Chapter 2
Chapter 2

English in India with Special Reference to Assam

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In this chapter we plan to trace the growth and developments of English education in India in general and in Assam in particular from the time of the arrival of the East India Company to the present day. The English teaching programmes and the problems involved in them will be discussed. When analysing general English courses in post-high school levels in Assam we will try to establish a link between manpower requirements in the State and the needs for English and to find how the present English teaching programmes prepare students to fit into different roles and positions expected of them in future.

2.1 The spread of English: From the earliest activities to the Wood's Despatch (1854)

The learning of the English language by Indians may be said to have been caused in the beginning by Christian missionaries who worked for religious conversion. Gradually, English spread among Indians. But the first
official document was drafted in 1854 which laid down in
concrete terms the responsibility of the East India
Company to provide for the education of all classes of
people. The document is called the Educational Despatch
of 1854 or "Wood's Education Despatch".

2.1.1 Missionary activities in India

With the sole aim of spreading Christianity among the
people of India the missionaries who came with the East
India Company established "charity schools" in order to
find platforms to meet different classes of people,
children and parents, and men and women which indirectly
sowed the seeds of spreading English in India. The
oldest of such schools was St Mary's Charity School at
Madras founded by Rev. W. Stevenson in 1715.

After 1765 when the Company became a political
power in India it felt the need to do something for
educating the Indian people, chiefly to win their
confidence and consolidate its rule in India. Thus were
established institutions like the Calcutta Madrassah by
Warren Hastings in 1785 and the Banaras Sanskrit College
by Jonathan Duncan in 1791.

In 1785, however, a Danish missionary named
Schwartz, with the assistance of John Sullivan, the
Resident at Tanjore, started three schools at Tanjore,
Ramnad and Shivanga in the Province of Madras with the object of teaching English to Indian children. These may be said to be the earliest schools for teaching the English language to Indians.

2.1.2 The Charter Act of 1813

When the Charter of the Company came up for renewal in 1813 the education of the Indian people was included within its duties. It was stated in the 43rd Section in the Charter Act that "a sum of not less than one lac of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India" (Sharp qtd. in Nurullah and Naik 46). But it did not say anything regarding the medium of instruction. So there ensued violent controversies on this subject with some favouring Sanskrit and Arabic, the second group modern Indian languages and the third, English. But, as it was found, there was a growing public demand for the study of the English language and literature.

2.1.3 Anglicist - Orientalist controversy

In a Resolution dated 17th July 1823 the
Governor-General-in-Council appointed a General Committee of Public Instruction for the Bengal Presidency. The ten-member Committee consisted of members like H.T. Prinsep and H.H.Wilson who were great Oriental scholars. So they tried to encourage Oriental learning by establishing Sanskrit Colleges and popularizing the study of classical Sanskrit and Arabic literature. But their action met with stiff opposition from people like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the Court of Directors of the Company who favoured Western education through the medium of English. As the public opinion was favouring English education there was a split in the Committee itself. Half of its members who supported the policy of giving encouragement to Oriental literature were known as the Oriental party or Orientalists and all other members who advocated for English to be adopted as a medium of instruction were known as the English party or Anglicists.

2.1.4 Macaulay's Minute (1835)

At last the matter of controversy between the Oriental party and the English party came before the Executive Council of the Government. Here, Macaulay, a member of the Executive Council wrote his famous Minute regarding the new education policy which is dated 2nd February
1835. He gave his own interpretation of the controversial terms and phrases occurring in the Section 43 of the Charter Act of 1813. His preference of English to Indian Classical languages and literature was on the grounds of expediency or desirability, utility and intrinsic merit. He was for teaching Indians what was good for their "health", and not what was palatable to their "taste." However, he expected only the upper class Indians to receive English education and be interpreters between the British rulers and the Indian people. His advocacy of the system of English education was to a large extent meant to meet the imperial needs of creating "a class of persons Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Sharp qtd. in Nurullah and Naik 84).

2.1.5 Lord William Bentinck's acceptance of Macaulay's Minute

Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General accepted Macaulay's Minute and in his Resolution of 7th March 1835 passed the orders that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone" (qtd. in Nurullah and Naik 61). The order also
said that the medium of instruction should be the English language.

2.1.6 Replacement of Persian by English as the official language of Government (1837)

In 1837 Persian was replaced by English as the language to be used in law courts. English also became the official language in all the higher branches of administration. To give further impetus to English education Lord Hardinge made an announcement in 1844 that to get any job under Government a person must have received English education with a good command over the English language. Since then a knowledge of the English language had become a must on the part of the applicant. The situation has not changed even after 150 years of the announcement.

2.1.7 The Educational Despatch of 1854

When there was an unprecedented growth of schools and colleges to impart English education and they were managed by different agencies like the missionaries, the Government and the local people, the necessity of a co-ordinating and regulating body which could examine the achievement of students and award them degrees was felt urgently. Dr F.J. Mouat, the Secretary to the Council of education submitted a proposal to Government in 1845
to establish a university at Calcutta on the model of the University of London. But the Court of Directors did not accept the proposal dismissing it as unnecessary and premature. Ten years later Mouat proposed to establish a different university and suggested that it should be named Presidency College which in course of time should "expand itself something approaching to the dignity and proportion of an Indian University."

The Court of Directors showed willingness to accept the proposal of Mouat and sent their famous Educational Despatch to the Governor General of India in Council on 19th July 1854. This Despatch is also called "Wood's Education Despatch" because it was probably written at the instance of Charles Wood who was then the President of the Board of Control. Some historians have also described it as the "Magna Charta of Indian education." This was the first official document which laid down in concrete terms the responsibility of the East India Company to provide for the education of all classes of people.

2.2 A brief analysis of English textbooks, syllabuses and question papers of three universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras during the nineteenth century

The following is a brief analysis of English textbooks,
sylabuses and question papers of the three universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras during the nineteenth century. (Mahajiteswar Das, a former researcher in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in India has touched upon this aspect in his work. The required information has been gathered from his research.) The courses in English for B.A. degree were highly literary in character. The works of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Young, Thompson, Bacon, Swift, Addison, Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, Southey and Macaulay were prescribed for the students of Calcutta University. Paraphrasing or reproducing certain passages were asked in the examinations which encouraged cramming. Questions on theme and moral of the plays were asked. An intimate knowledge of the prescribed texts were to be acquired by the student. Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Locke's *On Tolerance* and *On Human Understanding*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and Ruskin's *Lecture on Architecture* were prescribed for the students of Bombay University. The syllabuses and question papers show that the aim of teaching of English was not simply to give students "useful knowledge such as was required for practical purposes" but rather to give them a literary and humanistic training. The English syllabuses were framed on the assumption that the students had a good command of the English language but
in reality the majority of students did not possess that. In this regard the following excerpt from the Calcutta University Commission's Report (1917-1919) is relevant:

It is of the standard required for passing in English that complaints are most general and criticism most severe. To our question 11, which asked whether on entering the university students have an adequate command of English, 36 respondents reply in the affirmative and 168 in the negative. Mr J.M. Bose of Presidency College estimates that about 20 per cent of the students in colleges give up their studies owing to their inability to follow the lectures in English. (Qtd. in Das)

The teaching and examination system in the three universities gave only literary training and encouraged learning by rote the utility of which was questioned by many. There was a gradual decline in the standard of teaching and in examinations. Till 1890, the rate of failure in the B.A. examination of Calcutta University varied between 40 and 60 per cent whereas during the period 1890-1900 the percentage of students who failed in English rose to 75.
2.3 The growth of English education in Assam

English education in Assam began only after her annexation with the British empire on 26 February 1826 when the Treaty of Yandabu between the British rulers and the Burmese was signed. During that time an indigenous system of education imparting religious and spiritual knowledge with the study of scriptures was in vogue in Satras, Tols and Pathshalas. But when the British took over the administration, they wanted to educate and train the local people in the art of the new administration which needed written documents, files and intricate transaction in accounts.

Gauhati School which was the first of its kind to impart English education in Assam was established in June 1835 at the initiative taken by Major Jenkins, Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General of India. He had felt the need to educate local youths in useful and practical knowledge in order to engage them in government services. The demand for English education grew among the people of Assam and several schools came up in and around Gauhati the expenses of which were borne by the public. New revenue measures were introduced in 1833-34 which required the recruitment of a number of revenue officials who could
read and write English. So several regional language schools were established in several districts with English as a subject in the curriculum. Moreover, employment opportunities opened up for the English-knowing Indians in the newly-started tea estates, the railways and oil drilling sites. So all these factors contributed towards making English education popular among the people of Assam. But, unfortunately, collegiate education did not become successful in the beginning. In this regard S.P. Gupta says:

An attempt was made to introduce collegiate education at Gauhati itself in 1866 but it failed after a trial of several years owing to the low number of matriculates in Assam. ... Moreover, the university results were so disappointing, particularly for the period 1872-74 when the number of successful candidates was absolutely nil, that hardly any voice was raised in 1876 when government finally decided to abandon the collegiate education in the Gauhati School and also in the whole of Assam. (4)
But gradually the number of matriculates increased in Assam most of whom could not go to Calcutta for higher studies. The public opinion was built up in favour of establishment of a College in Gauhati. Manik Chandra Barua, a public leader was emphatic in his demand and it received the support of the Chief Commissioner of Assam Sir Henry John Stedman Cotton. He took urgent steps to establish a college at Gauhati in 1901 which was called Cotton College.

2.3.1 An analysis of the salient features of the teaching of English in college classes in Assam from 1901 to 1947

The teaching of English was done in all the colleges in Assam and the courses contained works of English dramatists, poets and essayists. The stress was on training the students in literary and humanistic disciplines. Writing essays on given topics and giving summaries or paraphrases of poems were also asked in the examinations. The literary content in the English syllabus had a tremendous impact on the life and thought of the people of Assam. The students who had studied the writings of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Bacon, Pope, Dryden, Johnson and other English writers, in their later life, brought about a Renaissance in Assamese literature freeing the Assamese
mind from the "thraldom of old world ideas." Thus 'all that was good and living ... was made, shaped and quickened' (to use Nirad C. Chaudhuri's words) under the influence of English education in Assam. Since then English has been very useful to the Assamese. They need it for political, administrative, economic, commercial and academic purposes. In short, English has an important and indispensable role to play in the development of the Assamese society.

2.4 Reforms in the teaching of English at the national level since Independence

In this section we propose to review briefly the reforms brought about in the teaching of English in the country since Independence through the recommendations of different Commissions and Study Groups set up from time to time by the Central Government. We will also discuss some other related matters like the medium of instruction and the establishment of the University Grants Commission.

2.4.1 Modern Indian languages as the media of instruction

After India got Independence there prevailed confusion regarding the role of English in education. Several
state governments adopted the language of their respective states as the medium of instruction up to the high school level. This had a discouraging effect on the teaching of English as a subject not only in schools but also in intermediate and degree curricula. Even there was the thought of switching over to the respective modern Indian language as the medium of instruction in different states both in degree and postgraduate levels of education. (This has been effected in almost all the states in the country now.) In British India English was the official language. But in Independent India when a new constitution was adopted, in its article 343, it was declared that Hindi in Devnagari script (with international form of Indian numerals) would be the official language of the nation. This had also a negative effect on the teaching of English in the country.

2.4.2 The University Education Commission (1948)

The role of the English language in education became unclear and uncertain. With this background the Government of India set up a University Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr S. Radhakrishnan in 1948. The Commission submitted their report in 1949 which has since guided the development of university education in India in the post-Independence period to a
great extent. Out of many recommendations the following three are relevant to us here:

1. For the medium of instruction in higher education they said that English be replaced as early as practicable, by an Indian language.

2. Pupils at higher secondary and university stages be made familiar with three languages — the regional language, the federal language, Hindi and English (in order to acquire the ability to read books in English).

3. English be studied in high schools and in the universities in order that we might keep ourselves in touch with the living stream of evergrowing knowledge.

To give recommendations on the reorganisation of secondary education a Secondary Education Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr A.L. Mudaliar was appointed by the Government of India in 1952. The Commission submitted their report in 1953. They recommended that in higher secondary course the student should study three languages — mother tongue, the federal language (Hindi) and English. The student whose mother tongue was Hindi was to study a modern Indian language other than Hindi. This three language formula was introduced
on the recommendations of the commissions headed by Dr Radhakrishnan and Dr Mudaliar.

2.4.3 Establishment of the University Grants Commission

In accordance with the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission, a University Grants Commission was set up, under executive orders, in 1953; and on the passing of the University Grants Commission Act, a Statutory Body was set up in 1956 with Dr C.D.Deshmukh as its first Chairman. The main responsibility of the Commission is to co-ordinate and maintain standards. It has assisted the development of postgraduate research and teaching, strengthened libraries and laboratories, examined several important problems of higher education such as student indiscipline, teaching of English or medium of instruction.

2.4.4 Problems of the medium of instruction

After the introduction of the three language formula there cropped up problems regarding the medium of instruction at the degree and postgraduate levels of education. As most of the teachers had received their training in English they preferred this language to any other language as the medium of instruction. Further, the textbooks and the teaching materials for different
subjects were not available in the regional languages. Writing textbooks on science subjects in the Indian languages did not seem to be an easy task as the Indian languages did not have the adequate scientific terminology and properly organized scientific discourses.

Two committees, the Kunzru Committee in 1955 and the Tarachand Committee in 1961, were appointed to look into the problems of the medium of instruction. Both the committees recommended that the change-over of the medium of instruction from English to the regional languages should not be hastened. Jawaharlal Nehru, the then prime minister also proposed a phased change-over.

In 1960 the University Grants Commission appointed a Committee of experts headed by Professor G.C. Bannerjee to examine the standards and methods of teaching and learning English language and literature at various levels of university education. The Report said:

The regional languages have not yet developed to a point where they can replace English as a tool of knowledge and as a medium of communication. Even when the regional languages become sufficiently developed
English will remain a window to world knowledge. It has, therefore, to be ensured that the student is able to read books, journals, reports, etc. in English in his subject. (Qtd. in Das)

The Committee recommended that at the university level attention should be paid to the teaching and learning of English so as to enable the students to use the language effectively for the purposes of communication.

2.4.5 Report of the Education Commission (1964-66)

The Government of India appointed an Education Commission in 1964 under the Chairmanship of Dr D.S.Kothari to advise the Government on the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects. The Commission submitted their report to the Government in 1966. On the structure of education system the Commission suggested that the new educational structure should consist of (a) one to three years of pre-school education; (b) a ten year period of general education; (c) a higher secondary stage of two years of general education; (d) a higher education stage having a course of three years or more for the first degree and followed by courses of varying durations for
the second or research degrees. As to the medium of instruction the Commission recommended that the regional Indian languages should be used as the media of instruction at the degree and postgraduate levels.

The Commission stressed the need for the study of English as a language for its usefulness in higher education as a 'library language'. The Report said:

The introduction of the regional languages as media of education should not be interpreted to mean underrating the importance of English in the university. For a successful completion of the first degree course, a student should possess an adequate command over English, be able to express himself in it with reasonable ease and felicity, understand lectures in it and avail himself of its literature. Therefore, adequate emphasis will have to be laid on its study as a language right from the school stage. English should be the most useful 'library language' in higher education and our most significant window on the world. (India 26-27)

The Commission also recommended that English would serve as a link-language in higher education for academic work and intellectual inter-communication.
2.4.6 Two Study Groups on the teaching of English

In 1964 the Government of India appointed a Study Group under the Chairmanship of Professor V.K. Gokak, Director of the Central Institute of English, Hyderabad to examine the position of English in school education as it would be when English would cease to be the medium of instruction at the university stage and would be replaced by Hindi or other modern Indian languages. It recommended a series of reforms in the teacher-training programmes, examination system and stressed special bridge intensive courses as evolved by the Central Institute of English, Hyderabad. The Study Group also recommended two types of courses in compulsory English at the degree level to meet the needs of different categories of students — one lower level course and the other the higher level course. The lower level course would be skills-based with emphasis on comprehension and the higher level course would emphasize written and spoken English. It also stressed the importance of promoting the skills of library-reading in the students.

The second Study Group on English was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Youth Services, Government of India in March 1969. It was asked to prepare a working paper outlining a practical programme of action for improving the teaching of English both at the school
and the university stage. It suggested several English courses, mainly 'bridge courses' or specialized 'crash' programmes, for special purposes of students. It also suggested several measures for the successful implementation of some of the major recommendations of the Education Commission 1964. The Group suggested a variety of courses to meet the new demands arising out of the changed situation in teaching of English in India.

2.4.7 English as a 'library language' in India

The Education Commission of 1964-66 in their Report said that even after the medium of instruction in colleges and universities was changed from English to Indian languages English would remain useful as a 'library language'. This led to some misconceptions among the teachers of English. To some it meant that students only needed the ability to read and comprehend books, journals, reports, etc. related to their subjects in English. So in the compulsory English courses more stress was given to the language component. But the productive language skills like speaking and writing were subordinated to reading skill.
2.4.8 Report of the Curriculum Development Centre in English (1989)

Towards the last part of 1985 the University Grants Commission (UGC) set up Curriculum Development Centres (CDCs) in various subjects of study at different universities for development and modernization of curricula and courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and to examine the existing ones. Centre for English was set up at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Hyderabad. The UGC's "Guidelines" speaks about the approach to teaching and learning and the resulting need to reorganize the curricula in the following words:

With increasing awareness of the importance of learning process, more learner-oriented or enquiry-oriented teaching method should be introduced in the instructional system, which enables the learner to engage himself in creative and divergent thinking, problem solving, self learning and to explore new avenues of communication, productive work as well as innovation through such methods as simulation games, project work and the like.

(CIEFL 3)
What the Centre says in its report about the present curricula in English vis-a-vis students is self-explanatory enough:

An examination of the existing curriculum in English at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels reveals that it does not, for the most part, take much account of either the linguistic competence with which the student joins the college or the university, or the linguistic demands of the job he might seek later.... Far from this, a typical college curriculum in English does not attempt to address itself to even the average student. (CIEFL 14)

The Centre considers the wrong official policy on the teaching of English more responsible for the fall in standards than any other factor. Its observation is important and quite relevant:

But one important factor that is sometimes overlooked is that in some states the official policy on the teaching of English has not remained stable. Now, no other single factor can affect the status of English in the curriculum more seriously than such a
situation. No teacher or student will pay more attention to a subject of learning than is demanded by the official status accorded to it in the curriculum. And the status accorded to English by many boards of education and universities has suffered a serious set-back.

(CIEFL 14)

So the Centre designed courses in General English which shift emphasis from teaching to learning. Greater emphasis is placed on the student's motivation to learn than on the teacher's ability to lecture. Courses have been so designed as to make the education more meaningful to the needs and aspirations of students as well as to make it socially relevant. Whereas a traditional undergraduate course in General English is heavily literature and content-oriented, the course designed by the Centre is specified, not in terms of a set of texts, but instead, in terms of the communication skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing which aim at enabling students to acquire the communicative use of English. The students need communicative English for academic studies and for success in future careers. The suggested General English course for the three-year B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com. students contains the following five units:
At least 2 units are to be studied by all students at the rate of one unit per year.

2.5 Educational institutions and the teaching of English in Assam

After taking a bird's eye view survey of the growth of the teaching of English in India since Independence let us now trace the developments in the field of teaching of English in post-high school levels in the state of Assam since 1947. The discussion centres round mainly the following points: (a) Growth of educational institutions in Assam since 1947; (b) The Government of Assam policy regarding the teaching of English in the state since 1947; (c) Changes in the structure of educational system; (d) Reforms in the teaching of English from time to time; and (e) Manpower requirements and the needs for English.

2.5.1 Growth of educational institutions in Assam since 1947

With the passing of the Gauhati University Bill on
October 15, 1947 by the Assam Assembly the first university was established in Assam containing the following words in the statement of object and reasons appended to the bill: "Assam offers great opportunities of study in many fields — linguistic, historical, ethnological, archaeological, geological, scientific and agricultural" (qtd. in Gupta 4).

The university started functioning with effect from January 26, 1948. Dibrugarh University was set up in 1965. An agricultural university at Jorhat named Assam Agriculture University has been established too. Recently, two central universities named Assam University (1994) at Silchar and Tezpur University (1994) at Tezpur were established in Assam by the Central Government increasing the total number of universities in the State to five. The Indira Gandhi National Open University which was established in 1985 has set up study centres at Guwahati and Dergaon in Assam. For the research and development of the North East languages, the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, a government of India organization, has set up a separate North Eastern Research Extension Centre at Guwahati. Under the aegis of the University Grants Commission several Academic Staff Colleges have been set up in all the States and Union Territories to
conduct refresher courses for college and university teachers in different subjects. In Assam an Academic Staff College has been established at Guwahati under Gauhati University. In 1992-93 there were already the following number of educational institutions in Assam: primary schools 28,876; middle schools 5,703; high/higher secondary (+2) schools/ junior colleges 3,467; colleges for general education 217; and colleges for professional education (includes only colleges of Engineering/Technology, Medical and Teacher Training) 15.

(Source: University News 15 Aug. 1994:20)

2.5.2 The Government of Assam policy regarding the teaching of English in the State since 1947

With regard to the teaching of English in schools, colleges and universities the Government of Assam has not passed any Act or spelt out a distinct policy. But it can well be said that implicitly whatever are the aims and objectives of compulsory English subject in schools and colleges are expected to be achieved in the teaching of English in the State. The students of secondary and higher secondary schools are required to acquire the ability to read and write in English so as to
continue their higher studies either in general streams of arts, science and commerce or in vocational, medical, agricultural, engineering, technological, law and other such fields. English courses for the students of degree colleges are expected to equip them with required proficiency in English to continue their postgraduate studies or practising their professions in later life. Although the Central Government gives direction, guidance and help to the State Government in connection with education, the implementation of any educational programme, the type of instruction imparted at each stage of education, the amount of English that the students are required to learn at each stage depend on the decisions of the Board of Secondary Education, Assam; the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council; different universities of Assam; their syllabus-framers; and academicians. It can be said that there is a kind of uniformity of aims and objectives in the field of education in general and the teaching of English in particular all over India. In recent times, there has been a growing sense of partnership and co-ordination between the Central Ministry of Human Resources Development (Ministry of Education) and other national agencies like the University Grants Commission on the one hand and the State Governments and the state-level educational bodies on the other for the improvement of
the standards of the teaching of English. As for the policy of the Government of Assam regarding the teaching of English it can be said that all the Governments that took over the administration of the State since Independence actively supported the effective implementation of the English teaching programmes.

2.5.3 The place of English in the language education in Assam

Assam is a multi-ethnic state. There are several tribal communities who speak their own languages besides Assamese which is the language of the majority of the people in the State. The tribal languages like Bodo, Karbi and Mising are taught in primary schools for the respective communities along with Assamese. But in secondary, higher secondary and degree levels Assamese is largely the first language which also happens to be the medium of instruction. By the Assam Official Language Act 1960 Assamese was declared the official language of the State with English as an associate official language. Since then Assamese language has been enjoying a legally-sanctioned dominant position in different spheres of the State. Nevertheless, English still continues to be used widely in administration and courts of law. It is not taught as a subject during the
first four years of primary school classes. It is taught as a compulsory subject from class five to class ten. It is also taught as a compulsory subject in the higher secondary and degree classes in all the three general streams of arts, science and commerce. English is the only medium of instruction at the postgraduate and research degree levels in the State. However, there are a few English medium schools and colleges managed by mainly private bodies.

2.5.4 The aims and objectives of teaching English at the secondary level in Assam

Now let us look at the aims and objectives of teaching English at different levels of education in the State of Assam. The following aims and objectives are stated in the secondary school syllabus for teaching English as a Second Language:

The goal of second language teaching is communicative ability. Our main concern, therefore, is developing the learner's ability to take part in communicating through English rather than their mastery of structural items. We would add to this that pupils must know not only how to manipulate the structures of English, they must also develop strategies for
relating these structures to their communicative functions in real life situations. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary that the student is engaged in meaningful activities and tasks where language is used for communication. (BSE, Assam 63-66)

The specific objectives of teaching English are to develop in students the ability (1) to understand English when it is spoken, (2) to speak English fluently and correctly in real life situations, (3) to read and understand English, (4) to write English correctly, and (5) to get familiar with and have love for rhymes and verses.

2.5.5 The aims and objectives of teaching English at the higher secondary and degree levels in Assam

Although there is no such government document in Assam clearly mentioning the aims and objectives of teaching English they are indirectly contained in the prescribed syllabuses and Prefaces or Forewords to the textbooks. At the higher secondary level the aim is to develop language ability of students to handle English confidently in speech and writing in diverse situations and to develop their communicative competence.
At the degree level the aim of teaching English is to improve the students' ability to read English with understanding and to use the language for simple communication. Some specific objectives are: (a) correcting, through practice, grammatical mistakes common in the written work of the students; (b) improving their various reading comprehension skills; (c) expanding their recognition vocabulary; (d) helping them to learn to write simple, clear and accurate English in continuous prose; (e) to teach them the skills of appreciation of prose, poetry and drama and in addition to these, particularly for science and commerce students, to improve their reading comprehension and writing ability with regard to scientific or commercial topics respectively.

2.6 Structural reforms in education

There have been several structural reforms in education at the national level following the recommendations of different education commissions set up from time to time. Those reforms have been implemented in the State of Assam too. The Education Commission (1964-66) under the Chairmanship of Dr D.S. Kothari recommended a 10+2+3 education system to be followed uniformly all over India — 10 years of secondary school course followed by 2
years of higher secondary course and 3 years of degree course. Now this structure has been followed in almost all the States and Union Territories of India.

Assam adopted it in 1973 with the introduction of the first 10-year school course. By an Act (Act XVII of 1984) called "Assam Higher Secondary Education Act" the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council was established by the Government of Assam in 1984 and all the institutions for +2 education were brought under its jurisdiction within the geographical boundaries of the State. After the formation of the Council uniformity has been brought in with regard to courses of study, syllabus and conduct of examination. The Three Year Degree Courses in arts, science and commerce have been introduced in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities with effect from 1984.

2.6.1 The role of English in the 10+2+3 system of education

Under the 10+2+3 system of education more stress is given to vocationalization and diversification of courses. So the study of the English language is so designed as to meet the requirements of students for different courses. Before Independence and for several years after it the study of English was mainly literary.
But now English is studied mainly as a tool of utility. The kind of proficiency in English which the student of a particular vocational, job-oriented course or a general course needs is the aim of the English syllabus in the school course. The study of English in the +2 stage prepares students to continue either their higher studies in general streams or in taking vocational and job-oriented courses. English in +3 stage aims at enabling students to use it mainly as a 'library language' so that he can read books, journals, reports, etc. in his subject of study and use it in simple communication. Moreover, English is useful in his future life in postgraduate and research studies or in the society in different official or professional fields where a minimum proficiency in English, if not the mastery of the language, is a necessity.

2.7 Change in socio-political attitudes to English

There has been a great change in socio-political attitudes towards English in India since Independence. Many politicians and a section of the educated elite consider English a legacy of servitude and advocate its removal from the educational system. But it is conveniently forgotten that English has a crucial role to play in India. In an article on the role of English in India, Verma (1-3) succinctly outlines the functions
of English. He says that it is our 'link with the outside world.' It provides access to the vast and growing knowledge in the fields of science, technology, medicine, social sciences, management, law and also humanities. It is the official 'link language' between the Central Government and the Governments of the non-Hindi-speaking States. This language is favoured by all-India institutions, all-India seminars, workshops, conferences, the legal and banking systems, trade, commerce and defence. It also plays an important role in bringing in national unity and integration. It is an associate medium of instruction in degree and postgraduate levels and a 'library language' and a 'language of wider communication' for many students and researchers. For educated bilinguals English continues to be 'the language of opportunity', 'the language of development' and 'the language of upward socio-economic mobility.'

English plays all the above functional roles for the students and people of Assam too. Moreover, this language is more important and useful to Assam because it is surrounded by States like Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya where the official language is English. So the knowledge of English is a must to keep good relation with these neighbouring
States. Inside Assam there are different ethnic groups like Karbis and Bodos and the Bengali-speaking Barak Valley people who prefer English to Assamese for the medium of instruction at degree and postgraduate levels of education.

An affiliating central university named Assam University has been established in the Barak Valley covering Cachar, Hailakhandi, N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong Districts. Now all the colleges in the above districts will get affiliated to Assam University and have English as the medium of instruction unlike that in the colleges of Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities where it is Assamese. So English has an important role to play in fostering a harmonious relationship among different ethnic groups in Assam and in checking the mentality of getting separated from Assam which has, of late, risen among Karbis, Bodos, Misings and other tribal-language-speaking communities.

At the national level as well as the level of the State of Assam not all students need English to the same level of competence to meet their individual requirements. So, since Independence, different education commissions and Study Groups have recommended suitable changes in English courses, syllabuses and textbooks at all the stages of education — secondary,
higher secondary and degree. Several changes have already been brought about. But if we look at the changes we will find that the courses in English at various levels have been given mainly language-orientation. Syllabuses and textbooks in English have been designed to give students communicative competence in the language rather than to develop in them a love for English literature and literary studies. Changes almost in the same line have been brought about in the General English courses, syllabuses and textbooks at different levels in Assam following the changes at the national level.

2.7.1 The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), English Language Teaching Institutes (ELTIs) and Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs)

The Central Institute of English (renamed in 1972 the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages), Hyderabad was set up by the Government of India in 1958 to provide for the study of English language and literature, the organisation of research, the training of teachers, the production of teaching materials and extension services and to help improve the standard of teaching of English in India. Since its establishment the Institute has been producing teaching materials in
English to suit the changing scenario in India and to meet the needs of the students. The Institute has also been conducting courses like the Post-Graduate Diploma in the Teaching of English (PGDTE) and the Post-Graduate Diploma in English Studies (PGDES) mainly for the teachers of English in colleges. But it could not have much impact on the teaching of English in different universities till late seventies. In Assam the General English courses in the three general streams of arts, science and commerce in the Three Year Degree Course of Dibrugarh University were framed for the first time in consultation with the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) in 1984. But Gauhati University is yet to design its General English Courses in the line of the CIEFL.

In accordance with the recommendation of the Study Group on the teaching of English English Language Teaching Institutes (ELTIs) have been established one each in every State. In Assam such an institute was set up by its Government in 1986. The Institute has been conducting short training courses for secondary school teachers on new orientation and methodology of teaching English in the changed social context.

The latest innovation in the field of higher education in India is Academic Staff College. In this
age of explosion of knowledge teachers need to improve their teaching methodologies, upgrade their knowledge in the respective fields and become innovative and creative. With the objective of keeping teachers in higher education abreast of modern developments in their respective fields the University Grants Commission in 1986-87 established 48 Academic Staff Colleges all over the country to conduct academic staff orientation programmes and subject-based refresher courses. Since then refresher courses in English and other subjects have been conducted by different Academic Staff Colleges for teachers. Such a college under Gauhati University has also been conducting refresher courses in English for the teachers of English in colleges in Assam.

2.8 Manpower requirements and the needs for English

In Assam, the skilled and trained personnel in different fields need proficiency in English as they do at the national level for the same reasons. Although scientists, engineers, technologists, doctors, educationists and social scientists in Assam converse with their workers and common people in Assamese, they have to read and write in English for official and allied purposes. Seminars, symposia, discussions and conferences are conducted in English, not Assamese.
Therefore there is still a need for English in the State for her all round development.

2.8.1 The problem of educated unemployed

The most serious problem in Assam, now, is not that a large number of graduates are unemployed but that they are 'unemployable' (to use the word of the Kothari Commission) and they are unemployable because they lack the required proficiency in English. This is the single largest factor responsible for growing unemployment in the country in general and in Assam in particular. In fact, in this State, this factor can be said to be solely responsible for making graduates in arts, science and commerce, and even those in technical streams 'unemployable'.

Public sector undertakings, central government offices, banks and even state government offices offer major sources of employment. They select candidates for appointment on the basis of combined competitive examinations and interviews. A candidate cannot be successful in these examinations and interviews unless he possesses a good knowledge of the English language and most of the graduates passing out from the universities in Assam do not possess a good knowledge of
English. From our experience as examiners in the General English subject for higher secondary and degree final examinations we have found that not more than twenty per cent of the total candidates really deserve pass marks. But correct evaluation is never made and examinees are awarded liberal marks to increase the overall percentage of successful candidates of the university. Even grace marks are awarded to examinees by the scrutinisers and tabulators.

So, naturally, the candidates who receive degrees on the strength of grace marks in English are never proficient in the language. This is the only reason why very few candidates from Assam qualify in the combined Indian Civil Services examination or in all India level banking services examinations or in any other all India level services examinations. The Oil and Natural Gas Company Limited (ONGCL) and tea estates are two other main sources of employment in Assam. But only a small number of candidates from Assam get appointment in posts of officers, managers and even clerks in them. It is again because Assamese candidates with required proficiency in English are not found sufficiently. Many business firms owned by the non-Assamese hesitate to appoint Assamese candidates due to the same reason. Either in government offices or in private sector in
Assam the employers complain of the poor quality of the clerical and secretarial work of their employees mainly due to their lack of minimum proficiency in English. Some employers have even complained that the candidates who come for interviews do not show any evidence of having acquired the basic skills of English so as to be able to perform normal, routine tasks in English which they will naturally be called upon to perform on the jobs.

In Assam at present there are no pre-employment training facilities in the use of English for ever increasing number of students preparing themselves for clerical and secretarial types of jobs. The only opportunity that they get to learn the use of English which will be required in clerical and secretarial jobs is in the English classrooms. It is, therefore, worth investigating the nature of English courses offered to these students and the extent to which they cater to the professional needs of various categories of students. As the textbooks and allied teaching materials in English form the major and essential part of the courses, it is required to find whether they are suitably designed in order to satisfy the aims and objectives stated in the syllabuses and to meet the needs and demands of the Assamese society. Another significant point is to be noted
that year after year, even generation after generation, it is the low proficiency in English that has posed a problem to students in getting a good job or good education. Many students, too, are compelled to give up their studies because of their poor knowledge of the English language. So it is imperative to investigate the causes of this dismal situation.

**Conclusion**

A study of the development in the teaching of English in India in general and in Assam in particular shows that students should be taught the important skills of the English language so that they can use it as an effective tool of communication. At the post-high school levels of education the vast majority of students in Assam pursue studies in general streams of arts, science and commerce. So the needs of these students for English must be analysed before designing the English teaching programmes. The prescribed textbooks and other teaching materials must stand the severest test of suitability and productive potential.