CHAPTER II

REFORMS AND READJUSTMENT
On the renewal of the East India Company's Charter in 1853, the problem of education attracted the attention of the authorities in England. After a thorough discussion with the competent educationists like T.C. Marshman, C.E. Trevelyan, F. Halliday and others, the Court of Directors decided in favour of mass education which would give birth to a more enlightened generation in future and thereby enable the Government of India to have a better system of administration. On this consideration, under the direction of the Court, a comprehensive scheme of education was drawn up in the Despatch of 1854 by Charles Wood, the then President of the Board of Control. The despatch brought to an end the period of vacillation and confusing experiments of a sporadic nature. It recommended that the efforts of the Government should be directed towards diffusing useful and practical knowledge suitable for the masses who were utterly incapable of obtaining it by their own efforts. It was suggested that the provincial Government should implement the scheme successfully which was introduced by James Thomason, the Lieutenant Governor, North-Western Frontier Province, where emphasis had already been given on the extension of primary education by establishing

1. C.D., 1854; 19 July, No. 49, Para. 41.
schools on indigenous model which, if followed elsewhere, would impart correct elementary knowledge to the great mass of the people.

Accordingly, the attention of the Government of Assam was directed towards encouraging the indigenous schools. In 1855, it was decided to take the first step mainly in spreading education amongst those Assamese People who were too poor to get rid of their illiteracy. Although the need for schools was great, the Government was then not in a position to provide adequate funds. As far as the circumstances permitted, endeavours had been made to establish indigenous and self-supporting schools on grant-in-aid basis. The Inspecting Officers, of course, persuaded the people to take their share and initiative in the diffusion of knowledge. In 1855-56, a large number of private schools of an indigenous pattern were opened in various parts of Assam. In 1855, in the district of Luckimpore, the first school of this kind was established in Gohpore mauza in the hope of eventually obtaining aid from the Government. In the district of Sibsagar, twenty-three indigenous schools owed their origin to the zealous exertions of Priolal Barua, the Sub-Inspector of schools, Upper Assam; of these,

2. C.D., 1854; 19 July, No.49, Para. 64.

* Mauza means a fiscal unit.
seven could fulfil the conditions for grant-in-aid.
Similar schools were established in the districts of
Darrang and Kamrup. All these schools imparted instruc-
tion to a total number of 1,479 pupils.

SUBSIDY SYSTEM:

An interesting experiment began in the following
year when rewards were made to those teachers who could
attract a greater number of boys for their schools to acquire
a little knowledge of the Three R's. The schools under this
experiment were known as subsidy schools. In the districts
of Kamrup and Sibsagar the experiment succeeded remarkably
well. The annual grant allowed for this purpose was rupees
sixty for Sibsagar and rupees seventy-five for Kamrup.

During 1857-58, there were six hundred pupils in the newly
established subsidy schools of Kamrup and seven hundred
and fifty in Sibsagar; but in other districts the system
did not work so well. In Luckimpore, there were three
subsidy schools with an aggregate of 125 scholars, in Nowgong
two with 126, in Darrang only one with eighty-six and in
Goalpara two with 165 pupils. Referring to the progress and
importance of these schools William Robinson, the Inspector

5. R.P.I.B., 1856-57; Appendix - A., P. 151
7. Ibid.
of Schools, wrote to the Supreme Government:

"These schools are ........ so well attended as they ought to be, yet in every instance, initiative have to be taken, the inert mass to be moved...................and persuaded not only to send their children for instruction; but to assist in the maintenance and support of schools. The result therefore, though small, is cheering. It shows that a beginning has been made in the career of social regeneration and that the huge machinery of national education has been set in motion."

The Supreme Government readily sanctioned a further sum of Rs. 275/- to be paid as rewards to all indigenous school-teachers. From 1863-64, it was decided that the continuance of rewards to teachers should depend on the conditions that the schools would run efficiently and be subject to the inspection and general control of the Education Department; but no conditions were imposed regarding the levy of tuition fees.

The subsidy system was not an unmixed blessing. Firstly, the grant of money was based on the efficiency of the schools; but proper judgment of a school could not be made regularly by the Inspecting staff as they could not visit all the institutions during the rainy season and in all other seasons on account of the difficulties of transport and communication. Secondly, if the teachers were not paid their monthly rewards regularly, they were tempted to take up other jobs for earning livelihood. Inspite of

10. Ibid; P. 270.
these difficulties, new schools of this kind were springing up in places where none of this kind had ever existed; and it was a source of great satisfaction that a good number of these institutions were making steady progress, and a general movement in favour of education became distinctly perceptible. It was to the credit of these schools that after several years of apparently unsuccessful toil, they were able to show signs of vitality, giving indication that the people were waking up to a sense of their ignorance. Demands for financial aids from the Government began to pour in from all quarters.

In the despatch of 1859, Lord Stanley, the first Secretary of State for India, admitted that the encouragement of self-supporting schools would promote the spirit of self-reliance in the people who would be inspired to take, in future, the initiative to impart education beyond the elementary course even with the assistance of the Government. Further, he suggested that as the subsidy schools alone would not be able to impart education to all children of school-going age, it was necessary to start new model schools under direct instrumentality of the state and to establish schools in the different parts of the country where no school of any kind existed and where the desire for education had been awakened. This was in direct

11. C.D., 1859; 7 April, No. 4, Para. 55.
12. C.D., 1859; 7 April, No. 4, Para. 55.
contravention to the despatch of 1864; and as a result, each province had to follow a policy of its own. In Assam, William Robinson, the Inspector of schools, in collaboration with the Commissioner of Assam, decided, in 1860, to abolish fifty out of seventy-one Government primary schools of purely elementary character. At the same time, he wanted to raise the standard of the remaining twenty-one schools after distributing them throughout the province in such a way that boys desirous of prosecuting higher studies might get easy entrance into them. The curriculum of these schools was almost the same as that of the Government village schools. Since the existing Government schools could not meet the growing demand of the large number of pupils for education of a higher order, Robinson's scheme receive the approval of the Government. It was considered desirable to keep up a few Government Village Schools of a superior grade instead of too many inferior ones. In 1862–63, nineteen schools of Kamrup, and ten of Nowgong were abolished, and twenty-one schools of Darrang, Sibsagar and Luckimpore were deprived of Government grant-in-aid. To compensate the abolition of these schools the system of granting rewards to a large number of indigenous schools was taken up.

The scheme raised great dissatisfaction amongst

13. B.E.P., 1860; 2 October, No. 9, Atkinson to Thompson.
15. B.E.P., 1862; 3 June, No. 20, Reports by the District Officers.
the people. They complained to their respective Deputy Commissioners about the difficulties of sending children to places so far off from their homes for receiving elementary education in Government Vernacular Schools of the superior grade. Inspite of this, the number of Government Village Schools was further reduced. In 1870-71, there were only sixteen Government elementary schools with 1,113 pupils on the roll as against fifty-one schools with 1,748 pupils in 1860-61. To compensate this, grant-in-aid to the indigenous self-supporting schools was increased and as a result the number of such schools raised to 147 with 3,604 pupils on the roll.

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Despite this increase, the progress of primary education was not satisfactory and the knowledge that was imparted in those schools was so disappointing that it was difficult to find even one in two hundred capable of reading and writing. The primary cause of slow progress was the continuance of Bengali as the medium of instruction; to the majority of the people Bengali was a language different from their own and not intelligible; and as such parents found little interest in sending their children to such

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17. Ibid.;
18. B.E.P., 1860; 2 October, No. 10, Robinson to Atkinson.
* Fifteen of these schools furnished no returns.
schools. So the adoption of regional language as the medium of instruction became imperative. On this issue there had raged a long-drawn controversy as discussed in Chapter IV, which continued with occasional breaks till the 1872, when George Campbell, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, made Assamese the medium of instruction in all the schools of the Valley of the Brahmaputra. Within a few years of the introduction of the new measure the number of primary schools or the pathsalas rose to 355 with 9,820 pupils as against 204 with 4,395 pupils in 1871-72. At the end of 1874, the primary schools numbered 481 with 11,338 pupils. Even the number of schools under regular inspection rose to 1,351 with 38,182 pupils as observed in 1882. A new set of schools, namely, Lower Vernacular School came into existence in 1882, which were intermediaries between the existing pathsalas and middle schools. Seventy-two schools of this type with an average of forty pupils in each were established in both the valleys under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Assam.

24. Ibid; P.12.
This rapid growth in the number of schools and scholars resulted in social regeneration of the people of both the valleys. Within a few years, the pupils were able to read and write letters, to survey the land they cultivated, and to compute the rent they had to pay for it. A knowledge of this nature was very useful to the people in the interior in their daily transactions; and it was this usefulness that made them appreciate the system of education newly introduced.

EDUCATION OF THE WOMEN:

Until 1854, the authorities at the Fort William were not disposed to undertake any responsibility for the education of the women on account of the social and religious prejudices of the age. Nevertheless, the Despatch of 1854 declared that by the encouragement of female education a greater impulse might be imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of man alone. Immense were, however, the difficulties that confronted the promoters of female education. The most formidable was the absence of a genuine demand for girls' education as means of livelihood. The material considerations, which formed a contributory factor in the spread of boys' education, were totally absent in the case of girls. Secondly, the conservative instincts of the parents of the upper and middle


classes displayed, in general, an apathy to the education of their daughters. Thirdly, the system of child marriage was an insurmountable barrier to education; as it necessitated the seclusion of girls at an age when their education began. Lastly, there was a belief that even amongst the Assamese people that the education of women might bring a social revolution; if the women began to be educated and independent, harassing times might come for men. In these circumstances, the educational facilities provided for women of Assam were availed of in the beginning by a few enlightened families and by the lower classes only. To the rest of the population, domestic management was regarded as the sole objective of women's life. Till the seventies of the last century, skill in weaving, cooking and husking paddy was considered greater accomplishments in a girl than all her knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic.

For the spread of female education, the Government of Bengal was, however, determined to give its 'frank and cordial support'. In 1857, rewards were offered to those primary school-teachers who would form girls' classes in their schools. The Government officials evinced great interest in this regard. In 1860-61, the first Primary Girls' School was opened by Utsabananda Gosain, the Deputy

Inspector of Schools, Upper Assam, and then three more by his brother Chandra Mohan Gosain in the district of Sibsagar. In 1862, in Lower Assam, there was only one school at Dharapore, near Gauhati, and the number rose to twelve in 1863-64. About this time, three girls' schools were established in Central Assam and in course of fifteen years forty-four Government schools were opened throughout the valley with an enrolment of 552. Raja Futch Sing, Extra Assistant Commissioner of Assam, Radha Mohan Goswami, Munshi of Gauhati, Chandra Mohan Goswami, a Deputy Inspector of Schools and Gunabhiram Barua, a social reformer, took great interest in female education. Private enterprise received adequate aid and encouragement from the Government. Inspite of such endeavours, the result was far from being satisfactory; for even after a lapse of twenty years total enrolment in Girls' schools did not reach even nine hundred. However, there occurred changes in social outlook of the people; even amongst the orthodox community, social usage like child marriage gradually lost its rigidity and their prejudices

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34. R.P.I.A., 1874-75; P. 14.
against the education of the women also began to disappear.

**GROWTH OF SECONDARY EDUCATION**

The Despatch of 1864 rejected the 'Downward Filtration Theory'. It declared that higher education should be extended widely to the masses. With this object in view the despatch suggested to the Government of India to establish a *zilla* (district) school in every district where opportunities for the higher education would make the students more useful members of the 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 again been 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. A monthly grant of Rs.144/- was sanctioned for upgrading the Goalpara School with the addition of an English Department under the superintendence of W.H.Brownlow: this school imparted instruction to forty-four pupils in English section and one hundred and

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35. C.D., 1854; 19 July, No. 49, Para. 42.
four to that of Bengali. In 1863, an Anglo-Vernacular School on grant-in-aid basis was established at Silchar in the district of Cachar with one hundred and thirty pupils.

At the end of 1861-62, Gauhati and Sibsagar schools were affiliated to the Calcutta University to send up candidates for the Entrance Examination, and, an opportunity was thus offered to the students of the secondary schools in Assam to send up candidates for that examination. Four boys out of ten in the first class of the Gauhati School offered themselves for the examination of 1862. Of these, Kamakhya Das Mitter and Leelaram Das passed in the second division and Mirza Fyaz Houssein passed with credit. From the Sibsagar School, out of the four candidates, only Anandalal Gangujali passed in the second division. But in the next year, no candidates from these two schools passed the examination. In 1864, three candidates passed the examination and obtained the newly introduced junior scholarships of rupees ten each for the prosecution of higher studies in Calcutta. But none availed of these scholarships.

39. B.E.P., 1863; 19 August, No.74, Martin to the Commissioner of Dacca.
41. Ibid., P. 161.
42. B.E.P., 1865; 30 January, No. 42, Inspector of Schools to the Director of Public Instruction.
since the parents were reluctant to send their sons away to Calcutta. The only communication to Calcutta in those days was by water and the journey was full of risks. Naturally, the parents were afraid to send their boys to such a far off place. Moreover, none of them had any well-wisher or acquaintance in Calcutta on whom they could rely to look after their wards. But the most important cause was the general poverty of the people who could not provide necessary funds; for the scholarship money was too meagre to meet their expenses in the presidency town where the cost of living was higher than any place of Assam.

COLLEGIATE EDUCATION:

To overcome these difficulties, William Robinson suggested to the Government of Bengal to attach a collegiate class to the Gauhati School instead of establishing a full-fledged college for the people of Assam. Because it would be too expensive to keep up a college for educating a handful of students in Assam. On the other hand, it would be more judicious to increase the annual grant of the school for the promotion of collegiate education. Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, accepted this

43. A.S., File No. 507; Inspector of schools to the Commissioner of Assam, 4 December, 1862, No. 750.

44. B.E.P., 1865; 30 January, No. 42, Inspector of schools to the Director of Public Instruction.
recommendation and in 1865 increased the annual assignment of Gauhati School from Rs. 2616/- to Rs. 12000/- in order to raise it to the status of a Collegiate School up to the First Arts (F.A.) course of the Calcutta University.

In May, 1866, the collegiate section was opened in the Gauhati School, which was the first step in the direction of collegiate education in Assam. The existing establishment was augmented by the recruitment of a few more experienced teachers, including Lakshminarayana Das, officiating professor of Mathematics of the Benares College. In 1869-70, Gauhati School sent up two candidates for the First Arts Examination of the Calcutta University; of these one passed. In 1870, a Law class was also attached to the collegiate section. One Sarat Chandra Bandyopadhyaya was appointed a Lecturer at a salary of one hundred rupees per month.

Unfortunately, at this stage, prospects of collegiate education was not at all promising. In 1870-71, the enrolment in both the arts and the law departments was seventeen and the number dwindled to seven in 1875. The per capita

45. B.E.P., 1865; 26 August, No. 48, Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of Assam.


48. B.E.P., 1870; 18 March, No. 40, Director of Public Instruction to the Commissioner of Assam.

expenditure of collegiate education in Assam stood at Rs. 1086/- which was much higher than that of the colleges in Calcutta, Hoogly and Patna where the expenses were at Rs. 210/-, Rs. 509/- and Rs. 498/- respectively. The result of the examination was also extremely disappointing. During 1874-75, two candidates appeared in the First Arts Examination, but none came out successful. Poor attendance and the miserable result ultimately compelled the Government to abolish the collegiate classes in 1876, and to revert the school to its former status of a zilla school.

EXPANSION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS:

Whatever might be the fate of the collegiate education, the demand for secondary schools imparting instruction in English was on the increase. The growing prosperity of the districts and the gradual substitution of English for Bengali as the court language made it essential that the youths of Assam should learn English. District schools were opened in Nowgong and Tezpur in 1865, in Dibrugarh in 1864, in Silchar in 1868. At the same time the Goalpara aided school was raised to the position of a

50. R.P.I.A., 1874-75; P. 46.
51. Ibid.; P. 45
52. R.P.I.A., 1876-77; P. 37.
Government zilla school. Several Anglo-Vernacular Schools were also established at Goalpara, Jorhat, Mangaldai and Barpeta. 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 1,499 in 1876-77. Similarly, the number of middle English schools rose to thirty-seven with an average of eighty pupils as against thirty-one with an average of seventy in 1876-77.

Evidently, the Despatch of 1854 contributed much towards the evolution of a new pattern of education in Assam. Larger sums were allocated to the local authorities for wider diffusion of knowledge amongst all classes of the people. This had resulted not only in the multiplication of high, middle and elementary schools, but also in the increased number of literates in the province. In 1854, the total number of literates per thousand did not exceed 1/ for both males and females whereas in 1881-82, the number of the male literates per thousand was thirty-nine

53. R.P.I.B., 1865-66; Appendix - A., Pp.325-26; also B.E.P., 1868, 30 June, No. 64, Clarke to the Director of Public Instruction.


55. R.P.I.A.; 1881-82, P. 4

56. Ibid.; P. 29.
and that of the female was one. The system was, however, not free from its defects. It was vitiated by abuses which to a great extent impaired its usefulness. The indigenous schools did not receive as much attention as was necessary; education of the masses, therefore, continued to be neglected. Although the despatch desired that more active measures of the Government should be directed towards imparting, useful and practical knowledge suited to every station in life, vocational bias was conspicuous by its absence in the secondary stage. In fact the prescribed course was considered as preparatory towards the University education only. In 1875, although, survey classes were opened at Gauhati, Golaghat and Jorhat schools, but these were neglected and ultimately abolished. No attempt whatever was made for the training of the secondary school teachers in Assam. The glaring defect was, therefore, the dearth of duly qualified teachers, without which the standard of education could not be expected to rise up to the mark. The Government of Bengal not unoften sent inferior men from Dacca or Calcutta for the higher posts in the schools, and for the lower classes, teachers with little more than a mere smattering of knowledge, were recruited

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58. C.D., 1854; 19 July, No. 49, Para. 41.
from the same province. Above all, English continued to dominate the secondary stage as the medium of instruction. The British authorities aimed at teaching the Assamese people through English completely ignoring the fact that 'an English youth is not taught Latin until he is well-grounded in English'. Hence, the difficulties arising out of a foreign medium of instruction contributed in no small degree to the slow progress of education in Assam.