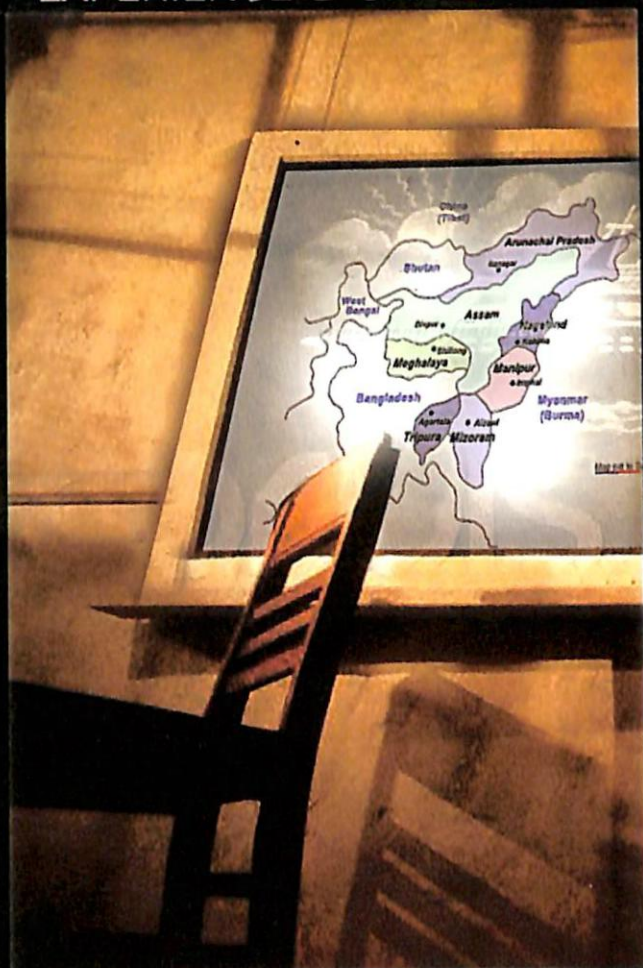


# EDUCATION IN NORTH EAST INDIA

EXPERIENCE & CHALLENGE



*Edited by*  
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## Planning Educational Development in North East India An Approach

J.B. GANGULY

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There has been significant development of the different socio-economic sectors of the north eastern states since the process of planned development was commenced in the early fifties. Basic social and economic overheads have been built up, though much more expansion of this infrastructure has to be made. State Domestic Products as well as per capita incomes and expenditures have risen considerably even as inter-household, inter-state and inter-sectoral distribution of incomes and expenditures has become more marked. Moreover, the problems of poverty and unemployment have causing miseries and deprivations to large segments of the population in each state.

According to the Planning Commission's estimates 40.04 per cent of rural population and 7.47 per cent of the urban population in the region were below the poverty line in 1999-2000. These estimates are based on the consumption expenditures for thirty days' recalled period. Percentages of total populations of these states who were below poverty line were: Arunachal Pradesh: 33.47 per cent, Assam: 36.09 per cent, Manipur: 28.54 per cent, Meghalaya: 33.87 per cent, Mizoram: 19.47 per cent, Nagaland: 32.67 per cent, and Tripura: 34.44 per cent<sup>1</sup>.

One of the root causes of persistent poverty has been the inadequate development of the most basic resource of the region, namely the human resource. According to T.W. Schultz, this resource "consists of the acquired abilities of the people—their education, experience, skills and health. This 'human capital'— not space, energy, cropland, or other fiscal properties of the earth — is decisive in improving the

welfare of the poor people throughout the World".<sup>2</sup> Besides, health care services, therefore, development and expansion of literacy and educational facilities, is of most crucial importance for promoting the welfare of this region's people.

These states have achieved good progress in raising the literacy rates of the people.<sup>3</sup> As against the all India literacy rate of 65.38 per cent, it is 54.74 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, 64.28 per cent in Assam, 68.87 per cent in Manipur, 63.31 per cent in Meghalaya, 88.49 per cent in Mizoram, 67.11 per cent in Nagaland and 73.66 per cent in Tripura.

Quite a good number of educational and training institutions have been established in these states. As in September 1996, there were all-told 11 universities, 8 boards of secondary education, 397 arts/science and commerce colleges, 5 engineering colleges, 8 medical colleges including ayurvedic colleges, 4 agricultural colleges, one veterinary college, 29 teacher training colleges, 124 junior colleges (+ two stage), 943 higher secondary schools (12+pattern), 5691 high schools, 10473 middle schools, 42901 primary schools, 4026 pre-primary schools, 16 teacher training schools, 17 polytechnics and 51 technical and industrial schools.<sup>4</sup> Since 1996, a few more specialized educational/technical/medical institutions and universities have started functioning in the region. Some of these are centrally managed and funded. Seats are also reserved in many important professional and technical institutions in other parts of the country for the students of the north eastern region. Liberal provision of stipends, scholarships and other forms of assistance in cash and/or kind enable the students of all the scheduled tribe and caste communities to prosecute their studies at all levels. Students of general categories also get state support for their education on the basis of means-cum-merit criteria.

Even as there has been considerable expansion of educational and training facilities, the structure of educational and skill formation opportunities has been a lopsided and iniquitous one. Therefore the progress has been across gender distribution of population and rural-urban divides, etc. Effective expansion of educational facilities in the urban areas and at higher levels has been disproportionately greater than that in rural areas and at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. No wonder, educational attainments of the rural people, particularly those of the remote areas and of women still lag far behind than that of the others. The drop out rates in schools are quite high.

The National Policy on Education envisaged provision of free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality up to the age of 14 years

before the beginning of the 21st Century. This goal is yet to be realized by ensuring universal access, universal retention and universal achievement. Each of the north eastern states should earnestly strive to achieve this goal on a top priority basis. The possibility of formulating and executing the Educational Guarantee Scheme as under implementation in Madhya Pradesh may be explored. For the purpose the system of delivery of primary educational facilities to the students in rural and hill areas will need to be decentralized by involving the grassroots level people's organizations, such as the gram panchayats, tribal village councils and the civil society.

Emphasis should be given on the spreading of literacy among women and effective education for girl students. For, unless female literacy rates rises, overall literacy ratio will not rise much. It must also be noted that rises in literacy levels as normally defined to mean the mere ability to read and write will not be adequate in today's Information Age. Training of people for acquiring appropriate modern skills and receiving vocational education will make people economically more productive.

Since there exists certain basic infrastructural deficiencies in the region and therefore, communication facilities for the people of the flood-prone rural areas and remote hill villages are extremely precarious, the possibilities of providing internet communication facilities for the people of these areas need to be explored. Such facilities may also benefit the children who are unable to attend the formal schools at specific hours set down in the school time-table on account of their participation in traditional productive activities for meeting subsistence needs.

An important component of development of human resource is the value-orientation of the people. The basic human values of the dignity of labour, honesty, sincerity, fellow-feeling, respect for human rights, gender equality etc., should be promoted through imparting education to the children and youths. They should also be taught to cultivate social values like community service, egalitarianism, commitment to conservation of natural resources and maintenance of bio-diversity etc. The course curricula must be secular; these should also be so designed as to inculcate scientific temper in the minds of the students.



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