

National Seminar on Minority Education in India: Issues of Access, Equity and Inclusion

Abstract of Paper on Present Difficulties and prospects of higher and technical education in Assam with reference to the minority communities

**By
Mr Mahbubul Hoque**

Introduction

The National Policy on Education 1986, updated in 1992 envisages paying greater attention to the education of the educationally backward minorities in the interest of equity and social justice. In pursuance of the revised Programme of Action (POA) 1992, two new centrally sponsored schemes, i.e., (i) Scheme of Area Intensive Programme for Educationally Backward Minorities; and (ii) Scheme of Financial Assistance for Modernisation of Madarsa Education were launched during 1993-94.

Special Affiliations

The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions 2004 has been set up by an act parliament under which minority education institutions can seek affiliation to Scheduled Universities. University of Delhi, North Eastern Hill University; Pondicherry University; Assam University; Nagaland University and Mizoram University are at present in the Schedule.

After effects of partition

The partition of the country in 1947 had touched Assam in a way it did not in most other parts of the country. It left many of the minority communities crippled. Over a period of time, now it has been felt that all the government schemes need to be implemented in an integrated way so as to have a wider coverage, greater thrust and visibility of minority education programme so that the community can be brought out from the quagmire that the partition has left them in.

Aspiration of two valleys

The minority communities of the State are spread over the two major valleys of the State i.e. Brahmaputra valley and Barak Valley. They have many common problems but also varying aspirations.

Assam Agitation and aftermath

The eight-year long Assam Agitation led by All Assam Students Union has affected the education scenario in the state in a significant way. Its affects are felt even now. In many educational institutions it has eroded to base of discipline and serious academic pursuits.

Present position

Number of educational institutions for higher and technical studies is limited in Assam. Those parents who can afford sent their children to metro cities in mainland India. The spending power of minority community being low, they are at a disadvantage.

Present difficulties

The vast majority of the minority community's population concentration is in char or river island areas which are even today bereft of electricity, communication network or schools. Higher and Technical education for these people is not only out of reach but a luxury also.

Madarsa Education

A large number of minority community families would prefer to send their children to madarasas for primary, secondary and even higher education. But it is felt that the Madarsa education in the State has not kept up with times. It needs a relook.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)

SSA is an ambitious scheme of the Government. But it has not been able to make an impact as expected in minority belts. Only when the primary education base is strong, it would produce candidates who could aspire for higher and technical education.

Higher & Technical Education –role of private players

It is not possible for the Government to meet the entire need for institutions for higher and technical education. Private players have to come to play a role in this sector. The Education Research & Development Foundation (ERDF) has already made an initiative in this direction.

Special Problems of Minority Communities

The first generation being illiterates, the minority communities are backward in many respects. Hence the need for education is not appreciated by the people and their leaders. A social reawakening is required.

Role of NGOs

NGOs, Self Help Groups and development organisations have to play a positive role in facilitating higher and technical education among the minority communities. Banks and financial institutions too have to play a role in this.

Mentors & Role Models

The community is conspicuous for the absence of mentors and role models among its people. This needs socio-political intervention.

AMU's Reach Out centres

The AMU, it is understood, has set up some out reach centres in places like Malda, Asansol etc. Assam would perhaps need such centres in its minority dominated areas. Moreover, Examples of Crescent Academy, Al Amin Institution of South India could also be replicated here.

Christian Missionaries

The Christian missionaries have contributed significantly in the spread of education in Assam. But their contribution is mostly limited to English language teaching and non-technical education. They are also coming up now with plans of private institutions for higher and technical education.

Moulana Azad Foundation

Awareness about the activities of Moulana Azad Foundation and other Government Schemes for the benefit of minority communities is very low. Campaigns should be planned to reverse this position.

Wakf Funds

Except for Tripura, the Wakf Funds in the North Eastern States are not very well managed. In Assam, they are in a pathetic state. If the Government takes corrective steps, then a lot of libraries and hostels can be set up for the students belonging to minority communities who want to pursue higher and technical education.

Non formal educational initiatives

All the initiatives for higher and technical education need not be of formal nature. They can be on the lines of IGNOU courses also. In that case it would be more acceptable and useful for the students belonging to minority communities.

Prospects

The prospect for higher education, education in technical subjects is vast in Assam. It emphasizes the need for a much higher level of investment in education of minorities of at least two per cent of the national income.