

Education and Digital Connection in Chakma Society

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made a tremendous impact on all spheres of our life so as globalization and education is no exception. The development taking places rapidly in the field of Science and technology have raised lots of issues and challenges to the under-privileged communities around the world especially to those who are educationally and economically backward. Chakmas being the marginalized and under-privileged society in Mizoram are far away of enjoying and accessing the technological assets developed in the Twenty First Century. There is lack of proper transport communication, telecommunication and the supply of power and electricity especially in the Chakma inhabited areas. The Digital India Programme is flagship programme of the government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. But we need to keep in mind, whether all the people of India are digitally literate? Whether there would have impact in the tribal societies? Whether all would have access to enjoy this opportunity especially in the backward areas of India where there is lack of proper supply of power and electricity? This paper tries to focus these questions and the various issues and challenges that the under-privileged and marginalized communities may encounter during the implementation of Digital India Programme.

Keywords: Education/Information and Communication Technology (ICT)/ Digital India Programme/ Digital Connection/ Under-privileged Communities/ Chakma Society

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made a tremendous impact on all spheres of our life so as globalization and education is no exception. The development taking places rapidly in the field of Science and technology have raised lots of issues and challenges to the under-privileged communities around the world especially to those who are educationally and economically backward. Though the technology all the world is digital connected now where we can exchange information very fast as well as an individual can interact with other individual with the help of video conferencing etc., but this opportunity is limited only those who have the knowledge, capability and accessibility of ICT.

The Chakma tribes are residing under three districts i.e. Lawngtlai, Lunglei and Mamit District in Mizoram. District In terms of education, transport communication, power and electricity and telecommunication, which are considered as the means of development of society and the country, the Chakmas are very backward in Mizoram especially in Lunglei and Mamit district. However, the people of Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) have privileged to enjoy and access a lots of government facilities comparing to the Chakmas of Lunglei and Mamit District. The reason is that the CADC has some autonomy power to exercise for the development and upliftment of the community. The Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) lies under Lawngtlai District, which was formed under

the Sixth schedule of the Constitution of India on April 29, 1972. The Council is the replication of the state assembly and exercises executive power over especially allotted departments. It is an autonomous council in South-Western part of Mizoram bordering Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Education in Chakma Society

The education system of those areas which are related to Chakmas is very poor so as the status of education comparing to other communities in the state. There are lots of reasons; the most crucial is involvement of politics for appointment, promotion and transfer of school teachers. There are also other reasons like lack of proper infrastructure, insufficient supply of teaching-learning aids, bad transport and telecommunication.

There is also the issue of substitution of teachers who are not even in any training but these teachers simply relaxed at home by giving substitute teacher, who are neither qualified nor experienced enough to teach properly. The problems and issues are same in all the schools of Chakma areas of Mizoram including CADC. However, developments have been taken place in the education system in CADC over the years can be divided into two phases which are given as follows:

Education before 1994

CADC inherited the authority to control and manage elementary education owing to the provisions of Para 6 (1) of the 6th Schedule to the Constitution of India. However, the same was not entrusted to the Council Government immediately after its creation. It was only in 1975 that with a total of 9 primary schools and 13 teachers the control and management of lower primary school was handed over to CADC.

District Primary Education Board (DPEB) was the agency to administer the lower primary Classes in terms of curriculum formulation, implementation and evaluation in CADC. Before 1994, Bengali Medium of Education is imparted to the learners in the school of all the Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram.

Education after 1994 and now

In 1994, the upper primary or middle schools were also handed over to CADC with a total of 5 upper primary schools and 22 teachers. After the upper primary schools were handed over to CADC by the Govt. of Mizoram, District School Education Board (DSEB) was constituted with the abolition of DPEB which came into existence with effect from 18th January, 1994. The executive committee of CADC together with the Mizoram Board of School Education empowered the DSEB to conduct examinations of both primary and upper primary level. The DSEB in its meeting held on 22nd March, 1994 introduced *Changmah* (Local Language) as an optional subject at the primary level and with the power to administer upper primary classes DSEB proposed to introduce *Changmah* as a compulsory subject from class I to class VII. The education system is administered under three circle, i.e. Borapansury circle, Longpuighat circle, and Kamalanagar circle.

It is worth to mention here that it is in the year 1994, the CADC authority develop the font of Chakma or *Changmah Script* (Table 1) along with the development of *Changmah* or *Chakma Keyboard* (Table 2). The CADC authority also introduced the English Medium of Education in all the schools inside CADC. Subsequently, the same has been introduced in the neighbouring Chakma village schools of Lunglei and Mamit District.

The structure of school education in the State of Mizoram is re-organized in conformity with the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986/1992, and the definition of elementary education as contained in the "*Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009*". The re-organized structure stands as:

1. Elementary Stage (Class I-VIII) 6-14 years
 - ⊙ Primary I-V
 - ⊙ Upper Primary VI-VIII
2. Secondary Stage (Class IX-XII) 15-18 years
 - ⊙ Secondary IX-X
 - ⊙ Higher Secondary XI-XII

At present, the education system in CADC and in others Chakma village schools is same as in the rest of the state of Mizoram.

Table 1: Chakma Script. (Source: CADC Changhma Class- I Text book, ChanghmaAbidhiPudhi)

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a | p | r | m | f |
| k | c | s | y | Y |
| x | > | < | z | N |
| o | v | u | w | g |
| e | i | j | d | ; |
| n | h | T | 0 | s |
| | T | 9 | q | |

k fU; HbEsInIgU (Changhma Sujayan)

Network Communication and Digital Connection

Chakmas being the marginalized and under-privileged society in Mizoram are far away of enjoying and accessing the technological assets developed in the Twenty First Century. The Chakma community in Mizoram is still under-privileged in terms of education and economic status. There is lack of proper transport communication, telecommunication and the supply of power and electricity especially in the Chakma inhabited areas. There are 90 Chakma Villages under Lawngtlai

district, 47 Chakma villages under Lunglei district and 20 Chakma villages under Mamit district. Therefore, there are around 157 Chakma Villages in whole Mizoram. Out of 90 Chakma villages in Lawngtlai district there are around 18-20 villages that can access telecommunication networks or mobile networks.

Under Lunglei district around 10-12 Chakma villages can access mobile network. And under Mamit district around 6-9 Chakma villages can have access to mobile network. The available mobile network service provider under Lawngtlai and Lunglei district in Chakma inhabited areas are Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), Aircel and Airtel. In Mamit district, the Chakma people can have access only BSNL mobile network, which is in function from last year (2016).

Digital connection and its utility in Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram

These are the following electronic and technological gadgets that the Chakma people commonly used and have connection or interaction in their day to day life:

- ⊙ Radio
- ⊙ Television/TV/DTH
- ⊙ Mobile Phone

Table 2: Changhma or Chakma Keyboard

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----------|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|-------|------------|------|
| ` | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 0 | - | = | Back space | |
| ~ | ! | @ | # | \$ | % | ^ | & | * | (|) | _ | + | | |
| ` | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 0 | - | = | \ | |
| Tab | Q | W | E | R | T | Y | U | I | O | P | [|] | | |
| | Q | W | E | R | T | Y | S | I | O | P | { | } | | |
| | q | w | e | r | t | y | u | i | o | p | [|] | t | |
| Caps Lock | A | S | D | F | G | H | J | K | L | ; | ' | Enter | | |
| | A | S | D | F | G | H | J | K | L | ; | ' | | | |
| | a | s | d | f | g | h | j | k | l | ; | ' | | | |
| Shift | Z | X | C | V | B | N | M | , | . | / | Shift | | | |
| | Z | X | C | V | B | N | M | < | > | / | | | | |
| | z | x | c | v | b | n | m | , | . | / | | | | |
| Ctrl | Wdw | Alt | Space bar | | | | | | | | | Alt | Task | Ctrl |

- ⊙ Computer/Laptop
- ⊙ Projector

Out of the five technological gadgets radio, television/TV and mobile are the common and most used by the people. Almost every household have TV and mobile phone where power and electricity and telecommunication network are there. The utility of Computer is increasing day by day by the learning youth due to the demand of the technology everywhere. Most students who can afford do have basic knowledge on computer. But there is lack of imparting proper computer or IT education in the schools of Chakma inhabited areas in Mizoram.

Issues and Challenges

The issues and challenges the Chakma society may face for implementing the Digital India programme are as follows:

- ⊙ Computer education and competency of the teacher.
- ⊙ Influenced of politics
- ⊙ Power & Electricity with proper digital infrastructures
- ⊙ Connectivity and accessibility of communication network
- ⊙ Financial matter and management issues
- ⊙ Digital literacy and awareness among the general public

These issues and challenges are not only in the Chakma Society, but also in all the economically and educationally backward rural areas throughout India.

CONCLUSION

Skill development and education are integral areas for development particularly in North Eastern Region (NER). Of all regions in India, the NER in particular requires an increased focus on skill development as a way of generation rural employment. Education is a sector which can effectively leverage ICT for example, through ICT –based learning and teaching through use of ICT.

The Digital India Programme is a very important

programme for the nation to cope with the development in the areas of Information and communication Technology happening around the globe. But, if this programme is also meant for the development and digital connection of rural India through ICT at the grass-root level, then only it will be beneficial for the Chakma Society.

Suggestions: To connect the Chakmas with digital programmes and to make them educationally empowered following steps should be taken;

- ⊙ Online books and materials may be developed in Chakma script; especially story books and poems for kids because it will be helpful in language development of children and it will be also helpful for the dissemination of the language to a larger audience.
- ⊙ Development of audio-visual clips related to folksongs and folk stories will be helpful in cultural representation of the society as well as it is also going to give some more mode of expression and representation to Chakma students.
- ⊙ Cultural empowerment may be done by e-books and online reading material.
- ⊙ Online Dictionary (mobile dictionary) should be developed.

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