Chapter 5

Privatisation of Higher Education: Manifestations and Challenges in Assam

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter attempts to investigate the issue of privatised higher education in Assam. Dealing with the empirical part of the study, this chapter endeavours to understand the various facets of private higher education and its impact in the higher education system of the state.

Objectives: The chapter is primarily guided by the following objectives:

- Nature of private higher education in terms of courses of study, fee structure, student enrolment, employment opportunities, quality of education.
- Comparative account of public and private institutions with regard to different dimensions of higher education.
- Role and effect of private higher education along with its effect in terms of equity and social justice.

Methodology: In order to realize the objectives of the chapter, primary data has been collected from different stakeholders through questionnaires and interview schedule. The data regarding various facets of the private universities have been collected from the Self Study Reports of the universities. Case studies of different students have also helped in understanding and analysing the different facets and issues at hand. (The names of the participant students have been changed).
Since the enactment of the Assam Private Universities Act in 2007, six private universities have been established in the state. Paucity of funds at the disposal of the government together with absence of direct social benefits from higher education are the grounds on which private higher education has been encouraged- that the government needs to cut down on its share towards higher education, rather concentrate on primary education, and encourage private investment. One set of argument views higher education as having a secondary role in social progress. Higher education plays only a baby-sitting role and does not hold much relevance. It is the primary education that deserves utmost attention of the government. The irrelevant and not-so-important role of higher education is claimed to be the cause of the government’s lukewarm attitude towards higher education. Economic growth and development is considered to be least dependent on higher education. Higher education can not contribute anything significant to economic development in view of the poor rates of return. Any government that aims to achieve growth and development, but does not prioritise higher education seem to be under the assumption that higher education is not necessary to achieve growth. Also it must have been assumed that building a knowledge society and preparing the youth to take on the challenges of vocation and earning, can be achieved without sparing any or much attention for higher education.

Another argument stands for the view that even if higher education can significantly contribute towards progress and development, it need not be provided only by the government. Private sector can also facilitate higher education rather than it being necessarily a state responsibility. State can step back from its responsibility of developing the higher education sector and invest the resources elsewhere, and the responsibility can be entrusted to the private sector. Another line of assumption put
forward in support of the withdrawal of the state has been that privatisation of education is never a problem; it is commercialisation that we need to save the education sector from. However both theory and reality have demonstrated that privatisation and commercialisation are actually synonymous. Both are guided by same motives and considerations, the most significant one being profit maximisation. Cost recovery has become a prime aim of both private as well as public institutions. Private institutions are especially guided by the objective of emerging as commercial institutions and entrepreneurial educational hubs (Tilak, 2014).

The argument of political leadership of Assam in favour of private higher education is in line with that of the central government for reducing government spending on higher education and facilitating private share in higher education. Privatisation of higher education has also been encouraged in view of the inadequacy and insufficiency of the public education system in so far as catering to the ever increasing demands of higher education is concerned. While public education has proved to be inadequate in facilitating accessibility to all the aspirants that the society produces, it has also failed to cater to the demands for professional courses among the students- the courses which can safely place the students in the job market. Accordingly a ground has been prepared for the operation of the private sector in the sphere of higher education in the state, which got crystallised with the enactment of the Private Universities Act.

5.2 Nature and Trend of Private Higher Education

Private higher education has come to occupy a significant position in the higher education sector of Assam and has definitely contributed towards the expansion of
higher education in the state. Along with expansion, private higher education has also brought about significant changes in the higher education sector.

5.2.1 Drive for Professionalism

When looked at the courses offered by the private universities, these universities are guided by the need for professional education to prepare the students for the industry or the market. Universities like Assam Don Bosco University, Assam Down Town University, Kaziranga University, Royal Global University provide courses on various professional courses and these courses are clearly accorded a priority in comparison to basic disciplines like social science, humanities or pure science. Technology, management are the two most preferred courses in these universities. Apart from these, they also provide various professional courses like Biotechnology, Microbiology, Biochemistry, Architecture, Fine Arts, Fashion Design & Technology, Communications & Media, Behavioural & Allied Sciences, Hospital Management, Paramedical, Allied Health, Nursing and Pharmacy. While Assam Down Town University provides no courses on any basic discipline, the other universities have got schools of basic science and humanities. However, they have a limited approach to these disciplines, as most of them opt for specific courses in these disciplines like Sociology, social work, psychology. Another important constituent of the courses offered by the private universities is the various diploma programmes offered on various professional subjects. However, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya and Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Viswavidyalaya have retained the thrust on basic disciplines of pure science, social science and humanities.

An attraction about professional disciplines has also been noticed among the students. As Rohan Das (name changed), an undergraduate student commented, “I prefer to opt
for professional courses like MBA or MCA after my graduation, as it would help me in getting a job right after I complete my studies. There is no such guarantee with general subjects with acute dearth of employment. Private universities tap on these opinions of students and parents and put more importance on technical and professional subjects. If private universities offer degrees on professional courses, a lot of students will be able to stay back here in Assam who otherwise would have to go outside the state to study these courses, is what many quarters argued, including the government. “We the private universities feel more responsible towards the needs and wishes of the students. Unlike public university we feel more committed to create graduates who are ready to be absorbed in the job market", said an administrative official of a private university. All the private universities offer courses on MBA, BBA and Computer science, and all these disciplines basically orient a student towards the corporate sector. Lately, public universities too have introduced these courses on the ground that these subjects are high in demand among the students and are also suitable in so far as employability is concerned. But we can never deny or underestimate the role of general education in understanding fundamental phenomena of nature or society, its potential of critically questioning the status quo and its inherent capability of bringing about much needed changes in the society.

The political forum has argued in favour of technical and professional courses in that they believe in efficacy of such courses in current economic system. Such courses are believed to contribute towards creating more employable youth who can be absorbed in various jobs. But what kind of jobs do the students get in? They eventually move out of

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12 An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted between June-July, 2016
13 An administrative official of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in 15.07.2016
the state only to get absorbed in companies and the corporate sector because these companies are mostly located in outside cities, some participants commented. They are also of the view that such education is unable to develop critical mind in students who are averse to societal realities and are more or less self centred only. Such neglect of basic disciplines and preference to professional disciplines will also deprive students of basic knowledge of phenomena and will also rob them off originality- some participants claimed. Such education though contributes towards skill building, does not really contribute towards actual knowledge building. Moreover, as more and more students are opting for technical and professional courses, not equal job opportunities are created. The jobs are saturated and many students remain unemployed, an ex student of a private university commented, a similar view being expressed by a student of a government engineering college as well. Many students studying technical disciplines in private institutions are sceptical about their future career prospects. They are not certain about where will they land up in terms of employment after completion of their studies.

When contacted, the ex students of private universities, of disciplines of technology and management, expressed that most of the students are working outside the state and are engaged in average jobs with not very satisfactory salary and positions. Some students also commented that this overestimation about technical professional subjects and students’ growing attraction towards the same is contributing towards a consumerist attitude among the students.

However, some participants opined about the necessity of professional courses keeping in mind the changing scenario. Samujjal Bhattacharya, advisor of the All Assam Students Union (AASU) expressed the view that we have to embrace change, and we
will have to mould our education system according to the demands of changing time\textsuperscript{14}. He was of the opinion that we have to prepare our students to fit themselves in the newly emerging scenario, and make them employable. Bhattacharya opined that these professional courses can be and should be introduced in public institutions, rather than only the private universities providing these courses. More and more students should get opportunity to study these courses and therefore, public universities should introduce new disciplines and courses, Bhattacharya added\textsuperscript{15}.

A significant development that has been noticed in the field of higher education in the state has been the opening up of certain new professional courses in public institutions of higher education. In similar line with the countries adopting neo liberal model of governance, the whole of India witnessed public universities adopting new model including introduction of professional courses. This change has also been executed in public institutions of higher education in Assam. These courses are completely financed by the students. These courses have been introduced in public institutions primarily as a source of revenue generation that can augment the financial resource of the institution. Along with facilitating access to education, introduction of these courses have come as a source of income generation for the public institutions.

Introduction of self financed courses in public institutions also raise the issue of social equity. These courses successfully generate revenue which is much above the costs involved, and hence can be termed as ‘surplus generating courses’ (Tilak, 2012). Introduction of these courses is favoured by the universities and other public institutions of higher education due to various reasons, such as, the institution or the departments

\textsuperscript{14} Advisor, All Assam Students’ Union; Personal Interview conducted on 27.06.2017, Tuesday
\textsuperscript{15} ibid
themselves can fix the fee of the courses which is generally high, these courses are free from the control and supervision of the governmental or other higher authorities, the revenue generated by these courses can be autonomously utilised by the concerned institution or the department. What needs to be understood is that the aspect of equity is not considered in designing these courses as well as in fixing the fee of these courses. The nomenclature of these courses itself suggest the prime objective of these courses, which is, generation of finances or revenues.

The public universities as well as almost all the government and provincialised colleges of Assam have introduced professional job oriented degree and diploma courses which are self financed. Gauhati University offers a number of self financed courses such as MBA, Sociology, Information Technology and Computer Science. Dibrugarh university, another old and prominent state university in Assam has a number of self financed courses too, namely Petroleum Technology, Computer Studies including BCA, MCA, Diploma courses like PGDCA, DCA, Management Studies including BBA, MBA and diploma course of PGDTM, Journalism and Mass Communication, Bio-Informatics etc. Cotton University (former Cotton College), another prominent higher education institution of the entire state, has also been providing a number of self financed courses- courses on BCA, BSc Biotechnology and Advanced Diploma in Mass Communication and Journalism. With the approval of Gauhati University and Dibrugrah University, the government asked different colleges affiliated to these universities to introduce self financed courses, so that the institutions can generate additional revenue and do not have to depend on the government to meet financial requirements for providing new courses and can be self sufficient. B. Baruah College situated at Guwahati has introduced two self financed courses- BBA and BSc IT in
2009. While there are 40 seats in BBA, BSc IT has an intake of 25 seats. Handique College, another prominent college of the city and the whole state, has introduced two self financed courses on Computer Application- BCA and PGDCA in the year 2008. Pragiyotish College, situated at the Santipur area of the Guwahati city, has been carrying four self financed courses. With four self financed courses of B.Com, BBA, BCA and MTM, 27% of the total students in the college are receiving self financed education (817 self financing students out of total 3118 students). Similarly, various colleges under Dibrugarh University have followed the same course of action and have introduced different self financed courses.

The costs of these courses are much higher than the other courses sponsored by the universities. All these self financed courses are professional in nature and are introduced keeping in mind the employability of the students after the completion of courses. Introduction of these courses is also driven by the motive to make the government and provincialised colleges financially self sufficient. The government many a times referred to financial limitations of the government and asked the institutions to become self sufficient.

A simultaneous development and considered by many as an issue of concern is the discouragement to traditional disciplines and courses, mostly social sciences. Some of the prominent subjects of social science like History, Economics, and Political Science are completely neglected in the private institutions. Reportedly the government has also decided to close down the departments of social science with less number of students in the provincialised colleges. While there is a growing demand and interest for professional education among students primarily because of the quick job opportunities, the disciplines of social science or humanities cannot totally be ignored. There still are a
large number of students who want to pursue higher education in these disciplines. The various disciplines of pure science and arts of Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University have a demand and supply ratio of 5:1 and 4:1, that is, only one fifth or one fourth of the applicants get a seat in these universities. Where do the other aspirants go if there are no other institutions offering these courses?

Globally as well as at the national level, there has been a massification of higher education due to increasing demand and rapid expansion of the same. Conventional higher education institutions have not been totally successful in catering to the demands of the newly emerging section of population eligible for higher education. Private higher education has been considered as an alternative to accommodate the rising demand of higher education.

Higher education has been linked with the job market. However conventional higher education many a time fails to cater to the demands of the market, which enhanced the expansion and development of private institutions of higher education. Private institutions are more motivated by the pragmatic need of meeting the demands of the students for courses suitable for the market. These institutions attempt to make higher education more responsive to the market demands by providing inter disciplinary and multi disciplinary courses and thereby facilitating a nexus between academics and industry. Accordingly there has been a proliferation of market oriented courses and short term courses.

In line with the private institutions at the global as well as national arena, private universities in Assam are seen placing more importance on professional courses in the
pursuit of achieving a knowledge based economy. Market driven disciplines have gained more prominence because of their potential to create employability for the youth, whereas disciplines like arts, humanities, social sciences and pure sciences are not receiving priority due to not being directly linked with the job market. Most of the private universities offer education on professional courses which can create employment ready graduates. These universities provide courses ranging from technology to fashion technology, institutional management to hotel management courses, and assure not only to produce employable youth but also to place them well in the job market. Ripun Borah, the then education minister when the private universities bill was proposed and passed in the Assam legislative assembly, justified the bill on the ground of employability of the students and suitability of professional courses in achieving the same. The opposition too supported the move of the government towards encouraging private enterprise and the need for professional and market oriented courses in higher education institutions.

5.2.2 The High ‘Cost’ of Education

One very important aspect of private higher education in every country is that of student fees; fund generated from students fee being the most primary and pivotal source of revenue for private higher education institutions. The initial investments made by the private institutions are recovered from the students in a couple of years. In India not much attempt is made by the private institutions to generate additional sources of revenue, whereas in some major private universities of US, statistics show that students fee constitute only a small portion of the total cost of education imparted to the students (Tilak, 2014). In the American higher education system, the private universities do not receive any fund from the federal or state government, and the students fee constitute
less than 40% of the total cost, with the rest of the cost financed by non-state and non-
student sources (Tilak, 2014). However in India, higher education is financed either by
the state or the students or solely by the students, and there are no other sources of
financing higher education. In India, student fees in private universities are about 40 to
70 times higher than fees in public universities; whereas in countries like US, Japan and
Korea with a considerable private sector, fees in private universities are only 8 to 10
times higher than that of public universities.

The following table shows the total cost of some of the courses of four leading private
universities in Assam-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course of study</th>
<th>ADBU</th>
<th>ADTU</th>
<th>KU</th>
<th>RGU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor of Engineering</td>
<td>460,000</td>
<td>290,000</td>
<td>5,20,000</td>
<td>4,40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Engineering</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
<td>2,90,000</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2,60,000</td>
<td>2,10,000</td>
<td>3,50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>3,66,000</td>
<td>2,30,000</td>
<td>5,20,000</td>
<td>3,35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCA</td>
<td>1,75,000</td>
<td>3,00,000</td>
<td>2,40,000</td>
<td>2,20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>2,05,000</td>
<td>2,10,000</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
<td>2,00,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSc</td>
<td>1,80,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1,20,000</td>
<td>90,000-1,10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Official websites of ADBU, ADTU, KU, RGU)

Though private institutions have been justified on the ground of expansion and wide
accessibility of higher education to an ever growing population of aspirants, by looking
at the fee structure of various courses of the private universities, it is questionable as to
what extent private institutions can cater to the higher educational needs and aspirations
of all sections of the society alike. While collecting data from the students of private
universities through random sampling, the researcher found out that most of the
respondents belong to financially stable and well to do families, whose education is being sponsored by their parents. The rest of the students were found to finance their studies through educational loan. Those financing their education through educational loan expressed financial constraints and heavy financial burden in view of the loan. Ritu Das (name changed), a student of a private university commented, “It is difficult to meet the cost of education in a private university for a lower middle class girl like me. I am financing my education through educational loan, and feel a sense of financial burden. But to secure my future I have no other option but to opt for a professional degree which comes at a cost. It would have been really helpful for students like me who come from not-so-well-to-do families if we could be offered such education at an affordable cost.”

Moreover another noticeable feature of RGU is that the cost of a course increases in proportion to the periodicity, i.e., if a student pays per semester or per year, he pays more than when he pays the whole amount as onetime payment. For example, in RGU, to pursue the course of MCA, onetime payment amount is 1,90,000 and yearly payment is 70,000 which makes up to 2,10,000 and semester payment is 36,500 which makes up to 2,19,000 in 3 years- which is the duration of the course. The same is the case with all other courses of the university. The private universities have also been found to increase their fee year wise in different courses.

As student fee constitutes the whole of the cost of imparting education, private institutions end up charging high fee from the students. Although these institutions have other sources of financing, they primarily depend on student fee to meet the cost of education, by making the initial investment. The Registrar of ADBU expressed “we

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16 An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in July, 2016
cannot help but charge high fee as we are a private university, and we primarily depend on revenue generated from the student fee. We have to meet the major expenses including teachers’ salary from the student fee"\textsuperscript{17}, he commented.

While the government tried to cater to the increasing demands for higher education by facilitating private undertakings in the sphere of higher education, such private establishments have ended up making higher education an exclusive good, not equally accessible to all the groups in the society. The high amount of fees charged by the private institutions has built a sort of monopoly of the privileged sections in the sphere of higher education. The expensive higher education system offered by the private institutions is surely depriving many talented and deserving students from entering the realm of higher education. There is lack of argument to claim for a rational ground for fee, for a higher education which is affordable and accessible; not only to a selected few, but to every aspirant in the society so that no talented aspirant is deprived of his/her right to higher education and to all the benefits accrued from the former. The significantly high amount of fees in private institutions ends up being regressive in reality. Fee in these institutions can be expected to be elastic enough to cater to the educational needs and wishes of middle and low income groups, which is definitely not the case with these institutions. The not well off sections in the society, who if equipped with higher education, could rise up the ladder of socio economic prosperity, are kept outside the reach of the benefits of higher education with barred accessibility.

**Comparison of Fee Structure of Public and Private Universities**

It is pertinent to look at the fee structures of public and private universities. Though it is acceptable that there will invariably be some difference between the fee structures of

\textsuperscript{17} Registrar of ADBU; Personal Interview conducted on 26.07.2016
public and private institutions, the major variation in the course fees is a matter of concern.

The following table shows a comparative account of fee structure of some of the courses offered by both public and private university-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses of study</th>
<th>CU</th>
<th>AEC</th>
<th>GU</th>
<th>KU</th>
<th>DU</th>
<th>ADBU</th>
<th>ADTU</th>
<th>RGU</th>
<th>GIMT</th>
<th>MSSV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>38,000</td>
<td>1,63,000</td>
<td>5,20,000</td>
<td>3,50,000</td>
<td>4,60,000</td>
<td>2,90,000</td>
<td>4,40,000</td>
<td>3,80,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>61,000</td>
<td>61,600</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
<td>2,90,000</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
<td>1,80,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSc (Pure Sciences)</td>
<td>12,900</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>12,800</td>
<td>1,20,000</td>
<td>12960</td>
<td>2,00,000</td>
<td>1,70,000</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1,20,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,60,000 (J&amp;M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10,880</td>
<td>1,40,000</td>
<td>8360</td>
<td>1,60,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1,60,000 (J&amp;M)</td>
<td>86,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>35510</td>
<td>5,20,000</td>
<td>1,09,520</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3,35,000</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Official websites of ADBU, ADTU, KU, RGU, GU, DU, CU, MSSV, AEC and GIMT)

It becomes clear from the fee structure of the public and private institutions that considerable amount of difference exists in fee structure of the same courses. About the fund and expenses of private universities, the private university act specified that all the expenses of the universities have to be borne by the universities themselves. And since they have to incur all the expenses from their own fund, naturally they have to generate revenue from students' fee. The registrar of another private university commented “being a private university we cannot help but levy high fee as we have to generate our
own fund and bear all expenses there from.”\(^{18}\) Private universities naturally have a motive of profiteering too. All these lead to high fee being levied on the students, which is not affordable by majority of population. Moreover whether the government should and would have any control over the private universities regarding fee structure, the act has no specific mention about the same. Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma when asked by media persons if the education minister considered any measure to control the exorbitant fees charged by private educational institutions, replied that his government would act soberly and would not act with regulation or threat against the private sector. “Private institutes are giving employment too. If I bring in any regulation, many institutes may close down and people will be unemployed then. Our motto is to take everyone along with us—Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas”, he commented (Economic Times, June 11, 2016). The inhibition and unwillingness on the part of the minister to regulate the private universities is a matter of concern. While the minister time and again reiterated the importance of regulating the educational institutions to ensure accountability and quality, the reluctance to control the functioning of the private actors point towards a tacit encouragement to privatisation without regard to the ramifications of the same.

### 5.2.3 Student Assistance and Educational Loan

The drive for privatisation has not professed as much about student scholarship to meet the cost of education as it has clamoured for educational loan. The student community in many instances have also had to resort to protests over cutting down on governmental scholarships and fellowships. Given the exorbitant cost of private education, the students opting for it are more in the need of assistance like scholarships and fellowships. The private universities maintain that they follow various policies and

\(^{18}\) Registrar of a private university; Personal Interview conducted between on 21.07.2016
strategies to increase accessibility of the weaker sections of the society- Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and Other Backward Castes (OBC). The authorities of the private universities opined that the students of these categories are admitted according to the norms prescribed by the government and they are supported by different measures like relaxation in marks, tuition fee waivers, scholarships etc. Assam Down Town University provides scholarship/freeship to 3.85% of the students. In Assam Don Bosco University, around 4.30% of the students are benefitted by fee waiver and around 1.12% of the students are benefitted by scholarship on the ground of merit. The university provides scholarship on application to around 0.60% on the basis of economic status; while around 1.06% students receive Ishan Uday scholarship, some scholarships are available for ST students of the university, scholarship provided by the Directorate of Technical Education decreased from 8 in 2012 to 1 in 2015.

The data collected from the students of the private universities revealed that the scholarship amount is not of much support in so far as financing education in the institutions is concerned. Kamal Das (name changed), a student of a private university commented that scholarship is not at all sufficient to pay the fee. “While I receive a scholarship of an amount of Rs. 30,000 annually, I have to pay fee worth Rs. 1,60,000. Along with the fee, I have other expenses too. The scholarship amount can hardly be of any help as far financing my education is concerned”\(^{19}\) - Kamal commented.

Gauhati University- a public university of the state provides fee waiver admission scheme to around 16% of the students, and poor students’ aid fund to around 1.5% of the students. Around 30% of the students get benefitted by different scholarships and

\(^{19}\) An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in July, 2016
freeships provided by the government, around 17% of the students receive the benefits of institutionally provided scholarships and freeships.

In Dibrugarh University- another prominent public university of the state, 1.25% to 3% students receive SC scholarship and 4.35% receive ST scholarship. Around 2% of the students receive north east council scholarship, around 1.5% receive students aid fund, and around 5.95% to 18% students receive various state government scholarships. Various endowment scholarships (some ranging to a lakh) are also provided to the students.

The data reveal that the public universities provide more liberal scholarships to the students and offer various kinds of scholarships and fellowships, thus benefitting more students. Also, the scholarship amount is of sufficient help to finance the education. The self financing courses however put heavy financial burden on the students as do the private institutions. Scholarship/freeship thus is not so much a viable tool to enable a large number of students avail and finance private education. A very small number of students get benefitted by them, and also the amount received is no way sufficient to finance their education. The researcher found out that among the sampled students those who are receiving some kind of scholarship do not find it sufficient and depend on other sources of funding including educational loan.

The private universities seem to be led more by the motive of financial efficiency and less by the issues of equity, accessibility in education. They adopt certain assumptions and navigate along those lines while validating their incontestable argument for charging high fee. The registrar of a private university put forward the argument- “higher education comes at a cost, so does quality education, and one has to pay price to
get world class education”20. The private institutions thus are basically driven by the philosophy that the students should pay for their education.

From the primary data collected from the sampled students of the private institutions, the researcher found out that the students of these institutions belong to financially well-off families. While education of most of the students is being financed by their parents, the other section of the students has been found to finance their education by availing educational loan. Educational loans have come up as a viable way of supporting and encouraging needy students to finance their education, who have to repay the money within a stipulated time of getting a job. However, as much as it is considered as a good option to some extent in so far as financing higher education is concerned, student loans have downsides too in that courses with employment potential are preferred both by the lenders and the borrowers, and that the conditions of these loans more often than not cannot be reached by the economically backward sections. These aspects carry serious repercussions in matters of equity and are also thought to be insensitive to the needs of the economically unprivileged students (Rani, 2009). Though required data are unavailable to assess the impacts and implications of student loans, the existing literature implies that student loan as an option of financing higher education may fail the aim of social equity. (Varghese, 2009; Rani, 2009).

The primary data of the study also revealed the fact that student loans demand a considerably sound financial status of the students. Ridip Kalita, a student of a private institution, commented that he had to opt for educational loan given the high fee of the course that is pursuing. But as he reveals, he belongs to a middle class family whose father is a businessman and mother is a housewife. When asked about job prospects

20 Registrar of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in 21.07.2016
after the completion of the course and about repayment of the loan, Ridip said “I hope to find a decent job after the completion of my study, so that I myself can repay the money. But if unfortunately I do not find a job with a good salary, my father has to help repay the loan”21. It thus becomes evident that a sound economic condition is a pre requisite not only as a condition of availing the loans, but also to repay the same.

The private institutions that the researcher selected do not have any information regarding student loans, as in how many students of their institution are availing these loans. However, what the researcher came to know is that these institutions encourage the students to avail the facility of these loans in order to finance their education, and also work as a guarantor and mediator between the banks and the students. The administrative officers of two leading private universities expressed that they link the students with the banks for loans and also help them get the loans in case the student cannot meet the required conditions of the loan.

Other than high amount of fee, another instrument that has come to be vigorously adopted to sustain the privatisation drive is that of educational loan. Policy discourses on higher education have replaced scholarships with educational loans. It is argued that even the needy students can be asked to avail educational loans to finance their education. When in 1990s the students’ loan programme was restructured, government wanted it to be so developed that loan repayments can produce a revolving fund which can sufficiently finance higher education and would absolve the government of spending money from public fund (Tilak, 2014). The supporters of private education and those who do not see any fault with high fee of education, argue the case of educational loan to help and support the needy students. Loans are considered as the

21 An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in July, 2016
panacea when it comes to concerns about the affordability of the poor needy students. However, the assumption that loan will provide solution to the problem of financing higher education appears defective and therefore needs reconsideration. The concept of educational loan is based on a non-public agenda that higher education is not a public good. As against a social merit good, loans view higher education as a highly individualised good. Seen within the realm of individualised good, the onus of higher education is moved from the society to the families and the individuals pursuing it.

5.2.4 Meeting the Demand of Employability

One of the rationales justifying the need of private higher education has been that of employability. It has been argued that private education can play a complementary role to that of the government and can augment employability of the eligible graduates. Higher education is certainly a very effective avenue of socio economic betterment of the beneficiaries, and the efficacy of the system certainly depends on its employability. Government institutions are often criticised for not being able to ensure the employability of the students. The beneficiaries of higher education are supposed to end up with a better socio economic prospect for themselves as well with a better contributing capacity for the development of the society. However, when it fails to do so, it sabotages the hopes and aspirations of both the individual beneficiaries and the society. The government, while arguing the case for private endeavour in higher education, argued that private institutions can be a paramount facilitator of employment in the state which suffers from a dearth of placements for the employable youth which compels them to move out of the city for higher education.

From the data available, it is found that ADBU has 11% successful candidates placed per year. Almost all the placed students belong to the disciplines of engineering and
management. ADTU has a placement of around 19% with around 15% off the campus recruitment. While placement is important, equally important is to enquire as to what kind of jobs do the students get into. When contacted by the researcher, a number of ex students of private universities and institutions commented that they are engaged in private and corporate jobs with not satisfactory salaries. They said that students of government institutions have better placement avenues and are placed in better jobs. What they earn from the jobs they are absorbed in does not suffice to meet the cost that they incurred in acquiring education in the private institutions, the students of the private institutions revealed. The two major public universities of the state GU and DU have annual placements of around 12% and 10% respectively. The students of the public universities, as they cater to varied disciplines- traditional as well as applied, have students placed across various avenues. The students as well as the student unions are however not satisfied with the placement avenues of these universities. The students are of the view that placement avenues of the universities are not encouraging, and that the institutions need to take certain strategies and measures to augment the prospect of avenues for the students.

Data collected by the researcher show that the students of the public universities perform better in various national and state competitive examinations. Around 17% of the students of GU qualify the national eligibility test along with good performance in some other competitive examinations like SLET, GATE, UPSC, state PSC etc. In the year 2015, a total of 144 students qualified NET, while 116 students qualified SLET, with a CAT qualifier and 29 GATE qualifying candidates. DU had a number of 90 NET qualified, 95 SLET qualified and 5 GATE qualified students. ADTU has 18 successful GATE qualified candidates and 1 NET qualified candidate in 4 years from 2012 to
2016. ADBU 20 NET qualified and 30 GATE qualified candidates in a span of 4 years from 2012 to 2016.

Professional education is very much on demand among the students due to the quick job opportunities of these courses. Private institutions have tapped on this demand and put utmost thrust to these courses. The data show that these private universities have been able to generate employment; fulfilling the need raised on the part of both the government as well as the students. However, what has also been found out during the research is excess availability of professional graduates with not satisfactory jobs. As two former students of private universities said that they have not yet got satisfactory job and are unemployed. They got jobs outside campus placement through their own networks, however those were not satisfactory and they chose not to join and are still looking for jobs, they said. It thus makes us question the fantasies associated with private professional education. Is there a lack of proper planning and subsequent wastage of financial and human resources?

While private universities outperform the public universities in the aspect of employment, which is also due to the reason that the former ones mostly provide professional courses, their performance in competitive examinations is behind public universities.

5.2.5 The Agenda of De Politicisation

Educational reforms in the line of knowledge economy seek to turn universities into spaces which are devoid of student politics. There are no students unions in any of the private universities and this clearly comes out as a depoliticising agenda. It is in fact a neo-liberal agenda to keep the educational institutions free from any kind of student
politics and politics is considered as a malicious thing to be allowed in educational institutions. Student politics in educational institutions has come to be highly condemned which is believed to rob students off credible educational pursuits and creativity. Though the private universities have student councils and student representatives in some bodies, they can never be equated with the stature of a student union. This only implies destruction of democratic space of the students and also their democratic rights. There have been many arguments as to how student politics has not reaped any benefit for the student folk of the state and has only been used by some for acquisition of power and influence. There is a tendency to keep students away from any kind of political activity. But does that call for no space for students rights at all?- that needs to be analysed. This aversion towards student politics gives rise to a-political attitudes among the students. A student, Manasi Sarma, said- “I do not have much idea about politics; nor am I interested. I do not think it has got any importance in an educational institution and I think it is good to keep campus politics free. Politics might hamper educational activities and performance”\(^{22}\). There is a belief that political activities in educational campus obstruct knowledge seeking. As students engage themselves in non academic activities, they deny themselves true knowledge building. Also there is a tendency among the upper middle class to keep their wards away from politics. Media also plays a role in projecting a negative image about student politics. Coupled with professional job oriented education, a non political campus of private institutions very well attracts upper middle and privileged section of the society. A student leader of the Assam wing of the Student Federation of India who is active on educational matters of the state said that private universities are creating a-political

\(^{22}\) An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted on 28.10.2016
individuals who are prepared only for the job market and are unaware of how society works. They are unaware of structures of the class structure in the society. As Giroux (2005) opined that by and large the political culture of the society is giving way to de-politicisation and democracy has come to be synonymous with market ideology.

Creating a space and ambience of debates and discussion by attracting and engaging with differing viewpoints is one of the traits of a good university. An inclusive academic ambience by default has people with varied viewpoints and university is the space to engage with such variety. The young people should rather thrive in a place where they have an opportunity to engage with people holding different standpoints which naturally kindles an attitude of dialogue and discussion and also forms a learning context. A space devoid of different viewpoints, voices bears deleterious repercussions for education and for democracy. Because education at least in parts is about engaging with differences, critically analysing issues- without which intellectual development of the students will be mimed and will have damaging implications for ‘intellectual capital’ that institutions of higher education should strive for.

5.3 Comparative Study of a Public and a Private Higher Education Institution
The researcher has undertaken a comparative study between two engineering institutions situated in Guwahati. One is the Assam Engineering College which is a government college affiliated to Gauhati University, a state university in Assam. The other institution which is taken up by the researcher is Girijananda Choudhury Institute of Management and Technology, which is a private institution. This comparative study was intended to understand and analyse different facets of educational institutions from the standpoints of public and private institutions. The prime objective has been to
analyse the impact of privatisation on the basis of the debates on pursuit of accessibility, equity as well quality of education coupled with effects on the society.

The researcher personally visited the two institutions. The researcher collected the data with the help of questionnaires and interviews with some of the students. The researcher aimed to get information from the students regarding their socio economic background along with their ways of meeting the cost of their education. Their reasons behind joining the particular institution as well as their individual perceptions about various aspects of education and the quality of education facilitated to them was also analysed by the researcher. (See Appendix for questionnaire and interview schedule). Students were selected by the method of Random Sampling. The sample consisted of 50 students from each institution.

Assam Engineering College (AEC) is the first engineering college of the north-eastern region of the country. Established in the year 1955, AEC is situated at Jalukbari and is considered as a premiere technical institute of the Eastern India. Spread across a campus of 400 acres of land, AEC has been the centre of significant academic activities and endeavours. It has continuously been contributing to meet the needs of technical knowledge in the region and has been a hub of academic pursuits. It is a government college established by the state of Assam and funded by the government. AEC is an approved engineering college under AICTE and all its branches are affiliated to Gauhati University. Initially AEC started off with the civil engineering branch, and soon enough all the other branches of engineering came into existence. The college offers degree courses on Civil Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Computer Science Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Industrial and
Production Engineering, Instrumental Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. Masters courses are also available in certain branches like Computer Applications (MCA), Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. All the masters’ courses provided by AEC are also affiliated under Gauhati University, the first university of the state of Assam. There are approximately 1650 undergraduate and 100 postgraduate students enrolled in the college.

**Girijananda Choudhury Institute of Management and Technology (GIMT)** is an institute in Assam in the private sector offering technical courses at the undergraduate and post graduate level established under the aegis of Shrimanta Shankar Academy (SSA) Society. The college was established with the approval of the state government and with permission from the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The college is affiliated to Assam Science and Technology University. The college has an intake of approximately 1320 undergraduate and 180 postgraduate students with faculty strength of around 100.

From the data collected from the students of the two institutions, it is revealed that while AEC caters to both urban and rural population, students of GIMT mostly hail from the urban areas. Regarding the socio economic status, students of AEC spread across different economic strata of society. However, a trend of upper middle class background has been revealed regarding the economic status of the students of GIMT. While GIMT has an intake of around 4% of SC students, around 18% of the students belong to the ST category and around 15% belong to the category of OBC students. In Assam Engineering College, around 7% of students belong to the SC category and around 12% of students and 15% of students belong to ST and OBC categories.
respectively. From what the data say, all the sampled students of GIMT had received education from private schools. However, in case of AEC, 40% students have had government school education, and 60% were educated in private schools.

About the parental background of the students, around 80% of the students of GIMT have well educated parents, around 75% with a post doctoral degree. Around 5% of the students also had a parent with a doctoral degree. About 60% of the parents of students of GIMT are working, both father and mother. The occupations and services are varied. Majority of the students’ parents were found to work in high designated and well paid jobs- government or private departments or personal establishments. Around 20% of the students’ parents are engaged in personal professions like doctors, lawyers or private construction firms.

In case of AEC, around 55% of the students have parents who hold a post graduate degree. No one from the sample had a parent with a doctoral degree. Around 17% of the mothers of the sampled students of AEC have a post graduate degree. Percentage of students who have both the parents working stands at around 35%, with most of the mothers being housewives. Parents are found to be employed mostly in government jobs with some also engaged in private and personal engagements. The socio economic backgrounds of the students are found to be varied with their fathers being employed in high and middle level designations. Comparatively, the students of AEC showed a humble economic background compared to a well off background of GIMT students.
The students of AEC appeared to be academically better as students who clear the Common Entrance Test conducted by the government of Assam and are selected by Directorate of Technical Education of Assam for admission, can only get admitted in the college. However, all the sampled students of GIMT said that they took admission in the college as they could not clear the entrance to study in AEC and therefore selected GIMT. Almost 80% of the students said that because they could not get admitted to AEC on the basis of merit, they chose GIMT as another engineering institute in the city. In terms of fees, the two institutions reveal significant disparity.

All the sampled students of AEC are financing their study without taking any loans and consider the fee affordable. Also they can avail a number of scholarships on different criteria. According to them, the education that they are receiving is worth the money that they are spending and are certain about their future career prospects. Among the sampled students of GIMT, each sampled student except two is self financing their education. The two students who are financing their education with the help of loans considered the fee quite high and had to avail educational loan. They expressed that it is a heavy liability on their parts to pay back the money and are not very satisfied about what they are receiving in exchange of what they are paying. The rest of the students whose education is being financed by their parents, one third of them are satisfied with the institution and the education that they are receiving.

About the satisfaction of the students with the faculty of the institutions, all the students of AEC expressed full satisfaction with the faculty. Each of them was of the opinion that the faculties are very knowledgeable, qualified, experienced, though they expressed concern about inadequate faculties. Among the students of GIMT, while 45% expressed satisfaction with the faculty, the rest were not satisfied with the quality of the teachers.
The students of AEC found the cost of education totally worth it and were quite confident about the impact that their education would have on their career prospects. They expressed conviction about how their future is going to unfold. However, the students of GIMT mostly expressed concern about their future career possibilities and stated that the cost of education is not worth what they are receiving and what future prospects it carries.

Regarding the infrastructural facilities and their qualities, around 65% of the students of AEC expressed dissatisfaction with the infrastructure and they particularly referred to the condition of the laboratories. They expressed that the laboratories are in the same condition that they were years ago and they need improvements in terms of laboratory tools and infrastructure. Around 60% of the students of GIMT expressed satisfaction with the infrastructure of their institution. They seemed satisfied with the academic building, classrooms, laboratories, hostel facilities et al. However, around 35% of the students were not satisfied with the infrastructural facilities. They expressed that the facilities available to them are not worth the cost of education.

Regarding the reasons behind them joining a particular institution, the students of GIMT pointed out a number of factors. They mentioned that they wanted to pursue professional education which will help them set a certain career prospect, and because they could not find any other better professional course, they joined GIMT. They also said that because the institution is in Guwahati, it was convenient for them in many ways and also they considered it a good option as far as private institutions are concerned. Another reason pointed out by the students is related to job prospects. As
GIMT is a private institution, they thought it would facilitate good placement options. All of them admitted that Government College was their first preference and conceded that government colleges are better in terms of educational facilities with better qualified teachers, but could not get in because of tough competition.

When asked to the students of AEC about their reasons for joining AEC, all of them said that being the oldest and the best engineering college in the North eastern region, AEC was obviously their preferred college. The reputation, educational standards and job placements of AEC are well known, which is why AEC was a natural choice, some commented. And because they got an entry into the college by beating tough state level entrance examination, they feel very proud to be a part of the college, they said. When the researcher tried to know about their views on private institutions, they commented that the vast number of graduates that are being produced by the private institutions is creating imbalances in the job market. They also expressed concern as to how private institutions can be very liberal and lenient in terms of grades and marks and how it contributes to low quality of output but with ever increasing quantity.

5.4 Privatisation and Quality of Education

The reason for introducing and encouraging private endeavour in higher education has been primarily twofold. The failure of the government to cater to the ever increasing demand of higher education and the undermined quality of higher education have been cited as the grounds which could justify the government sharing the onus of higher education with the private sector and private investments in higher education. Private higher education is thus expected to contribute to enhancing the accessibility and quality of higher education. The supporters of private higher education believe that
private education would meet the growing requirement of education and also improve the quality of the same by partaking in government responsibilities towards education and thereby lessening the burden on the government. On the other hand, the critics of privatisation speculate the effects of privatisation on the quality of higher education. They apprehend that the quality of infrastructure and teaching of private institutions of higher education is doubtful.

If the quality of an educational institution is to be judged by its infrastructural facilities, the private universities of Assam have to be given the credit of providing quality education. With big buildings spanning across huge campuses, modern classrooms equipped with ICT facilities, Wi-Fi facilities, well equipped libraries and laboratories, well developed hostel infrastructures, the private universities of Assam do not probably vindicate the apprehension of many quarters regarding poor infrastructural facilities of private institutions. But we need to apply caution when extrapolating the benefits of infrastructure to an educational institution. There is perhaps nothing inevitably great or inherently romantic about providing education amidst very well equipped infrastructure, modern labs just as there is nothing charming about conducting experiments amidst poor infrastructure and non-existent labs. Good infrastructure forms the basic conditions of an enabling educational experience, which public institutions mostly lack in. In today’s world permeated with media influence, students and parents very often make educational choices by looking at the infrastructural facilities as highlighted in the advertisements. However, some scepticism towards this aspect of education is important.

Against the claims of the government that private endeavour would augment the quality of higher education, there are severe qualms. It is the quality of the faculty of private
institutions that raise serious apprehension from various quarters. Also the disciplines
that these private institutions invest most in, alarm every conscious member of the civil
society who understands the ‘value’ that the courses and curriculum of an educational
institution are supposed to uphold. It has already been discussed that private investors
basically concentrate the academia to technical and management courses to meet the
demands of the aspirants (as they say).

The self study reports of the public and private universities reveal that the private
universities with an average teacher student ratio of 1.14 have less experienced and
qualified teachers than public universities. Who all are attracted and retained in an
institution also depends on the satisfaction of the teachers of the institution. A
satisfactory salary, security of tenure, job related benefits are what keep the teachers
motivated to fully devote themselves to the job of imparting knowledge to the students.
The teachers of private institutions however appeared to be more or less dissatisfied
with the service conditions. The researcher has found a general inclination among the
teachers to join government institutions. The teachers of Assam Down Town University
(ADTU) are paid as per the ADTU policy and do not receive benefits like post
retirement benefits, gratuity, leave encashment etc and the same was the case with the
Assam Don Bosco University teachers. Some of the teachers also felt dissatisfaction
about lack of academic freedom in terms of curriculum design and teaching
mechanisms. Though they commented that these factors do not affect their performance
or teaching, it is imperative that in an environment where the teachers are dissatisfied
with the service benefits and conditions, their performance is bound to be affected.

The data collected from the students of private institutions of higher education reveal
that the students of the private universities like Assam Don Bosco University, Assam
Down Town University, Royal Global University are very much satisfied with the infrastructural facilities available to them. These universities are equipped with very well developed infrastructural facilities like modern classrooms, laboratories, libraries as well as hostel infrastructure. However, the students of public institutions expressed dissatisfaction and concern about the infrastructural facilities available in these institutions like classroom and laboratory.

Regarding the quality of education provided, around 50% of the sampled students of private institutions expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching and the way in which knowledge is imparted. Patrick D’souza (name changed), a passed out student of a private engineering institution expressed- “I was never a good student, but here in my college, the teachers were very helpful, and I am satisfied with the institution. The fee was high, but was worth it. I would not have got the same attention in a government institution, which I got here.”23 However, a number of students expressed that they are not very satisfied with the teaching and opined that they would have been more satisfied to have been in a public institution and believe that the educational quality of public institutions is better than private ones though they lack in satisfactory infrastructure. “Infrastructural facilities cannot completely determine the quality of education”24 Ridip Das (name changed), a student of a private university commented.

The students of public institutions though expressed dissatisfaction with the infrastructural facilities, expressed contentment with the quality of teaching. Garima Das, a student of a public university expressed- “in public institution like ours, the faculty is very good and well qualified. Compared to private institutions, we receive

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23 An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in 21.09.2016
24 An undergraduate student of a private university; Personal Interview conducted in 21.06.2016
education from better qualified and more experienced faculty members though the private institutions have better infrastructural facilities.”

The credibility of a higher educational institution lies in how much value does it place on building intellectual capacity rather than impressive infrastructure and educational outcomes in terms of pass percentage and placements. Reducing educational objectives to granting degrees on technical and job oriented disciplines is similar to missing the woods for the tress. A university especially is supposed to provide a wide and liberal spectrum of disciplines. Theoretical standpoint, creative outlook and critical insights are to be promoted by an institution of higher education, especially a university. But all of these seem to have been relegated to the backseat as irrelevant and unimportant in the new job oriented educational system.

5.5 Equity and Social Justice: Where does Private Higher Education Stand?

The major issues confronting the higher education sector of the nation has been that of equity and social justice, that is, equal educational opportunity and benefit to all strata of the society. Equity demands accessibility of the vulnerable sections of the society who are the newly emerged beneficiaries of secondary education to higher education, which will eventually pave the way for their upward mobility in the societal ladder (Punnayya Committee, 1993, p. 18). There is however hardly any serious effort towards understanding and examining the impact of high fees on accessibility to higher education.

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25 An post graduate student of a public university; Personal Interview conducted in 08.07.2016
The student enrolment data of the private universities show that students of all categories are placed in the institutions, with maximum enrolment of ST students among the vulnerable sections. Assam Down Town University has an intake of 10% SC students, while ST and OBC students constitute around 35% and 20% of total student enrolment respectively. The percentages were quite lower in the formative stages. Assam Don Bosco University has an intake of around 2.86% of SC students, while ST and OBC students constitute 36.53% and 15.82% of the total students respectively.

When looked into the data of two prominent public universities of the state, Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University, Gauhati University has an annual enrolment of around 60% women students with 4% SC women, 11% ST women and 14% of OBC women students out of total enrolment. While SC students constitute around 8% of the student population, the university has an enrolment of 11% ST and 22% OBC students. Dibrugarh University also shows surplus women enrolment of around 54% of total student enrolment; while SC, ST and OBC students constitute around 7%, 13% and 44% of total student population respectively.

From the student enrolment data of the private universities, it can be inferred that the backward sections of the society get a fair representation in these institutions. What has been found out during the research is another set of inequality, that is, economic inequality. The data collected by the researcher makes it unambiguous that the students of the private institutions come from the economically well off sections of the society. The sampled students of the private institutions showed a trend of affordability to incur the high cost of private education. Also all the sampled students, the researcher found out, come from the urban areas with private education at the school level. The parents of the students are engaged in government or private jobs, business or practices with sound
economic conditions. Though provisions like reservation and scholarship are practised and are expected to ensure inclusiveness and accessibility of all sections of the society, these provisions have proved to be of negligible impact.

Pranita Deka (name changed), a student of Gauhati University revealed to the researcher how economic disability put a halting stone to her dream of studying the subject she wanted to. “I wanted to study Masters of Human Rights after my graduation although I did my graduation in Education. The content and the scope of the study really interest me. However this subject is not yet introduced in this university, nor is it available in Dibrugarh University. The course is available in a private university, but despite being so interested in studying the subject, I could not enrol myself in the university because I could never afford such a high fee. Taking educational loan was also not something I and my family members could agree on as it is not as easy as it seems. The burden of repaying the loan and uncertainty of job prospects kept me from taking admission and I decided to continue my studies here in Gauhati University”\(^2^6\), Pranita expressed.

Non interference of the state in the educational aspirations of individuals has been a major rationale put forth in favour and defence of privatisation of higher education. That the state should not intervene in the process of acquisition of knowledge by the aspirants paying the cost of it, and that those who can afford to pay should be left free to decide upon their aspirations and way of acquiring knowledge without the state intervening the same, is what the supporters of privatisation of education argue and put thrust on. This has paved the way for the private investors to design education in accordance with the expedience of those who possess the affordability to pay for such

\(^{26}\) An post graduate student of a public university; Personal Interview conducted in 28.07.2016
education. From what can be inferred from the cost of education of private institutions of higher education is that such education as well as the economic profile of the sampled students, it is pretty evident that private education can be availed only by the economically privileged sections of the society and is not equitably accessible to all sections of the society.

Ensuring equity necessitates expansion of higher education which can be materialised by more and more institutions coming to the fore and facilitating education to as many aspirants as the society may produce. This expansion, some believe, can be ensured by private investment in higher education, which will lead to enhanced accessibility to education. Though private higher education has definitely expanded the accessibility of higher education, equity has still not been achieved. Accessibility of the weaker sections of the society to the education system stands highly compromised in the face of profitability of private education and the corresponding high cost of such education. Measures like scholarship and educational loan that are initiated to facilitate educational accessibility to the vulnerable sections, work less in favour of the students and more in favour of the institutions. Higher education and the benefits accrued there from thus remain outside the scope of the weaker sections. Consequently, these sections are also deprived of the possibility of the upward mobility in social hierarchy. What operates therefore is a vicious circle of- vulnerable positionality, deprived opportunities and barred mobility to rise up in the ladder of social hierarchy.

It is thus found out during the research that the private institutions of higher education put the thrust on professional courses, and are building on the excessive demand for professional education. This is an unfortunate pointer towards the lack of initiative on
the part of the government to diversify and restore the education system so as to reduce
the dependence and concentration of the middle classes on professional education.
Expansion of education through privatisation reduces the burden on the government to
expand affordable and quality educational institutions. But this entails an irresponsible
role of the government in so far as providing educational facilities and avenues of socio-
economic mobility to all sections of the society are concerned. This also carries the
danger further adding to the class divisions in the society.

What came out from the study is that the sampled private educational institutions
largely cater to selected populations. Majority of the students belong to economically
secure families including the students belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled
tribes. Public institutions present a better picture in so far as accessibility to different
sections is concerned; because admissions to these institutions are based primarily on
merit and cost of education is not prohibitive. The scenario of private education does
not make us hopeful that expansion of higher education will also imply that a student of
a lower class uneducated family of a backward region will be absorbed just as a student
of an urban middle class student.

Private higher education has been justified on the ground of enhanced accessibility and
quality of education. It is recognised that private sector has contributed towards
expansion and enhancement of higher education in the state, as expected by the
government, who has hitherto been the sole facilitator. However, what remains to be
questioned is as to what extent private institutions of higher education are inclusive- of
all sections and strata of the society. As discussed in the previous chapter, Indian higher
education should ideally be based on the principles of justice and equity, facilitating
educational access to all sections of the society alike. Indian society is marred by basically two kinds of inequality- of class and caste. And private education while enhancing accessibility has allegedly eased the path of certain sections of the society only.

Privatisation of higher education might lead to a further divided society, reinforcing and consolidating the already existing socio economic disabilities. While public institutions are few and difficult to get in particularly for students of backward socio- economic backgrounds, private institutions are replete with the ones with well to do backgrounds. And unfortunately the state will have little to no control over these institutions further reinforcing the inequitable private education system.

5.6 Conclusion

Privatisation appeared to many as a panacea to all evils inhibiting higher education from achieving its goals. While it has definitely brought about expansion, but the expansion has a limited academic scope in so far as the private institutions primarily cater to professional courses. Tapping on the growing demand for professional education and the corresponding inability of the government to provide the same, the private institutions introduced professional courses which can guarantee employment. Introducing such courses come with twin advantage- these courses help the institutions attract the students for the attached job opportunities of these courses and it also provides freedom to these institutions to determine the cost of these courses as they wish (Mukhopadhyay, 1996). The logic of tapping other sources of funding for higher education in the form of privatisation creates way for profit making. In the process,
higher education has come to be synonymous with job and employment. Higher education certainly constructs an avenue for economic benefits and mobility. However what needs to be understood is if employability is taken as the cure to all the ills of higher education, is the avenue is equally available to everyone! If placements and jobs be the be all and end all of higher education, where will we land up in terms of achieving the larger goals of higher education!

With the growing demand for higher education, it is all the more important to expand and democratize the higher education system and to provide quality education to aspirants of all sections of the society. While expansion has been achieved, it has come with a ‘cost’ way too high for a large section of the society. Private higher education gives rise to a system which is for the urban upper middle class.

Higher education and the role of the government stand at a critical juncture now. While on one hand the government is supposed to ensure an equal educational system, on the other hand it lacks the ability or the willingness to control and regulate the private institutions. Burgeoning demand for higher and professional education coupled with resource constraints on the part of the government prevent it from regulating the private institutions. Professional education needs huge funding and given financial constraints, government cannot solely provide the funding. Properly designed cost sharing of some kind is not totally objectionable. But the ways that have been adopted are complete privatisation and exorbitant fee structure; the twin aspects and in the absence of a thoughtful scholarship agenda would jeopardize the process of establishing an egalitarian education system of ensuring the accessibility of lower classes of the society. Given the dominant nature of putting the financial burden on the students and the
motive of profit making, it cannot bring in the desired change in higher education system of reaching out to more and more aspirants. Also, as privatisation has put most emphasis on professional education, there is less possibility of it reaching out to large population in the society, because the cost of professional education even in government institutions is too high for a large population. Thus higher education will remain concentrated with the already better off sections of the society and the objective of making higher education a right to be enjoyed by everyone will fail. The system will only perpetuate the already existing structures of dominant socio economic status and will build an elite and segregated educational system, which will generate inequality of opportunities and restrain socio economic mobility. There is also a possibility of waste of manpower and resources due to lack of proper planning and availability of excess amount of professional graduates. Karnataka witnessed high unemployment and disinclination to work in backward and not so profitable areas among the medical and engineering graduates of private institutions.

Privatization of education poses serious threat to the pursuit of the ideals of the Indian constitution—the goal of establishing a just and democratic society. The most detrimental corollary of privatisation is the preference accorded to the capacity to pay over opportunity or right of an individual to receive quality higher education. It is to be realized that the high cost of private professional education is not supported by a corresponding system of student scholarships or loans which is sufficient to support the students (Tilak, 1999). It also needs to questioned as to how much of the cost of education can be or is to be borne by the students. Tilak (1995) argued that full cost recovery from the students is practised nowhere in the world. In western countries like US, student fee of major private universities constitute a tiny part of total costs of
education (Tilak, 2014). Private universities in US do not receive any grant from the federal government and the state and the student fee constitute less than 40%, while remaining 60% is met by non-state and non-student contribution (Tilak, 2014). The sources of financing higher education are state and students or only students. Philanthropic initiatives no longer exist and contribution of society or private actor is limited only to initial venture which is met with returned profits. Similarly, while private institutions in India charge fee 50 to 80 times higher than public institutions, countries like US, Japan or Korea have private universities costing 8 to 10 times more fee than public universities.

Private sector cannot be allowed to consider education as a profit making business. Institutions should raise funds from other sources to meet the cost of education and the fee of the students should only form a part of it. If continued unabated, private institutions would overtake government institutions thereby reducing the pressure on the government to expand higher education system and would make the goal of equally accessible education irrelevant (Tilak, 1995). The inequality of fee between the government and private institutions and the basic error of the capacity to buy education give rise to an inequitable education system.