LOCAL BODIES AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

Local bodies in Assam did very little for the promotion of education till 1882 as they commanded limited power and meagre finance. After the reconstitution of Assam as a separate province, four different kinds of Funds were created - the District Reserve Fund, the District Road Fund, the District Primary School Fund, and the Miscellaneous Improvement Fund. The Primary School Fund administered by the District School Committee had to allot money for the expansion of primary education. The Fund was enriched by grants by local bodies from land revenue sources. For better facility of administration, the funds were brought under the District Improvement Fund. But the scheme of having different funds could not work satisfactorily as they did not have sufficient money to spend for local purposes. The attempt made after the Resolution of Lord Mayo in 1870 for the introduction of local self-government did not materialise as there existed no local taxation system for local purposes. It was only in 1879 that the Chief Commissioner introduced the Local Rates Regulations which for the first time introduced 'local rates for local purposes'. According to this new regulation, a cess was levied on all lands in addition to land tax and local cesses. Five-eights of local income was given to the district bodies for the improvement of roads and communications.

The Resolution of 1870 introduced local self-government. But the various District Committees - like the District Improvement Committee, the District Road Committee - could not work satisfactorily because of the fact that the official members who commanded a majority in the committees did not worry much about the improvement
of conditions of the local people.

The second attempt for the enlargement of the powers and functions of the local bodies was made in 1881 when the provincial Governments accepted the suggestions for reform made by the Government of India. The Government of India suggested the reduction of official members in the district committees from one-half to one-third, the transfer of grants-in-aid from these committees to schools and dispensaries, and the transfer of the entire local rates together with a large portion of the provincial expenditure to these committees.\(^3\) The Government of Assam had to dep provincia­lise certain services increasing, at the same time, the powers of the district bodies. In the educational sphere, the district committees were entrusted with the sole management of primary education, The Government also decided to transfer the aided Middle and lower Middle Schools, the police primary schools and lower Normal Schools of Goalpara to the control of the district committees.\(^4\)

Reform in 1882

The most important reforms in local bodies were introduced by Lord Ripon, Viceroy of India, through the Resolution of 1882.\(^5\) He desired that local bodies should develop as an instrument of political and popular education by having non-official members in a majority, with non-official chairmen and adequate financial resources. Discarding the fear expressed by some members that the men were not sufficiently educated to run the local administration, the Resolution stated that local bodies should learn to work even 'at the risk of a temporary period of administrative inefficiency'. Following the Resolution, district committees were abolished in Assam and every sub-division was made the administrative area of a
Local Board. Attempts were made to have non-official members in a majority in these bodies for greater participation of the people in local administrative activities. The resources of these bodies came from three sources, viz., Government grant, tax revenue on property and trade, and non-tax revenue consisting of rent from lands, houses, fees from educational institutions, and charges realised from the market and commercial undertakings. The main items of expenditure were: (i) public health and sanitation, (ii) public works and communications, and (iii) public instruction. Thus, the Resolution of 1882 empowered the Local Boards to establish, aid, manage and control the primary schools. It also authorised the Boards to exercise general supervision and give grant-in-aid to the lower middle schools also.

Enlargement of powers as suggested by the Education Commission

The Indian Education Commission of 1882 had also emphasised the importance of local bodies in the matter of expansion of primary education. Stating that primary education should be declared to form part of the whole system of public instruction together with an almost exclusive claim on local funds set apart for education, the Commission had also pointed out that it could also have a large claim on provincial revenues. Further, the Commission emphasised the increasing role of the municipal and district Boards in the matter of expansion of primary education. The most important recommendation of the Commission was that both the municipal and local Boards should have separate school funds so that moneys raised through cess in rural areas could not be spent on schools in the urban areas. Again, past experience showed that common funds created for miscellaneous works either by municipalities or local Boards did not lay adequate
stress on the allotment of a definite sum for education. Instances were there when money earmarked for education was diverted to other purposes. Therefore, the Commission suggested that separate funds for education should be created in each municipality or Local Board. It was suggested that Municipal School Fund should consist of: (a) a fair proportion of municipal revenues to be fixed in each case by the local Government; (b) fee income from Schools wholly maintained out of the municipal school fund; (c) any assignment that might be made from the local school fund to the municipal school fund; (d) assignments from provincial funds; (e) any fund that might be assigned to the municipality for the promotion of education; (f) any unexpended balance of the school fund from the previous years. The Local Board School Fund similarly should consist of: (a) a distinct share of the general local fund - this share should not be less than a minimum proportion to be prescribed for each province; (b) fee income from schools wholly maintained at the cost of the school fund; (c) contributions coming from the municipal and provincial funds; (d) any other fund that might be entrusted to the Local Boards for education; and (e) any unexpended balance of the School fund from the previous years. Thus, the Commission recommended that more power should be given to the school boards to handle funds, and to undertake the responsibility of preparing annual budgets. The Municipal and Local Boards were made responsible for the proper maintenance of the primary schools and that responsibility included both the construction and repair of school buildings. The Commission also laid emphasis on the principle of aiding and improving the indigenous schools that existed in the areas covered by the Local Boards. Further, it should be pointed out that the Commission not only gave power to the local bodies to handle financial matters in
accordance with rules prescribed by the Education Department, but it also empowered them to appoint school teachers and to promote or remove them, as occasions so arose, with the approval of the Education Department. With the acceptance of the recommendations of the Commission by the Government in 1884, the local bodies secured wider opportunities for the expansion of primary education. It was indeed a very wholesome development.

**Introduction of payment-by-result system**

The Commission suggested a new principle for giving grant-in-aid to primary schools. Payment-by-result system was introduced. Under this system grants were to be given to schools on the basis of student performance in examinations conducted by the inspecting officers. The system seems to have been based on the idea that progress would be attained on the basis of healthy competition among pupils.

The system as such existed in Assam even before 1882. Now, with the acceptance of the Commission's recommendations, it was continued with slight changes. Instead of giving rewards to teachers on the number of successful pupils, fixed pay was given to the teachers supplemented by rewards under the reward rules. To cite an example from an official source, a teacher was given a 'fixed salary of Rs 8 and a capitation allowance, calculated on the number of pupils in the upper classes, which yields him on an average an income of Rs 6 a month'. This system was applied to all the primary schools in the plains. Incidentally, the great bulk of the lower primary schools were under the control of the Local Boards. As far as the hills areas were concerned, nearly all the schools there were maintained by the missionaries. Thus, under the new system as applied to the hills, lump sum grants were given from provincial funds to
the missionaries. The new system of grant-in-aid continued in Assam till 1917.

Active interest shown by the Government from 1902 to 1921

The responsibility of local bodies for expanding primary education was further emphasised by Lord Curzon in the Government Resolution of 1904. He stressed that 'in so far as District or municipal boards are required to devote their funds to education, primary education should have a predominant claim upon their expenditure'. The newly formed local bodies did not show much interest for the expansion of primary education. Therefore, the Resolution provided that budget estimates on educational charges of District or Municipal Boards should be submitted through the Inspector to the Director of Public Instruction before sanction. Thus the Education Department worked as the supervisory body and, a link between these two bodies was expected to be maintained by the inspecting officer. The Resolution made the local bodies responsible for the improvement of primary schools and the differentiation of courses of rural schools from those in the urban areas. It suggested reform in the curriculum with a view to imparting basic knowledge to make men better; for instance, it wanted to make cultivators intelligent cultivators. It also suggested the replacement of the payment-by-result system by the improved method of grant-in-aid.

The Resolution of 1913 envisaged the expansion and possible extension of primary education on a voluntary basis. Expansion was to be secured by means of board schools, 'except where financially impossible when aided schools under recognised management should be encouraged'. It did not encourage any great distinction between the curricula of rural and urban primary schools but suggested the introduction of practical teaching in
geography. It also suggested school excursions and nature study in the former schools.

"These are the various ways through which the local bodies were entrusted with the responsibility of extending the sphere of primary education.

**Enlargement of powers of local bodies in Assam**

The Assam Local Self Government Act of 1915 gave wider powers to local bodies to manage all affairs of a local nature falling under their responsibility. A local board was to be charged with the responsibility for the establishment, maintenance and management of all primary and middle vernacular schools under public management within a sub-division. It was to be responsible for the appointment of teachers and payment of their salaries. It could be charged with the responsibility for the establishment, maintenance and management of any other school or classes and could give grant-in-aid to such schools. Stipends and scholarships could be awarded by the local boards.  

The Act of 1915 gave local bodies more powers to look after the educational activities in their areas of operation. But the provision in the Resolution authorising the management of schools other than primary schools also appeared to be premature in view of the glaring reality that an insignificant 3.34% of only of the entire population was literate. Such being the situation, primary education should have had an exclusive claim on local funds.

**Enrichment of local funds by imperial grants**

During this period the local bodies received a number of grants for expenditure on primary education. The Government of India released imperial grants of several lakhs of rupees to be spent on primary education - Rs 40 lakhs in 1902, Rs 35 lakhs in
1904, Rs 50 lakhs in 1912-13 and Rs 30 lakhs in 1918-19.\textsuperscript{14}

These grants were made to the provincial governments. Naturally, therefore, the provincial governments could now grant larger funds to the local bodies. But even with this increased grant, the local bodies did not have funds enough to meet the minimum needs in the field of educational expansion. Local Boards in India spent only 9.2% of the total expenditure on education while the municipalities spent only 4.3% on education. In Assam, the percentage of expenditure on education from local funds stood respectively at 11.1 and 1.1. Out of the total educational expenditure of Rs 34,83,928 in Assam, Rs 3,86,036 and Rs 37,765 only were spent by the local bodies and municipalities in 1921-22.\textsuperscript{15} The following table serves to show the expenditure incurred by the local bodies and municipalities over the years on education:\textsuperscript{16}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Local funds</th>
<th>Municipal funds</th>
<th>Grand total of exp.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881-82</td>
<td>63,345</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>3,11,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904-05</td>
<td>377,152</td>
<td>9,218</td>
<td>10,46,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915-16</td>
<td>726,152</td>
<td>43,010</td>
<td>26,87,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>413,743</td>
<td>26,198</td>
<td>30,34,217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures show that from a meagre sum in 1881-82, local funds increased to some respectable dimensions by 1915-16. But then the World War I intervened with the result that the amounts began decreasing as revealed by the figures for 1919-20. The aftermath of the War had very depressing effects on the economy of the belligerents including the British India Government. Further, funds
had to be diverted urgently to meet the situation created by earthquakes, floods and cyclones. The local bodies had also their share of difficulties due to these calamities. The result was that education became the casualty. The funds that had to be diverted came to be restored gradually, but on many occasions the local bodies could not manage to restore the sums under the head of education because of the generally depressing economic conditions. Instead of helping the Boards to come up in such circumstances, the higher authorities wanted to punish certain Boards as in Sibour by refusing to allow them to participate in the imperial grant of one lakh of rupees for their failure to restore the previous sums on education.17

Another aspect of the situation deserves attention. Some local boards spent little and certain others like Habigang practically nothing on education. As for the municipalities, some of them did spend the prescribed minimum of 3% of their income while the Shillong municipality spent 0.6% of its income and the Sunam and Maulvi Bazar municipalities did not spend anything on education.18 This showed that local bodies spent money at different rates even in 1921.

Powers enjoyed by local bodies under dyarchy

Under dyarchy, the local bodies acquired more power to control education. The Act of 1919 stated, 'there should be, as far as possible, complete popular control in local bodies and largest possible independence for them of outside control'.19 The power of the Education Department to control and determine the activities of the local bodies was curtailed by this Act and these bodies were given the right to determine their own course of action. It was laid down that members in any educational committees were to be
elected, that they should have elected heads, and that they would be responsible to the people only for their activities. The local bodies were given the power to increase their revenue by raising taxes, levying cess, or by securing grants from the government. They had the power to adjust their financial resources and to allot money according to the strength of the funds. The Government were not to interfere in financial matters except in case of gross negligence.

The compulsory Primary Education Act of 1926 made the local bodies more responsible for the introduction of compulsory primary education in their areas, leaving, however, the decision to the majority of the members in the education committees. Education Committees were to be formed with the right to enforce compulsion in the areas allotted to them and to compel parents to send their wards to schools. The local bodies were free to distribute grants to schools, to raise money by levying cess when necessary, and to manage their administrative activities. The power and freedom secured under this Act, though compulsion was not in fact introduced in any part, freed the local bodies from the control of the Education Department.

Increase in the number of primary schools

Establishment, management and aiding of primary schools formed part of the responsibility of the local bodies in Assam. In 1904, local bodies managed 1,892 primary schools; the figure increased to 3,374 in 1920 and 4,809 in 1936-37. The number of aided schools increased from 617 in 1904 to 816 in 1937. During the same period, the number of secondary schools managed by local bodies increased from 122 to 213. But the rate of increase in the number of primary schools was extremely slow compared to the vast number
of illiterate persons and the increased powers enjoyed by the local bodies. Alert and efficient local bodies, bodies sympathetic to the people, could have increased the number of primary schools. It seems devolution of power bringing in its wake larger powers for the local bodies did not lead to the exercise of these powers in the interest of mass education. Evidently, education was not yet considered as a most important duty of statutory bodies.

Failure of local bodies to provide more funds

It was generally expected that under dyarchy the local bodies would spend more money for the spread of mass education. But the contribution of local bodies to the total educational expenditure was meagre considering the responsibility given them for the introduction of compulsory education. In 1936-37, they spent 13.24% of the total educational expenditure in Assam as against 12.73% in 1930. The following table gives a revealing picture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1931-32</th>
<th>1936-37</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Board Fund</td>
<td>2,68,294</td>
<td>3,10,141</td>
<td>41,847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total expenditure</td>
<td>12,22,269</td>
<td>13,20,453</td>
<td>98,184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increase of local funds by Rs 41,847 was not much in comparison with the needs of the situation. The increase in total expenditure was also inconsequential. In 1919-20, the amount of local funds stood at Rs 4,13,743 and that of the municipalities amounted to Rs 26,198. The reduction by almost 50% was due to the abolition of imperial grants and transfer of some funds from provincial to central government. In spite of the power enjoyed by the local bodies to raise funds for the cause of educational progress, no
educational cess was levied by them for fear of losing popularity among the people. The position was such that even in 1937 the amount of local funds spent on education could not come up to the level of expenditure reached in 1919-20.

**Diversion of local funds for schools other than primary schools**

Throughout the period under review, i.e., from 1882-1937, the local bodies diverted a portion of their meagre resources for other stages of education also. In 1902-03, the local bodies spent 74.35 per cent for secondary, 2.36 per cent for training, .80 per cent for special schools, 10.56% on indirect expenditure, and 72.17 per cent for primary schools. In 1919-20, the percentage of expenditure on secondary schools from local funds increased from 9.57 in 1915-16 to 17.67, and from municipal funds the percentage of expenditure increased from 23.3 to 35.63; this had the inevitable effect of decrease in expenditure on primary schools. Thus, the decrease was from 74.96% to 59.25% under local funds, and from 65.74% to 37.31% under municipal funds. Even in 1937 this diversion from local funds continued to the great detriment of primary education. Such diversion from local funds and in an increased rate did not fulfill the provisions made in Government Resolutions of 1884 and 1904 that primary education should have an exclusive claim on local funds.

**Conclusion**

Local bodies in India were created by Lord Ripon's reforms and these were entrusted with the care of primary education on the same basis as the school boards did in England after 1870. The difference lay in the fact that while the local bodies in India were created by an executive order, the boards in Britain were created by legislation. Lack of legislation was the most striking
trait in the Indian system. This deficiency caused lack of the required alertness, initiative and sincere efforts on the part of the local bodies. In England a series of Acts were passed designed to make compulsory education a real success. A similar effort in India would have been highly conducive to the cause of expansion of primary education.

Local bodies in Assam came to be organised and developed after 1882 and these proved to be the main agency for the expansion of primary education. In Bengal, most of the primary schools were started and improved by private bodies and voluntary organisations while in Assam most of them were organised by the local bodies. However, it deserves to be noted that the local bodies in Assam failed to utilise their opportunities to the full in the matter of promoting the cause of expansion of primary education. The compulsory Primary Education Act was passed in 1926, but not a single local body came forward to implement it. Lack of measures to enforce compliance under the provisions of the Act led to failure in the matter of expanding primary education.

The Education Department could not intervene effectively due to the absence of any effective penal provision in the Act. The Department did not have the power to compel the local bodies to distribute funds properly. On the other hand, suggestions made after inspection by the local education officers for the improvement of the schools were very often ignored. No local body took any action to remedy the defects complained of in the inspection reports. The municipalities, better off than the local boards, did not take any initiative in submitting schemes to the Government for the introduction of compulsory primary education. Neither did they take any initiative to raise
money for primary education by levying education cess. They usually looked to the Government for grants. Naturally, therefore, no scheme of compulsory primary education was introduced by any municipality even at the end of dyarchy for the simple reason that municipalities avoided such responsibility on the ground of finance. The local boards, by and large, followed suit as they were not under any legal obligation to explain their activities to the Department.

Freedom of action enjoyed within their allotted sphere by the local bodies did not make them responsible in matters of proper management of educational affairs. No particular policy was followed in the distribution of grants. Instances were there when grants were refused to needy schools. Irregularity was too frequent in the matter of distribution of grants with the result that teachers sometimes did not get their salary for months together. On the other hand, members of the local bodies could not appreciate the value of education properly and it was this that must have led them at times to utilise educational grants for agricultural and other purposes, leaving the schools to suffer from extreme financial hardship. Even the grants for building and equipment were utilised for other purposes. The result was that many schools had to be closed down due to financial difficulties. Failure to appreciate properly the value of education led to such unhappy results.

These defects were not peculiar to Assam. India as a whole suffered from the general malady. The Report of the Hartog Committee criticised the excessive devolution of authority which brought about the defects observed practically in all the local bodies. It stated that under recent legislation, powers had devolved on local bodies in such a way that the ministers responsible...
to the legislature had no effective control over the expenditure of money voted for mass education; and that in some cases owing to inadequacy of inspection they had little information as to the results of that expenditure. Excessive devolution of powers to local bodies and lack of control over the expenditure led to mismanagement in the administration of primary education. Such a situation was undoubtedly created to a large extent by the rather inexperienced and comparatively uneducated members of the local bodies who failed to realise the true value of education. The Committee stated, 'there is ample evidence that local bodies are very inexperienced in the difficult work of educational administration, that they are often reluctant to consult educational officers and that in consequence there is much that is wasteful and ineffective in the present system'. Much extra-academic considerations prevailed in certain matters. There were powerful Chairmen who arranged for the appointment of their favourites as teachers. The Hartog Committee itself had reported that some teachers spent more time in paying visit to the quarters of the Chairmen and members of the local bodies in order to curry favour with them, to secure transfers or to retain their existing posts. Such malpractices led the Committee to recommend increased powers for the Education Department. It was pointed out that quality could be increased and expansion made possible if the local bodies were brought under proper supervision. It was also recommended that Ministers should have effective control over local bodies and their educational expenditure.

The Government of Assam considered the question of introducing a set of rules clearly defining the functions of the local bodies and the Education Department. It was proposed that the Government
should withdraw all grants from the local bodies if they did not follow the directions given by the Education Board proposed to be established. The establishment of a provincial Primary Education Board was envisaged as it was thought that 'there is no doubt that the progress of primary education has been handicapped by division of authority between Government and local bodies. At the last session of the Council a resolution proposing the creation of a primary education board was passed which appears to indicate general acceptance of the view that more united control is needed'.

It was proposed that the Minister in charge of Education would be the head of the Board which would outline policy, control expenditure, and insist through local committees on regular payment, appointment of qualified teachers and a proper distribution of grants. A Bill incorporating these proposals designed to bring about centralised control over primary education was circulated to elicit public criticism. It would have been a good experiment to gear up the activities of the local bodies. Unfortunately, no legislation was passed to give effect to the proposals.

During the transitional period of 1901-1921, the relationship between the members of some local bodies and the Inspecting staff was not very cordial. The Education Department was not informed of the decisions and actions taken thereon by the local bodies. As the Act gave importance to elected members, many local bodies did not include Deputy Inspectors as members of the Education Committees. Complaints were often received from the Surma Valley and other parts of Assam regarding the strained relations between the Deputy Inspectors and the local boards. Once the Director of Public Instruction stated, 'it is the common etiquette to describe the relations between the Department and local boards as cordial.
and friendly. But as a matter of fact the Departmental officers have to maintain their position by adjustment only. In some Municipal Boards, they ceased to consult the Department altogether and established direct relations with their schools. The Deputy Inspector was excluded from municipal education committees also. This meant that the professional expert was denied his proper place; anyway, the Deputy Inspector 'ceased to exercise any influence over the teacher'. It goes without saying that such a state of affairs militated against the idea of attaining a high rate of literacy coupled with improvement in teaching.

Our survey shows that in the last phase, i.e., between 1921 and 1957, adequate funds for promoting mass education were not forthcoming. The local bodies were not successful in the matter of raising education cess to provide additional revenues for education. A variety of causes - post-War economic depression, natural calamities, and political unrest in the wake of non-co-operation movements - led to a certain slackening in the rate of educational progress. Naturally, the local bodies could not discharge their responsibilities properly and they failed to serve as the most powerful agency for promoting the rapid progress of primary education in Assam.