

Classes on boat come to aid of flood-hit students

FLOATING SCHOOL Assam floods have affected nearly 23,000 schools but children of inundated Barpeta district are able to continue their education by attending classes on a boat

HTSPECIAL

Utpal Parashar

utpal.parashar@htlive.com

GUWAHATI: Anjuara Khatun, 9, is a bright student. However, for the past two weeks, she hasn't been able to attend classes because her school is submerged under flood waters.

Despite that, Anjuara has been able to keep up with her studies, thanks to a floating school that holds classes on a boat for students of inundated schools in Assam's Barpeta district. "Our school in Tapajuli Char is under water. But we are able to continue with our studies by attending classes on the boat," said the Class 4 student of Alipur primary school.

Like Anjuara, nearly 60 students of three primary schools located on Mazidbitha, Bheragaon and Tapajuli 'chars' (sandbars) in Barpeta district benefit from the novel initiative.

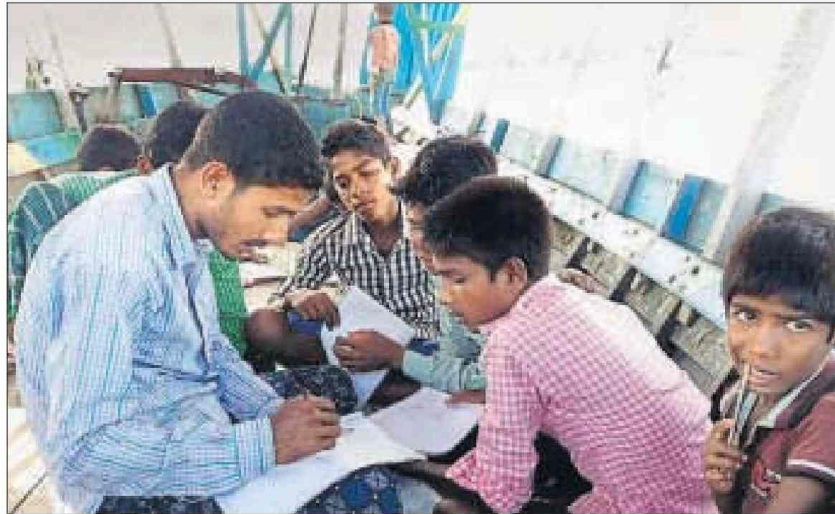
In Assam, sandbars formed by silt deposition of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries are populated by nearly 25 lakh people. These 'chars', located in 14 districts, are severely affected during the annual floods.

"We began conducting the classes on the boat six months ago. It proved a blessing for the students during the floods," said Jahidul Islam, a development worker with Jhai Foundation, which launched the initiative.

Classes on the boat are held for two hours every afternoon. The boat travels to the three 'chars' to pick students up from their marooned homes.

"Initially there was some hesitation from some parents. But now there's no such issue. The students look forward to the classes and parents are also happy," said Jahidul Beg, who teaches English to the students.

There are over 2,000 villages located on the 'chars' of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Over 68% of residents in these villages live below the poverty line and face problems related to erosion and flooding.



Students attend classes on a boat in a 'floating school' in Assam.

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In Majidbitha Char and nearby areas, schools remain closed for nearly three months every year due to the rising waters of the Beki, a tributary of the Brahmaputra.

"Floods damage our houses and crops. But thanks to the classes on the boat, the studies of our children don't get affected," said farmer Kasim Ali, whose two children, Magroon and Kohinoor, attend the classes daily.

The school on boat has become popular and there's demand from other areas to start similar initiatives for flood-affected students. The Jhai Foundation is planning to get a bigger boat or buy another one to cater to more students.

Nearly 23,000 of the 51,898 schools in Assam have been affected by floods this year. Many of the schools that remain above water are acting as relief camps for thousands in the flood-affected districts.

While classes in affected schools have remained disrupted for weeks now, Anjuara and her friends from Mazidbitha, Bheragaon and Tapajuli 'chars' are lucky to have a boat to continue their studies.