

## Educational scenario in rural and tea garden areas of Assam

Ruksana Saikia

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

### Abstract

Basic education is essential to enhance personal knowledge and skill, which enable an individual to operate ideally in the society and manage basic requirements of survival. Educational opportunities in the tea garden and areas are limited to lower primary levels and most of the schools do not conform to the pupil-teacher ratio according to the RTE Act. In general, workers of tea gardens in Assam are backward in education, despite having basic schooling facilities in most of the tea gardens. Moreover, literacy rate among women workers is very low in comparison to their male counterparts. Lack of education and awareness are the major hindrances to overall capacity building of tea garden workers.

**Keywords:** tea garden, scenario, Assam

### Introduction

Education is a vehicle through which one can achieve success in life. Education improves social status, cultural and intellectual qualities - the means of generating civic society. Education is a Fundamental Right for the Children of 6-14 years age group. With the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, it is expected that issues of drop out, out-of-school children, quality of education and availability of trained teachers would be addressed in the short to medium term. It provides for children's right to an education of equitable quality, based on principles of equity and non-discrimination. Most importantly, it provides for children's right to an education that is free from fear, stress and anxiety.

India is a nation of villages, about two third of the total population lives in the rural areas. Majority of the India's population belongs to rural areas and from poor family background. But the educational conditions in the rural areas still in a very bad shape after more than 69 years of our independence. It is a major challenge to ensure their access to quality education.

Robert Bruce, a Scottish adventurer, first spotted tea plant in Assam. Bruce reportedly found the plant growing "wild" in Assam while trading in the region. Maniram Dewan directed him to the local Singpho chief Bessa Gam. Bruce noticed local tribesmen (the Singhpos) brewing tea from the leaves of the bush and arranged with the tribal chiefs to provide him with samples of the leaves and seeds, which he planned to have scientifically examined. Robert Bruce died shortly thereafter, without having seen the plant properly classified. It was not until the early 1830s that Robert's brother, Charles, arranged for a few leaves from the Assam tea bush to be sent to the botanical gardens in Calcutta for proper examination. There, the plant was finally identified as a variety of tea, or *Camellia sinensis*, but different from the Chinese version (*Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis*)

Maniram Dewan was the first Indian tea planter, and is credited with establishing the first commercial

plantations of the Assamese variety of tea. In 1837, the first English tea garden was established at Chabua in Upper Assam. In 1840, the Assam Tea Company began the commercial production of tea in the region.

Tea garden is the one of the leading industries in Assam. But it is unfortunates that the educational status of tea garden areas is yet in a backward stage. It seems to be a curse for this great community of Assam. The proper light of education has not still reached the greater section of this labour force. The lack of educational facility for various reasons kept them in Dark Age.

**Primary/ Elementary education** in India is divided in two parts-

- Lower Primary (1st standard to 5th standard),
- Upper Primary (6th standard to 8th standard)

Elementary school is defined as a period of formal education following pre-school but before high school. Primary Education is the initial stage of education and has as its basic aim to create, establish and offer opportunities to all children, regardless of age, gender or country of origin, to achieve a balanced cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is being implemented as India's main programme for universalizing elementary education. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children. SSA provides for a variety of interventions, including inter alia, opening and construction of new schools, additional teachers, regular teacher in-service training, academic resource support to ensure free textbooks, uniforms and free support for improving learning outcomes.

**Secondary education** is divided into two parts –

- Lower Secondary (9th standard and 10th standard)
- Higher Secondary (11th and 12th standard).

Usually, secondary education covers students of 15 to 18 Years age group. Secondary schools may be affiliated to national boards or various state boards. Rashtriya

Madhyamik Siksha Abhijan (RMSA), is a comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of the Government of India for providing quality and meaningful Secondary education. RMSA has a vision to make secondary education available, accessible and affordable to all young persons.

**Higher education** is the main backbone of sustainable economic development and modern society. In India, higher education imparted by universities is facing challenges in terms of Access, Equity and Quality. The Indian Higher Education System has established itself as the largest system in the world in terms of number of institutions and third largest in terms of student enrollment (after China and USA). The main governing body at the tertiary level is the University Grants Commission, which enforces its standards, advises the government, and helps to coordinate between the center and the state. But majority of the higher educational institutions are urban centric in India and higher educational institutions which are belong s to rural areas are of lack quality. As a result of this rural and poor people are deprived.

#### **Educational Scenario of Tea Gargen and Rural Areas of Assam**

Assam is one of the educationally backward state of India with 62.45% of literacy according to census 2001 and 73.18% of literacy according to census 2011. Just 14 per cent of Assam's population live in urban areas. Around 2.68 crore persons live in rural areas of Assam as per census2011 report. Among the different communities living in Assam, the tea garden communities are educationally lagging behind. It is admitted that literacy rate of these community is lower than other communities. It has been also observed that growth of primary education is poor in tea garden of Assam. The total population of the community is estimated to be around 20 percent of total population of Assam.

**In a report by the Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR), it has revealed that at least 80% of the state's tea gardens have been defying the Right to Education (RTE) Act.**

The shocking report may put the tea gardens in deep trouble for violating child rights. The people living in the tea gardens of Assam have always been used for political gains for parties. The survey conducted by the ASCPCR has found that majority of the children in the tea gardens are engaged in plucking leaves, made to work in factories and do not go to school. Students are made to attend classes in very unhygienic rooms, sometimes even in verandah. Sanitation and cleanliness is a part of healthy life. But this was totally absent in tea garden schools. Children are made to travel long distances to attend middle schools after primary education. It is also believed that this is one of the causes for the high school drop-out rate in tea garden areas. The cases of child

trafficking and child marriage are also on the rise in tea garden areas.

#### **Literacy is declining in Assam's char areas:**

The chars are normally triangular in shape and are prone to erosion. The inhabitants lead an uncertain life with erosion often forcing them to shift their settlements. The char areas are distributed across 23 sub-divisions of 14 districts along the Brahmaputra's course from Sadiya in the east to Dhubri in the west. An estimated 25 lakh people reside in 2,251 villages on these chars. Some 68% of the char dwellers are below poverty line (BPL).

Various Govt and Non -Govt organizations are working for the development of education system in char areas of assam. Ajmal National Rural Programme is a lay of hope for those residing in Assam's seasonal islands of Brahmaputra River and its tributaries where poverty and illiteracy goes hand in hand.

SSA, Assam is also working for universalization of elementary education in these areas. But it has not achieved proper success due to the lack of trained teachers, frequent absent of teachers, poor communication. Teacher, appointed through Teachers were appointed by Government of Assam through Eligibility Test. But many teachers are not willing to work in these areas due to poor transportation, lack of rented accommodation etc.

#### **Educational Scenario of Slum Area of Assam**

Children of slum areas are not getting free and compulsory education properly. Few numbers of children are regular students and they get mid-day meal at school. But those who are not regular students they also get free text book, uniform etc. Medium of instruction also hampers in their study as many of them belong to bihari and Panjabi community. So they cannot cope the instructions provided to them in Assamese language. Children don't like to go to school because the school environment as well as infrastructure is not able to attract the children. Most of children work for livelihood and they don't get time and space at their home for their study. Their parents do not help them in their study. Parents don't have any idea that the primary education is free and compulsory for their children about age group of 6-14. They heard "Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, but don't know the aims and objectives of it.

#### **Higher Educational Institutes in Assam**

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. The state has recently made strides in setting up several high standard institutions to provide education in the field of engineering and management.

### **Challenges and Opportunities of Education in Rural and Tea Garden Areas with Special Reference to Assam**

- Almost 24 lakh children live in the tea gardens of Assam.
- About 50 per cent children do not attend schools regularly.
- A huge population of tea garden workers still live below the poverty line
- Culture of exclusion is also rooted in the history of seclusion of the tea garden communities from larger social fabric of the state.
- Just 20 per cent of the children access pre-primary education in ICDS centres, also known as Anganwadi kendras.

**Universal Retention:** Universal enrollment alone cannot ensure education for all. The enrolled children must complete the full cycle of elementary education.

**Non-availability of schools:** Distance of schools from the gardens is another reason for low literacy rate. The objective of SSA is to provide a primary school within a reasonable distance of 1 kilometer. The objective of RMSA is to provide a secondary school within a reasonable distance of 5 kilometers and a higher secondary school within 7-10 kilometers from any habitation. Educational opportunities in the tea garden areas are limited to lower primary levels due to the non-availability of secondary schools in rural and tea garden areas.

**Infrastructural Facilities in the Schools:** The infrastructural facilities are one of the important aspects in the education system. Though school buildings are pucca yet they are not conducive. There are problems of door and windows, partition wall, Urinal and toilet, electricity facility, pure drinking water and ceiling fan etc. in tea garden primary schools. 70% percent schools do not have separate toilet facilities for girls. As per RTE act there should be at least one class room for every teacher. In most of the schools there is no partition between the classes.

The shortage of school building must be removed either from the Government or from the tea garden management and arrangements have to be made for providing partition wall or separate classroom for separate class in all the schools.

**Boundary Wall & Playground:** Very few school have pucca boundary wall. Some schools have boundary wall of barbed with fencing. With a proper boundary wall students can be taught cleanliness, need of tree plantation and many other important co-scholastic competencies.

Playing the main process for mental and physical development of children. Due to the lack of play activity, pupils have to suffer indirectly to a great extent. Teacher can teach the students about discipline, unity, friendship, good manners, morality etc. through the medium of play. All the schools must have playground for the all-round development of the school children. All the necessary materials and instruments for co-curricular activities must

be supplied by the Government or the tea garden authority or management. These co-curricular activities must be included in the class routine and regular practices with teachers' full involvement must be ensured

**Lack of Academic and professional qualification of Teacher:** Many teachers are having general qualification below the norm specified by NCTE. Most of the teachers of primary and secondary schools do not have professional qualification like D.El.Ed, B.Ed.

In order to attract qualified teachers, provision of Incentive, residential quarter etc. should be provided to teachers working in tea garden and rural area schools, Technology based teaching should be introduced to help people learn—anytime, anywhere; anytime. For this govt. can establish community based ICT centers in rural and tea garden areas. Students in villages might not have access to good teachers but technology can help to overcome such issues by bringing good quality standardized content to thousands of learners in rural areas.

**Teacher Pupil Ratio:** The pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) in primary schools should be **30:1**. But there is disproportionate ratio of Teacher and pupil in the Tea garden and rural area schools. Isolated environment of the tea-gardens, problem of communication, apathy towards children of the labourers are some of the causes for which the teachers do not like to be posted at the tea garden schools. Again, there are some school with two teachers where enrolment is high and they have to manage all the 5 classes at a time. It is difficult for the Headmaster to manage school under such situation. Many teachers hired other persons to teach students and they are busy in their household issues.

**Method of Teaching:** Success of education mostly depends upon the method applied in teaching the students. About 80 percent schools use lecture method as main method of teaching. Though play way method is most suitable for primary education but most of the Teachers uses play for passing their times. Of course, SSA is providing training courses for every teacher but it is not properly followed in the tea garden and rural areas schools. Maximum no of teachers of rural areas do not applied discussion and activity method in teaching. Teaching aids are not used to present any difficult concept.

**Difference in Spoken Language at Home and written language at School:** Language is a vehicle of human expression. The tea garden laborers speaks their dialects at home and at all the situation where the people from same community gather. But the medium of instruction in most of the tea garden L. P. schools are in regional language. Therefore, all the students of this community have to learn the medium of instruction first to get knowledge about the curriculum of primary level. Educated boys and girls from the tea garden communities should be appointed in garden L. P. school to minimize linguistic difficulties.

**Improper use of Mid-day meal:** MDM scheme is helping in increasing enrolment and attendance. School dropout is reducing due to MDM. It helps nutritional health of the Tea Garden children. However the operation of the scheme is not free from defects. Though a separate cook is employed for cooking MDM, a good amount of the teaching time is wasted in managing the programme. Sometimes, it found that in some schools, MDM is not given regularly to students.

**No cooperation between parents and teachers:** Parents generally cannot manage time to come to school and they are also not interested in educating their child. And teachers also do not think it necessary to visit the homes of children. Community participation programmes should be organized in important days.

**School Management Committee:** About 60 percent school management committees are non-functional. The president of the school management committee should be selected from the guardians of students. But in rural and tea garden areas, generally parents are illiterate which creates a huge problem in proper management of the school.

**Improper Social Environment due to ignorance and lack of awareness of the Parents towards Education:**

The illiterate parents cannot realize the value of education. The social atmosphere in tea garden area is not at all suitable for education. Majority parents are illiterate. All of them pass their free time sitting before TV, hearing tape recorder, radio etc. and taking alcohol. All these activities create only disturbances for the learner. Their duty is finished in giving admission only and never shows interest for providing the necessary reading and writing materials like paper, pencil etc. They do not have any high ambition for a better life. They admitted their child in school so that they can have their mid-day meal at school.

Their living standards are very below standard. Most of them are of ill health. So they became the victim of various types of epidemic diseases. They are ignorant about the modern development of science and technology and they live in midst of various types of superstition, prejudices etc. The habit of taking alcohol in excess quantity by the tea garden laborers hampers the educational progress of the children in primary level.

Since the atmosphere in the society as a whole is not congenial for education, some parents and their children also suffer who are conscious for educational progress. Therefore, the guardian should be made aware of the importance of education in order to develop a desire to educate his/her children. Today the age is very much competitive. The courses in schools, colleges are also becoming more advanced day by day. They are unaware not only about the need of education but also about various programmes/schemes, some of which are meant specifically for the upliftment of the Tea-Tribe and rural development.

Adequate socialization process has to be adopted and means of communications should be improved to break the social isolation of the people of rural and tea garden.

The garden authority should organize awareness Programme like T.V show, film among the garden labourers to aware them in all aspects.

**Absence of Adult Education/Women education:** Adult education is a powerful auxiliary and an essential incentive to primary education. No programme of compulsory education of children can succeed without the active support and co-operation of adults. But absence of adult education among the tea garden labourers and rural areas has some impact on the slow progress of primary education among the children of these areas. Parents should be given adult education to reduce illiteracy. Establishment of adequate number of Adult Education Centre in these areas is suggested. Existing literature on children's schooling has also upheld the role of mother in the educational attainment of her children. Women's education is important factor for attaining children's education level. Hence, step should be taken to raise the level of mother's education in tea garden and areas. Awareness campaign should be organize to aware evil effects of large families.

**Presence of Child Labour:** As the tea garden labourers are not interested for the education of their children and they are economically very poor, so they drop their children from the school as soon as they find difficulties for supplying the necessary materials for education of their children. They engaged their child in plucking tea, selling goods in nearby market.

Programmes should be arranged to make aware of parents about the legal actions for involving minor child in child labour like-domestic help, brick field, industry etc.

**Role and Attitude of the Tea garden management:** To improve primary education in the tea garden areas, it is necessary to play a vital role by the tea garden management. Tea garden management/ tea authority is not so concerned about the education of the children of the tea garden laborers. Though some facilities have been provided by some of the tea authorities but the percentage is not encouraging.

**Negligence of girl's education:** Illiterate workers were not able to spend in education of their children owing to their poor economic condition. They generally used to engage their girl child in cooking food, fishing, fetching of water, collection of firewood, child rearing etc. They are in favour of early marriage.

**Natural hazards** like flood, erosion, snowfall etc also hampers in the development of the system of education. All weather affordable schools especially during the time of summer will be a boon for the girl students in the remote rural areas of these states. At the time of flood these people become cut -off from the educational system, which not only make an adverse impact on their examinations but also their further study. Many among them leave schools for ever due to this gap in their study. The floating schools on the boats may be a one way short term solutions to fill up this gap.

**Lack of Higher Educational Institution:** Due to urban centric and uneven distribution of institutions of higher education, it is not equally available in the rural areas of the state. Non availability of higher educational institution in rural areas of Assam is also one of the great challenges of development of higher education in rural areas. Non availability of such institutions also demotivates the major section of people to enroll themselves for higher education and develop knowledge for development of themselves as well as the society. The rural people have no easy access to the electronic and print media due to various reasons.

**Financial Problem due to high cost:** Financial problem has always handicapped the desired progress of quantitative and qualitative higher education in rural areas of Assam. So most of the people are not financially sound and they desire to involve their kids after a minimum level of study into their agricultural activities due to non-availability of fund to enroll their kids to higher education. As a result the development of rural areas also moves downward.

Cost of higher education have to be minimized, so that the families belongs to lower category of income can also enroll their kids for higher education. Scholarship facility should made available on merit basis.

**Neglect of Traditional field of knowledge:** Growing popularity of professional courses with prospects of quicker and better employability has negatively affected the enrolment of students in traditional fields of knowledge like basic sciences, classical language and literature, art etc. Most of the talented students move out of the state after completing senior secondary course in search of good professional and technical colleges like medical, engineering, management etc.

**Unemployment problem:** Problem of educated unemployment now-a-days is a great challenge to higher education. Most of the institutions in area running by theoretical courses and seen dearth of vocational and technical courses.

**Lack of computer illiteracy** is seen in rural areas; so students/ aspirants of higher education unable to follow the e- learning facilities.

**Language is barrier** for higher education; that all the schools of rural area from Lower Primary to Higher Secondary follow the medium of instruction in regional language, but the medium of instruction of higher education is English in many disciplines.

**Problem of road and transport communication:** it is seen that maximum rural roads are very poor in transport and out of reach of the target area of educational institutes.

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