

EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTH EAST

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The Context :

The basic urge of most Societies today is development. This is particularly true for the societies of North East India which have remained stagnant for centuries and now in the state of revolt against poverty, unemployment and low level of development. This revolt is again ignited by their rising aspirations for speedy socio-economic progress and is based upon the conviction that education, if planned properly, can play a key role in accelerating the process of development. Today nobody would dispute the fact that education has always worked as a major instrument to achieve the objectives of socio-economic and development of a nation. While the school education equips the society by providing enlightened work force, university education provides competent leadership for the all round development of a nation by supplying top level man power such as scientists, engineers, doctors, teachers, managers, bureaucrats, technocrats and so on. Seen from this perspective, every nation now plans education to achieve developmental goals. In our country the importance of education for development was recognized way back in 1960's by Indian education Commission whose report was then rightly titled as Educational & National Development.

But, what role education has played in the development of these North Eastern States? What is the level of socio-economic development of these North eastern States? What is the status of education in the North Eastern region? What are the shortcomings of the educational system of the region? What may be the future vision of education for the socio-economic development of the region? The present paper is an attempt to answer some of these questions.

Profile of North Eastern India :

North-East India refers to the eastern most region of India consisting of the contiguous Seven Sister States and Sikkim. North-East India thus comprises of the eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura which

contains an area of 262, 279km (about 8 percent of India) and shares a population of 40.2 millions (about 4 percent of India) as per the 2001 census.

Despite being rich in natural resources with fertile land, dense forests mineral deposits and oil reserves, In majority of the region has lagged behind the rest of the country due to historical reasons. In majority of the states, the people are tribal and are engaged in agricultural activity. The region is known for its unique culture, handicrafts, martial arts and scenic beauty. Some of the common problems of the region are insurgency, poverty, unemployment drug addition and lack of infrastructure & development.

In terms of area, Arunachal is the biggest state in the region, Assam is the second biggest and Sikkim is the smallest. The first two shares about 62% area of the region. In terms of the population, Assam is the giant with over 66% of the regional population (See Table No. 1)

Table No. 1: Showing Area, Population and Number of Districts for the North Eastern States.

Sl. No.	State	Area %	Population (2001) %	No. of Districts
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	31.94	2.71	13
2.	Assam	29.92	66.26	23
3.	Manipur	8.52	5.94	9
4.	Meghalaya	8.44	8.64	7
5.	Mizoram	8.04	2.22	8
6.	Nagaland	6.32	4.95	8
7.	Sikkim	2.71	1.34	4
8.	Tripura	4.00	7.94	4
	North East	100.00	100.00	76

Source : Census of India-2001

The growth of population of most of the NE states has been higher than all India average. In Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, the tribal population ranges between 64 and 95 percent of the States population. The region is less urbanized (except Mizoram) than the national average.

Development Scenario of the North East :

Since the process of planned development was commenced in the

early fifties after independence, there has been significant development of the different socio-economic sectors of India. But, there has been wide disparity in the level of development between and within its various regions. The process of socio-economic development is never homogenous over a large geographical space. The areas that have physical constraints, historical isolation and socio-cultural heterogeneity within themselves are bound to lag behind compared to the other states of the country.

Though the region is rich in natural resources but it is economically backward with intraregional disparities in the level of development. The major proportion of the workers remain engaged in the primary sector of agriculture alone which is based upon primitive methods of Jhum cultivation with its meager productivity. The proportion of workers engaged in the secondary sector of industries is nowhere above one percent of the total population. In the tertiary sector, especially in services, there has been significant proportion between 9 to 13% of the total population (Pathak, 1990)

In the absence of any technological progress in agriculture, the productivity of land as well as man continues to be more or less stagnant. Low agricultural productivity leads to low income which, in turn, leads to poverty. The following Table No. 2 shows the population below poverty line, per capita Income and Index of Social & Economic Infrastructure (ISEI) for different North East States.

Table No. 2 : Showing the Population Below Poverty Line and Per-Capita Income for the North Eastern States.

Sl. No.	States	Population Below Poverty line (BPL) (1999-2000)	Per capita Income (2001-02) In Rupees	Index of Social & Economic Infrastructure (ISEI),1999
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	33.47%	12,335	69.71
2.	Assam	36.09%	10,951	77.72
3.	Manipur	28.54%	13,213	75.39
4.	Meghalaya	33.87%	14,510	75.49
5.	Mizoram	19.47%	NA	82.13
6.	Nagaland	32.67%	NA	76.14
7.	Sikkim	36.55%	16,143	108.99
8.	Tripura	34.44%	NA	74.87
	All India	26.1%	17,978	---

Source : Annual Report 2004-05, Ministry of DONER (From YOJANA, December, 2005).

The above table shows that :

- (i) Except Mizoram most of the North East states fall at higher level in BPL as compared to national figure.
- (ii) Per capita income of these states is also far below than the national average.
- (iii) Comparing the index of social & economic infrastructure (ISEI) of the North-eastern states with some other Indian states like Kerala at 178.68, Punjab at 187.5, and Goa at 200.57, we find that the situation of NE states is very disappointing. All most all the North-eastern states have ISEI below 100 points except Sikkim. Situation seems to be worse in the case of Arunachal Pradesh.

Thus, we find that the development level of the people of North East is characterized by low agricultural productivity, low per capita income and poor socio-economic infrastructure. This is being reflected in wide spread poverty, unemployment, poor housing, shortage of drinking water and poor means of transportation and communication.

In spite of the rich natural resources and huge capital investment in the North East in various sectors of economy including education, the level of overall development of the North Eastern States fall far below as compare to the other states of the country. In one of the study (Pathak, 2003), to measure the level of prosperity , the economy of 25 states (excluding the union territories) have been divided into four major sectors viz. agriculture, industry, infrastructure and social and overall composite index for each state has been prepared by taking into account the progress in the above four sectors.

On the basis of their performance, the states are divided into four categories as given below :

High Category	Medium Category	Low Category	Very low Category
Punjab	Himachal Pradesh	Sikkim	Tripura
Tamil Naidu	Goa	Manipur	Nagaland
Haryana	Andhra	Bihar	Assam
West Bengal	Kerala	Jammu & Kashmir	Meghalaya
Gujarat	Kamataka		Mizoram
Maharashtra	Orissa		
	Uttar Pradesh		
	Madhya Pradesh		
	Rajasthan		

When we look to the above table, all the North-Eastern States have been found to fall in the very low category (except Sikkim and Manipur which lie in the low category). According to India Today's Survey (Aug. 15, 2005) on the best and worst states, except Mizoram, none of the North Eastern state's record speaks well in most of the counts. In most of the North Eastern states, productivity of most of the crops as well as fertilizer consumption are low and per capita electricity consumption is way below the national average. Hospital beds, doctors per 1000 population, infant mortality, life expectancy, in all counts, these states are underdeveloped.

In spite of the above dismal scenario, the majority of the people of north east do not seem to have much dissatisfaction in general simply because they evolved their own value system and social safety net which provide them immediate security and satisfaction in whatever situation they are. This may be, in a sense, positive attitude to live on. However, it is this level of satisfaction which acts as a hurdle in the way of their own future development.

Status of Education in North Eastern States :

While education is considered as an important factor in the process of development, advancement in education status is considered as an important of development itself. Progress of education in North-Eastern States may be viewed from several angles at different stages of education.

(A) Literacy Performance :

The following Table No. 3 reveals that the Literacy rate in the North-Eastern States have significantly improved over one decade.

Table No. 3 : Showing the literacy rate and rise in literacy of North Eastern states.

States	Literacy Rate %		Rise in Literacy %
	1991	2001	
Arunachal Pradesh	41.59	54.74	13.15
Assam	52.89	64.28	11.39
Manipur	59.89	68.87	8.96
Meghalaya	49.10	63.31	14.21
Mizoram	82.27	88.49	6.22
Nagaland	61.65	67.11	5.46
Sikkim	56.94	69.68	12.74
Tripura	60.44	73.66	13.22
North East	57.97	68.66	10.69
All India	52.20	65.50	13.30

Source : WWW. Census India.net.

Except Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Assam, the literacy percentage in all the north-eastern states was higher than the national average of 52.20% in 1991 and also higher than the national average of 65.50% in 2001. Except Tripura which has improved its literacy rank in 2001 and Mizoram which could retain its second position both in 1991 and 2001, the rest of the north eastern states have slide down in the All India Ranking of states. Sharp fall is recorded in Nagaland from 13th to 21st position. Two factors seem to be responsible for fall in ranking in terms of literacy rate (Lahiri, 2004).

- (i) Heavy Population growth rate (64.41% in Nagaland during 1991 to 2001) highest in the country.
- (ii) Tremendous upsurge in literacy in some of the states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Naidu, Uttaranchal, Punjab & Sikkim have pulled down the literacy rank of north-eastern states.

(B) School Education :

School Education comprises four stages: Primary, Upper Primary, Secondary and higher Secondary. Between 1986 when the Fifth All India Education Survey was conducted and 1993 when the Sixth All India Educational Survey was conducted, there has been an overall increase in the number of schools of different categories. The Table No.4 shows the percentage increase in the number of schools of different categories during the period from 1986 to 1993.

Table No. 4 : Showing Percentage Increase in the Number of Schools In Different Categories I 1993 over 1986.

Sl. No	States	Primary Schools	Upper Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Higher Secondary Schools	All Schools
1	Arunachal Pradesh	20.36	52.20	58.00	96.77	28.64
2	Assam	11.66	39.11	30.58	63.56	17.58
3	Manipur	9.64	61.01	29.75	260.00	18.90
4	Meghalaya	11.02	23.31	42.01	350.00	14.85
5	Mizoram	-6.17	31.32	58.13	---	10.81
6	Nagaland	8.31	32.30	93.68	---	18.52
7	Sikkim	11.97	-2.48	20.00	76.92	11.23
8	Tripura	5.29	3.58	20.36	52.00	8.29
	All India	7.89	17.11	24.74	53.00	11.79

Source : The Sixth All India Educational Survey.

The above figures show that the increase in the number of schools for all categories, in general, was more than the national average. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) the North-Eastern States, as special dispersion, were allowed funding pattern of 90:10 as against 75:25 at national level during 2005-06 and 2006-07 while 15% sharing in their case was borne by the Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (DONER) from the Non-lapsable Central Pool of Resources administered by them.

Under the centrally sponsored scheme of Restructuring and Reorganization of Teacher' Education, 72 DIETS and 16 CTE'S/IAS'S have been sanctioned so far for the NE States. MHRD has also sanctioned 96 kendriya Vidhalaya and 85 Jawahar Navodaya Vidhyalayas (JNV's) for the NE region (North East Today, Aug. '07). For the promotion and coordination of School Education in the North Eastern Region, NCERT, New Delhi has recently established North Eastern Regional Institute of Education (NERI) at Shillong.

(C) Higher Education :

There has been a vast expansion of higher education in the North East in last two decades. Let us now analyze the present higher education scenario of the region and compare the same with the national average to know where we stand. The table No.5 shows the present position of higher education in the various states of the north-east.

Table No. 5 : State Wise Important Indicators of Higher Education in the North East.

Sl. No.	States	No. of Universities (Including Deemed Universities)	No. of colleges	Enrolment (17-23 yrs) %
1	Arunachal Pradesh	02	08	4.86
2	Assam	05	328	5.76
3	Manipur	02	650	11.88
4	Meghalaya	01+02*	47	10.84
5	Mizoram	01	30	9.40
6	Nagaland	01	35	5.69
7	Sikkim	01+01*	07	5.69
8	Tripura	01+01*	21	4.79
	North East	14+01*	541	6.39
	All India	330	12,600	8.23

Source : MHRD Annual Report 2002-03 and Education Statistics 2000-01 (As quoted by Pathak and Gogoi, 2004) *Private Universities.

From table 5 it is clear that the percentage of enrolment in HE to total population (in the age group 17-23) in three states of North East viz., Manipur (11.88%), Meghalaya (10.84%) and Mizoram (9.40%) are above the national average (8.23%), while the states of Tripura (4.79%), Arunachal Pradesh (4.86%), Nagaland (5.69%). and Assam (5.76%) are far below the national average. To achieve the threshold target of 20% enrolment during the Eleventh Plan (2007-2012) special measures are needed for the North Eastern states. The above figures indicate that educational facilities in the North Eastern States are at par with the national average.

At present the North East has the distinction of having 10(ten) Central Universities in the region.

- (i) North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong
- (ii) Assam University, Silchar
- (iii) Tezpur University, Tezpur
- (iv) Nagaland University, Kohima
- (v) Mizoram University, Aizwal
- (vi) Manipur University, Imphal
- (vii) Central Agricultural University, Imphal
- (viii) Tripura University, Agartala
- (ix) Arunachal University, Itanagar
- (x) Sikkim University, Gangtok

Most of these universities now have faculties of arts, science commerce, engineering and management. Besides the above, the North East have the following premier institutes in the region.

- (i) North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), Itanagar.
- (ii) Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati.
- (iii) Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Shillong.
- (iv) Institute of Hotel Management, Shillong.
- (v) National Institute of Technology, Silchar.
- (vi) National Institute of Technology, Tripura.

- (vii) Tripura Medical College, Tripura.
- (viii) Guwahati Medical College, Guwahati.
- (ix) IGNOU Regional Centres in each North Eastern States.
- (x) Central Institute of Technology, Kokrajhar, Assam (w.e.f.2007).
- (xi) North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Medical and Health Science (NEIGRIHMS), Imphal.

Thus we find that the number of different levels of educational institutions have increased many times in the recent past. Earlier students from the north-east India were compelled to go to outside the region mainly for their higher studies. But now most of them can avail the opportunity from their own region without spending much money. From the above discussion it is observed that there has been a significant development in the educational scenario of the North-Eastern States of India.

Weakness of the Educational System of the North East :

It is a well established fact now that education contributes to socio-economic development of the region. But, in case of North East, the system of education is not able to contribute as much as to some other states of India. There seems to be the following shortcomings of the Educational Systems of the North East.

- (i) Though the educational expansion in the North Eastern States appears to be quite impressive, it still falls short of the demand. The educational data reveals that for all levels viz., primary, middle, secondary and higher levels, the rate of growth of educational facilities, such as schools and teachers have been lower than that of enrolment at these levels.
- (ii) There have been imbalances also in this educational expansion. Over the years higher education has grown relatively more than other levels of education. Research studies indicate that in the initial stages of development, elementary education contributes more to the economic development as compared to other levels of education.
- (iii) Vocational education could not grow in the past and all expansion has been in general education. Research reveals that it is the vocational education which contributes more to economic development than general education.

- (iv) Whatever expansion of education has taken place it is mostly quantitative and not qualitative. It has resulted in poor quality of education. The educated labour force produced by the system is not adequately equipped with the kind of knowledge, skills and values as required by the region to boost its economy.
- (v) In the North East, like other states of India, there has been an increasing problem of unemployment. The educational system has prepared the people by spending heavy cost but they are not contributing to the process of development due to unemployment.
- (vi) In spite of massive effort, the educational system of the north east could not eradicate illiteracy. We still have 26.34% people illiterate in the region (as per 2001 census). It is this illiterate population which contributes the sizable portion of the labour force in the region.
- (vii) Like other states of India, North East also adequate educational facilities have not reached in the rural areas. Rural farmers are still illiterate.

These shortcomings of the educational system are largely responsible for holding down the rate of economic growth of the North East indicating thereby the failure of our educational system to contribute to production and in turn to the process of development. The failure of the education to contribute to economic development may be attributed mainly to the two reasons.

- (i) Lack of proper linkage between education and development and
- (ii) Low level of investment in education.

Vision of Education for the Socio-Economic Development of the North East :

The very purpose of the education is to enhance the quality of life and life management systems. Education, therefore considered a powerful tool for the development of any society or nation. It is because of this reason the national plan of a country is always linked with its education plan. The Eleventh Plan (2007-12) of India has given major thrust to the investment in education and therefore it is also being referred as National Educational Plan by planners. As such there has been no separate policy of Education for the North Eastern Region, though

the region is quite different in many ways. The region is abundant in natural resources with great potential for development, literacy level of the region (68.5% as per 2001 census) is more than the national average (65.5%) and percentage enrolment in higher education is as good as it is in some of the developed regions of the country. In spite of these plus points, the region has poorly developed infrastructural facilities at all levels of education and has not been able to utilize its resources because of its failure to prepare people with the necessary competencies and skills within the region. When education fails in preparing the right kind of manpower, the socio-economic development of region is bound to suffer.

It is now agreed that education contributes to development by increasing the productivity of the labour force and converting it into human capital, which in turn, increases the GNP or Per Capita Income of the country. Education does so by increasing the knowledge, training the mind, developing the required skills, inculcating right kind of values and attitudes and raising the level of motivation and commitment. The important of human capital in the process of development is well supported by a recent World Bank study () of 192 countries which reveals that 16% of growth is explained by physical capital, 20% by natural resources and 64% by human capita.

Research further reveals that physical capital gives significant result only when it is supported by latest technology, effective management system and efficient human capital. Low productivity is due to the inability of the labour force to exploit the natural resources to the maximum and utilize the physical capital to the optimum. This inability is due to the lack of productive capacity of the masses. A programmed for capacity building of the masses is therefore urgently required. The following educational strategies may therefore, be required for the speedy socio-economic development of the north-eastern region.

1. **Elementary Education and SSA :** There has been a considerable progress in enrolment at the elementary level in last five years during the Tenth Plan (2002-07) as a result of implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the North-Eastern States, but the quality of teaching is still lacking. The goal should be for all schools to have physical infrastructure and quality of teaching equivalent to Kendriya Vidyalayas. The reason for poor quality of teaching has been the absence of trained teachers.

Teacher absenteeism is a major problem in many areas. Teacher training is also inadequate. Efforts are to be made to improve the presence and quality of teaching by appointing adequate number of trained teachers.

- 2. Non-Formal Education of Farmers :** North east economy is mainly based on agriculture. But, agricultural productivity of the rural people who are the agricultural produce is generally found low because of the lack of proper education and training in the improved methods and techniques of farming. And therefore farmers' education is of vital importance as the majority of the people are involved in agriculture. The observation reveals that agricultural productivity differs from region of within a country. For example, agricultural production is very high in some areas of north India (like Punjab, Haryana, plains of Uttaranchal and western Uttar Pradesh) but it is not so in some other parts of the country (like North Eastern States). Though there may be many reasons for this difference, farmer, education is one that seems to be quite significant. A survey of studies on farmers' productivity by Lockheed et.al (1980) concludes that four years of primary education of farmers' increased their productivity by 7.4%. The research literature further reveals that the investment in farmers' education can boost technical efficiency by increasing farmers' ability to correctly apply agricultural inputs and techniques so as to enhance agricultural productivity.

The above research studies led us to conclude that farmers' education has a positive effect on agricultural productivity and therefore, systematic efforts should be made to introduce farmers' education in the field through non-formal system of education and in the schools through formal system education.

- 3. Mass Secondary Education :** In the era of knowledge economy we cannot be satisfied with universalisation of elementary education alone. A person with a mere eight years of schooling will be as disadvantaged in the knowledge economy as an illiterate person is in modern industry. The North-Eastern States now should move towards the universalization of secondary education upto class X level and therefore should make efforts to provide access to education to all children in the age group of 6 to 16 years. A new mission for secondary education under the banner

of SSA-2 to cover up to class X is to be put in place in next five years.

4. **Vocational Schools at +2 Levels** : Education which does not develop vocational skills in pupils, may not be of much practical use when they come out of schools. Research has revealed that it is the vocational education which contributes more to the economic development than general education. It is high time that the states of North East start thinking of establishing vocational schools which provide agricultural, technological and management education in different vocations like; food science and technology, agro-products, biotechnology, electronics and instrumentation, computer science and information technology, marketing and financial management and so on. To begin with, agriculture and management as a separate stream should be introduced at 10+2 level.
5. **Technical Education for Skill Development** : Skill development in youths should be a priority area for the speedy socio-economic development of the NE states. ITI's play an important role in this direction. More ITI's in the region should be opened so that each district of the state has one ITI. The number of skills for which training is provided must be increased. Special attention should also be given to the modernization of existing it is. Private investment should also be encouraged in this area.
6. **Science and Maths Teaching** : Research studies have revealed that the Science and Maths teaching has been the weakest link at school level. As a result not many good students are able to come up to college and university level in these streams. One of the important reason for this problem has been the shortage of trained and committed science and maths teachers in the region. Other reason is ill-equipped or absence of science laboratory. These states have to take some special measures to upgrade the science and maths education by attracting motivated and trained science and maths teachers and providing well equipped science laboratories in schools.
7. **Quality Higher Education** : As described earlier, the expansion of higher education has been very fast in the North existing state and private universities. Region has one IIT, one

IIM, two NITs, four medical colleges, two institute of technology and one regional institute of education. But there is a serious problem of quality. While some of these institutions of higher education compare well with the best of the institutions of rest of India, the average standard is still much lower which need to be improved. New colleges need to be set up in remote areas of the region to provide easier access to higher education. Existing institutions must be strengthened and distance education need to be encouraged. Efforts must be made to address the issue of increasing enrolment in universities and colleges, the problem of varying standard, out dated syllabi, inadequate facilities and most of all the need to create an environment that will attract top class faculty.

8. **Calling for Investment in Education by NENRI :** In the present scenario of globalization, North East need heavy investment in education for the expansion of quality higher education. Let us give a call to all the North Eastern Non-Resident Indians (NENRI) who are living out of India to come back to North-East and invest here in the education of the North East.

Conclusion :

As compared to 1980s, the educational scene in the North-East is not bad today, The only issue is that the educational investment in the North East must contribute to the economic development of the region. If education and development are inter related then how is that the educational investment in some other Indian states like Punjab and Haryana, Karnataka and Kerala is Yielding return in terms of development but the same is not happening in the North East. It has come to be realized that the fundamental problem in development is not the creation of wealth but the creation of the capacity to create wealth- a capacity which reside in the people of the country. Our educational system should, therefore, make all efforts to develop their capacity to create wealth in our school going children and college youths. To achieve this objective there is therefore, a need to have a separate educational policy exclusively for the North East which take into consideration the unique socio-cultural features of the region and frame such a policy of education which is conducive to the socio-economic development of the North eastern States.

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