Chapter II

Secondary Education in Assam: 1826 - 1947

I. A Brief Account of the State of Assam

The present state of Assam is situated in the North East corner of the Republic of India. The boundaries of Assam fall between 24° and 28° of the North latitudes and between 89° and 97° degrees of the East longitudes. Assam has international borders with Burma and China on the East, Bhutan and Tibet on the North, and Bangladesh on the West. Assam proper with which the present work is concerned now occupies the entire Brahmaputra valley from Goalpara to Sadiya being approximately five hundred miles in length with an average breadth of sixty miles throughout, and Barak valley comprising the districts of Cachar and Karimganj. The entire Brahmaputra valley is intersected by a number of tributaries of the Brahmaputra both in the North and the South and is surrounded by hills on three sides. On the North it is bounded by some lower ranges of the Himalayas, and on the South by the Garo, Khasi and the Jayantia hills. The Eastern part is bounded by the Patkai and Naga hills. The hill region is inhabited by the hill tribes — on the North by the Bhutanese, Akas, Defalas, Miris and Abors, on the East by the Mishimis, Khamtis,
and the Singphos, and on the South by the Garos, the Khasis, the Mikirs and the Nagas. There are many mountain passes scattered in the northern and the southern hills through which intercourse between Assam and the rest of the country often took place in the past. In fact, for ages past, the hills and the plains have been closely related.

Although the political boundaries of the state of Assam have changed from age to age, its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in such a way as to ensure its cultural identity through ages. Prior to the advent of the East India Company, the Brahmaputra valley was ruled by the Ahoms, an offshoot of the great Shan race. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom kingdom, crossed the Patkai hills and entered into the Brahmaputra valley and established a principality of his own. In the next three centuries, the Ahoms brought under control the greater part of the Brahmaputra valley by defeating the Morans, the Borahis and the Nagas, and other original inhabitants of the region. In the early part of the sixteenth century, the Koches in the West of Assam became very powerful. This halted the forward policy of the Ahoms. From the sixteenth century, the Mughals in the West posed the most formidable enemy. The Ahom-Mughal conflict continued with occasional breaks for the greater part of the seventeenth century. The Mughals occupied many important places of Assam including Gargaon, the capital of the Kingdom. King Godadhar Singha (1681-96) finally expelled the Mughals in 1682, reoccupied Gauhati and extended the boundary of the kingdom as far as the river Manah.
From the middle of the eighteenth century, the Ahom monarchy was on the decline. Internal conflicts and rebellion broke out. The neighbouring hill tribes began to intrude frequently. Moreover, the repeated Burmese invasions made the Ahom kingdom weak. The situation became worse when the Burmese unleashed a reign of terror. Murder, plunder, and devastation became the order of the day. At last, the Ahom ruler sought help from the East India Company to save Assam from the barbaric attack of the Burmese. In 1826 with the treaty of Yandaboo, the East India Company captured power and brought Assam under its sovereignty.

II. Development of Education Prior to the British Rule

Till the Ahom conquest, ancient Assam was known as Kamrupa, During the Ahom rule it became Asoma. It is said that the word 'Asama' means "unparalleled" or "peerless" and was used to describe the invincible might of the Ahoms. Assam played a glorious part in the promotion and spread of education in ancient times. 'The Mahabharata', the 'Kalikapurana' and 'Jogini Tantra' which provide materials for the ancient history of Assam reveal that Kamrupa was an important centre of Hindu culture within the main stream of political and cultural life of Aryavarta. Assam in general adopted Hindu culture. In the 13th century when the Ahoms conquered the Chutias of Saumarpith, and also drove away the Kacharigis from their native land, they gradually identified themselves with the Assamese people and helped in the emergence of a common culture — the Assamese culture — , patronised Hindu
priests, and erected Hindu temples which later developed into centres of Sanskrit learning. From many ancient literatures and epigraphs it is seen that till the time of British occupation, there was a regular system of education in Assam with well-organised courses of study and fixed hours of schooling. The learned people of the day were the Brahmins, but the people of the other classes were not wholly illiterate. It is obvious that the 'vyavaharis' (lawyers) 'lakhas' (scribes) and other officials who copied books, made up accounts, and drew up deeds, were all educated. Education centred round the 'Gurugriha', schools maintained by private individuals, or at village schools provided by the Brahmins. The great Vaishnavita apostle, Srimanta Sankardeva, received his education at a 'tol' or 'chatrasala' maintained by the Brahmin 'guru' Mohendra Kandali. This shows that even non-Brahmins were admitted to these schools along with the Brahmin.

Learning flourished well in Assam and made it attractive to scholars of the other countries. Hiuen Tsang rightly remarked that 'men of abilities came from far to study here'. This is evident from the visits of such scholars as Sankaracharya (788 - 820 AD), Nanaka (1644 - 1538 AD) and Guru Teg Bahadur (17th century).

The Ahom rulers had to devote much of their time to conquest, consolidation and the warding off of foreign aggression; yet they helped to promote the cause of learning. In spite of repeated invasions by the Burmese, the neighbouring hill tribes, and the Mughals, and many internal conflicts, the Ahoms preserved their passion for the country's past and recorded all the important
events that occurred, and published them under official patronage. These historical records (Buranjis') are valuable contributions to Assamese literature. The system of education that prevailed during the Ahom period was practical rather than theoretical or bookish. There was provision for military training, medical education, training in various types of cotton or silk manufacture, moral education, and Sanskrit instruction in Ahom language and instruction in historical education. The 'vaishnavite' movement initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva ushered in a new life and culture of Assam and helped the growth of a unique type of institution called the 'Satras' which became great centres of learning along with the 'Namghara', the community prayer hall. The cultural history of Assam in respect of fine arts, crafts, education, and learning since the beginning of the 16th century till the advent of the British, largely developed around the Vaishnavite movement which in turn found expression through the 'Sattra' institution.

After the Mughal invasions of the state which were finally repulsed, many Muslims who came with the invaders, stayed back to settle in different parts of Assam and adopted Assamese culture. They established some 'Moqtabs' and 'Madrassas' which were also centres of learning, imparting Islamic education to the believers.

III. Development of Secondary Education in Assam from 1826 to 1947.

Even after the period of internecine strifes and foreign invasions, the indigenous system of education continued in Assam
in a number of 'Sattras' 'tols' and 'pathsalas', 'Moqtabs' and 'Madrassas' in all of which instruction imparted was mostly of a religious nature. That, too, was confined only to the priestly class and the nobility and the scribes (the Kakoties). The rest of the people were illiterate. It has even been said that the population that first came under the British comprised individuals among whom it was difficult to find a person who could read and write.  

The introduction of British Administration was followed by the establishment of civil and criminal courts in different parts of Assam. The functioning of these courts needed literate people. The British administrators found that the local people were not competent to serve in the offices; so people from Bengal who had the advantage of Western education much earlier had to be employed in different government offices, and Bengali was introduced as the court language also.

David Scott, the first Commissioner of Assam who was also the Agent of the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier, had obtained a sanction of the Government of India in October 1826 to promote the indigenous system of education by assignment of land. Accordingly, in Guwahati, Jorhat, and Darrang, Scott established a total of eleven schools the larger number of them being in lower Assam. In those schools, Sanskrit as a language was taught. It was Scott's belief that undue emphasis on English would not only wound local sentiment and feeling but would also generate misapprehension in the popular mind to the great
disadvantage of the rulers. Scott's idea was largely accepted by the Government of the East India Company with the result that the orientalist view prevailed at the official level as a general policy till 1834.

In 1834 Captain Jenkins was appointed Commissioner of Assam, and Agent to the Governor General. Jenkins felt that in Assam the natives of the soil were bypassed in the affairs of the government and that the Bengalees were taking their place in all the offices. He realised that the native people must be relied on, and it was upto the government to train them to take up positions of trust and responsibility. He, therefore, strongly urged the Government of India to establish schools to impart English education to the Assamese youth at each of the subdivisional headquarters i.e. Guwahati, Nowgong, Darrang and Biswanath. A section of the Assamese population grew desirous of giving English education to their sons as the knowledge of English would help them in getting jobs under the Government. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1859) started an English school at his own residence and appointed a teacher to teach English to some pupils.

The proposal submitted by Jenkins reached the General Committee of Public Instruction and it recommended the establishment of an English school at Guwahati. The Gauhati English School was opened in 1835 with a European headmaster, Mr. Singer, at a salary of Rs.150/- a month. The school started with an enrolment of fifty-eight students and the number increased to one hundred.
and fifty in 1838, and three hundred and eighty at the end of 1840. In 1841 another English school was started at Sibsagar with Mr. D* Souza as its headmaster.

Lieutenant Bogle, the collector of Kamrup, in 1837 emphasising the importance of vernacular education pointed out to the Government of Bengal that English education would help only a few intelligent learners whereas to the great majority it would be a mere wastage to acquire even rudimentary knowledge of it. Therefore he urged for the introduction of vernacular education by which all kinds of useful information would be attained by the people at large. After acquisition of vernacular, he added, there would be also a desire for English education, that would act as a proper channel for higher branches of knowledge. The Central Government gave due consideration to the proposal. James Matthie, who succeeded Mr. Bogle, gave impetus to the scheme. As a result, in 1835, twenty one village schools were established in Kamrup and similar schools were set up in the next two years at Darrang and Nowgong. By 1843 the number of village schools stood at twelve in Nowgong, five in Darrang and twenty in Kamrup.

The Christian Missionaries established many schools in different parts of Assam. They learnt the regional language, translated English works into vernacular, and published books for the use of the pupils. Only in the Mission schools was Assamese used as a medium of instruction. In other village schools, instruction was imparted in Bengali, covering the elements of
reading, writing and arithmetic, while at 'Sadar' i.e. sub-
divisional schools, there were two independent departments —
English and Bengali. Subjects taught in the junior classes were
Wilson's chronology, Yates' Elements of Natural Philosophy,
English Grammar, the use of globes, arithmetic, and translation
and composition, while the curriculum of the senior classes con-
sisted of Marshman's History of India, Homer's Iliad by Pope,
Elements of Natural philosophy, Geography, Arithmetic upto vulgar
fractions, and compositions and translations. Provision was also
made for the teaching of the classical subjects, i.e. Sanskrit,
Arabic and Persian.

Thus an attempt was made to provide liberal education with
an emphasis on the study of English for the Assamese pupils in
a way to attract them for jobs under the government. However, it
was found that on the part of beginners, it was very difficult
to learn English both as a subject and as a medium of instruction.
Hence, in spite of the eagerness shown by the native people of
Assam, the students did not turn up after admission on account
of the unintelligibility of the medium. The Government of Bengal
thought it desirable to make the teaching of English optional.
Consequently both the schools at Guwahati and Sibsagar were
converted into Anglo-vernacular schools.

It is to be mentioned here that after the British annexation,
Assam had undergone four major administrative changes till
independence.
1. Immediately after the Company's take over, Assam formed a part of the Bengal presidency. In 1874 Assam was separated and was placed under a Chief Commissioner.

2. In 1905 a new province of Assam was formed.

3. Then it was annexed to East Bengal.

4. Again in 1912 Assam was separated, and a new province came into existence with the districts of Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Darrang, Nowgong, Sylhet (now in Bangladesh), Kamrup, Goalpara, Cachar, and the Mikir Hills (now North Cachar Hills), Naga Hills (now Nagaland), Khasi-Jayantia Hills and Garo Hills (now Meghalaya), Manipur, and the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram).

The Wood Despatch of 1854 laid the foundation of the modern system of education in India. As it accepted the 'downward filtration' theory that education should spread from the higher to the lower stratum in society, it recommended education of the masses, through a number of High schools, Middle schools and Primary schools to be supported by grants-in-aid. The Despatch of 1854 suggested to the Government of India the establishment of a zilla (district) school in every district where opportunities for higher education would make the students useful members of society. At the end of the year 1881-82 the number of Government high schools in Assam was eleven with 2,264 pupils as against nine with 1499 in 1876-77. Similarly, the number of Middle English schools rose to thirty-seven with an average of eighty pupils as against thirty one on average in 1876-77.
Although the Despatch declared that more active measures should be directed towards imparting useful and practical knowledge suitable to every station of life, vocational bias in the secondary school courses was absent. In fact, the secondary courses were only preparatory for University education.

In 1875 survey classes were opened at Guwahati, Golaghat and Jorhat schools, but they were neglected and ultimately abolished. For training secondary school teachers of Assam also no attempt was made. In 1870-71, besides Gauhati zilla school, there were in the Kamrup district six government middle vernacular schools attended by 300 pupils. There was one government middle varnecular school in the Nowgong district, while in the Sibsagar district there were one high and two middle schools. The Despatch of 1854 introduced the system of grant-in-aid to encourage local enterprise for starting schools. As a result, there was a significant rise in the number of local schools. For example, the number of the aided middle vernacular schools in 1891-72 rose to 21 in the district of Sibsagar alone.

In 1873-74 there were 71 Middle vernacular, 11 Middle English, and 6 High schools in Assam. In some cases certain schools were upgraded to the level of High schools. The Karimganj Middle English School attained that status in 1894 and, earlier, Habiganj Middle English School attained that status in 1883. Very few schools were developed to the Entrance standard.
After the separation of Assam from Bengal in 1874 a separate Department of Education was established. Assam was governed as an appendage of the province of Bengal. The Bengali language had been introduced as a court language and as the medium of instruction from 1836. The introduction of Bengali as a medium of instruction in schools and courts resulted in a setback not only to the development of education but also to the growth of the language and culture of the local people. It was the missionaries who established the rightful claim of the Assamese by preparing books in Assamese and publishing an Anglo-Assamese grammar. They also laid stress on English education so that local scholars could extend their sphere of activities, and enter into administrative office. At their instance, English schools were established at Sibsagar, Silchar and Sylhet.

It was the accepted policy of the government prior to 1874 that in the sphere of secondary education it was better to have a limited number of efficient and well-attended schools than to keep a large number of inefficient and poorly attended schools. As a result, there was very little increase in the number of high schools. The administrative officials stationed in Assam decided to maintain a satisfactory level of efficiency in secondary education of the province by keeping a model secondary school under direct government control and management in each district. Accordingly, all the districts of Assam had one High school, a few Middle English schools, and Middle Vernacular schools to serve as models. Side by side, the Government of Assam
also followed the policy of improvement in respect of (a) school buildings (b) Educational accessories (c) Financial management and (d) qualifications of teachers.

The Hunter Commission of 1882 recommended government withdrawal from direct management of secondary schools to encourage private enterprise in the field of education. As a result, the expansion of secondary education was left to the operation of the grant-in-aid system. As soon as the district was provided with an efficient high school, the government offered necessary assistance for expansion and maintenance of the secondary school of that district. Between 1882 and 1904, the number of aided schools increased. In 1905 the Province of Assam was amalgamated to a few districts of Bengal on political grounds. From 1905 to 1912, due to several reasons, there was a rapid increase of secondary education in the province. The reasons to be mentioned are :

1. The movements launched after the partition of Bengal gave a new impetus to education in Assam.

2. The Government of East Bengal and Assam also followed a vigorous policy of educational expansion in the newly-formed province.

3. Increasing population compelled the cultivator class to turn to other means of employment for their children. The people demanded more educational institutions.
4. English education not only opened opportunities of employment under the government but also secured respect from society.

5. Introduction of new curricula in secondary education during the period also helped the growth and expansion of those schools.

6. Provision of physical training in the curriculum and re-organisation of teacher training in the province also gave a new impetus to secondary education.

7. The adoption of a comprehensive scheme of technical and industrial education promoted the expansion.

8. The sanctioning of additional grants for female education.

9. The constitution of Central Text Book committee which took up effective measures for reform in schools.\textsuperscript{18}

The subsequent declaration of the educational policy of the Government of Assam was guided by the policy of the Government of India which laid several points regarding secondary education in the form of Resolutions as follows:

1. Improvement of a few existing government schools by employment of graduates and trained teachers and introduction of a graded service for the teachers of English with minimum salary of Rs. 40/- and maximum of Rs. 400/-.

2. Provision of proper hostel accommodation for the schools.

3. Introduction of a school course complete in itself with a
staff efficient to teach what may be called the "modern side" with special attention to the development of a historical and geographical sense.

4. Increase in grants-in-aid to the aided schools.

5. Expansion and improvement of training institutions so that trained teachers may be available for public and private institutions.

6. Founding of Government schools in such localities where there was demand for such schools.  

The Government of Assam also formulated its own policy in the light of the policy of the Government of India which contained the following points:

1. The Government of Assam decided to follow the policy of extending the Government high schools so as to permit the opening of two sections in each class.

2. Encourage the opening of Middle English schools in places where there was no second high school to relieve the pressure upon the lower classes of the existing high schools.

3. To improve the existing high schools by increasing grant-in-aid to enable them to retain the services of reasonably well-qualified teachers.

4. To assist in the opening of new high schools when a demand is clearly shown to exist by the public and where people are
sufficiently eager for the establishment of such an institution.

5. To provide for proper hostel accommodation.

6. To make provision for increasing grant-in-aid.

7. To improve manual training and science teaching.

As a result of the policy of provincialisation, the following high schools were provincialised up to 1914.

3. The Habiganj Aided High School at Habiganj in 1914.

New Middle schools were opened at Tezpur, Barpeta, and Habiganj to relieve pressure on the lower classes of high schools. The unaided schools at Gauhati and Dibrugarh were taken to the aided list.

As a result of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, a Ministry of Education was created in 1921. From that date, the Minister of Education was made responsible for the formation of the educational policy. The subject of reform and improvement of secondary education received considerable attention from the University of Calcutta and the Legislative Council of Assam, and the Department of Education. Consequently, during the year 1927-1928 there was a substantial increase in the number of schools and students that have been recorded since the formation
of Assam as a separate province in 1874. The expansion continued during the next quinquennium also and eight new High Schools came into being, viz. 1. Bilasipara Indra Narayan Academy in Dhubri, 2. Bajali High school, Barpeta, 3. Chamata High school, Kamrup, 4. Kamrup Academy, Gauhati, 5. Barpeta Vidyapith, Barpeta, 6. Dergaon High school, Dergaon, 7. Puranigudam High school, Puranigudam, 8. Dawson High school, Nowgong. High school classes were opened in the following schools in Assam valley, viz. Korora in Gauhati, Sootia in Tezpur, Tinsukia in Dibrugarh. Middle English schools and Middle vernacular schools were increased from 80 to 116, and 44 to 64 respectively during the period.

After the introduction of provincial autonomy in 1937, the Government of Assam followed a progressive policy for the development of education in the province. Attempts were made during the period from 1937 to 1947 to remedy the defects and introduce reforms in the light of recommendations of the Sargent's Report. But these could not be implemented fully owing to financial stringency and industrial backwardness of the province.

During the period of 1874 to 1947 there were three agencies for the spread of education in Assam: 1. Department of Education 2. The Local authorities. 3. The Missionaries. There were also some private individuals who tried to contribute for the advancement of secondary education by making liberal donations of fund, land, buildings, and by instituting scholarships.

In Assam, in the year 1874, there were two classes of secondary schools, viz. English and Vernacular. The vernacular course
covered the education of those pupils who desired to carry their schooling in their mother tongues somewhat beyond the primary stage. The English secondary schools aimed at giving a sound English school education. The teaching of English was a prime object throughout the course, and in higher classes instruction in all subjects was given through the medium of English. As regards the stages of instruction, the secondary school course was divided into two stages viz. (a) Middle school stage and (b) High school stage. All government-aided and private schools that taught up to the standard of Middle English and Middle vernacular scholarship examinations were called Middle school. In such a school there were seven or eight classes reckoning from the lowest class. The vernacular middle course was nothing but the prolongation of the primary course and completed the instruction of those who did not aspire for English education. In these schools the medium of instruction was Bengali and the school course included the following subjects:

1. Bengali and Assamese — Comprising literature, grammar and composition.

2. Geography — Description of the four quarters with special knowledge of the geography of India and map drawing.

3. Arithmetic — The whole and also hand book on monetary matters.


5. Mensuration and surveying.
6. Sciences including Botany, Natural philosophy, physical sciences, and Dr. Gunningham's Sanitary Primer.

In the Middle English schools, in addition to these subjects students also learned English in the five higher classes. Up to 1873, all schools which prepared pupils for Middle English and Middle Vernacular Scholarship Examinations were called Middle schools and no separate record of vernacular and English schools were available. From 1873 onwards, these types of schools were properly classified into Middle English and Middle vernacular schools, and records were maintained of each type separately.

Under High Schools were included all those schools, Government, Aided, and Private, that taught up to the Entrance standard of any Indian university. Being merely preparation for the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University, the High schools of Assam offered the following subjects: English, Mathematics, History, Geography, and a second language as compulsory subjects, while Drawing was optional. It must be mentioned that a high school did not confine itself to secondary education only, there being also a large number of students in a high school who belonged to the primary stage.

As regards the courses of studies for Matriculation Examination, the Secondary Education Inquiry Committee appointed by the Assam Legislative Council in 1928 finally approved the proposal as contained in the Resolution for Matriculation Examination
passed by the Calcutta University on 26th June 1926. According to the resolution, the candidates for Matriculation Examination were to be examined in the following subjects:

1. A Major vernacular language viz., Bengali, Assamese, Uriya or Hindi — two papers.


3. English — two papers.


5. History — one paper.

6. Geography — one paper.

7. For candidates who have taken a major vernacular, at least one, but not more than two, and for candidates who have taken minor vernacular, at least two but not more than three, of the following: (a) A third language viz. Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, Armenian, Latin, Greek, Syrian, French, German and Indian vernacular other than the vernacular of the candidates taken up as compulsory subjects, (b) Drawing and Practical Geometry, (c) Experimental Mechanics (d) Elementary sciences (physics and chemistry) (e) Hygiene including first aid (f) Botany (g) Mensuration and surveying (h) Commercial Geography (i) Business Method and correspondence (j) English.
Candidates for Matriculation Examination also were required to produce a certificate that they had received training for a specific period according to a prescribed syllabus under an approved teacher in at least one of the following subjects:

1. Agriculture and gardening
2. Carpentry
3. Smithy
4. Spinning and weaving
5. Tailoring and sewing
6. Music
7. Domestic Economy
8. Basket making
9. Telegraphy
10. Such other subjects as may from time to time be prescribed by the syndicate.

From 1928 to 1932 some subjects of vocational instruction were introduced in the secondary school course of the following High Schools:

1. Dibrugarh Government High School — Instruction in wooden furniture.
3. Sapatgram school — Instruction in sewing and carpentry.
4. Krishnai Middle school — Instruction in carpentry.
5. Karinganj Government High School — Instruction in wood work. However, such vocational courses in secondary schools of Assam could not be continued owing to the paucity of funds and the required number of trained teachers in those subjects, and appropriate text books.
During the period 1937-1947 Assam made considerable progress in education mostly in number but not in quality. In 1937 just before the introduction of the Provincial Autonomy, there were only 100 high schools with 30,994 pupils on the roll and 297 Middle English schools and 240 Middle vernacular schools with an enrolment of 26,523 and 3,803 respectively. In 1945 there were 203 High schools, 440 Middle English schools, and 331 Middle Vernacular schools in the province with an enrolment of 50,226, 29,561 and 33,906 respectively.  

The secondary schools of Assam were also running without the requisite number of trained teachers, and this deficiency contributed to the deterioration of the quality of education. The following table shows the number of trained teachers in the period 1921 - 1945.

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We can conclude that the secondary stage of education suffered from several defects during the period of British rule in Assam in particular and in India as a whole in general. Some of these are listed below:

1. Domination of Matriculation examination over the secondary course.

2. Overwhelmingly literary nature of the course.

3. Improper introduction of vocational subjects without suitable textbooks and courses of study.

4. Failure of the government or the university to reform the curriculum.

5. Lack of adequate funds from the government.

6. Lack of funds at the disposal of private agencies. Over and above, secondary education in Assam at this time was seriously handicapped as it was built on weak foundation of primary education which was not properly organised. Without giving proper attention to the reorganisation of primary education, emphasis was laid on the expansion of the secondary schools. Upto 1835, the main object of the educational policy of the government was to conciliate the influential classes of society and gain their support and sympathy for the smooth running of the administration. During the period which may be termed as Anglo-vernacular period, dating from 1854, the Government reiterated the policy which laid down earlier that western learning and not oriental learning was to be promoted in
India. Within a few years the demand for Western education increased so much that almost all the money available was spent on secondary and collegiate education.

IV. The Influence of Secondary Education upon Higher Education in Assam during the Period 1826 - 1947.

The Woods Despatch of 1854 declared that higher education should be extended widely to the masses with the above object in view. The Despatch suggested to the Government of India to establish a zilla school (district school) in every district where opportunities for higher education would make the student more useful members of society. Accordingly, the existing vernacular schools at Gauhati and Sibsagar were considered suitable to be turned into secondary schools in Assam. In 1855-56 the vernacular school at Gauhati was upgraded to a zilla school with 144 pupils in the Bengali Department, and fifty-seven pupils in the Department of English which had been again reoriented. Similarly, Sibsagar vernacular school being placed on the footing of a zilla school had seventy-seven pupils studying in both the departments of English and Bengali. In 1863, an Anglo-vernacular school on grant-in-aid basis was established at Silchar in the district of Cachar.

At the end of 1861-62 Gauhati and Sibsagar schools were affiliated to the Calcutta University to send up candidates for
Entrance Examination. In 1864, 3 candidates passed Entrance Examination and obtained the newly introduced junior scholarships of rupees ten each for the prosecution of higher studies in Calcutta. But nobody availed himself of these scholarships since the parents were reluctant to send their sons away to Calcutta. As there was no provision for higher education, the Assamese students had to go outside the state for pursuing higher studies.

To provide facilities for higher education to the people of Assam, William Robinson suggested to the Government of Bengal to attach collegiate classes to Gauhati school instead of establishing a full fledged college for the people of Assam. It was thought that it would be too expensive to keep a college for educating a handful of students in Assam. In 1865 the collegiate section was opened in Gauhati school which was the first step in the direction of collegiate education in Assam. In 1869-70 Gauhati School sent up 2 candidates for the First Arts (F.A.) examination of the Calcutta University; of these, one passed. In 1870, a law class was also attached to the collegiate section. The prospect of collegiate education was not very promising. In 1870-71 the enrolment in both the Arts and Law departments was seventeen and the number dwindled to seven in 1875. The result of the examination was also disappointing. During 1874-75 two candidates appeared in the F.A. examination but neither came out successful. Poor attendance and miserable result ultimately compelled the Government to abolish the collegiate classes in 1876 and revert the school to its former status of a zilla.
The failure of collegiate education was the real exposure of the state of secondary education in Assam. Till 1874 only a few schools had developed to the Entrance standard and as such even the total number of successful candidates from these infant institutions was not enough to cater to the needs of a second grade college (upto F.A.). Therefore, without a corresponding increase in the number of feeder schools, it was futile to hope for the success of an institution for higher education.

In 1882 C.A. Elliot, the Commissioner of Assam (1881-85) instituted several senior scholarships in addition to the existing junior school scholarships, to enable the students of Assam to prosecute higher studies in Bengal. In 1883-84 there were forty-six junior and eleven senior scholarship holders from Assam in colleges of Bengal preparing themselves for F.A. and B.A. examinations respectively. In June 27th 1892 Raja Girish Chandra Ray, a zamindar of Syllhet who had keen interest in education, started a second grade college upto F.A. It was named Murarichand Roy college. The college did not receive any aid till 1912. It was maintained by the munificent zamindar. In 1899-1900 it was found that the total number of students from the province reading in Arts colleges in Bengal was about three hundred, of whom forty two passed the F.A. and sixteen the B.A. examination. Manick Chandra Baruah, a highly public-spirited man of the age, in a strong note to the government wrote thus: "Assam is the only province which has not got a college. Indeed, it has not a high institution worth the name. A college at
Gauhati with a European principal will be better appreciated by
the student". Sir H.S. Cotton, the then Chief Commissioner of
Assam, decided to establish a second grade college at Gauhati
in 1900. On June 17, 1901, a Government college was started at
Gauhati after the name of Sir Henry Cotton. It was affiliated
to Calcutta University upto the F.A. standard and the courses
comprised English, Second language, Mathematics, Physics, Chemis-
try as compulsory subjects, History, Logic, Physiology and
Sanitary science being optional subjects. In 1909-10 Cotton
College was raised to the status of a first grade one. It was
affiliated upto B.A. and B.Sc. standard of Calcutta University.
In 1912 the Murarichand College was provincialised. In 1916-17
the Murarichand college was raised to the status of a First
Grade college with affiliation upto B.A. pass. In 1930 Jorhat
College was established by private enterprise with a gift of
good site and a large building by Muralidhar Baruah. The
Brindaban College at Habiganj was started in 1931 and was upto
F.A. standard.

In 1935 several new colleges came into existence : Gurucharan
College at Silchar, St.Edmund's College, St.Anthony's College
and Lady Keane Girls College at Shillong. During 1937 there were
3 Government colleges, the Sanskrit college at Sylhet, Cotton
College, and Murarichand College). Along with these institutions,
four unaided institutions were the intermediate colleges at
Jorhat, Silchar, Habiganj and Shillong. The number of students
rose from 97 in 1904 to 2,258 in 1937. As Assam did not have a
separate university till 1948, the colleges in the province were
affiliated to Calcutta University. This, too, was a cause for the poor condition of higher educational institutions in Assam. Because it could not be expected of Calcutta University to give time and attention needed to look after the needs of the growing colleges. The progress of higher education was slow because of the slow and halting policy of the government and also for their neglect in eradicating the evils in the educational system.

One of the serious defects that hindered the progress of higher education in Assam was the neglect of the Assamese language which was the mother-tongue of the state. Upto 1903 the Assamese language was excluded from the list of subjects for entrance examination. A proposal for its inclusion was submitted to the Registrar, Calcutta University, in 1902 by the then Chief Commissioner of Assam. In the following year, Calcutta University included Assamese and Khasi as languages for the Entrance Examination. (Simultaneously, another important decision in favour of the Assamese language was also taken in 1903 when the Chief Commissioner conveyed to the Director of Public Instruction that thenceforth, in the Assam valley excluding the Goalpara district, the Bengali language would not be taught as a second language; it is to be used as a medium of instruction in classes below class IV. The slow progress of higher education had surely influenced the whole educational organisation of the state. It exhibits the condition of secondary education of the state also, because secondary institutions are the feeder institutions for higher educational institutions. Although the
schools imparted to the students some knowledge of Western science and literature, the dominance of an alien medium had curbed the progress of higher education. We are to admit that in the few products of higher education, we have had some early champions of higher education like M.C. Baruah and Rai Bahadur Jagannath Baruah. However, it is to be noted that higher education was really a gateway or passport for employment. Even to-day we have the legacy of the alien rule in the aim of education namely, as a passport for employment.\textsuperscript{34}

Table II below shows the progress of higher education in the state from 1882 to 1899, and Table III shows the number of institutions and scholars in the state in the five years immediately before independence, i.e. from 1942 to 1947.
Table II

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<th>No. of successful candidate examination entrance</th>
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<th>1310</th>
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<th>1316</th>
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Alvertisements:  
A. Model Bailey  
B. Susan Bailey  
C. Other than the native of the province.

(In general, ballots are sometimes sent out, but the vote is not always valid. (Votes 1331-26))
There were 22 colleges in Assam in 1946-47 including the Government Sanskrit College, Sylhet, against 14 of the preceding quinquennium:

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
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<th>Unaided</th>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>2,055</td>
<td>2,569(a)</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>4923</td>
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<td>1,869</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>3473</td>
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</table>

(a) Included 35 B.T. students and 292 pupils of the school department of St. Edmunds Arts College, Shillong.


The above tables (Table II, Table III) show the progress of higher education in the state.