



Role of Education in Peacebuilding in Postcolonial Manipur

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Abstract: Post-Independence education in India driven with equity, access, and quality education as its goal has undergone significant transformation; and understanding its evolution in India since independence sheds light on the achievements, opportunities, and challenges that have shaped the educational landscape. Education plays a crucial role in Peacebuilding in post-Independence India, especially in conflict-ridden states like Manipur, by promoting understanding between ethnic groups, fostering critical thinking, enabling individuals to resolve conflict, and creating a dialogue platform, which contributes to a peaceful society through addressing the root causes of violence. However unequal access to quality education, political instability, developmental gap between the hill and valley, identity polarization, social injustice, frequent disruption of ethnic violence and insurgency movement pose challenges to education and Peacebuilding in Manipur. The study employs descriptive and analytical approach as its methodology, and the paper examine: i).The role and challenges of education and Peacebuilding in Manipur, ii). Identify the strengths, weaknesses and gaps of education systems' contributing to Peacebuilding in the volatile state political framework, iii).How the post-conflict political environment within the state affect the 'success' or 'failure' of education programmes for Peacebuilding? And the way forward.

Keywords: *Education, Peacebuilding, Conflict, Political Environment.*

1. Introduction

Education has long been known as a force for change that can promote peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion, especially in conflict-torn societies. In areas such as Manipur—a state in India's north-eastern border region characterized by decades of ethnic conflict, insurgency, and political turmoil—education plays an even more important role in reconstructing broken communities and building the foundations for durable peace. The colonial legacy and its aftermath have left Manipur to struggle with entrenched structural disparities, ethnic conflicts, and rival claims to identity and self-rule. These are compounded by insurgent movements that have tried to contest the authority of the Indian state, usually ending in violent clashes and pervasive insecurity. In such a fluid context, education is not only a tool for the transmission of knowledge but also a tool for the transformation of attitudes in society, for dialogue, and for non-violent conflict resolution. But the efficacy of education in these respects is contingent upon its accessibility, its inclusivity, and its alignment with the principles of peacebuilding.

This essay examines the relationship between education and peacebuilding in postcolonial Manipur, focusing on how education can help resolve structural issues, address the underlying causes of conflict, and promote long-term stability. This study aims to provide methods that education can be used as a peace catalyst in Manipur by examining the advantages and disadvantages of current educational paradigms as well as the larger sociopolitical environment. Manipur's socio-political reality and conflicts are heavily influenced by the legacy of colonialism. The British colonial government's divide-and-rule tactics planted seeds of discord among various ethnic communities, and the forced integration of Manipur into the Indian Union in 1949 helped to intensify the prevailing tension. This postcolonial history emphasizes the significance of redressing historical grievances and structural injustices through education because it offers a forum for communal healing and reconciliation. The essay starts by looking at the theory of peacebuilding, based on foundational works of scholars like Johan Galtung and Betty Reardon. It goes on to look at the particular challenges to Manipur's education system, including unequal access, political instability, and ethnic fragmentation. It then assesses the strengths and limitations of existing educational frameworks in promoting peace, with a focus on gaps in curricula and student involvement. The role of the post-conflict political landscape on education efforts is also examined, with an eye toward stable government and consistent policy. The essay then

concludes with practical recommendations for institutionalizing peace education, closing gaps, and engaging the citizenry. By exploring in-depth, the essay highlights the significant power of education to reform conflict-ridden societies and lay groundwork for sustainable peace in Manipur.

1.2 Understanding Peacebuilding

The term peacebuilding was first coined in the mid-1970s by Johan Galtung, a pioneer of peace studies, to promote system-based solutions for conflict resolution and building enduring peace. According to him, there could be no lasting peace if mechanisms were not built into social structures to end the cycle of violence and establish constructive alternatives. This basic concept took further hold in 1992, when the United Nations codified the term in ‘An Agenda for Peace’, with the definition being attempts to establish and maintain systems that consolidate peace and avoid falling back into violence. Scholars and policymakers built upon this vision further. John Paul Lederach subsequently described peacebuilding as an evolving, multifaceted phenomenon, highlighting the necessity of multifaceted approaches to turn stuck conflicts into long-lasting peace. By 2000, the Brahimi Report furthered the concept of peacebuilding as something greater than post-conflict reconstruction. It emphasized the need to rebuild institutions, reintegrate fighters, promote human rights, and foster democratic governance and reconciliation to deal with the underlying causes of conflict.

Whereas early models—from the United Nations' 1992 Agenda for Peace to the Brahimi Report (2000)—emphasized post-conflict reconstruction, reform of governance, and reconciliation, today's thinking increasingly identifies peacebuilding as a positive, participatory process going beyond ceasefire agreements. An important factor in this change is the potential of education, a tool that is ideally suited to eradicating long-standing divisions, contesting dominant historical narratives, and empowering marginalized communities—particularly in regions with a colonial past and on-going conflict. Postcolonial Manipur, a north-eastern Indian state shaped by centuries of colonial exploitation, ethnic diversity, and contested sovereignty, exemplifies the complex interplay between structural inequities and cyclical violence. Here, colonial-era policies and post-independence neglect have long shaped education institutions, which have both reflected and strengthened social divisions. Due to curricula and schools that are disconnected from regional cultures and languages, identity-based inequalities have inadvertently been

perpetuated, and limited access to high-quality education has further solidified political and economic marginalization. But education also has the ability to change things by fostering critical thinking, bridging linguistic and ethnic divides, and redefining collective identities. This essay argues that in postcolonial Manipur, education is a key component of lasting peace rather than a supporting actor in peacebuilding. Through exploration of how school policies, pedagogies, and institutions are able to grapple with longstanding grievances, practice inclusive citizenship, and foster resistance to polarising ideologies, the research places learning as both an image of civil conflict and as a driver to its resolution. Based on Lederach's focus on "long-term cultural change" and the UN Peacebuilding Commission's appeal for integrated, locally grounded approaches, the analysis highlights education's two-pronged mission: healing the scars of colonial and postcolonial trauma and building the foundations for just and inclusive societies. In Manipur's fractured social landscape, reconceiving education becomes not only a developmental necessity but an exercise in peacebuilding in itself.

1.3 Education in post-independent India

After independence, India's education system has come a long way, shaped by the forces of equity, access, and quality. These three pillars have influenced policies and reforms to expand education, broaden opportunities for everyone, and enhance learning outcomes. Decades later, India has made considerable progress in raising the enrolment rates, narrowing gaps in education for marginalized groups, and improving the quality of education. But persisting challenges like socio-economic disparities, digital divides, and a lack of suitable infrastructure continue to undermine the effectiveness of these reforms. A historical study of how education evolved post-independence requires an understanding of the achievements, opportunities, and challenges associated with these three foundational goals.

Equity in Education

Ensuring equity in education implies offering equal and inclusive opportunities, particularly to historically marginalized communities like the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), women, and economically weaker sections. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) was the first to stress the importance of equitable education, proposing a Common School System to reduce differences between socio-economic groups. Through the years, several policies and programs have sought to bridge these gaps:

- a) The Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, made free and compulsory education a fundamental right for children aged 6-14 years, ensuring that disadvantaged groups had access to schooling.
- b) Reservation policies in higher education institutions and public sector jobs have provided greater opportunities for SC, ST, and OBC students.
- c) The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2001, played a crucial role in universalizing elementary education by improving school infrastructure and promoting inclusive learning.
- d) Initiatives like the National Programme for Girls' Education (NPEGEL) and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) were introduced to enhance female literacy, particularly in rural and tribal areas.

Despite these efforts, inequities remain. Gender disparities in education, particularly at the secondary and higher levels remains and continue to hinder women's participation in the workforce. Similarly, caste-based discrimination and socio-economic barriers still limit access to quality education for many students, especially in rural and remote regions (Jha & Parvati, 2019). Addressing these challenges requires more targeted interventions, better implementation of policies, and increased financial support for marginalized groups.

Access to Education

Expanding access to education has been a major priority for post-independence India. Significant strides have been made in increasing school enrolment rates, reducing dropouts, and improving educational infrastructure. Several key policies and initiatives have contributed to these advancements:

- a) The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, 2009) have focused on improving primary and secondary school access by building more schools, providing free textbooks and uniforms, and offering financial incentives for disadvantaged students.
- b) The Mid-Day Meal Scheme (1995) was introduced to boost school attendance and address malnutrition among children from low-income families.
- c) In higher education, the establishment of institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and Central Universities has expanded access to world-class education.

- d) Digital learning initiatives such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, and e-Pathshala aim to provide online educational content and reduce geographical barriers to quality learning.

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist. Dropout rates remain high, particularly among girls and students from marginalized communities, due to factors such as child labour, early marriages, and economic hardships. Additionally, rural-urban disparities in educational access continue to widen, with many remote areas lacking proper school infrastructure, qualified teachers, and digital connectivity (Kingdon, 2007). Addressing these issues requires stronger policy implementation, improved school infrastructure, and expanded digital access to ensure that education reaches every child, regardless of socio-economic background.

1.4 Education as a Catalyst for Peacebuilding

Theoretically, peace education is based deeply on Johan Galtung's original work on negative and positive peace. Negative peace is the lack of direct violence, whereas positive peace involves the removal of structural injustices and inequalities that are the root causes of conflict. In Manipur, where inter-ethnic conflicts and insurgencies have continued for decades, education is a key tool in the pursuit of peace, it is not so much about transmitting knowledge but about developing awareness, attitudes, skills, and behaviours that foster non-violence and constructive conflict resolution.

In Manipur, education can have a multi-dimensional role in promoting peace. To begin with, it can bridge ethnic divides by providing spaces for dialogue and understanding. For example, schools and universities can be used as platforms for students from different backgrounds to meet, challenge stereotypes, and develop empathy. Secondly, education can push back against extremist ideologies by fostering critical thought and media literacy, allowing people to challenge polarizing narratives spread by insurgent groups or political elites. Thirdly, incorporating conflict resolution skills in curricula empowers students with useful skills for resolving grievances peacefully. Last but not least, education offers a common platform for dealing with past injustices, such as colonial heritage or post-colonial exclusion, and discussing reconciliation and collective healing.

Yet for education to realize its peacebuilding role, it needs to move beyond conventional school walls and enter formal as well as informal learning spaces. This calls for intense cooperation between policymakers, educators, and civil society to make sure peace

education is not a single isolated endeavour but an integral transformation in the social fabric. For instance, NGO-led community programs can supplement school curricula through conducting workshops on intergroup dialogue and cultural exchange. This has been exemplified by the case the of the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) which is mentioned below.

In the same vein, teacher training courses must highlight conflict-sensitive pedagogy to allow instructors to approach sensitive subjects with nuance and compassion. In addition, the incorporation of peace education into extracurricular activities can be enhanced. Debate clubs, theatre performances, and art projects are some of the activities that can serve as a creative platform for students to learn about peace, justice, and coexistence. These activities not only support classroom learning but also instil a sense of empowerment among young people, enabling them to become agents of peacebuilding. By integrating peace education into a variety of layers of learning, Manipur has the potential to develop an ecosystem that fosters values of cooperation, tolerance, and non-violence, a foundation for peace that is enduring.

Challenges to Educational Access amidst Conflict in India

The educational landscape in India's conflict ridden state like Manipur is fraught with challenges that significantly impede its role in peacebuilding. Access to quality education stands out among the most crucial of these issues and manifests sharply as a gap between rural and urban communities and ethnic groups. It is heightened by the hill-valley divide, which represents both a physical and socio-cultural gulf. While the valley area is more endowed with improved education infrastructure, such as well-facilitated schools and a greater number of trained teachers, majority of the hill areas remain underserved. This unequal distribution of resources not only perpetuates social inequalities but also fuels resentment and conflict, aligning with Galtung's (1969) concept of structural violence that entrenches systemic disparities. In addition, even after pursuing their education, most young Manipur graduates encounter high unemployment levels and a scarcity of industry, rendering it hard to find decent jobs. Such disconnect between education and employment tends to be frustrating, and some end up being susceptible to extremist ideologies or criminality as a way of dealing with economic vulnerability. In response to this challenge, there is a critical need to improve technical education, encourage entrepreneurship training, and establish local industries capable of creating sustainable employment opportunities. Closing this gap

between education and the employment market will not only decrease unemployment but also support long-term peace and stability within the region.

Political unrest further exacerbates these problems. Widespread protests, insurgency violence, and bandhs (strike general strikes) have frequently destabilized the education system, resulting in repeated closure of schools and universities. Such interruptions deprive students of steady learning opportunities, halting their academic progress and weakening the continuity of peace education programs. In accordance with Paulson (2011), this contradiction undermines institutional capability, and it becomes a challenge to institute long-term reforms that promote peace by education. Overall, the challenges presented reveal the imperative to implement systemic changes to promote fair access to education and a peaceful environment conducive to peacebuilding in Manipur.

1.5 Strengths and Weaknesses of India's Education System in Peacebuilding

In spite of the numerous challenges confronting India's education sector, there are several strengths to be recognized that provide a platform for peacebuilding interventions. One of the greatest strengths is the rich cultural diversity of the nation, which offers enormous potential for intergroup interactions in educational institutions. In the context of Manipur, schools and colleges can use this diversity to bring about mutual appreciation and understanding of different ethnic traditions, languages, and histories. Such exposure not only promotes tolerance but also helps to develop a common identity that will help bridge the communal divide at least to some extent. Furthermore, initiatives undertaken by various civil society organisations and NGOs have also played a huge role in the development of peace education. They organise programs promoting extracurricular activities, leadership development, and community-based workshops on conflict resolution, dialogue, and reconciliation. These grassroots initiatives supplement formal education and prove that collaborative strategies to peacebuilding are possible. The system is not, however, flawless.

A glaring omission is the absence of institutionalized peace education, which continues to be an ad-hoc exercise and not a formal part of the curriculum. In the absence of standardized content and teaching methodologies, the effectiveness of peace education continues to be patchy and narrow. A final major problem is the lack of proper training in peace pedagogy among educators. Most teachers are not equipped with the skills and materials needed to adopt conflict-sensitive pedagogies, making it difficult for them to deal with sensitive issues or facilitate intergroup conflict reduction. These issues are made worse

by a lack of resources, particularly in conflict-prone areas where schools lack enough funding, subpar facilities, and a variety of instructional materials. These disparities impair education's quality and limit its capacity to contribute significantly to peacebuilding. Together, the advantages and disadvantages show how crucial it is to implement particular changes in order to make the educational system a useful tool for promoting peace in Manipur and other conflict-affected areas of the nation.

Bridging Cultural Divides: Addressing Curricular and Engagement Gaps

A critical analysis of India's education system demonstrates major lacunae that are inhibiting its ability to advance peacebuilding. One of the most prominent deficits is the lack of multicultural and inclusive curricula. Educational content today does not adequately address the diverse histories, languages, and viewpoints of a state like Manipur which is ethnically diverse, thereby advancing a discourse that excludes certain groups. Exclusion not only makes minority students feel disconnected from their education but also advances stereotypes and entrenches divisions. In response to this, curricula would have to be redesigned to incorporate culturally appropriate content celebrating the pluralism of the state. History lessons, for example, would have to incorporate contributions of every ethnic group towards Manipur's heritage, and literature courses could have works from writers of every background. Inclusivity like this would encourage a sense of belonging and mutual respect among the students, the foundation for reconciliation.

Equally troubling is the lack of students' participation in peacebuilding activities. Schools do not often organize forums for inter-ethnic communication, cultural interactions, or collective problem-solving, losing opportunities to foster harmony among young people. Student-initiated peace clubs, shared cultural celebrations, and joint community service are some of the initiatives that can fill these voids by facilitating interaction and collaboration across ethnic divisions. For instance, conducting debates or workshops on common challenges, e.g., environmental conservation or economic development, may bond students around a common agenda which will eventually narrow communal barriers. By integrating such activities into the school ethos, education has the potential to become an efficient instrument for instilling peace and developing collective identity in Manipur.

1.6 Political Challenges of Education in a Post-Conflict Environment

The success of education programs in Manipur's post-conflict setting largely depends on the existing political conditions, which offer both challenges and opportunities.

Governance issues, including unstable policy environments and poor institutional capacity, have persistently thwarted attempts to introduce holistic peace education programs. In post-conflict environment, immediate stabilization is usually the priority at the expense of long-term social development, producing disjointed and temporary reforms. In Manipur, this tendency has resulted in a lack of sustained commitment to peace education, with initiatives frequently abandoned or altered due to changing political priorities (Paulson, 2011). This instability not only affects the continuity of education reforms but also undermines public confidence in the system, making it more difficult to make significant headway.

Another major hindrance is the political manipulation of educational policies. In certain situations, political elites utilized schools and education to sustain certain narratives beneficial to their own interests, not promoting a collective vision for peace. For instance, textbooks and curricula may emphasize certain historical events or cultural narratives while omitting others, thereby perpetuating divisions rather than reconciliation (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). Such selective storytelling can deepen ethnic tensions and undermine efforts to build a cohesive society. Furthermore, the persistence of armed groups and intermittent violence create ongoing security threats that interfere with the operation of schools and universities. Such interruptions, in addition to recurring political protests and bandhs, produce an environment of unpredictability that retards academic advancement. As Galtung (1969) highlights, structural violence in the form of insecurity and instability limits access to education, reinforcing cycles of conflict and inequality.

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to establish a stable and transparent policy framework that insulates education reforms from political volatility. Collaborative efforts involving the government, civil society, and international organizations can help create a supportive ecosystem for peace education, ensuring that initiatives are resilient to political shifts and aligned with the broader goal of fostering sustainable peace in Manipur.

2. A Case Study: Naga Mothers' Association and Peacebuilding

The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) has led one of the most well-known grassroots peacebuilding projects in the area. Since its founding in 1984, the NMA has played a significant role in combating the violence within the Naga insurgency, particularly the violence that occurs between different groups of the insurgency.

The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) was instrumental in peacebuilding by launching the "Shed No More Blood" campaign, which called on all insurgent Naga groups to discontinue violence and settle their scores through negotiations. Proactively participating in mediation attempts, the NMA brokered peace talks by sitting down with insurgent leaders and the government. On top of this, the organization carried out education programs that sensitized communities to the ruining effects of violence and the need for peaceful conflict resolution. Aside from lobbying, the NMA also offered assistance to widows and families of victims of insurgency-related violence, focusing on women as peace builders. Through their sustained efforts, inter-factional killings were dramatically curtailed, ushering in a climate favourable to wider peace talks and durable stability in the region.

Education as an instrument for Peacebuilding in the NMA's Efforts

The success of the NMA demonstrates how education—both formal and informal—played a transformative role in peacebuilding in Manipur. The association's approach combined traditional conflict mediation techniques with modern educational, emphasizing the following aspects:

- a) *Community Awareness and Education:* The NMA utilized education as a tool to spread messages of peace, teaching communities about the devastating impact of violence and the need for reconciliation.
- b) *Workshops and Training:* Peacebuilding workshops equipped women and youth with conflict resolution skills, enabling them to act as mediators in their communities.
- c) *Alternative Learning for Conflict-Affected Groups:* The NMA advocated for and supported alternative education programs for individuals affected by insurgency, including reintegrating former combatants through skill-based training.
- d) *Dialogue and Cultural Exchange:* Education facilitated dialogue between different ethnic groups, fostering a sense of shared identity and reducing hostilities.

The NMA's work aligns with the broader role of education in peacebuilding in Manipur by demonstrating that education is not just about literacy but also about fostering values of non-violence, coexistence, and reconciliation. Their success showcases the power of grassroots educational initiatives in transforming conflict-prone societies.

Pathways to Institutionalizing Peace Education

To transform education into a robust mechanism for peacebuilding in Manipur, a multi-pronged approach is essential. Central to this effort is the institutionalization of peace

education within the formal curriculum. This involves integrating subjects such as conflict resolution, human rights, and intercultural dialogue into school syllabi, ensuring that students develop the skills and values necessary for peaceful coexistence. For instance, dedicated modules could explore the histories and contributions of Manipur's diverse ethnic groups, fostering mutual understanding and respect. Training programs for teachers must also be prioritized, equipping them with the pedagogical tools to deliver peace education effectively. Workshops on conflict-sensitive teaching methods and cultural sensitivity can empower educators to address sensitive topics constructively and mediate intergroup tensions in classrooms.

Bridging the hill-valley divide in education is another critical step. Targeted investments are needed to improve infrastructure in hill areas, recruit qualified teachers, and ensure equitable distribution of resources. Mobile libraries, digital learning platforms, and teacher exchange programs can help mitigate disparities and bring quality education to underserved regions. Strengthening civic engagement in schools is equally vital. Encouraging student-led peace initiatives, such as inter-ethnic dialogue forums, cultural exchange programs, and community service projects, can foster unity among youth and instil a sense of shared responsibility for societal harmony. Finally, ensuring policy stability and political commitment is indispensable. A long-term, transparent policy framework, supported by collaboration between the government, civil society, and international organizations, can sustain peace education initiatives and shield them from political instability. Together, these measures can position education as a cornerstone of peacebuilding in Manipur, paving the way for a more inclusive and harmonious society.

3. Conclusion: Harnessing Education for Sustainable Peace in Manipur

The emancipatory power of education to build peace and reconciliation cannot be overemphasized, especially in conflict-torn societies such as Manipur. By remedying structural imbalances, closing ethnic gaps, and empowering citizens with the capability to resolve disputes constructively, education becomes a pillar of long-term peacebuilding. Yet this potential can be achieved only by a collective push to overcome structural impediments ranging from resource disparities and political uncertainty to fractured curricula and poorly trained teachers. Through institutional change, policy coherence, and inclusive school curricula, Manipur is able to realize the transformative power of education in order to

overcome past hurts, promote intergroup harmony, and construct a vision for a future that is common to all. The path towards peace is complicated and challenging, but through the unshakeable determination to make education a transformative instrument, Manipur can make way for an inclusive and peaceful society.

Education, when carefully conceived and executed, can break down the walls that fuel conflict and division. It can be a bridge between communities, encouraging dialogue and respect and giving people the critical thinking skills to challenge divisive ideologies. In Manipur, where the trauma of colonialism and post-colonial turmoil still shapes social dynamics, education offers a platform for reconciliation and collective healing. By instituting peace education, closing the hill-valley gap, and encouraging civic life, the state can create an educational setting that not only imparts knowledge, but also instils values of compassion, cooperation, and non-violence. Lastly, the success of peacebuilding through education relies on on-going collaboration among stakeholders. Governments need to commit to long-term change, civil society needs to ensure grassroots efforts are supported, and educators need to adopt conflict-sensitive teaching. International agencies can similarly be crucial by offering technical support and funding. All these efforts, combined, can develop a sturdy peace education system that can endure political turbulence and respond to the underlying drivers of conflict.

While Manipur makes its way to peace, the significance of education cannot be overlooked. It is not just an instrument of personal empowerment but a collaborative effort to revive trust, achieve unity, and imagine a common future. Investing in education as a means for peace, Manipur can make its history of conflict one of resilience, diversity, and hope. The path ahead is challenging, but the promise of a prosperous and peaceful Manipur makes the journey worthwhile.

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