Assam the attendance rate in Lower primary school is 69.4% as against 75.5% national average and at the upper primary level it is 67.9% as against 75.9% national average. Attendance rate of teachers is also low. The average rate of teacher's attendance is 81.7% and 80.5% respectively in Lower primary and Upper primary schools.

## **XII. LOW LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT**

Learning is at the centre of all educational process. Parents send their children, after all excepting them to master reading and writing and acquire knowledge. It is difficult to condone poor performance of schools on this count. Poor learning levels act doubly against of the marginalized group. According to Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2015 at the lower primary level 14.80% of the children could not read anything while 16.40% could not read letter and 18.20% could not read words so far reading ability is concerned. Again in Arithmetic 12% of the children could not learn anything, while 21.20% could not learn number, 21.70% could not learn subtraction and 23.20% could not learn division.

## **XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (1) Improvement of physical infrastructure of the elementary schools.
- (2) A strong monitoring mechanism is must to monitor the academic as well non academic activities of the schools.
- (3) Community participation is must not only in school management but also in regular monitoring of the schools in the locality.
- (4) Rational deployment of teachers
- (5) Provision of adequate training for teachers
- (6) Proper management of mid-day meal scheme
- (7) Regularity in the supply of text books

## **XIV. CONCLUDING REMARK**

It is proved from the discussion that the number of schools across the state have grown, enrolment rates have also raised significantly over the years, dropout rates have also reduced considerably, but still we are far from the goal of universal elementary education in real sense. School education is plagued by poor infrastructure, shortage of teachers and their low level of training and motivation, regional and gender disparities etc. We are now in the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new century of challenges and opportunities. The world has seen more changes than ever before. The 21<sup>st</sup> century ushers in the concept of globalization in all its manifestations. Under this circumstances quality of education is also becoming an important issue in the recent years. It is an urgent need that the government must take appropriate strategies to accelerate the progress of school education not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. Quality school education must be assured for all children.

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