CHAPTER II

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The first person to suggest the establishment of a separate university for Assam was Lt. Col. P. R. T. Gurdon, the Commissioner of the Assam Valley as early as 1916. The circumstances in which he made this suggestion may be of interest to us. Surendranath Banerjee of Bengal moved a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council:

'This Council recommends to the Governor-General in Council to consider the advisability of placing the University of Calcutta under the control of the Governor like the Madras and the Bombay Universities'.

Thus, Surendranath Banerjee desired that the Calcutta University should be controlled not by the Government of India but by the Government of Bengal. Archdale Earle, the Chief Commissioner, Lt. Col. Gurdon and Ghana-shyam Baruah who was a member of the Imperial Legislative Council thought that the interests of Assam would be affected if Calcutta University was controlled by the Governor-in-Council of Fort William. Therefore they decided to oppose the resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council. Opposing the resolution, Lt. Col. Gurdon said 'We in Assam would like to have a university of our own when the time comes. Burma and Bihar are contemplating universities of their own.'
Assam, in process of time, will adopt a similar course. When that happens Bengal may be safely left so far as we are concerned, to manage the University of Calcutta which will then have no authority in Assam. Therefore, Lt. Col. Gurdon pleaded that until the establishment of a separate University for Assam, the Calcutta University should be under the control of the Governor-General-in-Council. Gurdon said that the interests of Assam were safe so long the Calcutta lawyers did not control the syndicate of the Calcutta University.

Gurdon was supported by H.N. Setelvad of Bombay. Sir Sankaran Nair, the member in charge of education informed the Council that the Government of India had resolved that there should be no change in the situation till the Patna and the Burma universities were constituted (1).

On 25 March 1916, Gurdon wrote to W.R. Botham, the Second Secretary to the Chief Commissioner -

"We should not consider, I venture to think, what

should be our next move. I think it is certain that we shall not be able to make any arrangement with the Calcutta University to suit our interests and as we cannot join the Burma or the Bihar University, we must have a university of our own. There are, of course, certain difficulties in the way, the first of which is want of money but the second and the most important obstacle is the divergence of the feeling about a university for Assam which will certainly arise in the two valleys. The Surma Valley may perhaps prefer to remain subject to the Calcutta University whereas the Assam Valley will vote for a University somewhere in the Assam Valley, Gauhati for choice. Might I suggest that we should try judiciously to probe public opinion in the two valleys on the subject and that in the meantime, Cunningham (The D.P.I.) might be asked to consider to which of learnings our university might begin. I thought, perhaps a University confined in scope to the educational ground covered by the present Cotton and Earle Law colleges but Cunningham may have other ideas. We should have faculties of medicine and Engineering but these perhaps might
Gurdon also wrote that he would discuss this subject with Sharp, the Educational Commissioner to the Government of India. Thus Gurdon not only conceived the idea of a separate university for Assam but also how the university should be organised and what branches of learning should be established to begin with.

W. R. Botham was skeptical about a separate university for Assam. Botham wrote—

"I doubt whether Assam will be able to afford a separate university for many years".

But the Chief Commissioner Archdale Earle was in favour of the idea of a separate university for Assam. He wrote—

"I think the Hon'ble Chanda is in favour of a University for Assam as soon as it is practicable".

Cunningham, the D.P.I., however disagreed with Archdale Earle. "I do not think", wrote Cunningham "the
time is ripe or nearly ripe for the establishment of a university of Assam and I shall be surprised if further communication expected from Gurdon does not make it clear that this is the view also of the Educational Commissioner.

Should I be wrong in this, however, should Sharp offer encouragement I may possibly be allowed an opportunity of advising again.

Gurdon discussed this subject of a separate university with the Educational Commissioner Sharp of the Government of India. What Sharp told Gurdon was not communicated officially to Archdale Earle.

In April 1917, one of the members of the Assam Legislative Council for the first time in its history suggested the establishment of a separate university for Assam. In December of the same year, the Assam Association at its annual conference held at Sibsagar passed a resolution demanding the establishment of a separate university for Assam. This resolution was repeated next year at its annual session held in 1918 in Goalpara.

The Calcutta University Commission wrote in 1920
that the Cotton College might rightly aim and ought to aim at becoming the seat of the University. Cunningham commented on 11 June 1920, "Considering all these things, I am reluctantly led to the conclusion that if money can be found to develop the Mirarichand College on the lines which have been promised and to advance the Cotton College in such wise as could enable it to become a University College under the scheme of the Commission, Assam should cut free from Bengal, and have a university of its own ...
I cannot urge that the time is really ripe for a university in Assam or that the adventure will not be attended by risks of the gravest. But it is as ripe for Assam as for Burma or Bengal or Mysore. And if as it would seem we are between the devil and the deep sea it may be the wiser course to prefer the sea. We shall at least moor out on our own course with the spirit and resolution of those who are dealing themselves with their own destinies'.

Cunningham wrote "What money we should need to develop under the Commission's recommendations should amply suffice to furnish us with a university for Assam. To begin with, the official headquarters of the university would have to be in Shillong. A simple form of administration could be worked out leaving much to the constituent
colleges. No staff of highly paid officers would be needed in addition to those we have'.

Cunningham concluded by writing 'For the present I venture to urge that we should not postpone indefinitely the realization of our hopes by aiming at two universities one at Gauhati, one at Sylhet. A single university centered in the capital controlling colleges in the different valleys which will supplement and react upon one another would be a force of great influence in the political unification of the Province.

Promode Chandra Dutta was opposed to the establishment of a university at Gauhati because it would create complications and arouse feelings of resentment in the minds of the people of the Surma Valley unless they were also given a university of their own. Further, it would not be able to provide instruction in all branches of learning. It would be worse than useless to have a dwarf university in which all learning was starved. Dutta said 'If this Province is to remain as it is let us have two universities in the two valleys. Let each of these universities specialise in certain subjects'.
The Assam Association demanded in December 1919 that a district university should be established in Assam. But the 4th Surma Valley Literary Conference held at Sylhet on 3 April 1920 resolved that the present connection of Sylhet and Cachar with the Calcutta University should be maintained.

On 7 April 1920 Nabin Chandra Bardoloi wrote that Assam should have a separate university of its own. Dalim Chandra Bora and Padmanath Gohain Baruah urged for a separate university, but Manmohan Lahiri thought that time was not opportune for a separate university for Assam. Sir Nicholas Beatson Bell however supported the separation of Assam from Bengal so far as university was concerned.

On 21 March 1923 A J Laine wrote that Assam must have a university of its own. That was the only remedy to get rid of the stepmotherly attitude of the Calcutta University.

On 14 October 1920, Rajendra Narayan Choudhry asked a question in the Legislative Council whether the Government contemplated the establishment of a University or Universities for the Province and if so whether it was
taking any steps towards the establishment of the same.
A. R. Edwards replied that the Chief Commissioner was
anxious to see that after the introduction of the reforms
scheme, the people of each valley in this province, should
solve their own collegiate and university problems in the
manner which appealed to them. To a question of Muhammad
Bakht Mazumdar on the same day if it was a fact that Assam
would soon be provided with a university of its own and
in that case if the Government would consider the special
needs of the Surma Valley people in such a university.
A. R. Edwards replied that the matter was being considered
by the Government of India in connection with the pending
legislation about Calcutta University.

On 22 February 1921, the Chief Commissioner thought
that Sylhet and Gauhati should have their own universities.
That is he thought that one university would not be suffi­
cient but two universities one in the Surma Valley and
another in the Assam Valley should be established; because
these two valleys were inhabited by people of distinct cul­
ture and civilization speaking different languages.

In September 1921, a resolution was introduced in
the legislative council by Dalim Chandra Bora for the
In September 1922, Moulavi Munawwar Ali moved a resolution in the Legislative Council recommending to the Government that a committee be appointed to formulate a scheme for establishing a university in Assam on the lines of the Durham University.

The Under-Secretary to the Government, S.P. Desai wrote that there was no money for the execution of the scheme of the kind proposed by Munawwar Ali. But Ghanasyam Baruah, the Minister for Local Self-Government said, 'We may any day be faced with the difficulty of not being able to follow Calcutta university in some matters and there is no harm in looking ahead'. The Governor agreed with Ghanasyam Baruah and wrote 'I understand that we have to seek salvation in a university of our own. The D.P.I. Cunningham was however not in favour of establishing a university, because he thought that schools and colleges should be reformed before instituting a university. Reform of colleges and schools would entail huge expenditure and there was no money for that! Cunningham thought that as long as there was no
change in the status of the Calcutta University, there was no urgency for a separate university in Assam(2).

The establishment of the University of Assam was one of the resolutions that Brajendra Narayan Choudhury moved in the September session of the Legislative Council but it was withdrawn for political reasons(3).

The demand for a separate university was made because of the practical difficulties to which Assam was subject to. The Assam Government had no voice in matters connected with its educational policy. On 11 June 1920, the Director of Public Instruction, J.R. Cunningham wrote 'Assam has been; as it must remain, to all practical intents, unrepresented on the university council. It had had a handful of members on the senate whose voice was lost when the local cause they had to plead was uncongenial to Calcutta; and who had no influences whatever in the larger affairs of the university policy. Always, however, there was the Government of India above the university and Assam could appeal to

(2) No. Education B, October, 1922, 104-5.
(3) Assam Legislative Council Proceedings, 1924, P 1020.
the Imperial Government against the decision of Calcutta. What is the situation under the new regime ... The control of the university will, to all practical intents and purposes be absolute with Bengal. The Government of India is eliminated. Formerly we were a part and parcel of the university working under the Imperial Government in an area which included four provinces. Now we are too remote and unfriended suburb of the city of Calcutta'.

The demand for a separate university in Assam was so acutely felt that Nichols-Beatson Bell, the Chief Commissioner of Assam wrote to the Government of India on 10 August 1920 as follows: 'The educational problems of Assam differ not only in bulk but also in nature from the educational problems of Bengal. The Chief Commissioner is profoundly convinced that the reformed Government of Assam, supported by the educated public in the two valleys will be able without assistance from Bengal, to solve all the educational problems of this province and to erect a self-contained structure culminated by one or more provincial universities'.

In 1920, when university education became a Provincial subject, there was need for a separate university for

(4) No. 479/3/E, 10 August 1920
But the proposal did not receive serious consideration for financial reasons. It was also considered advisable that the Province should settle down under the new constitution before it undertook legislation for a separate university. Cunningham also said 'A few years' delay will give us the benefit of much experience which the universities had in other provinces'.

But there was persistent demand for a separate university. The Government of Assam was compelled to exhibit interest in this matter. Therefore it wrote to the Government of India on 21 March 1923 - 'There is a considerable feeling in the Province that the interests (educational) of Assam have not always been sufficiently recognised in the past, but this seeming neglect is doubtless due to the fact that the development of higher education in Assam is comparatively recent. Assam was still a part of Bengal when the university of Calcutta was established. In 1874, when Assam became a separate province, it contained no institution of collegiate status. The Province has now two first grade colleges under Government management both affiliated up to Honours degree standard in a wide range of subjects and numbering 900 students on rolls. One of them is the only college outside Calcutta which undertakes Post-
Graduate instruction, (Cotton College). There is also a Government Law College and the proposal for the establishment of a training college for teachers have been approved and are only held up for want of funds.

In spite of this development, Assam still lacks effective representation on the councils of the Calcutta University. The addition in 1921 of the Governor of Assam and the Minister of Education to the list of ex-officio fellows has proved of little practical advantage and Assam is still un-represented on the Syndicate, in which the Executive Government is vested. Moreover, Assam has some justification for feeling that no attempt is made to correct its lack of direct representation, by any special care for its interests, when matters affecting interests arise. Many illustrations of this tendency could be given but it suffice to mention a few recent outstanding cases. The Calcutta University Act, 1921 which transferred the control of the university to the local government of Bengal was passed without any consultation with the Government of Assam and contained no provisions safeguarding the interests of Assam. A few months ago, the senate and the Syndicate of the Calcutta University drafted and submitted to the Government of Bengal for sanction the revised
matriculation regulation framed without any reference to this Province, and in total disregard of its existence. Firstly, the Bill now under consideration was framed by the Government of Bengal and submitted to the Government of India without any previous reference to the Government and it appears that two private members' bill seeking to effect vital changes in the constitution of the University have already been introduced in the Bengal Legislative Council without any opportunity being given to Assam to express their views on the subject.

All this shows that the Government of Assam was thinking of a separate University for Assam for some years. It was not established because of lack of finances.

From 1923 to 1927, there was a lull. In the July session of 1927, Moulana Munawwar Ali introduced a resolution in the Legislative Council for a second time suggesting the establishment of a University. The question was examined once again. The Under Secretary to the Government of Assam wrote, 'Though personally I would very much like to see a separate University established in Assam, it seems to me that the question is at present beyond practical politics, especially from the financial point of view...... At present we are committed to a scheme of primary education.
It is likely that the Government will be called upon to provide funds at an increasing rate every year for the expansion of primary education. The two Arts colleges in the two valleys, in their present state with only limited number of subjects, affiliated to the Calcutta University can hardly be considered suitable nucleus for a university. The present law college at Gauhati is not in a prosperous condition. We have not yet got a single college for women. The Calcutta University has served our needs in the past and perhaps can do so for some years more. Therefore, the Under Secretary said that there was no need for a separate university at present.

Muhammad Saadulla, the Education Minister agreed with the views expressed by the Under Secretary, and said, 'I see no advantage in having a university of our own with not fully developed colleges. When for our Medical, Veterinary and Engineering education, we shall have to depend upon Bengal and Calcutta University. Barring the subjects English which could be taught up to M.A. standard in the Cotton College, we have no post-graduate teaching in our colleges. This means that even for the post-graduate teaching we will have to be dependent on our own neighbours and other
Provincial universities. What earthly good will therefore accrue to our Province by having a costly senate and Syndicate and other University paraphernalia, I for myself do not see *(5).

The Governor Laurie Hammond agreed with Saadulla. As a matter of fact, all the Ministers and the entire Government, both the Transferred and the Reserved Halves were opposed to the idea of a separate university for Assam.

Besides Munawwar Ali, several others like Hyder Ali Khan, Pyari Mohon Das introduced similar resolutions, but they were all opposed by the Government for financial reasons.

Munawwar Ali did not keep quiet. On 20 March 1931, he moved another resolution in the Assam Legislative Council. This Council recommends to the Government of Assam that a university be established in this Province *(5)*. The Education Minister Abdul Hamid who also hailed like Munawwar

*(5) Education B Sept. 1928, 346-60.*
Ali from the Surma Valley, opposed the resolution. He said,

'If we want to have a university, it must necessarily have an academic atmosphere about it. It is no use of having a university and appointing certain number of educational officers to conduct the examination. The difficulty of collecting a group of men whose scholastic career might serve as an inspiration to the students of the university would require a decent sum; and at this stage neither the Government nor the House will, I think, consider it a practicable proposition'.

In other words, Abdul Hamid said that Assam would have a university of its own when funds were available. Munawwar Ali withdrew the resolution (6). No member from the Assam Valley protested against the statement made by the education Minister. It appears from the proceedings of the Council that some of the members from the Surma Valley were definitely opposed to the proposal. The representatives from the Assam Valley did not like to wound the tender feelings.

(6) A.C.L.P. 1931, P 555.
of their fellow members. Even persons like Rohini Kumar Choudhury, Moulavi Keramat Ali and Mahadeb Sarma did not support when the resolution was moved.

In 1933, a resolution was tabled by Brindaban Chandra Goswami for the establishment of a university in Assam but it was defeated.

On 11 September 1933, Munawwar Ali put a question in the Legislative Council, enquiring whether the Government prepared any scheme for the establishment of a university in Assam. The Minister for Education replied in the negative (7).

The Legislative Council, Assam, in its memorandum to the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Government of India Bill 1935, said that 'Assam is the only province in India without a University of its own. Whenever a question was raised in the Council, the Government said that they had no funds for the purpose and men adequately qualified to manage the University'.

(7) Ibid 1933, P 41.
The redoubtable Munawwar Ali in the meanwhile took the bold step in preparing a bill to provide a university for Assam. But the Governor refused his sanction for the introduction of the Bill in the Legislative Council on the ground that it would impose a great burden on the revenues of the province (8).

In his address to the Legislative Council in 1935, the Governor referred to the Bill sought to be introduced by Munawwar Ali and said that an enquiry would be made by a Special Officer.

Abdul Hamid, the Education Minister, speaking on the demand for education said that an experienced officer would be appointed as a special officer to make an enquiry into the matter of establishing a separate university for Assam and report (9).

On 6 March 1935, speaking on Demand No. 25(Education) Jogendranath Gohain moved a cut motion to censure the Minister for education for his failure to establish a university.

(8) Ibid 1935 P 701
(9) Ibid 1935 P 708
in the province and for failure to take earliest, sincere and practical steps for establishing a university. The Rev. Nichols Roy supported the cut motion and said that a university for Assam was a necessity (10). But, the Education Minister replied that finance was the biggest hurdle in the way of establishing a university (11).

Gopendralal Das Choudhury from Sylhet opposed the cut motion on the ground that public opinion in Sylhet with regard to the establishment of a University in Assam was not crystalised.

Not only Gopendralal Das Choudhury but also Abdul Rahim Choudhury, another member from the Surma Valley opposed the cut motion of Jogendranath Gohain on the ground that public opinion in the Surma Valley was not in favour of a University for Assam (12).

Abdul Hamid, the Minister for Education assured Jogendranath Gohain that he would advise the Government to

(10) Ibid P. 547
(11) Ibid
(12) Ibid
press before the Subvention Committee for the inclusion of expenditure that would be involved in establishing a university in Assam. On the basis of this assurance, Jogendra-nath Gohain withdrew the cut motion.

Brindaban Chandra Goswami from Nowgong also moved a cut motion and it was carried in the House. The Ministry did not resign.

On June 1, 1935 the Rev. Nichols Roy moved a resolution in the legislative council recommending to the Government of Assam that a scheme for a university in Assam be immediately prepared and placed before the Council (13).

The Education Minister said that the matter would be taken up and that a Special Officer would be appointed to do the spade work. After the receipt of a report from the Special Officer, an expert committee would be appointed to examine the report and advise the Government as to the measures to be taken in the preparation of the scheme. The scheme would be placed before the council (14).

(13) Ibid.
(14) Ibid.
Nichols Roy's resolution evoked opposition from some of the members of the Surma Valley. Gopendralal Das Choudhury and Abdul Rahim Choudhury said that Surma Valley was not in favour of a university for Assam. But Minawwar Ali said that Surma Valley wanted a University for Assam. In spite of the opposition from some of the members of the Surma Valley the resolution was passed by a tremendous majority of 28 votes to 7. The seven persons who voted against the resolution were Birendralal, Gopendralal Das Choudhury, Piyari Mohan Das, Sanat Kumar Das, Abdul Rahim Choudhury, Muhammad Misaraff and Abdul Mannan. In other words, four Hindus and three Muslims from the Surma Valley voted against the resolution, whereas all the members of the European Block, eight Muslims and 14 Hindus, Christians, and the Scheduled Caste members voted for the resolution. The two Ministers and the two Executive Councillors did not participate in the voting. Unfortunately the merits of the resolution were not considered by some of the members. The feeling of Surma Valley and the Assam Valley was brought into existence. Of course it must be said that not all the members of the Surma Valley voted against it. The strong protagonist Minawwar Ali voted in favour of the resolution. The strongest support, however, came from the solid
European bloc. Speaking on the resolution Roffey the leader of the European group said 'I can say quite definitely that we are in favour of a university for this province' (15).

Not only the legislature supported the idea of a separate university for Assam, eminent men also supported the move. The Nobel Laureate Sir C. V. Raman wrote - 'The natural desire of the Assamese people to have a university of their own would, I am sure, receive universal support'.

The idea was also supported by Sir Debi Prasad Sarbadhikari the learned Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University. In his address at the Convocation of the Calcutta University 1935 Sir Adhikari said - 'Assam wants a University of its own for it has its own problems and requirements and traditions which a huge institution like the Calcutta University could not serve'.

On 5 June 1935, Rohini Kumar Choudhury put a question in the Legislative Council enquiring what steps were being taken to establish a university in Assam and at what cost. Jogendranath Gohain also put a similar question. The Minister for education replied that an enquiry was being made

(15) Ibid.
into the matter and that the Government decided to appoint a Special Officer (16).

On 13 September 1935, the Rev. Nichols Roy asked the Minister for Education whether a scheme was prepared by the Government for the establishment of a university. The Minister replied that no scheme was prepared by the Government for the establishment of a university in Assam and that it would not be prepared until the Special Officer submitted his report and the report was considered by an Expert Committee. On the same day, Moulavi Kermat also asked the Education Minister, whether the Expert Committee was appointed. The Education Minister replied in the negative (17).

On 15 September 1935 Kasinath Saikia asked the Education Minister whether a Special Officer was appointed. The Education Minister replied that Cunningham, a retired Director of Public Instruction was requested to take up the work and that he had agreed to do so (18).

The selection of Cunningham by the Government as a Special Officer to study and report on the question of

(16) Ibid
(17) Ibid
(18) Ibid
establishing a university in Assam, provoked controversy. The question was whether Roberts, the Director of Public Instruction and former Principal of the Mirari Chand College, or Cunningham, who retired long ago, should be the Special Officer. Rohini Kumar Choudhury moved a cut motion when a supplementary demand was moved by the Education Minister to discuss this point. During the discussion, Kasinath Saikia contended that Cunningham had no open mind so far as the establishment of a university for Assam was concerned. He (Cunningham) had already expressed in so many words that there was no need for a separate university for Assam (19). There was animated debate on this point. The proposal to appoint Cunningham was criticised on the ground that Cunningham retired long ago and that he was not in touch with the realities of the situation. Secondly, the Government must bear a heavy expenditure on his travel from England to India and back. Third, Roberts was still in service and was conversant with the needs and aspirations of the people and there was no need to meet a heavy expenditure on his travel. Therefore, he should have been appointed. But the cut motion was defeated because the Government, particularly Governor Keane, was intensely interested in the appointment of Cunningham. Roberts was not selected because there was a belief.

(19) Ibid
that he was in sympathy with the demand for a separate university for Assam. Cunningham was not in favour of the proposal for separation from the Calcutta University. Since the Government was anxious to scuttle the proposal, Cunningham was selected (20).

Cunningham took charge on 11 November 1935. Before his arrival, the Secretariat had already prepared and issued an elaborate questionnaire.

On 11 March 1936 Jogendranath Gohain asked the Minister for Education about the steps taken for the establishment of a university for Assam. The Minister replied that the Government was studying the report submitted by Cunningham (21).

In his budget speech 1936-37, the Minister for Education said - 'The Special Officer has completed his task. The Hon'ble Members will be provided with the copies of the report. The Government will consider the report in due course and decide what further steps they are to take for the completion of the scheme of a university of Assam' (22)

(20) Ibid
(21) Ibid
(22) Ibid
On 16 March 1936, Nilambar Dutta put a question in the Legislative Council about the appointment of an Expert Committee to consider the scheme for the establishment of a university for Assam (23). The Minister for Education replied that it would not be possible to say when the expert committee would be appointed and published the Cunningham report.

The Cunningham Report:

Let us now consider the recommendations of the report. Several witnesses appeared before the Commission to give evidence. The Assam Association prepared carefully an elaborate scheme. Munawwar Ali prepared a bill and submitted it to the Commission. The Hindu population of the two valleys were divided. The differences between the two were sharp, and strongly expressed. The opinion in the Assam Valley was unanimous. The people of the Assam Valley wanted a university immediately and were determined to have it at any cost. They said that it should be located in Guwahati. They argued that a separate university was necessary for the study and

(23) Ibid. 1936. P 69.
promotion of the Assamese language and culture and for the advancement of the interests of the Assamese. The University should be both residential and affiliating. It should concentrate on the development of higher education in North East India. It should not only satisfy the requirements of services and professions but should develop the economic and cultural needs of the locality.

The Bengali Hindus, on the other hand, adopted a hostile attitude towards a separate university for Assam. They argued that Calcutta University was first in date, first in numbers and first in importance, the premier university of India with its long record of public service, had established itself firmly in the affection and esteem of the Hindu bhadralog (superior castes) of the district. The Hindus of Sylhet felt that it was the Calcutta University that brought the Bengalis culturally and politically where they were and where they are proud to be. Separation from the Calcutta University, they argued, meant disloyalty to the parent institution. 'Let the Assam Valley have a separate University' they said, 'but the people of the Surma Valley do not want one. Why it should be thrust on us against our will'. There were some who said that there should be a separate university in the Surma Valley with its headquarters
at Sylhet. There was a third group who represented before the Commission that the University should be established not in Gauhati or in Sylhet but in Shillong, the capital of Assam which was neither Bengali nor Assamese. Finally there were some who were dissatisfied with the Calcutta University and favoured the establishment of two small universities, one in Sylhet and another in Gauhati. This is a compromise measure to satisfy both the contending elements.

In their memorandum to the Cunningham Commission, fifty representatives of the Surma Valley wrote that the proposal to have a provincial university was premature. The first duty must be the re-organization of the primary and secondary education so as to solve the problem of unemployment; that the province lacked the means to start a university providing for advanced studies in a variety of subjects; that Assam lacks the intellectual capital to man the governing bodies of a university; that the spirit of jealousy between the valleys threaten the prospects of corporate action for the promotion of common good; that the diversity of vernaculars in the province would ultimately add to the cost of maintenance and a small university would not be able to meet the expenditure; and that the separation of Assam from the Calcutta University would bring about the complete
cultural ruin of the Bengalis in Assam.

Basant Kumar Das, one of the members of the Assam Legislative Council did not favour the formation of a separate university for Assam. However, if there was to be a university, it must be located in Sylhet and not in Gauhati.

Amarnath Ray another member of the Legislative Council, from Sylhet did not agree with Basant Kumar Das. He said that a scheme for a university should be drawn up which might be given effect to as soon as funds were available. Himself a graduate of the Calcutta University was dissatisfied with the Calcutta system and strongly favoured the establishment of a residential university for Assam.

The Governor Sir Nicholas Beatson Bell thought of developing Gauhati and Sylhet into Oxford and Cambridge of Assam. He, therefore, advised the conversion of Mirarichand College at Sylhet and the Cotton College at Gauhati into universities, affiliating and residential. Each university should be controlled by the respective valleys. Beatson Bell also recommended the establishment of a Board of Secondary Education to take over the administration of Intermediate education.
The Muslim opinion in Sylhet was not free and fearless. They did not like to incur the displeasure of the Hindu Bhadralog. At the same time it had no special affection for Calcutta as the Hindus had. Cashar and Goalpara left the discussion to others. But the Silchar bar dominated by the Hindu aristocracy followed the Sylhet Bar. The domiciled Bengalees in the Assam Valley did not wish to involve themselves in this controversy. The Hill areas were not interested in this matter. But the Calcutta University Commission (1919) however recommended the establishment of a separate university for Assam. The Commission opined, 'Gauhati might rightly aim and ought to aim at becoming the seat of a university and to this end it should undergo a period of apprenticeship to independence'.

The Cunningham Commission recommended that there should be a single university for both the valleys, centered at Gauhati. The Vice-Chancellor should be a part-time Officer. The Governor should be Chancellor. The Minister for Education should be the Pro-Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor should be part-time Officer because there was not enough work for him. The offices of Registrar and Treasurer should be combined in one man. The Court should be the supreme governing
body of the University. It should have the power to revise the acts of the executive and academic councils. It should exercise all the powers and perform all the duties conferred and imposed on it.

The Court should consist of ex-officio members, the Chancellor, the pro-chancellor, the vice-Chancellor and other officers of the university, the Principals of the colleges, the professors and readers, life members appointed by the Chancellor, graduates elected by the registered graduates, persons nominated by non-academic bodies, representatives of the collegiate staff other than principals and nominees of the Chancellors. The aim was in structuring the court to secure a balanced body in which all the interests are adequately represented. It should meet annually. If necessary the Vice-Chancellor may call for special meetings.

The executive functions should be concentrated in the Executive Council consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, the Director of Public Instruction, the Principals of the constituent colleges, a representative from each of the faculties nominated by the Vice-Chancellor, the Rector and two persons nominated by the Chancellor.
The Cunningham report was not revolutionary in character. The tax-payer should have been spared from the heavy expenditure of Rs. 17,000 incurred on the Commission to write this simple report. Cunningham need not have been brought all the way from England. This business could have been done more effectively by the Principal of the Cotton College Roberts.

After the receipt of the report, it was referred to an Expert Committee for scrutiny and preparation of a scheme.

On 16 March 1956, Nilambar Dutta asked a question in the Legislative Council about the appointment of an Expert Committee to consider the scheme formulated by the Cunningham Commission for the establishment of a university for Assam. The Minister for Education replied that it would not be possible to say when the Expert Committee would be appointed (24). The Minister also informed the House that the matter was taken up to the notice of the subvention committee.

On 21 March 1956, the Rev. Nichols Roy asked the Minis-

(24) Ibid 1956. P. 320
ter for Education whether any scheme had been prepared for the establishment of a university in Assam. The Minister replied in the negative (25).

On 1 October 1936, Rohini Kumar Choudhury asked the Minister for Education as to what action was being taken for the establishment of a university in Assam; whether a scheme had been prepared for the same. The Minister replied that the scheme had to be postponed for want of funds. Thus the Cunningham Report prepared at a cost of Rs.17,000 was sent to the State Archives for eternal rest (26). For sixteen years the question of establishing a separate university was debated but no action was taken. Dyarchy passed into history.

On 1 April 1937, Provincial autonomy was introduced. Saadulla was appointed Chief Minister and Rohini Kumar Choudhury who evinced keen interest when he was in the opposition as Revenue Minister. But no action was taken immediately after the Ministry came into existence because

(26) Ibid. 1936. P. 1511.
of political instability and veiled opposition from the Surma Valley. Nine months after the introduction of Provincial Autonomy, on 20 December 1937 Purna Chandra Sarma asked the Minister for Education whether any proposal was made for the establishment of a university. The Minister for Education replied in the negative (27). The next day, Mahi Chandra Bora asked the Education Minister about the fate of the Cunningham Report. The Education Minister repeated the same reply of having no funds.

One year after the assumption of office, Saadulla, while presenting the budget for 1938-39, said that steps were being taken to establish a university. In the same year, the redoubtable Munawwar Ali who took keen interest in the establishment of a university for Assam and who was also the Education Minister, got a bill drafted in consultation with the Education Officers. It could not be introduced in the Legislative Assembly because of the fall of the Government of which he was a member.

On 10 March 1939, Abdur Rahman put a question about

the establishment of a university for Assam. Gopinath Bordoloi who was the Premier and Education Minister replied that the subject would be taken up in the near future. Bardoloi talked of the establishment of university both inside and outside the Legislative Assembly. Fakruddin Ali Ahmed, the Finance Minister in the Bardoloi Ministry also said that the question of establishing a university was engaging the attention of the Government. But the Congress Coalition Ministry came to the conclusion that the proposal might be shelved for the present for financial reasons.

The third Saadulla Ministry which came to office consequent on the resignation of the Bardoloi Ministry in December 1939, revived the proposal. In order to enlist the support of the Hindus of Assam Valley, Saadulla while presenting his budget for the year 1940-41 said in clearest terms that the question of establishing a university for Assam was engaging the serious attention of his Government and that he would come forward with definite proposals.

On 7 January 1941, Rohini Kumar Choudhury informed the Legislative Assembly that Dr. S.K. Bhuyan was appointed a special Officer for the preparation of a scheme (28).

(28) Ibid 1941.
On the basis of the scheme prepared by the Special Officer, the Assam University Bill was prepared.

On 4 March 1941, Rohini Kumar Choudhury sought the permission of the House for the introduction of the bill (29). The permission was granted.

On 11 March 1941, the Education Minister Choudhury moved that the Assam University Bill be referred to a select committee of 17 members who represented all sections of the House with seven as the quorum. He was anxious that the bill should be passed in the same session. Therefore he said that the report of the select committee should be submitted by 31 May 1941.

The salient features of the bill were, first, the university would be an affiliating university and not a teaching university nor a residential university. The Minister gave reasons why the university would be an affiliating and not a residential and teaching university. 'University acti-

(29) Ibid 1941.
vities under the direct control and management cannot be concentrated in one particular centre. There are 14 colleges in Assam, three in Gauhati, four in Shillong, three in Sylhet, one in Habiganj, one at Silchar, one at Barpeta and one at Jorhat. If a residential university was established the whole teaching should be concentrated in one place. All other colleges would have to be abolished or they should continue to be under the Calcutta University. A centralised university giving importance only to colleges of a particular town will retard the growth of educational centres. The reasons given by the Minister for establishing an affiliating university are neither convincing nor sound. The Minister was not aware of the fact that a university could be both residential and affiliating. In this country universities were both residential and affiliating. The Minister, however, assured the House that provision was made for converting the affiliating university into a residential one.

To meet the opposition of the Bengalis the bill provided for the study of Bengali and Islamic studies. The bill also provided for the military training of students. The bill laid down that all the high schools and colleges already
recognised would continue to be recognised.

The jurisdiction of the university shall be the whole of Assam and the Indian State of Manipur.

The university could undertake teaching.

The degrees and diplomas awarded by the University shall be recognised by the Government of Assam.

The minorities shall be represented adequately in the university senate. The Chancellor would be authorised to nominate 40 Fellows. One third of them shall be Muslims.

The subjects that might be taught would be Assamese, Bengali, Islamic studies, archaeology, domestic science, commerce, anthropology, politics and economics.

Disputes between the university and its officers shall be decided by arbitration.

All High Schools recognised by the Calcutta University shall automatically be recognised by the Assam University.
The first Vice-Chancellor, the first Adviser, the first Registrar and the Treasurer would be appointed by the Chancellor on a salary to be fixed by him.

The registered graduates constituency would be composed for a period of six years from the commencement of the Act with graduates of the Assam University and of other Indian Universities or of any foreign university who were permanent inhabitants of or domiciled in Assam.

The bill was published on 26 February 1941.

The bill created a great controversy. The two valleys were divided. The Surma Valley was opposed to the proposal to establish a university for Assam. The Assam Valley insisted that a university should be established in Gauhati. Kamini Kumar Sen urged that the bill be circulated for public opinion. He also said that the Surma Valley was totally opposed to the proposal and that the demand for a separate university was confined to the Assam Valley alone; that the Provinces of Orissa, Sindh and North West Frontier Provinces had no university for their own; that there was
no qualified human material for the purpose; that Calcutta University had brilliant scholars whereas Assam had none. Further there were no professional colleges, like the Medical College, the Engineering College and the Veterinary College as feeder institutions. Therefore Sen said that there was no need for a university for Assam (30). Saadulla justified the establishment of the Assam University. The entire European bloc gave a solid support to the bill and the bill was referred to a select committee of 17 members. The Committee could not submit its report before the prescribed date. In January 1942 there was a political crisis and the Saadulla Ministry went out of office. The Constitution was suspended and Governor's rule was imposed. Thus all the efforts made by Rohini Kumar Ghoshchury ended in smoke. During the next three years there was no move for the establishment of a University.

In October 1944, a meeting held at Sibsagar, discussed the ways and means for the early establishment of a university for Assam. The meeting formed a Trust Board for collecting money and for deciding upon other practical measures.

(30) Ibid 1941.
for the implementation of the decision. By another resolu-
tion the meeting decided to call a convention of members
drawn from the entire Assam Valley and the Hill districts
for a fuller discussion of the subject. Accordingly, a
university committee was set up in every sub-division of
the Assam Valley and the Khasi Hills. These committees
sent representatives to the University Convention held in
Gauhati on 29th and 30th December 1944. The Convention while
ratifying the Sibsagar resolution in regard to the formation
of a trust board, authorised the trust board to increase the
strength of the Trust Board from 19 to 25. The Convention
also decided that the University should be called the Gauhati
University located at or near Gauhati.

The Trust Board was a representative one. The Convention constituted a committee of three to prepare a scheme
for the establishment of a University. It also enlisted the
cooperation of five others to help the Trust Board in carrying out its work.

The Trust Board met on 6 June 1945 and constituted
an executive committee of seven members with Gopinath Bordoloi as President.
The functions of the Trust Board were the collection of funds, the acquisition of land for the construction of buildings, the construction of buildings and to do all other things before a body corporate was brought into being to take charge of the administration of the university. When the body corporate was constituted the Trust Board would dissolve itself automatically.

The Trust Board was able to collect by 31 July 1945 Rs. 3,43,421-9-0 although they appealed for Rs. 30 lakhs.

The Congress after being in political wilderness came back to power in 1946. The question of establishing a university for Assam was discussed in March 1946. Bardoloi made a surprising statement. In 1939, Bardoloi was talking loudly inside and outside the legislature about the desirability of establishment of a university. But in 1946, he said, "This (the establishment of a university for Assam) is not an immediate problem for the Government at the present moment. But I would like to tell the House that if there are ventures which have enough resources to have an ideal institution in the nature of a university it will surely be the duty of the Government to help such ventures with such means as Government can provide. But the Govern-
ment out of its own accord are not thinking of instituting any university in Assam at the present moment*. After making this statement Bardoloi suddenly jumped and said rather irrelevantly, 'I would not like to have a replica of the Calcutta University in our own Province!' (31).

Bardoloi's statement caused a flutter in the Assamese community. He was the President of the Trust Board constituted for the sole purpose of establishing a university. The intelligentsia expected him to take the earliest opportunity to bring into being a university. Evidently, political pressure was applied and the members of the party showed signs of discontent. Therefore on 1 September 1947 Bardoloi as Education Minister introduced the Gauhati University Bill in the Assam Legislative Assembly and it was referred to a select committee. There was no opposition to the Bill from the members of the Cachar District. The Bill was taken up for consideration on 13 September 1947 and passed into law on the same day. Clause after clause was approved without discussion or division. This was due to the fact that Sylhet which was strongly opposed to separation from the Calcutta

(31) Ibid 1946.
University went over to East Pakistan and Cachar district was not strong enough to oppose the bill. Thus came into being the Gauhati University on 26 January 1948.

Dibrugarh University:

In 1959 there was a feeling that there should be a second university in Assam. On 15 October 1960, the Governing Body of the Kanoi College passed a resolution that a second university should be established in Dibrugarh. Kanoi, the founder of the Kanoi College offered a donation of Rs. 20 lakhs for the purpose. In December 1960, some of the teachers of the Gauhati University met the Chief Minister and impressed on him the idea of another university for upper Assam. The Chief Minister welcomed the idea. On 16 March 1961, a committee was set up to examine the suggestion. The members of the Committee were the Secretary to Government, Education, Dr. B.K. Baruah, Mr. H.B. Kanoi, Mr. L.P. Dutta, the D.P.I., a representative from the UGC and Jogiraj Basu. The Committee recommended the establishment of a university at Dibrugarh. A bill was framed and passed on 5 April 1965 without any discussion worth mentioning and the University was established on 1 July 1965 with jurisdiction over higher education in the Districts of Lakhimpur (now
Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh) and Sibsagar in Assam.

**Assam Agricultural University:**

The Government of Assam realised that agricultural production could only be increased by the application of science and technology. It was with this aim that an Agricultural College and a Veterinary College, experimental stations, and extension organizations were developed during the period 1947 to 1965 in the State. In order that these organizations could be effective it was necessary to have a progressive Research Organization to solve the problem of farmers. The Indo American Team on Agricultural Education and Research appointed by the Government of India had studied the situation comprehensively. The Team recommended that the approach to agricultural advancement should be reoriented by integrating research training and extension into a well knit organization. The Education Commission, 1964, observed that at least one Agricultural University should be established in each State.

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The urgency of bringing about a rapid increase in food production in the State necessitated a re-examination of the existing pattern with the aim of bringing about maximum possible efficiency and effectiveness of the organization serving agriculture. It was apparent that there was need for establishing a much closer inter-relationship between research, teaching and extension programmes which was not possible under the existing arrangement. Therefore the Government decided to establish an Agricultural University at Jorhat for the development of agriculture, animal husbandry and allied sciences in the State of Assam. The Assam Agricultural College at Jorhat and the Assam Veterinary College at Gauhati formed the nucleus of the Agricultural University (33).

North Eastern Hill University:

The people of the Hill Areas of the North Eastern Region have been pressing for a long time for the establishment of a University for the North Eastern Region. In September, 1965, some of the members from the Hill Areas made

(33) Ibid. 1968.
a representation to the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in this behalf. The University Grants Commission to whom the said representation was forwarded set up a Committee under the Chairmanship of Professor A.R.Wadia to study the question and make suitable recommendations. The Committee recommended setting up of a Central University at Shillong. Legislation in respect of Universities is related to entry 11 of the State list in the VII schedule to the Constitution and Parliament had no power to make laws in this behalf unless the legislatures of two or more States passed a resolution in pursuance of Article 252 of the Constitution empowering Parliament to pass necessary legislation on the subject. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya approached all State Legislatures to co-operate with it. Only Nagaland and Meghalaya Legislative Assemblies passed the necessary resolutions for the establishment of a Central University at Shillong. Parliament passed necessary legislation and the North Eastern Hill University was established in July 1973.

University Centres:

In addition to four Universities, there is one Postgraduate Centre of the Jawaharlal Nehru University at Imphal.
Manipur and another of the Calcutta University at Agartala in Tripura. These centres are likely to become universities in course of time because they are in two States.

**Conclusion:**

We think that instead of having any more traditional type of universities, we should have a separate university for professional courses. Except the Agricultural University in Assam, there is, so far no institution of higher learning and research in fields of technology of the standard of a university. There are institutes of technology which are deemed to be universities in different states. But no effort has so far been made for establishment of such an institute in North Eastern India. Besides there should be a university or an autonomous institute of the standard of a university for postgraduate teaching and research in medical and allied sciences.