

Development of Elementary Education in Barak Valley: Special Reference to Manipuri Medium Schools

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered the most influential agent of modernisation besides industrialization and urbanization in India. The British laid the foundation of modern education in India. Although, they did not initially to develop an educational system, in early 18th century the British administrators began to pay attention to promoting education. British Education became popular over time because English is the language of administration, international and national commerce, as well as English is the language and education have an economic value, since without your knowledge, jobs in the highest echelons of occupational hierarchy are not unavailable. Therefore, the demand for such education has been increasing and the traditional one became obsolete and useless and was confined to some institutions of oriental studies only.

Naoria Phulo was the pioneer of the Manipuri educational movement outside the Manipur. Naoria Phulo's dream was started by 'Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha(NHMM)', Manipur in 1935 and later with the establishment of its branch i.e. 'Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha(NHMM)', Cachar Branch in same year. NHMM, Cachar branch became pioneer organization in introducing Manipuri as a medium of instruction in Barak Valley as well as in Assam. And meanwhile, the constitution of India and Indian Educational Committee and Commission should provide various facilities to introduce the medium of instruction in the school education in India. As a result of them, Manipuri medium education has a significant place in the education of Barak Valley. We try to analyse this paper to focus about the historical development of Manipuri medium elementary education in Barak Valley

Keywords

Manipuri, Education, Barak Valley, Development, Elementary etc.

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Introduction

Barak Valley is the southernmost region of the Indian state of Assam and is situated between Longitude 92° 15" and 93° 15" East and Latitude 24° 8" and 25° 8" North, covering an area of 6922 square kilometres(sq.km). The region shares its borders with the North Cachar Hills district and state of Meghalaya in the north, the state of Manipur in the East, the state of Mizoram in the south, and the state of Tripura in the west. Administratively, the region at present is comprised of three districts, viz. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. Cachar is the largest district and Hailakandi is the smallest with total geographical areas of 3786 sq.km. and 1327 sq.km respectively and area of Karimganj district is 1809 sq.km. to have a clear picture of the course of the history of valley, it is essential to have a picture of the state of Assam which it is a part.

Education is the key to unlock the main gate of civilisation and modernisation. It is the most important input for the development of an individual, society and nation. It plays an important role for the development of a particular area. The more an area is educationally developed, the more economic stability and quality of life that area enjoys. Education should therefore stress in such a way that it will lead to the development of an individual and society which will ultimately develop the economy of that region and enhance the quality of life.

Statement of the Problem :

Education is generally considered as a corner-stone of socio-economic and cultural development of a society/ country. It is an important aspect of human resource development. Education is a lifelong process by which an individual acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights. Education has emerged as the most important single input in promoting human resource development and technological progress, creating a social order, based on the virtues of freedom, social justice and equal opportunities.

Modern Education system was introduced after British rule in India. In the history of education we witnessed that our education system has changed from time to time. Some parts of Barak Valley's education system is similar that of Bengal's education system because Bengal was the main centre of education during the colonial period. The modern education system in India was also originated from Bengal.

Like wise with India, the modern education was introduced in the Barak Valley of Assam after the coming of British rule in Cachar. But its story is remained unknown, but Story of Bengal's education system is known to all. This is one of the big problems in reconstructing the story of modern education in the Barak Valley as no study has done on it. So if a proper research work is done on elementary education system of Barak Valley, as well as also Manipuri language as a Medium of Instruction. It will be very helpful to reconstruct the story of Barak Valley.

With the introduction of modern education in the Barak Valley, we have seen number of changes in the existing education system and also change social system of Barak Valley. The modern education demolished the old education

system (Tols, Maktab & Madrasa) and established a number of schools in Barak Valley. The Christian Missionaries played a commendable role in this field. There came a new kind of education system and educational institutions like Primary schools, Basic schools, Secondary Schools and College education.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this research work are :

1. To study the background the introduction of modern education in Barak Valley.
2. To investigate the process of establishment of Manipuri Medium Schools in Barak Valley.
3. To study the development of Manipuri medium.
4. To focus the role of various organizations in the instruction of Manipuri medium.

Hypothesis of the Study:

The proposed research work is to explore the aspects of modern education in the Barak Valley as well as the introduction of Manipuri medium in the valley. It also tries to highlight the impact of modern education to the Manipuri society in the Valley.

Methodology of the Study:

A large number of Data are available in the form of written records like books, magazines, journals, reports, official records, articles and newspapers etc. For the collection of these data, it is needed to explore from the various record rooms like Cachar district records room and Hailakandi district records room, Manipur State Archives, Gauhati Archives, Assam University, Silchar, Manipur University, Canchipur's Library and Silchar District Library etc.

The method of the study will be based on historical and empirical method. The tools and data require for the collection of the work will be based with the help of primary and secondary data. The oral sources will also be adopted in the work, in order to write in a systematic way. The analytical method will also be applied in this work.

Development of Elementary Education in Barak Valley Pre Independence:

As mentioned above the Kings of ancient Cachar were eager to acquired knowledge and education. They even organised Scholarships for Brahmins and Kayasthas without making any distinction between them for having studied *Sanskrit education in Nawadeep* and *Modern Education in Calcutta*. Some academics were to teach the Bengali and Sanskrit languages as well. This facility, of course was limited to Brahmins only. The kings awarded the well learned Brahmins with the lands. *Tolls* were available at the residences of *Pundit Brahmins* to teach Sanskrit language & Scriptures.

British education became popular over time because English is the language of administration, international and national trade as well as being the language of science, technology and law that the English brought with them. As the English

language and education have an economic value, since without its knowledge, jobs at the higher rungs of occupational hierarchy are unavailable. Thus, the demand for such education has been on the increase and the traditional one became obsolete and useless and got confined to some institutions of oriental studies only.

On 24th April, 1830, at dead of night, while Manipuris killed king *Govinda Chandra*, after than a dramatic change occurred in the *Political scenario* of Cachar. On 14th August, 1832, Cachar plains came under British rule and subsequently in 1854 North Cachar Hills were also annexed. The administration of newly formed Cachar was put under the charge of Captain Fisher by the British Government. Captain Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar, submitted his report to Governor General, Lord William Bentinck in June, 1834, wherein suggestions for educational development in Cachar were made. The medium of education would be Bengali in Cachar District was his experiential decision which is still to be remembered. These suggestions, of course, took a long time for implementation. In the mean time the next Superintendent Mr. Burns took over charge of the district. He also submitted his report on 22nd September, 1837, to the same effect stating that if the modern education be started instead of the indigenous one, it would be more beneficial for the people of Cachar no doubt, but the expenses to be incurred for this purpose would not be met up from the resources of this district.

A few days after, one School was opened at Silchar at the cost of subscriptions of local bureaucrats and Supers. But it did not run for a long time due to non-collection of subscriptions in time. In 1851, all guardians made a prayer to the Commissioner of Surma Valley seeking educational advantage, who in response called in a few of guardians amongst them for confirmation on the matter that how many of them were ready to offer subscription only one *Ana* monthly. But none came forward to this proposal. Rather some of them made prayer in a different way that a Government School is opened immediately so that the students may be provided with scholarship.

It appears from the situation that the bureaucrats were not economically sound in position although they were very interested to educate their children. Mr. Burns, the administrator of the region, of course, responded to their request favorably. He tried his best to establish a Government School but in vain. However, in 1857, with the help of local subscriptions, three schools – one each at Hailakandi, Silchar and Katigorah were started. There were 128 students in Silchar School while Hailakandi and Katigorah had 30 each. In 1861, enrolment of students in Silchar School stood at 13 only, following which it was closed. However, during these five years, students who had been a little skilled in Bengali and English were appointed either in Tea Estates or in Government Offices. Schools situated at Hailakandi and Katigorah continued somehow. Government was no longer willing to establish a School at Silchar for which people of Silchar became displeased and aggressive and protested. They publicly criticized the Government from various angles and owing to this the Government could not be indifferent to that issue. On 17th July, 1862, the then Superintendent *Stuart* requested the Inspector of schools, **Mr. Martin** to allot Rs.100/- to 150/- for the maintenance of primary expenses towards the

establishment of a school at Silchar. Thus, the decision for opening a school in Cachar with the Government initiative was taken. According to a letter written to the Commissioner of 15th Division, Dacca on **30th June 1853**, by **G. Verner**, Superintendent of Cachar.

The following accounts of schools in Cachar as per record in the Statistical Account of Assam by W. W. Hunter provide an inkling into this expansion and growth of education from 1856-57 onwards:

Growth of Schools and Enrolment in Cachar 1856-1901

Years	No. of Primary Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Secondary schools	No. of pupils	Total no. of pupils
1856-57	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1860-61	NA	NA	1	NA	18
1865-66	NA	NA	7	NA	NA
1874-75	99	2119	7	373	2492
1880-81	108	2565	7	446	3011
1890-91	190	4706	3	413	5119
1900-01	248	7188	4	654	7842

Source: W.W.Hunters' Statistical Accounts of Assam, 1879 and B.C.Allen's Assam District Gazetteere vol.I, 1909.

The above account shows that, Cachar took a different course in the development of education from Assam especially in the pre-independence period obviously for historical reasons, explained earlier. Consequently the region had very late head start in modern education.

Development of Elementary Education in Barak Valley post independence:

Having understood the importance of education and its usefulness as a potent weapon for societal development, from time to time efforts were made to expand the facilities for the masses and therefore with the intention of providing free primary education and mandatory for all children in the 6-14 age group as provided by the constitution of India, although required during the British govt. itself. After independence, education received the highest priority. Thus Article 45 of the constitution of India directed the state to endeavour to fulfil this promise initially. However, this promised could not be fulfilled, realising the urgency of achieving the literacy ratio in the country this stage of education became a fundamental right in 2002 under Article 21A of the constitution. Several programmes have been implemented, policies have been adopted from time to time to provide education from classes I to VIII for all children in the age group of 6-14 years. As a result of repeated efforts the initiatives enrolments in elementary education in India multiplied several times but still around 26% (Census, 2011) of the total population of India is illiterate which respect about 1/4th of the world total illiterate population. The development of elementary education in Barak Valley region advanced in time with developments in the country as a whole. The following summarized the development of elementary education in Barak Valley, which increase to 1874 in 1950-51, there were 1442 elementary schools in Barak Valley, which increase to 1874 in 1960-61, an increase of 29.96% and there were 2206 in 1970-71, an

increase of 17.72% over the previous decade that increased further to 2983 in 1980-81, an increase of 35.22%. In 1990-91, the total numbers of elementary schools in Barak Valley was 3036, an increase of only 1.78% over the previous decade. In 2000-01, the number of elementary schools in Barak Valley grew to 5,259, an increase of 73.22%, which increased further to 5,816, an increase of 10.59% in 2010-11 over the previous decade.

No. of elementary schools in Barak Valley from 1950-51 to 2010-11

Types of Educational institutions	1950 -51	1960 -61	1970 -71	1980 -81	1990 -91	2000 -01	2010 -11
M.E. School	177	212	278	447	514	1017	1433
L.P. School	1256	1662	1928	2536	2522	4242	4383
Elementary Schools	1442	1874	2206	2989	3036	5259	5816
Total							

Source: Census of India, 1951-2011.

Origin of Manipuri Medium of Instruction Schools in Barak Valley:

Naoria Phulo was the pioneer of the Manipuri medium educational movement outside the Manipur. He was also the pioneer who launched a movement to revive the Meitei indigenous language, a religion in the early part of the 20th century. Naoria Phulo's dream was started by NHMM, Manipur in 1935 and later with establishment of its branch i.e. NHMM, Cachar branch became a pioneer organization in introduction Manipuri as a medium of instruction in Barak Valley and in Assam. And meanwhile the constitution of India and Indian education committee and commission should provide various facilities to introduce the medium of instruction in school education in India.

After that Article 350A of the constitution of India provides the medium of instruction for Linguistic Minorities in their mother tongue in the primary stage of education. After that, All India Council for Education adopted a policy 'Three language Formula'(TLF) in 1956. The NPE-1968 talked about regional languages and TLF. The NPE-1968 recommended the inclusion of the TLF which includes the study of modern Indian languages in secondary stage. This was reiterated in the NPE-1986, and adopted as the Programme of Action 1992. These are major attempts to come up with a language policy for education in India.

The incomplete work and demand for the introduction of Manipuri language and as a medium of instruction in school education in Assam's Barak Valley started by 'NHMM, Cachar branch' was restarted by Naha Marup, Cachar, Lakhipur and 'Thougal Marup, Jaffirbond, Hailakandi. As a result of the demand, Manipuri language was introduced as a medium of instruction up to the lower primary level in 1956, upper primary level in 1959 and HSLC level in 1978, on temporary basis and finally in 1984 respectively.

Development of Manipuri Medium Elementary Education in Barak Valley:

The demand for Manipuri language as a medium of instruction in school education was initiated by NHMM, Cachar branch was surfaced during the 1950s and continued until 1984. During this time, the introduction of Manipuri medium education in Assam was taken carried out under the banner of different NGOs like Naha Marup Cachar, Lakhipur, Thougai Marup, Jaffirbond, Hailakandi, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad Cachar branch, All Assam Manipuri Society, Cachar, Assam Bengal Manipuri Association, Manipuri Literary Forum, Cachar, Cachar Manipuri College Student's Union, Cachar and Assam Manipuri Education Forum, Cachar etc. The demand for the introduction of the Manipuri Language as a Medium of instruction in lower primary schools started in the 1950s and continued until 1956. The demand began to gather momentum in 1955. Seeing the momentum in demand, the govt. of Assam also began to send their govt. representative Sri Radhika Ram Das, the Deputy Minister of Education, to investigate the matter in different areas of Assam inhabited by the Manipuris for that purpose. After visiting the different areas of Assam inhabited by the Manipuris, he also suggested to the govt. for approval of the introduction of Manipuri medium in Assam's primary level schools. And according to letter no. – EMI 211/53/10, PF Shillong, the 7th June 1956 Manipuri was introduced as a medium in the lower primary schools of Assam.

After obtaining the lower primary level, the demand for introduction of Manipuri medium at middle English schools was started in 1959 by various Manipuri organisations. Using their efforts to introduce Manipuri Medium situated nearby the Manipuri inhabited areas of Barak Valley. But unable to succeed with the demand, finally the Manipuris of Assam united under the various leading organisations and began to establish M.E. Schools in 1963 in different areas of Assam by their own cost for the education of those students who passed LP level in their own mother tongue. As a result of the demand accordingly in 1965, the govt. of Assam recognised those Manipuri medium ME schools who were established during 1963. Therefore as a result of the demand in 1965, the Manipuri medium was recognised as a medium of instruction at the ME level in Assam. At present, the Manipuri medium is running in the Barak Valley as mentioned below:

Manipuri Medium Schools in Barak Valley

District	L.P. School	M.E. School	Secondary School	Total
Cachar	124	39	26	189
Hailakandi	34	9	5	48
Karimganj	--	--	--	--
Total	158	48	31	237

(Source : Field Survey)

Conclusion:

It has already been mentioned that in order to take advantages of the facilities of Article 350A, TLF and other

policies of language education etc. The Manipuris in Assam began their demand for introduction of Manipuri medium in the state from the early 1950s onwards. As a result of its demand, Manipuri language was introduced as a medium of instruction at LP school stage in 1956, then ME level in 1965 and up to HSLC level on the basis of experimental basis in 1979 and finally in the year 1984 depended on SEBA in Assam. The demand for introduction of Manipuri medium in the HSLC level for linguistic minorities, the govt. treats differently of education from primary level to HSLC level of Education. The journey of development of elementary education in Barak Valley's Manipuri medium schools has also played a significant role in the Barak Valley's Education.

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