

A Note on the Education of the Bodos in the Present Perspective

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Education in the Bodo-dominated areas of Assam is a pivotal issue for the development of the people. It is almost in shambles from the days of Bodo Movement since the last part of the twentieth century. Traditional education they receive in the sick educational institutions take them nowhere; it is neither holistic nor challenging. Economic instability is one of the major causes for the educational backwardness of these people. There is no initiative and clear-cut policies from the side of the government to sustain them economically. Hence, education is a neglected agenda. About twenty percent of the Bodo people have been converted to Christianity who are educationally better than the Hindus or those who practice the tribal religion, Bathou Dharma.

Although 'Brahma Dharma', pioneered by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma inspired cultural expression, made them politically conscious as well as assertive, it has not been successful in giving them stability and making them educationally up-to-date.

The Boroland Territorial Council (BTC), an offshoot of the truce between the most influential Boro militant group, Boro Liberation Tigers (BLT) and the Centre, and the resultant signing of the Boro Accord on 10 Feb. 2003 between the said militant outfit and the central government, seems to promise the Boro people their political rights, economic stability and upliftment and spontaneous expression of their cultural identity. If things move in a positive manner, it is expected that within a decade the Boro people will not remain educationally backward; they will rather move forward very fast as they have proper inclination for it. Given the political rights, they wish to forge ahead educationally; they have already realized after a decade of armed struggle that education is the most important tool in their hand for genuine development.

They have good linguistic ability. Even though they have their own language to speak and write which has Mongoloid origin, they also speak Assamese, Bangla and Hindi. They have a natural tendency of speaking English fluently, although with mistakes. Through English language they wish to prosper intellectually: they always wish to collect the ideas and

informations. They sincerely want to learn and be educated. But the problem is the lack of guidance. They are not happy with the outdated educational system. That is why in the Bodo-dominated Kokrajhar district one finds more English-medium schools than the conventional schools owned by the state government. It is noteworthy that when all over India there is demand for the introduction of regional language as the medium of instruction and official language, the Bodos are very much silent about it. They love to speak English and write English also. They know very well that English language is the life-line in academic field. Hence, they are properly oriented so far as their goal in life is concerned. In the year 1996 an ethnic cleansing took place in Gossaingaon subdivision of Kokrajhar district. Santhals were the target of the Bodo militants, National Democratic Front of the Bodos (N.D.F.B.). They torched their houses and a large number of Santhals were killed. It had its repercussion upon the innocent Bodos and the people of other communities. Their peaceful life was disturbed. Education was completely out of gear. The Bodos were left with no environment for development. Education was in such a pass that the offspring of the well-to-do Bodo families started going out of the state for higher study. The Bodo Movement which started in 1990 at the behest of the A.B.S.U (All Bodo Students' Union) in protest against the negligence of the Bodo people both by the central and state government aggravated their educational problems.

For proper spread of education and dissemination of knowledge Bodo people in general and the influential A.B.S.U. in particular have been demanding the establishment of a separate university in Kokrajhar. But it is yet to be green-signaled by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Establishment of a central university in Kokrajhar will usher in the academic development not only of the economically backward Bodo students in particular but also the students of the lower Assam in general.

Like all other sectors of socio-economic life, educationally the Bodo tribal people are at different levels of development, but on the whole, formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. Prior to 1950, the Government of India had no direct programme for the education of the tribals. With the adoption of the Constitution, the promotion of education of scheduled tribes has become a special responsibility of the Central as well as of the State governments. The total picture of spread of education among the tribals is not very encouraging, barring a few tribes of north-eastern region like the Khasi, Naga, Mizo who tremendously benefited from the vast network of missionary institutions. Since education is probably the most effective instrument for ensuring equality of opportunity, the Bodo tribal people are lagging far behind their more

fortunate fellow countrymen due to lack of education. More allocation of funds and opening of schools do not go far in providing education to the Bodos. Some economic factors too are responsible for lack of interest shown by the tribal people in getting education. Since most of the tribal people are living in abject poverty under subsistence economy, it is not easy for most of them to send their children to schools. For a Bodo tribal family, to send its grown up girl or boy to school, is essentially a matter of economics, and entails dislocation in the traditional pattern of division of labour...many parents cannot just afford to send their children to school.

The Bodo people are also not able to respond properly to the educational system that has got superimposed on them both in terms of its structure and content. They are taught through the same books which form the curriculum of non-tribal children of the urban and rural areas of the rest of the state. Obviously, the contents of such books rarely appeal to the tribal children who come from different cultural background. Stories of scientific and technological progress, founders of modern India, history and geography of the country, etc. of course, form necessary part of any curriculum but the situation demands that their education should start with the teaching of demography, history and ecology of their own region and their neighbourhood. National consciousness or the consciousness of a near-by bigger culture should not be imposed from above or outside, but they should be made aware of it in a systematic manner.

Under the traditional Bodo tribal set-up a child enters adulthood with confidence. He knows his environment thoroughly, knows how to construct his own house, cultivate his field, weave his cloth : in short he acquires all his skills to lead a reasonably comfortable life within the limitations of his culture. The simple skill of reading and writing acquired in a formal school is no match for this. We cannot afford to push him back to his environment. Therefore, a balance should be struck somewhere to evolve a system of curricula where the tribal school, in addition to being a part of the national scheme, should have a supplementary curriculum adapted to the specific local conditions. In order to develop a sense of dignity among the Bodos their hobbies and activities like art, crafts, agriculture, dancing etc. must be allowed to find fullest expression in the extra-curricular activities of the school, thus providing some continuity of the traditional values and forms of organization.

A scheme is to be worked out through which the school children will be able to link-up the school and the teacher with their parents and

the tribal activities. The school has to act as a centre of disposal of simple technical know-how beyond the skills of reading and writing to become an effective agent of social change. This student -teacher - parent continuum should be able to generate a congenial atmosphere so that the broad purpose of education, which is to enable an average citizen to comprehend the social, political.economic and other processes and forces around him, is fully served. Needless to say this Utopian scheme largely depends upon suitably trained and dedicated teachers.

Infrastructure also plays a good role for developing proper educational environment. Most of the school buildings in the Bodo-dominated Kokrajhar district are in bad shape. Once built, those are hardly repaired by the Government. During the monsoon the students seat under the leaking roof. Libraries are almost non-existent. Most of the primary schools run in Bodo areas are single teacher-managed whose presence in the school is more an exception than a rule. The education of Bodo people in the education of their children also depends considerably on the timing of school hours in different seasons . It should not clash with their important socio-economic activities and events.

Prevention of Child-labour

It is largely felt that education as an alternative to child labour can be a well-established strategy in the Bodo inhabited Kokrajhar district. But it will work if people are conscious enough and they ensure full enrolment and retention of children in the formal education system. But unfortunately, enrolment is poor and universalizing education and ensuring that every child is in school is still not a reality. There are still high proportions of school dropouts, especially in higher age groups. The poor enrolment and high dropouts could in turn be due to militant activities, law and order problem, non-availability of schools, poor and irrelevant course curriculum, lack of teachers and other relevant infrastructure (like buildings, classrooms, desks, blackboards) and lack of employment opportunities after completing school. All these factors make returns from education very low and makes it unattractive for households to send their children to school.

The State, however, has to remain the main provider of education for the Bodo people, particularly at the primary level and especially for the poor. Increased community participation and Government expenditure on education and poverty eradication is a must for the solution to the problem. ♪

Introduction of Entrepreneurship Education

In the Bodo area in general and Kokrajhar district in particular, the challenges to entrepreneurship education are tremendous. In this region there have always been a shortage of trained personnel in various functional areas of management - On the one hand there are a large number of educated unemployed who are mostly looking to government to give them some jobs and on the other hand they are not adequately trained so that they can exploit their own potential. Normally, of the various resources, the human resource is considered to be the most crucial and important. Unfortunately the educated youths of this region have not realised this and also not been given exposure about managing their own projects and careers. Thus, a large number of opportunities are being lost. It is in this context that through entrepreneurship education - the important task of developing enterprising youth can be accomplished.

In order to motivate the youth to take an entrepreneurial career, it is strongly felt that entrepreneurial values need to be inculcated in them along with regular academic curriculum. Values are mostly acquired by people at an early stage of education. Values, attitudes, and motivation combined together induce the people to acquire skills and competence to achieve goals directed by values. Opportunities are now emerging for entrepreneurial activities in traditional and non-traditional areas, but the supply of entrepreneurs is not increasing. This is largely due to the absence of entrepreneurship element in educational system. The primary driving force behind the entrepreneurial spirit is a quest for personal achievement - a sense of self-satisfaction.

There exists tremendous opportunities for effective development of the entrepreneurial spirit at the termination of every educational package - school education, college and unive adding entrepreneurship as a terminal HRD intervention, the use, demand and worth of the educational package is bound to grow enormously.

Conclusion

Education being the most effective instrument of empowering the socially disadvantaged groups, all the effort should be made to improve the educational status of these groups, especially that of the women and the girl child. Infact, the educational backwardness prevalent among the Bodo people, necessitates an added thrust on their education, training and skill-upgradation as it will bring forth not only social empowerment but also economic empowerment.