

Policies, Programmes and Enrolment of Tea Tribe Children at Primary Level: Status Survey

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Abstract

Education is a major indicator of social and economic development of any country and its people. There is a history of education rights all over the world. In the Universal/United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Article 26 (1) emphasises that “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory.” Article 21A of Indian constitution also highlight that “The state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a fundamental right.” (Hence, given the RTE act which is also called for inclusive and education of disadvantaged groups.) Moreover, the tea garden worker’s children come under this group. The tea garden workers of Assam are commonly known as ‘Tea Tribe’. The tea tribe community constitutes 20 per cent of the total population of Assam. Government has put up massive plans, provisions and acts that also has clauses dealing with the education of tea garden children. In spite of this backdrop and provisioning, the educational status of tea garden children at primary level is abysmally low. This paper highlights the enrolment rate of education of tea garden children of Assam with special reference to Lakhimpur district. The analysis of the data is based on primary sources. This paper also draws conclusions pertaining to the low enrolment in spite of government initiative at the State and center level.

INTRODUCTION

Description About Tea Tribe

The tea garden workers are characterised as a specific group of

people who are aboriginal tribe of India, but not of the state of Assam. During the colonial period, the British planters brought some people from different origins and different places

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of India such as Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and Orissa into tea gardens of Assam to engage them as labourers for tea cultivation. The tea garden workers are not the sole ethnic group; they have multi-culture and tradition, multi races and multi-language (Baishya, 2016).

Simply speaking the tea garden workers of Assam are called the Tea Tribe, also known as Adivasi (Chopra 2016). National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) stated that the tea tribe community has relative backwardness, as a result, they fall under the Other Backward Class (OBC) of Assam. They have been struggling for their original identity as Schedule Tribe status in Assam, because they are not sole ethnic group and tribe, in fact, they consist of ST's, SC's and OBC's of the different State of India. However, in Assam the tea tribe community is grouped together with the 96 subgroups in the central list of OBCs. The concept of tea tribe includes tea garden labourers, tea garden tribes, ex tea garden labourers and ex tea garden tribes.

Government Policies and Programmes

Education is an essential tool through which one can enhance their all-round development. Primary education can be considered as the cornerstone which can provide a strong basis for further education. In the twenty first century a major shift has been observed in the primary education in India by

introducing a flagship program Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA, 2001) with the objectives to enhance quality education and make it accessible to all with two other centrally sponsored schemes named as Rashtriya Madhymik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels of school education in accordance with the sustainable development goals (SDG) for education. This integrated scheme is known as Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan.

Meanwhile some other initiatives are also taken to strengthen the primary education. Among them Right to Education Act (RTE Act, 2009) provides a justifiable plan to enhance the improvement of all aspect of primary education. This act is also called for quality, equitable and inclusive education for the children of disadvantage group which includes free and compulsory elementary education, Neighborhood School, age-appropriate class, through activity and discovery method of teaching, psycho-social development of the children, social equity by making provisions of 25 per cent reservation in the private school, suitable teacher pupil ratio at 30:1 for primary level and 35:1 upper primary. However, the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyaan scheme mainly aims to support the states in the implementation of this act. Due to enormous government programs and enrolments drives, the enrolment of children in primary level is being increasing. This is highlighted in

the study of Urvashi Sahni (2015) and also highlighted that the problems have been addressed related to access to education and infrastructure as India has 1.4 billion schools and 7.7 billion teachers. Sandeep Sharma and at all (2020) also pointed out that the enrolment of primary education has been improved in India after launching signature initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA), United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India is the second most populated county in this world where 20 per cent children having six to fourteen age groups are not enrolled in primary school (Urvashi Sahni, 2015).

In India the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary level is 92.56 percent in 2018–2019 (UDISE). As it has been observed the enrolment ratio is declined in compare to the year 2017–2018, which were 102.79. According to ASER (Annual State of Education Report, 2020) a nationwide survey of rural education in terms of reading and arithmetic skills conducted by the NGO Pratham, the children between the age group 6 to 14 got enrolled 65.8, 28.8, 0.8 in government, private and other school (Madarsa etc) respectively. It clarified that above 60 percent children enrolled in government schools and near 30 percent enrolled in private schools whereas 4.6 per cent children are not enrol in school. From the above discussion it can be said that the status of enrolment of children in

primary level is quite satisfactory but on the other hand the children belonging to backward groups are still depriving from primary education in rural areas. Tea tribe children also comes under the disadvantaged group and despite the numbers of government schemes, policies their condition is improvised.

There are many studies which throw light on the fact that the children living in tea garden area have gone through different difficulties for instance, poor academic performances due to language difficulties, school environment is not conducive, school drop-outs, lack of facilities related to drinking water and playground, absent of co-curricular activities, low number of female teachers and lack of trained teachers in the findings of Sarma & Rabha (2020). The similar findings also shown in the study of Gogoi, 2015 that reveals that there is lack of educational facilities such as teaching learning material, school building, and playground, school dropouts and poor academic highlighted in the study of Saikia, 2016. Low enrolment rate also found in the study done by Saikia, 2017; Bosumatari & Goyari (2013) pointed out some factors are responsible for low literacy and drop-out rate such as economic backwardness of the family, negligence of girl's education, non-availability of school, early marriage, etc.

NEW EDUCATION POLICY

Later on, a kind of flexible and broad based, National Education Policy 2020

came in to light with the objectives to localise the education system by encouraging regional languages as a medium of instruction in both public and private schools. It also made provisions of inclusive education to incentivise the merits students belonging to SC, ST, OBCs and other socio-economic backward groups by expanding the National Scholarship Portal to support, foster and track the progress of students receiving scholarship. With the help of proper implementation of this policy can meet the local needs and can improve their condition as well.

Moreover, some other relevant programs, schemes and acts are described in the following accelerates the educational status of the tea garden community:

The Plantation Labour Act (PLA), 1951 under this act the Tea Garden Management Companies are responsible to provide provisions related to health, water, sanitation, canteen, crèches, recreational facilities, housing facility and educational facilities for the benefits of plantation workers and their families. According to this Act, for the children between the age of 6 and 12 of the workers employed in any plantation exceeding twenty-five in number, the State Government may make rules, requiring every employer to provide educational facilities to the children in such manner and standard as it may be prescribed. Moreover, the Assam Plantation Rules, 1956 highlights some rules for the employer

in regards to education facility of the tea garden workers children such as—(i) constructing and managing primary school with respect to education under section 14 rules 52. (ii) under the rules 53 and 56, some parameters should be set in respect to construction of school building, spaces for playground, and norms for the pupil teacher ratio (PTR), qualification for teachers, duration of curriculum, the standard and syllabus of the course of instruction. (iii) to impart free education according to rules 57 and to make provisions, facilities related to the workers children and to empower the state government to constitute an advisory board under the rules of 57A.

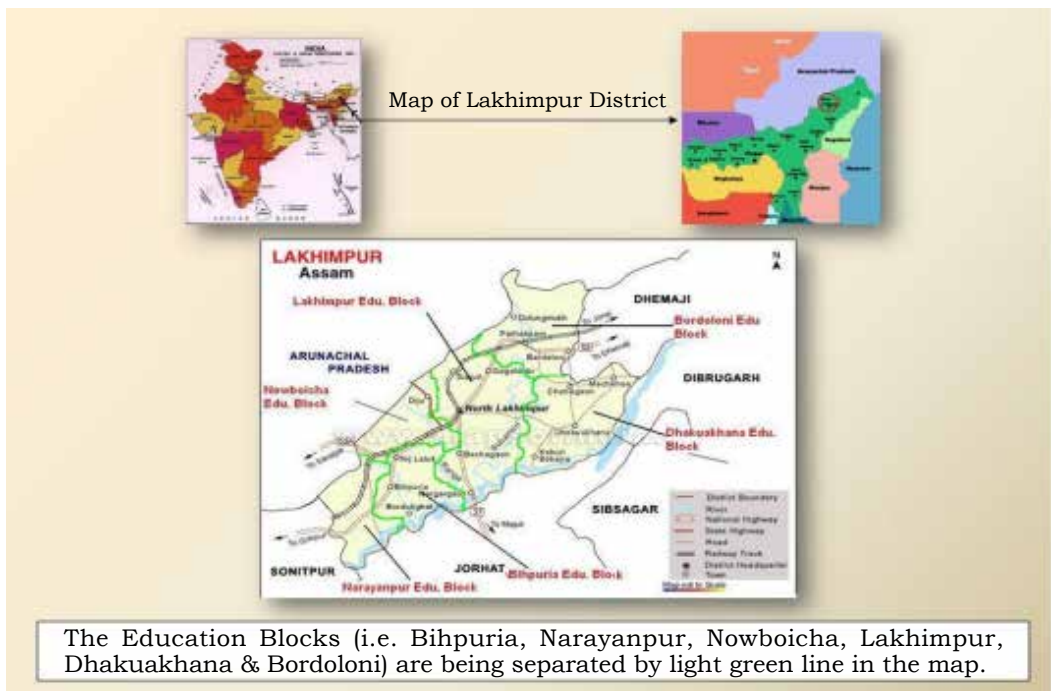
Under RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan), the Assam government has initiated to establish 100 new UP (Upper Primary) school in tea garden area. There is limited UP school in tea garden area. In order to enhance enrollment in primary and upper primary level, the government has taken progressive to upgrade the existing LP (lower primary) and UP schools to High schools up to Class X. To bring disadvantaged section in to mainstream part of the society an initiative was taken by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Under this, a project was launched by the Assam government for the development of education of tea tribe community. The major initiatives are construction of 119 model high school and road in tea garden, Mobile medical units, and financial assistance

for self-employment, Scholarship to meritorious students, etc.

Profile of Lakhimpur District

Tea more commonly produced in tea gardens of Lakhimpur District which is an administrative district of Assam. According to Tea Board of India, there are 14 A+ grade tea gardens in India from which 8 A+ grade tea garden situated in the Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh District of Assam. There are eleven tea gardens in the Lakhimpur district. In this district, the

tea garden labour population is about 50,000 out of 1,200,706 the overall population of Lakhimpur district (District of India, 2019). In Assam, the overall enrolment of children in primary level is 105.64 per cent in the year 2018. The tea garden authorities have the responsibilities to educate the tea garden worker's children as per the rules under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Subsequently, they established some primary schools in each tea garden and those schools are named as Tea Garden Managed School.



Source: Google image

Tea Tribe and their Status of Education

Generally, the schools of tea gardens are limited to Elementary levels. There are two types of school management in tea garden area of Assam. Firstly, government school which is run, funded, managed by the government. Secondly, Tea Garden Managed School is operated by the tea garden authorities. The levels of school are Primary level (I–V), Upper primary (VI–VIII) and Composite school (primary to upper primary I–VIII).

The gross enrolment of tea tribe children at the elementary level which is about 251, 105 out of 7,760,346 (DISE data 2019–2020) of the total enrolment of children between the age group of 6–14 of the state of Assam, which represents only 3.24 per cent of the total enrolled children at elementary level inside and outside of the tea garden area of Assam. There are three Educational Blocks in Lakhimpur district which are, Bihpuria Block, Lakhimpur Block, Nowboicha Block.

Table 1
Showing the Blocks and Tea Garden Wise Population and Enrolment of Tea Tribe Children in Lakhimpur District

Sl. No.	Block Name	Tea Garden	Child Population (6–14 years) Boy Girl	Enrolment (Primary level) Both Boy and Girl	% of Child Enrolment	
1.	Bihpuria Block (1)	(i) Harmoti T.G	423	498	152	16.50%
2.	Lakhimpur Block (6)	(i) Johing T.G	562	538	209	19.00%
		(ii) Kailomari T.G	393	368	134	17.60%
		(iii) Chinatoli T.G	453	441	205	22.93%
		(iv) Seajuli T.G	220	214	150	34.56%
		(v) Ananda T.G	597	543	226	19.82%
		(vi) Pathalipam T.G (Hindi)				
3.	Nowboicha Block (4)	(i) Doolahat T.G	497	450	258	27.24%
		(ii) Tunijan T.G				
		(iii) Silonibari T.G	193	195	121	31.18%
		(iv) Dezoo T.G	505	788	281	21.73%

Source: Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) and Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE), Assam (2019–2020).

Table 1 depicts the enrolment and its percentage of tea tribe children in three educational blocks named as Bihpuria, Lakhimpur and Nowboicha in Lakhimpur district. In Bihpuria block, there is one tea garden which has one primary school. The overall population of tea tribe children in this block is about 921 under the age group of 6–14 years. Out of this population, boy and girls are 423 and 498 respectively. The total enrolment of this age group children is 152, which covers 16.50 per cent of the population.

Moreover, in Lakhimpur Block there are six tea gardens such as Johing T.G, Kailomari T.G, Chinatoli T.G, Seajuli T.G, Ananda T.G, Pthalipam T.G and each has one tea garden managed primary schools. In Johing tea garden 562 and 538 are boys and girls from which approximately 209 are enrolled at the primary level covering 19 per cent of the population. Whereas, Kailomari tea garden has 393 and 368 boys and

girls respectively and about 134 are enrolled at primary level and covers 17.60 per cent of the population.

Whereas Kailomari tea garden has 393 and 368 boys and girls respectively, and about 134 are enrolled at the primary level and covers 17.60 per cent of the population.

In Chinatoli tea garden, 205 are enrolled at the primary level which comes to 22.93 per cent of the total children population where 453 and 441 are boys and girls respectively.

In the tea garden of Seajuli, 220 and 214 are boys and girls respectively. Out of the total 434 students, only 150 students are enrolled at the primary level, which covers only 34.56 per cent.

Furthermore, there are 597 and 543 boys and girls respectively in both the Ananda and Pthalipam tea garden, out of this 226 are get enrolled in primary school and they cover 19.82 per cent of the total population.

Thereafter, both Doolohat and Tunijan tea gardens have 497 and 450

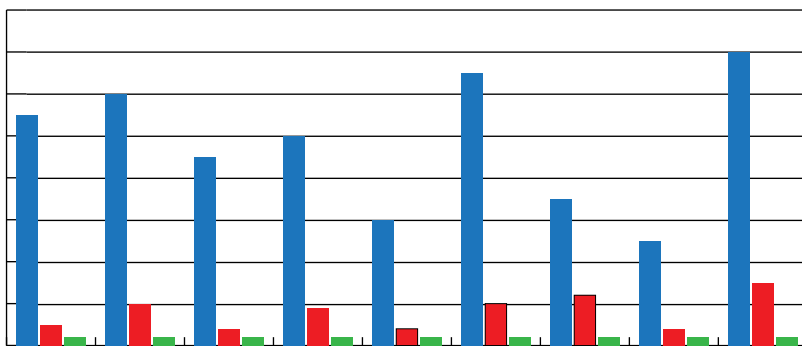


Figure 1

(Source: Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) and Directorate of Elementary Education (DEE), Assam).

tea tribe boys and girls respectively in the age group of 5–15 years. A total of 258 students are enrolled at the primary level covering 27.24 per cent of the total population.

In Silonibari tea garden 193 boys and 195 girls are tea tribe children where 121 are enrolled and covers 31.18 per cent of the overall population.

The Dezoo tea garden constitutes 505 boys and 788 girls, where 281 tea tribe children are enrolled with 21.73 per cent of the total population.

The current status of enrolment and percentage of enrolment of tea tribe children in the tea gardens of Lakhimpur District is given in Figure 1.

Table 2
Overall Population and Enrolment and Percentage of Enrolment of Tea Tribe Children in Three Blocks of Lakhimpur District.

Block Name	Overall tea tribe population (Age group of 6–14 years)	Overall enrolment and percentage (%) of enrolment of tea tribe children at primary level
BIHPURIA	921	152(16.50%)
LAKHIMPUR	4329	924(21.34%)
NOWBOICHA	2628	660(25.11%)

Table 2 depicts the overall enrolment of tea tribe children in each block of Lakhimpur district. In Bihpuria block the total child population is about 921 of which 152 are enrolled at the primary level. On the other hand, there are 4,329 tea tribe children in Lakhimpur Block where 924 are admitted at the primary

level. In Nowboicha Block there are 2,628 tea tribe children of which 660 are of enrolled.

Figure 2 shows the overall population and enrolment, and percentage of enrolment of tea tribe children in three blocks of Lakhimpur District.

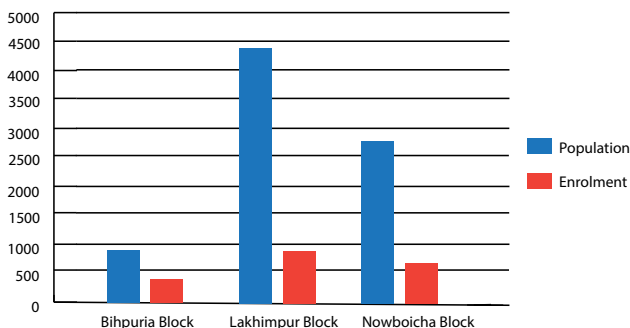


Figure 2

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data shown above reveals that there is low enrolment of tea tribe children in the tea garden schools. It highlighted the vast difference between the overall population and the total number of children actually enrolled between 6–14 years age groups. With only 1,736 enrolled among the overall population of 7,878, it can be said that only 22.04 per cent of the tea tribe children are enrolled in the tea garden schools of Lakhimpur district in Assam.

CONCLUSION

From the ongoing discussion it can be concluded that the enrolment of tea garden workers children in tea garden schools are not satisfactory. Although, the government has taken numerous measures to improve the

condition of their education they still lag behind even at the enrolment stage. The different research studies also highlighted the same evidences including poor academic performances and lack of trained teachers (Sarma & Rabha, 2020); lack of teaching learning material, school building, and playground (Gogoi, 2015); school dropouts (Saikia, 2016); low enrolment rate (Sarma, 2009; Saikia, 2017); economic backwardness of the family, negligence of girl's education, non-availability of school, early marriage, etc., (Bosumatari & Goyari, 2013). In a nutshell, efforts should be made to bring about the holistic development of tea tribe children. There is a need for interventions from both the center and state, district and block levels, workers union bodies and local bodies, to mitigate the various roadblocks in all the aspects of their life.

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