In the medieval period, education was not the concern of the State. There was no State-maintained system of regular public institution for the masses as at present. But learning was patronized by the court and learned men were venerated. They were mainly Brahmins. Common people were also not wholly illiterate. The "vyayaharis, Lekharus and other officers who copied books, maintained accounts and drew up deeds were all educated. Even the copper-smiths and masons, who engraved epigraphs, must have been able to read and write."\(^1\)

2.2 In medieval times, there were four types of institutions for imparting knowledge, the tols for Brahmins mainly, pathsala for nobles and elite, muktabs for Muhammadans and satras for vaishnava masses.

Tols: Tols were residential schools and as a rule admitted only the Brahmin boys. The medium of instruction was Sanskrit and subjects taught were Dharmashastras, system of philosophy and studies connected with the priestly functions. Some of the tols were attached to the temples and others existed independently. They received large grants in cash and kind from the kings, rulers and citizens for the maintenance of the teachers and pupils. Tols existed
from the sixteenth century onwards in places like Bardowa, Bamduka, Shri-Hati, VyasaKuchi, Hajo, Retnapara, .. The great vaisnavite apostle Sri Sri Sankaradeva received his education at a tol maintained by the Brahmin guru Mahendra Kandali. This shows that even non-Brahmins were admitted into tols. In the eighteenth century, many Sanskrit books were translated into Assamese and a great number of books and treatises were written and compiled on diverse subjects.

Pathsalas: The pathsalas were really elementary schools imparting instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic. Besides institutional learning, a system of private instruction was prevalent during the Ahom days, (1228-1826). The study of history or Buranjis was indispensable for the members of the royal family and for the members of the Ahom nobility and bureaucracy. There were two officers, Chiring Phukon and Bar Chiring Barua who were in charge of subjects like teaching of the Ahom language, promotion of study of Buranjis and writing of books in Ahom and their preservation, etc.

In the early British days, there was a system of family teaching where reading, writing and little arithmetic were taught to the sons of mauzadars by their fathers. Sometimes, a few boys of the neighbourhood joined the sons of mauzadars.

Among the Khamptis of the Lakhimpur district, the children were instructed from time immemorial to read and write Khampti by their Bapus, or spiritual instructors. These Bapus moved about from village to village, usually remaining for about three or four months at a village. During their
stay, all the children attended a class, where they were taught to read and write. Willson, the Inspector of Schools reported in 1881 that it was rare to find a Khampti who could not read and write his own language.6

Muktabs The Muslims built mosques to which muktabs were attached. The chief business of the muktabs is to instruct boys in those portion of the Koran which a Muslim is expected to know by heart in order to perform his Namaz. Sometimes, instruction in reading, writing and simple arithmetic was also included in the curriculum.7 In 1792, Dr. Wade found 'ten or twelve houses of instruction for the children of Musslemans at Goahawtee and more than twenty at Rangpoor.'8

Satras: A satra is a religious centre with a school and a library. Instruction was imparted in ancient lore and scriptures, music, dance, painting, sculpture, etc. The varied and rich vaisnava literature played a great role in educating the mass of people. More stress was laid on audio-visual education and practical training than on mere book knowledge. The Bhawanas served as a most powerful education media. The vaishnavite movement and its rich gifts to the nation worked wonders in the domain of bringing education, religious and ethical, to the very door steps of the masses of people in the age when literacy was confined to the privileged and leaning was essentially aristocratic.9 The important Satras used to maintain a regular band of scholars for imparting instruction.

Professional Education: There was also a system of
professional domestic training due to the caste system and existence of professional groups like Kamar, Kumar, Tati, Khanikar, etc. The boys had no choice other than to follow the profession of his father. The young craftsman was brought up and trained by his father and in absence of father by his elder brother or by a kinsman.

2.3 Thus, upto the beginning of the British period (upto 1826), there was no well-organised, state-maintained and regular system of public instruction in Assam. The educational institutions and facilities existing during the period were not meant for masses, but for special classes, such as, nobles, members of the royal family, Brahmans and the members of the priestly classes. There was no fixed system of giving grants-in-aid to educational institutions. No curriculum or a fixed period of instruction also existed at that time.

II. UNDER THE EAST INDIA COMPANY (1926-1858)

2.4 The anarchy of the later Ahom times and repeated Burmese invasions resulted in the destruction of the existing educational institutions. Scott proposed to revive and encourage the indigenous schools by land grant to pandits following the old custom to make such land grants to individuals. The proposal was accepted. In October, 1826 he obtained sanction for the establishment of 12 or 15 schools mostly in Lower Assam in Gauhati, Nilachal, Na-Duar, Patee Darrang, Hajo, Bajali, Seela, Bishwanath, Nowgong and Desh
Darrang (Mangaldoi). Medium of instruction in these schools was Sanskrit and the subject matter taught was *sastras*, but in some schools, the curriculum consisted of the study of arithmetic, medicine and astronomy. The products of the indigenous schools were found wanting in maintaining written documents, files, accounts and helping the British officials in running the administration of the province. The schools proved to be totally inefficient for any good purpose.

Scott, therefore, proposed to establish schools for teaching English and other subjects. Accordingly, a branch of Serampur missionary was set up at Gauhati in 1829 under James Rae and a mission school was started by Rae in 1829. In 1830, Scott sent three Khasi and nine Garo boys for education in the school. Scott was also anxious to establish a school for girls at Gauhati. Rae and his wife to take charge of the school.

In 1835, Jenkins recommended to the General Committee of Public Instruction the resumption of the rent-free grants on the death of the existing incumbents. He proposed to set-up English schools in each sub-division under the supervision of an European officer. This proposal was submitted just at the time when the Governor-General in Council resolved to promote European literature and science among the Indians and finally settled the controversy between the Anglicists and the Orientalists. In June 1835, the General Committee of Public Instruction readily agreed to open an English school at Gauhati.
2.6 But the Gauhati school was not easily available for educating the children of Upper Assam. In 1838, a proposal to establish an English and Bengalee school at Sibsagar station and two branch schools at Jorhat and Joypore and 8 mofassil schools in Upper Assam was submitted. The school at Sibsagar was started in 1841.

2.7 Demand for schools in the rural area of the province also rose by 1838. Therefore, Mathie,* proposed to establish 22 mofassil schools in different paraganas of Kamrup. These schools imparted elementary education in reading, writing and arithmetic. These schools proved very useful and similar schools were set-up in other districts. In 1857-58, the number of village schools stood at 78 with a total enrolment of about three thousand.

2.8 The Christian missionaries also played a significant role in promoting the cause of vernacular education in Assam. The first attempt to start a school for a hill tribe of the Province was made for the Garos. In 1826, a school was established at Scott's initiative at Singheemarree at Goalpara for the education of forty Garo boys in useful arts. But the school could not be continued due to difficulty in finding out a suitable teacher for the school. The school was closed down by 1828. The British authority permitted the American Baptist Mission to impart education among the Garos and the mission began their work in 1867 under the guidance of Rev. Bronson. In the beginning, the missionaries operated from Goalpara. A school came up at Damra and simultaneously churches were set up.

*Captain James Mathie, D.C. Kamrup.
Among the Khasis, the first attempt in respect of religious and educational work was made in 1832 by Alexander B. Lish of the Serampore Baptist Mission by opening three schools with an enrolment of 36 pupils. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist mission (earlier called the Welsh Presbyterian Foreign mission) originally located at Sylhet extended their operation to Cherrapunji in 1841. After the arrival of Rev. Thomas Jones of Welsh mission in the Khasi hills in 1841, the first educational institute at Mawsmai at Cherra was started in 1842. At that time the Khasi language had not been reduced to writing. The missionaries studied Khasi language. In the absence of an indigenous script, they adopted the Roman character, after a trial of the Bengalee. Soon more schools were opened. Rev. Jones sent out his pupils as teachers to the village schools as soon as they were in a position to teach others. By 1851, schools were set up in Shella. Schools were also opened in Jowai in 1854. No assistance from the Government was forthcoming to the Cherra school until 1854, in which year grant of Rs. 50 was sanctioned. By this time, the mission had established themselves as a force in the Khasi hills and were beginning to reap the fruits of their years of labour.

Educational work in other hill areas was not started during the period under review. Among the Nagas, Dr. Miles Bronson of American Baptist mission started work in 1840 at Namsang, a village near Joypur. He wrote a spelling book and a simple catechism in Namsanghe dialect. These were the first books written in any Naga language. After the
Naga disturbance in 1841, he left working among the Nagas and moved to Nowgong.  
2.11 The Christian missionaries also played a great role for the educational development in the plains of Assam. Rev. Nathan Brown and Rev. A.T. Cutter, the pioneers among the missionaries, settled down at Sadiya and started their work among the local Assamese and also among the Khamtis and Singphos. They started two schools after three months of their arrival at Sadiya in March 1836. After shifting to Joypur and then to Sibsagar in 1842, they set-up 14 schools in Sibsagar by 1844. On the other hand, after shifting to Nowgong in 1843, Rev. Branson started a school and an orphanage in Nowgong.  
2.12 The missionary taught Bible in their schools, but their medium of instruction was Assamese, while instruction imparted in all the Government village schools was in Bengalee. In the Government primary schools elementary reading, writing and arithmetic were taught. On the other hand, the missionary schools were both literary and vocational.  
2.13 Thus, during the period, a beginning was made in the field of public education. Education was at a very low ebb. It was confined to males. Education was not popular because the medium of instruction was Bengalee. The people also did not appreciate the value of education. The idea of girls education was not entertained.
III. DURING THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION
(1858-1874)

2.14 The Despatch of 1854 introduced the present education system in the country. But before full implementation of the directions of the Despatch, the East India Company ceased to be a political power in 1858 and the Government of India came directly under the British crown. Assam was administered from Calcutta as a division of Bengal up to 1874, when it became a separate Chief Commissioner's Province.

2.15 There was slow progress of primary education during the period also. By 1871-72, the number of primary schools in Assam was 204, of which 53 were in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. District-wise number of schools is shown in the table 2.1.

<table>
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<th>Unaided</th>
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<td>1</td>
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2.16 As stated earlier, the progress of primary education was tardy, because of adoption of Bengalee as medium of instruction in Assam. Cambell made Assamese the medium of instruction.
by his famous resolution of 1872. As a result, number of schools rose rapidly. At the end of 1874, the primary schools numbered 1048 with 22,557 pupils.  

2.17 **Arrangements for Inspection:** In 1844, with a view to effecting a 'vigilant control' and introducing an uniform system of instruction, a post of Inspector of Schools was created. William Robinson, the Head Master of Gauhati school, was appointed as first Inspector of schools for North East Division including the circle of Assam. It was found later on that the Inspector was unable to do justice to the duties and responsibilities assigned to him because of the extensive backward area placed in his change. The distance of one station to another, inordinate delay in travelling due to bad communication and the inaccessibility of village schools rendered it impracticable for the Inspector residing at Gauhati to do any more than examining the schools once a year or in some cases once in two years. In 1855, to assist the Inspector, five Deputy Inspectors of schools were placed in different zones - one in Lakhimpur and Sibsagar, one in Darrang and Nowgong, one in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, one in Sylhet and Cachar and one in Kamrup and Goalpara. In 1871 also, 5 posts of D.I. continued.

2.18 **Campbell's resolution of September 30, 1872,** laid down a new policy for offering grants-in-aid to Pahsalas. It was proposed that after departmental inspection, the teachers should be given stipends between Rs.2 to Rs.5 per mensem. Implementation of the resolution led to the growth of pahsalas in Assam. Efforts were made to bring the tols and muktabs in line with the departmental system of education and grants-
in-aid were offered on the sole condition that the schools would keep and submit regular accounts and teach a little vernacular and arithmetic, without at all interfering with their religious instruction. But scarcely any tols or muktabs applied for grants.38

2.19 Concluding Remarks: Thus, the period 1858-1874 was really a period of preparation. Combell's resolution laid a strong foundation for further development of primary education in the Province. The grave injustice and wrong done to Assam by imposing Bengalee as medium of instruction at primary level was removed at the end of the period.