INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND

Location

The present State of Assam lies at the north-east corner of the Republic of India. It is situated between 24° N and 18° 18'N latitudes and 89° 46'E and 97°04'E longitudes with an area of 87,523 sq. k.m.1

1.2 At present, it is bounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur on the east, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Bangladesh on the south and Bangladesh, Tripura and West-Bengal on the west. The portion of West-Bengal bordering Assam forms a narrow corridor of about 64 Kms. below the foothills of Bhutan and Sikim providing a route to the rest of the country. After independence, the boundary of Assam has changed many times. Now, it is left with the plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and hills districts of North-Cachar and Karbi Anglong (erstwhile Mikir hills).

Natural Division

1.3 The Assam State is divided into two distinct physical divisions: (1) the plains area comprising the eight plain districts of the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley district of Cachar and (2) hills areas consisting of
two districts, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills. The most dominating feature in the topography is the course of the river Brahmaputra. It has carved out its own valley between the two ranges of hills - the Assam Himalaya in the north and the Shillong plateau on the south.

The Brahmaputra Valley

1.4 Physiographically, the Brahmaputra valley consists of a flat east-west plain interrupted by a few hilly regions rarely more than 80 k.ms. wide in Upper Assam. The valley narrows down to almost half while by-passing the granitic projection of the Mikir hills halfway down. It widens again to embrace the Kapili plains into its fold. Running through another narrow passage near Gauhati, the valley finally opens out into North Bengal plains. The valley is traversed in all directions by numerous rivers and streams from the neighbouring hills flowing down to the main river.

The Barak Valley

1.5 The valley, a separate plain area, is drained by Barak river system and completely cut-off from the Brahmaputra valley by the Shillong plateau. Cachar is the only district of this valley included in the State, the other, Sylhet has gone to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) as a result of partition. Cachar is heterogenous land composed of both high hills and low land and plains.

Hill Districts

1.6 The hill areas within Assam comprise the two dist-
districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills. The entire area lies between eastern part of the Shillong plateau and the Naga hills. Heavy rainfall and the hot air at the bottom of the hills stimulates the growth of most luxuriant vegetation. As a result, the entire area is densely wooded. Mizo hills, Naga hills, Khasi-Jaintia hills, and Garo hills also formed parts of Assam before 1971.

People of the Barail Range

1.7 The Barail range of hills separates the valley of the mighty Brahmaputra river from the valley of the Barak river. To the south of Barak valley stretch in almost parallel lines from north to south the mountains of the Mizo hills. The whole of this hilly region is fascinating country but what is more fascinating than the natural scenery, vegetation and wild life abounding them are the colourful people, the tribes who inhabit them. The most important tribes in these hills are the Garos, Khasis, Jaintias, Karbis, Dimachas, Kukis, Nagas and the Mizos.

1.8 Mizo hills is inhabited by many tribes. The majority belongs to the tribes like Lusei, Hmar, Pawis and Lakhers, who came to the area from the east and the north. There are other tribes like Reangs and Chakmas, who came from Tripura and Chittagong hill tracts.

1.9 The inhabitants of Naga hills, generally termed as Nagas, belong to more than twenty major tribes, sub-tribes and clans. The prominent among them include the Konyaks, the Aos, the Semas, the Angamis, the Chakhesangs, the Pochuri
Sangtams, the Lothas, the Changs, the Phoms, the Yimchungers, the Khirmungan, the Rengmas, the Zeliangs and the Kukis.6

1.10 In the Garo hills, the Garos are the major tribe. Other tribes of the district are Hajongs, Rabhas, Dalus. Besides, the non-tribal Bengalees, Nepalis and other plains people have settled in the Garo hills since the advent of the British.7

1.11 The North Cachar hills district is inhabited by three main tribes namely, the Dimacha (Kachari), the Kukis and the Zemi Nagas. The Dimacas are the most populous of the tribes, who ruled over other tribes from the beginning of the sixteenth century (1536) till British annexation in 1854.8

1.12 In Khasi and Jaintia hills, Khasi and Jaintias are the chief tribes. Other tribes in the district are: Mikir on the north, Lalung, Viate, Vaiphe and Hmar in small numbers in Jaintia hills. Bengalees form a majority of non-tribals at Shillong town. Other non-tribes are Nepalis mostly graziers in Bhoi area and Assamese in Government services.9

1.13 In the Karbi hills, Karbi is the Chief tribe. Other tribes in the districts are: Dimacha, Naga, Garo etc. A sizable number of Bengalees have also settled recently in the district.10

History of the People

1.14 The people of Brahmaputra valley has a rich historical past. Assam was known as Pragjyotishpur and Kamarup in the rest of India even from pre-historic time. Assam's
early contact with Aryan India is revealed by reference in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. This area figured also in the accounts of three foreign travellers - Ptolemy in fourth century A.D., Hiuen Tsang, the famous Chinese traveller in the seventh century, and Arab traveller Alberuni.

According to anthropologists, many thousands of year ago this land, like any other parts of India, was inhabited by Austric races. Mongolians migrated into this area through the eastern gate. The last group of Mongolians to come to Assam and settled here was the Ahoms. Almost from the earliest times when the Aryans came to India, streams of Aryan people also reached this part. Brahminical influence on the society was invariably great. It is on this account that Buddhism failed to secure a foot-hold in this area. From the fifteenth century, contemporaneous with the Vaishnavic renaissance in other parts of India, vaishnavism gained a foot-hold in the Assam plains under the leadership of Sri Sankardev. The influence of the cult of Vaishnavism on the culture, literature and society of the people in Assam was profound. Thus, there was an educational background in the plains of Assam on the basis on which the British easily built up an educational system.

By the Treaty of Yandabu on February 24, 1826, Assam was annexed to the British territories. The Ahom prince Purandar Singha was however installed as a Rajah of Upper Assam comprising Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts, while Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong districts were formed.
into a Commissionership under David Scott. Purandar Singha was pensioned off in 1838 and the area also was placed under direct administration of the British. 16

1.17 In 1826, the Cachar king Gobinda Chandra entered into a Treaty with the British. He was assassinated in 1830. In 1832, the territory was annexed by the Doctrine of Lapse. 17 The Jaintia paragana i.e. the plains portion of Jaintia kingdom, was taken over in 1835 and later the entire kingdom was taken over. 18 The North Cachar was held by Tularam Senapati, a vassal Kachari Chief from 1829 to 1850 and then by his three sons. In 1854, the British took it over. Sylhet had been a part of the British territory. 20

1.18 Later on Goalpara was transferred to Coochbihar Commissionership and Cachar to Dacca division and then retransferred to Assam in 1874. Before 1874, Assam was administered as a division of Bengal, under a Commissioner. In 1874, Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissionership. The district of Sylhet was aided to Assam. 22

British Conquest of Assam Hills:

1.19 The hill tribes bordering Assam plains, were little affected by the British occupation of Assam until the end of the nineteenth century. They proved to be so hostile and their hills so impenetrable that, although a large section of their mountain had for many years lain nominally within the British territory of Assam, the Government was content to leave them and their area alone, except for an occasional
expedition and establishment of a few military out-posts to punish a particular tribe for raiding or massacring British subjects. The extension of tea industry and other European interest in Assam, however led the British to extend their political authority and administration into the hills.

Khasi and Jaintia Hills: The first contact between the British and the inhabitants of the Khasi hills followed upon the acquisition of the grant of the Dewani of Bengal in 1765. In 1826, after the expulsion of the Burmese from Assam and occupation of the province by the Company, the British entered the Khasi hills in order to negotiate for the construction of a road through the territory of the Khasi Siem of Nonghlaw, which would unite Sylhet with Gauhati. An agreement was reached and a sanitaria was established at Nonghlaw. Misunderstanding unfortunately arose and Khasis rose in revolt and massacred some of the military officers and sepoys in 1829. This led to military operations which continued upto 1833, when the last of the Khasi Chief tendered his submission. The Jaintia hills came into British possession in 1835, after Raja of Jaintia relinquished his hill territory.

The district was divided administratively into three portions, namely, British possessions, petty dependent states, and the Jaintia hills portion, which was wholly British. The twenty five Khasi states were merged with the Province of Assam on January 26, 1950 only.

On April 2, 1970, the Khasi hills district was separated from Assam and along with the districts of Jaintia.

**Garo hills**: In 1765, after accession of the Dewani of Bengal, the British extended their authority to the border of these hill areas. The British Government, at first, maintained a loose supremacy of the outer hills and only nominally controlled the affairs inside the hills. The Garo hills were first taken under direct British management in 1866, and in December, 1867, Captain W.S. Williamson took-up his quarters at Tura, in the heart of the hills. Since then direct administration was introduced in the Garo hills. Till 1871, nearly one hundred villages had tendered their allegiance to the British Government. There yet remained, however, in 1872, about sixty independent villages, in the centre of the hills. A successful expedition was organised in December 1872 for annexing these villages. In 1874, the district was attached to Assam. The district became a part of the autonomous State of Meghalaya in April 2, 1970.

**Mizo hills**: The history of British administration in the Mizo hills (erstwhile Lushai hills) really began in 1890. At that time, the territory was divided into north and south, the northern part was allotted to Assam and the latter to Bengal. In 1898, both the parts were merged into a district of Assam under a Superintendent. The Superintendent, administered the district with the help of Chiefs. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Mizo hills was declared as an 'Excluded Area', over which the provincial
Government had no jurisdiction.30

Under the sixth schedule of the Constitution, the Mizo District Council was set up in 1952 and the Pawl-Lakhier Regional Council in 1953.31 A section of the Mizos demanded independence. This demand was met to some extent by the creation of a Union Territory on January 21, 1972.32

Naga Hills: The British contact with the Nagas began in 1832 and a number of expeditions were led into the hills for punishing the Nagas for raiding the plains of Assam. Naga raids continued till 1865, and in 1866 a new district as Naga hills was formed.

The headquarters of the district was at Samaguting when the district was formed in 1866. The headquarters of the district was transferred to Kohima in 1878, and in 1889, a new sub-division was added to the Naga hills with its headquarters at Mokokchung.33

In 1929, the educated section of the Nagas pleaded before the Simon Commission that their territory should be excluded from the proposed reforms to save them from being overwhelmed by the people of the plains.34 In June 1947, the Naga National Council declared that the Naga hills would cease to be a part of India when the latter attained independence. In March 22, 1956 N.N.C. founded, what it called the 'Naga Federal Government' and proclaimed that Nagaland is a 'People's sovereign republic'. Thus, an armed rebellion flared up in the Naga hills.35 A section of the Naga people
realising that violence was futile, advocated a negotiated settlement of the Naga problem. As a result, a new State of Nagaland was inaugurated on December 1, 1963 as a counterpoise to the demand for an independent Nagaland by the followers of Phizo.³⁶

**Partition of Bengal and India**

1.20 In October 1905, when Bengal was partitioned, the Province of Assam was joined to Eastern portion of Bengal and a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was constituted. In April 1912 Assam was separated from Eastern Bengal.³⁷ In 1947, the district of Sylhet and eight thanas of Cachar district went to the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), while four thanas of Karimganj sub-division of Sylhet district were merged with Cachar.³⁸

**Administrative Divisions of Assam**

1.21 The present State of Assam has ten administrative districts, namely North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup, Goalpara, Karbi Anglong (formerly Mikir hills), North Cachar hills and Cachar. Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hill are hill districts. The other eight districts are plain hill districts. Till 1971, both the districts constituted a single administrative unit known as United Mikir and North Cachar hills district. The district was formed in November 1951, with some parts of Nowgong, Sibsagar, Cachar and United Khasi and Jaintia hill district.

**Demographic Features**

1.22 The State has recorded the highest rate of population
growth in India during the post-independence period. The rates of decennial growth in the State were 34.98 per cent in 1951 - 1961 and 34.95 per cent in 1961 - 1971 compared to 21.64 per cent and 24.80 per cent respectively for India as a whole. The higher rates of population growth are attributed to immigration of people from other parts of India and outside. The rate of decennial growth in the State is mounting in each decade compared to the national growth rate.

1.23 The density of population in the State went up from 102 person per Sq. Km. in 1951 to 138 persons per Sq.Km. in 1961 and then to 186 persons per sq. Km. in 1971. The density of population of the plains districts is quite high being 224 persons per Sq. Km. The districtwise distribution of area, population, density and variations of the districtwise population between 1951 to 1961 and 1961 to 1971 are shown in Table-1.1. It is apparent that population is unevenly distributed. Kamrup and Cachar districts are high density area and hill districts of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong are very low density area. Lower density of population in the hill districts is due to the rugged topography and difficult habitational facilities.

1.24 As per 1971 Census, Assam has 912,557 scheduled castes and 1,606,646 scheduled tribes population which is respectively 6.24 per cent and 10.99 per cent of the total population of the State.

1.25 As per an estimate made by the Directorate of Economics


### TABLE - 1.1

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<td>107</td>
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<td>28,54,183</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>209</td>
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<td>17,36,188</td>
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<td>246</td>
<td>23.53</td>
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<td>3,79,310</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>36.95</td>
<td>40.00</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL:</strong></td>
<td><strong>78,523.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,28,856</strong></td>
<td><strong>106,37,329</strong></td>
<td><strong>146,25,152</strong></td>
<td><strong>102</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
<td><strong>186</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.98</strong></td>
<td><strong>34.95</strong></td>
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</table>
and Statistics, Government of Assam, total population of Assam in 1974 is 160,88,200 out of which 84,81,400 are male and 76,06,800 are female. As per the same estimate, the population of the Primary school-going children for the age bracket 6+ to 11 years as on March 1, 1974 is as under.

**TABLE - 1.2**

Population ( ,00) in the age bracket 6+ - 11 as on March 1, 1974

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<th>Age</th>
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<th>Girls</th>
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<td>2,387</td>
<td>2,349</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>2,238</td>
<td>2,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,204</td>
<td>2,134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL: 11,437 11,187

Thus, Assam, situated in the strategic north-eastern corner of India is inhabited by people with different historical past with varying social and cultural background and values and in ununiform stages of development. It was, therefore, not possible to prescribe and follow a uniform pattern of education for the people. Different segments of the people required different treatment suitable to the tradition, state of social and cultural development reached by them at a particular point of time. This posed a challenge and how this challenge had been met in the distant past and at present by the Government and society at large is a subject matter of the present investigation.
II. AIM, OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

1.27 Primary education is the first stage of education. In this stage, a child is taught the three R's and prepare him for entry into a middle or a secondary school after a course of 3 to 5 years. In Assam, primary instruction covered 5 years in 5 classes. Before 1973-74, the classes were A, B, I, II and III. The junior basic schools are really primary schools, having 5 years of schooling in grades I, II, III, IV and V. In 1973-74, after introduction of 10+2 pattern of schooling in the schools of Assam, the duration of instructions in the primary schools has been brought down to 4 years. Now the primary schools consist of four grades, viz. I, II, III and IV. Elementary schooling covered two stages - primary and middle. The primary stage is for the children of the age group 6+10 and middle stage for the age group 11-14.

Before 1912, primary schools were called lower primary schools. Lower primary standard had a course of 5 years duration, while upper primary standard had a course of two years. In 1912, with the introduction of new course of instruction, upper primary course was dropped. As a result of this the distinction between upper primary and lower primary schools was abolished and all the upper primary schools were either converted to primary schools or middle schools. 43

Period for Investigation:

1.28 The period for investigation is one hundred years from 1874 to 1974. We have also studied primary education in the medieval period i.e. before the advent of the British
and also from 1826 to 1874, based mainly on secondary sources.

Objective of the Investigation:

1.29 The investigation has been carried out with the following broad objectives:

Firstly, to trace and re-construct the historical development of primary education in the State of Assam;

Secondly, to analyse the factors which have influenced the development and progress of primary education during the different stages of the period;

Thirdly, to examine the problems faced in different periods/stages and regions of the State for the extension of primary education and the measures taken to overcome the same;

Fourthly, to assess the part played by different agencies, such as the Government, local bodies, private enterprises including mission bodies, etc., for the spread of primary education in the State;

Fifthly, to evaluate the overall impact of the primary education at different periods;

Sixthly, to draw lessons for guidance in future on the basis of the past one hundred years; and

Lastly, to suggest measures for improvement of primary education in the State in future.

Method of Investigation:

1.30 This work is based entirely on original sources available in "Assam Records" - the proceedings of the Government of Assam in Home and Education departments preserved in the Record Room of the Assam Civil Secretariat. For tracing the development of primary education from 1874 to 1922 these sources have been consulted. For the period 1922-1927 old files and proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council have been consulted. For the period 1927-1966 the Quinquennial Reviews of Progress of Education were consulted. Annual
Reports of the Director of Public Instruction of Assam, old files preserved in the Record Room of the Assam Secretariat, Acts, Proceedings of the Assam Legislative Council and Assembly were also consulted. In respect of the period 1966-74, materials have been collected from the office of the Director of Public Instructions, Assam, Director of Elementary Education, Assam, Proceedings of the meetings of State Primary/Elementary Education Board, Government publications such as Statistical Hand-Book, Five Year Plans, etc.. These documented sources were supplemented by personnel discussions carried out with the officials of the Education department in the Assam Secretariat, Directorates of Public Instruction and Elementary Education, etc. for linking some gaps in information for the post-independence period. As far as possible, all available records were consulted.

Field Investigation:

1.31 A limited field investigation was carried out as a part of this investigation. The field investigation was carried out to study the problems at the grass-root level and condition of the primary schools of the State. The investigation was carried out in 10 sub-divisions of the Deputy Inspector of Schools selected at random. From each D.I.'s sub-division, one S.I.'s circle was selected. Thus, 10 S.I. circles were selected for field study. The main criteria for selection of the S.I. circles was representative character of the circles. Full lists of schools were prepared from each selected S.I. circle. From these lists, four schools
from each of the S.I. Circle in the plains areas, three schools from each of the two S.I. circles in the hill areas, and 11 schools from the only S.I. circle in the urban area were selected at random for detailed investigation. From each of the S.Is of the selected circles, information were collected about their frequency of visit to the schools, quality of inspection, etc. These information were supplemented by records left by the inspecting staff in the Inspection Registers of the selected schools. Investigation regarding quality of accommodation, school compound, amenities available in the schools etc. were carried out in the 45 selected schools. Out of the 162 teachers in these schools, 120 teachers were chosen at random for investigation to find out their age distribution, educational qualification, training received by them, income, attitude, etc..

To investigate about the extent of attendance of the children in school, reasons for wastage and stagnation, etc. two villages - one school village and another a neighbouring village of the school village - from each S.I. circle were selected. In respect of the urban area, 4 wards were selected for investigation. In all, 18 villages and 4 wards in the urban area were selected. The wards were selected purposively. The most backward wards from the point of view of education were selected for investigation. From these villages and wards, 500 householders were selected from north-eastern corner of the selected villages and wards. Some simple schedules and questionnaires were prepared appropriate for
each category of respondent and interviewed. Discussions were also held with the D.Is., S.Is., teachers and householders.

Concluding Remarks:

1.33 The findings and conclusions of this thesis were discussed with officials of the Education Department. In fact, some of the suggestions and recommendations, emerging in course of the discussion, have been incorporated in this work. The investigation for the purpose of this work was started from June 1977 and completed in June 1980.