



Development of Teacher Education in Assam During Pre-Independence period

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Abstract:

Preparing teachers professionally competent and committed to the cause is the responsibility of the teacher education system. The historical perspective provides a sound background for evolving an effective teacher education programme of a country. This study made an attempt to trace out the early initiatives for the development of Teacher Education in Assam, to study the development of Teacher Education in Assam under the British rule, and to find out the status of Teacher Education in Assam at the time of Independence. The study found that the development of Teacher Education was taken place in the form of Normal Training Schools. The first normal class was started at Gauhati School by William Robinson in 1844. At the time of Independence, there were total ten Normal Schools in Assam, out of which there were only three government Normal Schools meant for training of male teachers at the time of Independence. Training of Secondary School Teachers was not found during this period.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, Pre-independence period, Assam, Development, Education, Teacher*

1. The rationale of the study

The success of education depends to a considerable extent on performance of the teacher. It is the teacher who holds the key to the effective translation of educational policies into concrete actions in the classroom. Preparing teachers professionally competent and committed to the cause is the responsibility of the teacher education system. Teacher education has been a matter of concern for teachers and teacher educators over the last couple of decades. Because, the quality of a teacher depends, to a large extent, on the quality of teacher education received by him/her. The new social functions and consequently the changing role of the teacher have given rise to new policies and programmes of teacher education. Moreover, the historical perspective provides a sound background for evolving an effective teacher education programme of a country. Thus, a need is felt to make an attempt to trace out the growth of teacher education in Assam during the pre-independence period.

2. Statement of the problem

The present study was formally stated as, "Development of Teacher Education in Assam during Pre-Independence Period" with a view to achieve the following objectives:

3. Objectives of the study

1. To trace out the early initiatives for the development of Teacher Education in Assam.
2. To study the development of Teacher Education in Assam under the British rule.
3. To find out the status of Teacher Education in Assam at the time of Independence.

4. Methodology

The present study used historical method for collecting the pertinent data and events from secondary sources of data. As such, different sources of research studies, government reports and documents pertaining to teacher education of Assam as well as India were studied and used in the analysis of the growth and development of Teacher Education in Assam.

5. Development of teacher education in assam during Pre-independence period

Since Assam came under British rule much later than the rest of India, the progress of education in Assam before independence was not remarkable. It is, therefore, obvious that from the very beginning of the British rule Assam was lagging behind the other states of India in the field of teacher education too. Till the first decade of the twentieth century, there was not a single teacher training institution in Assam although the first Normal School was set-up at Serampore (Bengal) in 1793. However, some sporadic efforts were made to improve the efficiency of a teacher through supervision or training during the early days of the East India Company. In 1841, William Robinson was appointed as the Inspector of Schools under the Commissioner with a view to affecting a 'vigilant control' and to introduce a 'uniform system of instruction.'

Although the Council of Education realized the importance of training of teachers for promotion of education, no attempt, whatsoever, was made in that direction until 1844. In that year, on the recommendation of the Council, the Government of Bengal provided necessary funds for starting normal classes in few colleges and schools of Bengal. In the same year, the first normal class was started at Gauhati School by William Robinson, the Inspector of Schools. During the first year, six youths were selected for their qualifications and character from this province and each of them was awarded an allowance of rupees three per month. Within few years, the number of students rose to one hundred. Increase in enrolment encouraged the government to convert the normal class, in November 1855, to a full-fledged normal school with two grades of lower and upper classes. The school was put under the charge of the Head Master of the Gauhati Vernacular School and a sum of rupees one hundred and eighty was sanctioned for the stipends of thirty-six students at the rate of rupees three each month. In 1863, the training institute was put under separate charge and one Harihar Das was appointed as its superintendent on salary of rupees eighty per month. But unfortunately, there was a rapid fall in the number of students from 1864, which compelled the Inspector of Schools to close down the school.

The failure of the Gauhati Normal School was a blessing in disguise. With a view to checking the fall of the number of trainees in normal school, Robinson suggested to the Government of Bengal that the student should be subjected to execute a bond to serve under the government for a certain number of years after successful completion of the training. The government decided on 25th January 1866, that three normal classes should be established, one in each station of Gauhati, Sibsagar and Tezpur at a total monthly cost of Rs. 399. Accordingly, normal classes were started with effect from May 1866. There were thirteen stipends for the Sibsagar normal class, eight for Tezpur, and sixteen for Gauhati class. The training instructor was given a monthly salary of rupees fifty in each school.

The normal class at Gauhati worked well, but Sibsagar normal class suffered from the apathy and negligence of the frequently changed Deputy Inspector of Schools, upper Assam. The government closed down the Tezpur normal class in 1867, when there was sudden fall in the number of the trainees and the stipulated amount was diverted to starting a normal class since started at Nowgong. In these circumstances, the normal classes could not cope up with the increasing demand of supplying duly qualified teachers. At the end of two years, only twenty-six from Kamrup, nine from Sibsagar and ten from Nowgong were found qualified with normal certificates.

Of the private enterprises, the different Missionary Societies in Assam had realized the importance of training of teachers who could be profitably utilized for preaching the Gospel amongst the backward people in Assam. With this object in view, in between 1863 and 1867, training classes for the lower grades of elementary school teachers were started by the Missionaries at Tezpur for the Kacharies, Nowgong for the Mikirs, Darma for the Garos and Nongsowlia (Cherrapunjee) for the Khasis. The later two were attached to the central schools of Darma and Nongsowlia. Except the Tezpur normal class, others received a monthly grant of rupees fifty for support of the pupil teachers, each of them received a stipend. The course of study was limited to those of reading, writing and arithmetic with the

single exception of Tezpur where geography and natural history were added to the elementary lessons. The medium of instruction was Assamese in Tezpur and Bengali in other places.

In 1872, George Campbell, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, allotted four lakhs of rupees from the provincial savings for the development of primary education in Assam. As a result, the number of primary schools rose to 966 in 1874-75, as against 203 schools in 1871-72. This enormous increase in the number of primary schools necessitated a corresponding increase in the output of qualified and trained teachers. With this object in view, Campbell ordered that all the newly appointed teachers of village schools should be attached for some months to training classes at the district headquarters. With a view to enforcing the training scheme, in the beginning of 1874, Campbell sanctioned an additional grant of Rs. 20,233. Before the end of the year, a normal school was established in each station of Silchar, Sylhet (now in Bangladesh), Goalpara, Lakhimpur and Khasi-Jayantia Hills (Cherrapunjee) in addition to the existing ones in Kamrup, Nowgong and Sibsagar. In the following year another normal class was started at Mangaldai.

Although there had been a rapid rise in the number of schools and trainees, the results were far from being satisfactory. The normal school at Silchar which turned out only thirty-four certificated teachers since its establishment was closed down in 1876-77. The normal school of Goalpara which entailed a yearly expense of about Rs.1,451 to government and produced only seven certificated Gurus during the last three consecutive years, was also abolished.

In the meantime, the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara drew up a new plan for the training of teachers. He desired that in the standard middle vernacular school, a special Guru class need be introduced to train up teachers who would, of course, be given the stipend during the period of training. The first step in this direction was taken up by the Deputy Commissioners of Nowgong and Goalpara who introduced the system of allowing the Gurus to undergo training on stipends in the middle vernacular school near their homes. The success of the scheme, commonly known as apprenticeship training, convinced C.B. Clarke, the then officiating Inspector of Schools, to adopt it in place of Guru classes which had been working unsatisfactorily. But unfortunately, the scheme did not receive approval of the Government of Assam.

In the meantime, the Indian Education Commission of 1882, after a thorough review of the existing arrangement for training of teachers in different parts of the country, recommended a more efficient and practical course for the future trainees. To give effect to this recommendation, the Government of Assam adopted a new plan for training on the line of the apprenticeship course. However, by 1888-89, only six departmental schools came to be established one each in the districts of Kamrup, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Khasi and Jayantia Hills, and two in Darrang. In 1888-89, there were 173 trainees in these schools, and the number decreased to 127 in 1901-02. The smallest number of trainees was at the Sibsagar School. The government also opened 16 teachers' training classes attached to M.V. and M.E. Schools to train Gurus and primary school teachers. But the enrolment of trainees in these specialized classes was not encouraging, and, therefore, the government decided to abolish, with effect from 1st October 1903, all the government training schools and Guru training classes with the exception of the first-grade schools in the districts of Kamrup (at Gauhati) and Khasi and Jayantia Hills (at Shillong). It was proposed that specially selected students would be trained in the middle and high schools partly as pupils and partly as monitors. At the end of such apprenticeship, they would be appointed as village school masters in primary and lower secondary schools. In fact, after the decision of the government to rationalize the system of teachers' training by abolishing a number of training schools, the missionaries also closed down two of their three training schools due to financial difficulties and poor attendance.

After the Government Resolution of 1904, the Government of Assam had to revise its earlier decision in the matter of maintaining a small number of training schools only. The first grade training school at

Gauhati could not cope up with the growing demand of the province. Moreover, the introduction of Assamese as medium of instruction in middle vernacular schools created considerable difficulties since most of the teachers were untrained. In 1905, a separate Department of Education was created in Assam, and the Department made an attempt to reorganize the Gauhati School. In 1906, the first formal Normal School was set up at Jorhat, followed by the Silchar Normal School. Both aimed at supplying teachers for middle vernacular schools where the language was either Assamese or Bengali. Special classes were also attached to these schools for training of village school masters. During 1906-07, there were 32 and 115 trainees on the roll at Jorhat and Silchar training schools, respectively. In 1913, two female training classes were started; one for the Bengalees, attached to the Welsh Mission Girls' High School at Silchar and another for the Assamese under the supervision of the American Middle English Mission School for girls at Nowgong. In 1914, a certificate course was introduced in both the schools. There were two standards: the junior for those who had passed only the primary examination, and the senior for those who qualified themselves by passing out the middle school examination. Even during the period of next four years total number of certificated female teachers did not exceed twenty, of those, ten secured junior mistress certificates and ten senior certificates.

Table 1: Classification of Teacher Education Institutions and Number of Students in Assam (1947-48)

Type of Institutions	Male			Female		
	Govt.	Aided	Unaided	Govt.	Aided	Unaided
Normal and Training Schools	3	3	1	--	3	--
Number of Students	216	83	19	--	70	--

(Source: Statistical Cell, DSE, General Educational Tables of Assam for the year 1947-48).

Thus, at the time of independence in 1947, there were total ten teacher education institutions in Assam in the form of Normal Schools out of which seven were for males and three were for females. There was no Secondary Teacher Education institution in Assam during pre-independent period.

6. Conclusion

From the above findings it may be concluded that the growth of Teacher Education in Assam was late as compared to other parts of the country. The early initiative for Teacher Education in Assam was marked in 1840s. The development of Teacher Education was taken place in the form of Normal Training Schools, and out total ten Normal Schools in Assam, there were only three government Normal Schools meant for training of male teachers at the time of Independence. Training of Secondary School Teachers were not found during this period.

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