

Movement of the Manipuri Medium of Instructions in the Barak Valley

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Abstract

The Manipuris settled in Barak Valley from ancient times and thus, Barak Valley became one of the Manipuri inhabited areas in Assam. The Manipuris in Assam started the movement for learning Manipuri Medium in the Barak Valley. As the result for the demand Manipuri Medium was started at L.P schools in 1956, then M.E Schools and upto H.S.L.C Schools on the basis of experimental basis in 1979 and finally in the year 1984 under the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA), in Assam. Thus, the paper tries to analyze how the movement take place to introduce Manipuri Medium in Barak Valley.

Keywords: Manipuri - Community, Language, Medium in Schools, Movement, Barak Valley.

Introduction :

Each mother tongue each community in the world is presume to be the best language. Whatever developed in minds easily be expressed with the help of one's own language. A nation can also survive with the language spoken and mass which is considered as their own heart and soul. Whatever well and woe, good and bad , etc. that are independently expressed in terms of the own language may be regarded as their own cultural identity. Thus , every nation in the world tries to uphold the dignity of their own language the Hindu's believe the Sanskrit Language as their Sacred Language, the Muslim's Arabic, and the Christain Hibru language, likewise the Manipuris, by recognising "Meeteilon" as their own language solemnised in with high degree of respect and generosity. It is indeed fortunate for those community's which can study the subject in their own languages.

Movement for learning Manipuri Language in Schools :

The elite group of each community tries to develop their own languages. Viswa kavi Rabindranath tagore, the Novel Laureate who translated his own product 'Geetanjali' from the original Bengali to English once said, "since my childhood, I have been trying to get well-equipped of my own language, thought, poems, etc. and thus feel comfortable to get easy access to it". The Japanese people always learn in their own mother tongue and can culminate to the highest level in the world. In india too, those enlightened scholars of west bengal like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohon Roy, Bankim Chandra, etc. who always wanted to uphold the dignity of their own mother tongue spearheaded the idea of learning mother tongue. The Manipuris outside Manipur started the movement for learning Manipuri Medium in the Barak Valley. It was actually Laininghal Naoria Phullo who first brought up the issue of learning Manipuri mother tongue in the educational institutions. Laininghal confronted miserably with what the Manipuris could not get the opportunities of learning in his mother tongue with their own script in the stiff face of the Bengalees. During his school days he could hardly face the challenge of his bengalee friends who ridiculously charged him of not having the own Manipuri history, Sahitya, Culture, Language, Script, etc. Even when he was serving as a teacher in the Victoria Memorial high school he faced the same shameful events. To give answers to these questions, he started translating the text of Harishchandra as 'Iningthow Harishchandra' in 1919. Thus, he had awoken the Manipuris from the trend of learning other tongue.

In 1918, when Laininghal was S.I. of Police in the Dibrugarh Reserve Office and posted at Amingao, he met the Majesty Maharaja of Manipur, Sjt. Churachand at Amingao on his way to Calcutta. Taking the opportunity of meeting the Maharaja, he submitted a representation to the king, praying for-(1) establishment of Manipuri Medium Schools for the Manipuris and (2) provision for availing the opportunity of using our own script instead of the Bengalee script in the schools. He sought the blessings of the King on the above items of humble demand.

It thus reveals the real fact that the person who first tried to revive the Manipuri language and culture during the 20th century is Laininghal Naoria Phullo. Along with him, those who took the bold mission of revivalism in the erstwhile Manipuri society were Hijam Irabot, N.Bidyapti Singh(the first Manipur MLA in Assam, 1946-1951), etc. Their uncompromised contributions to the society will never be forgotten by the Manipuris in the generations to come.

Later the wave of spearheading for the Manipuri cause was the 'Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha' , Cachar Branch established in the year 1935 in the Barak Valley. The Mahasabha strongly pleaded that the Manipuris in Assam should learn in their own tongue in the educational institutions. The leading roles played by Oinal Baladev as President of the Mahasabha and Secterary, Ngariyambam Priyadhvaj will always remain the mind of the Manipuris in the

society. In the year 1943, the establishment of 'Jafirbond Tarun Sahay Samity' also joined the language movement. The Samity, with its conglomerative efforts could help Shri N.Bidyapati Singh to get elected as the first Manipuri MLA in Assam. N.Bidyapati, not only being the first Manipuri MLA in Assam, but also took much initiative in the establishment of NG High School at Sonai as one of the founder teachers and pursued for introduction of Manipuri as Manipuri Alternative Vernacular in Gauhati University in 1951.

After independence, basing on language the State Reorganisation Commission was set up in India in the year 1950, following which the regional language movement started in many states of India. As a result, every state language in the eye of democracy became the Official Language of their respective states and other communities having their language, culture, etc. could enjoy their rightful claims. Later many organizations sprang up in the Barak Valley to claim their rights. The forceful organizations, established among others in those days was the 'Naha Marup', born on February 2, 1953 at Lakhipur, Cachar along with 'Thougan Marup' of Jafirbond, established at Laishramkhun on February 05, 1956. At the strong initiatives undertaken by its members like Keisam Punshi, Oinam Norendra (President), Yumbam Nandababu (Secretary), Haobam Gourahari (Sribar), Phuritsabam Brajamohon (Singerbond), Laishram Joy Kumar (Binnakandi), Sagapam Gour Singh (Binnakandi), Ingudam Lokeshwar Singh (Konjengleikai), etc., the Association marched forward demanding for introduction of the Manipuri Language in the educational institutions in the state of Assam. Resultantly, the private Manipuri LP and ME Schools were established in the erstwhile Cachar district in 1954. The Naha Marup organized to felicitate with honor the then Education Minister of Assam, Shri Amiya Das at Singerband in March, 1956. The then Hon'ble Minister was accorded warm welcome with Memorandum, insisting him to introduce the Manipuri Medium of Instructions in the schools. Thus, the unabated strength of movement of the Naha Marup and the Thougan Marup brought the light of getting establishment of 30 L.P schools in the L.P standard in Manipuri Medium in Assam in June, 1956. Then, in 1957, the joint deliberations of Sagapam Gour Singh, the then Member of Silchar Education Board, its Chairman, NandaKishore Singh, Ramaprasad Das, DI; and two ASIs, namely Th. Bagischandra Singh and Jagadananda Singh pushed forward introducing Manipuri Medium of Instructions in the primary level in the year 1957. In the same year, the Thougan Marup also materialized the mission in Hailakandi. Later, the Naha Marup, Thougan Marup, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Assam, All Assam Manipuri Student's Union (AAMSU), etc. started demanding the Assam Government for introduction of the Manipuri Medium of Instructions in the ME standard.

It is mentioned herewith that under the leadership of Keisam Punshi Singh and Sagapam Gour Singh of the Naha Marup, representations were submitted to the then Chief Minister of Assam Shri Bimala Prasad Chaliha for introduction of the Manipuri Medium of Instructions in M.E & High Schools of Assam when he visited Cachar in 1959. Besides this, a delegation team of 7 members was also constituted, viz. Shri Bagindra Chandra Singh, Lakhipur (AEI of Schools), Shri Kaushini Sharma, Lakhipur, Shri Mukta Babu of Bon Tarapur, Shri Binode Behari of Jafirbond (President, Thougan Marup), Khaidem EKendra (General Secretary), Thangjam Sajoutombi Singh (Member), Shri Sunil Kumar (Member). The team went to meet the then Chief Minister of Assam, Shri Bimala Prasad Chaliha at Shillong and pressed the demand for the introduction of the Manipuri Medium of Instructions. They could find the chance of meeting the Chief Minister during Assembly Session with the help of the then MLA of Katlicherra, Shri Gourishankar.

Thus, as a result of pressing upon the Government of Assam on the issue from different corners, finally permission for introduction of the Manipuri Medium of Instructions was accorded in M.E Section by the Government of Assam in the year 1963. And in the year 1977, the Manipuri Medium was introduced at H.S.L.C Standard in Assam. As per agreement reached between E. Chandra Singh, the then President of the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Assam and D.Gogoi, the then chairman of SEBA, the Manipuri students got availed themselves of appearing at the H.S.L.C Examination in Manipuri 1979 on experimental basis. After five years of experimental basis, the Manipuri Medium of Instructions was regularized since 1984.

In a nutshell, the dream of getting Manipuri Medium of Instructions in the educational institutions of the Manipuri inhabited areas of Assam became a reality, following the joint movements of Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasanna, Jafirbond Tarun Sahay Samity, Naha Marup of Lakhipur, Thougan Marup of Jafirbond, Manipuri Sahitya Parishad of Assam, All Assam Manipuri Students' Union (AAMSU) and many other social elites of the community. It paved the way to create history among the Manipuris in Assam. Since then the Manipuri students have been getting a new lease of life while pursuing education in their own mother tongue in Assam; and fresh impressions have been embarked upon them with high hopes and inspirations. In the Barak Valley, there are at present around 28 L.P schools, 31 M.E & 26 High Schools in Cachar district; whereas there are 10 L.P schools, 6 M.E & 5 High Schools in Hailakandi district; and there is one each of the L.P school, M.E & High School in the Karimganj district.

Thus, the pioneers of the Manipuri society struggled hard with their available resources so as to achieve the goal of bringing Medium of Instructions in the educational institutions to follow. But, does the present generation pay the price to those pioneers? the answer to this question is quite shaky.

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