Coming of the British:

Assam since long past had encountered various problems. Including the State of Manipur an area of roughly two thirds of the province was held by native states or frontier tracts or populated by hill tribes under special form of administration. Just a hundred years ago after the Treaty of Yandaboo which was signed in 1826, the Court of Directors assumed charge of the province. Alexander Mackenzie in his book "The North East Frontier of Bengal" stated that:

"Nothing could have been more wretched than the State of Assam when the valley was first occupied by British troop. Thirty thousand Assamese had been carried off as slaves by the Burmese. Many thousand had lost their lives and large tracts of country been laid disolate by wars, famines and pestilences which for nearly half a century affected the province. The remnant of the people had almost given up cultivation supporting themselves chiefly on jungle roots and plants, the nobility and the priestly families had retired to Goalpara or other places in the British territory, often after losing all their property and with them had gone crowds of dependents glad to escape from miseries of their native land. We found the Assam Valley surrounded North, East and South by numerous savage tribes whom the decaying authority of Ahom dynasty had failed to control and whom the disturbed condition of the province incited to encroachment."

Such was Assam when British found it. A benevolent despotism replaced chaos and after that began to develop along with other provinces putting it into the mainstream of India in progress. The right of self determination, political

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1. Memorandum submitted by President, Assam Legislative Council to the Chairman of the Joint Select Committee; Budget A. March 1936, Nos. 19-20.
consciousness, the idea of economic and cultural development steadily began to grow in the mind of the people. Economic development was practically not there. Agriculture was the sole industry, side by side supported by petty cottage and small scale industries, which had dominated the economy of Assam to a large extent even to day. The method of agriculture was primitive.

Agriculture: Backbone of Assam Economy:

Agriculture had been the occupation of the Assam peasants for centuries in the past. The attempt made to improve agriculture in Assam may very well be described as haphazard and without patient experiment and research no improvement would be possible with the indigenous agricultural practices. The chief articles produced in Assam were paddy, mustard oil, Jute, Sugarcane etc. The Marwari bought those from petty local traders and also from cultivators. In most cases the agriculturists disposed of their produce at the nearest market or to the middlemen trader who use to come to them with a boat or a bullock cart to carry the produce. He seldom took the trouble nor he could afford to carry his produce to a distant market where better prices might be available.

The agriculturists in Assam depended on mahajans or marwaries, for providing them with long term and short term credit. The rate of interest varied in different localities but no where it was less than 24 percent per annum.

In many places it was as high as 60 percent. Loans were given as a sort of advance against crop which when really had to be made over to the financier on term which he imposed. When the cultivator was in distress and was therefore compelled to borrow grain for his subsistence he had to repay in kind with interest at a very high rate. Long term credit is not given unless immovable properties were mortgaged.

The co-operative credit movement in Assam came into existence after the constitution of the province of East Bengal and Assam. Owing to adverse circumstances it was not making much headway till the year 1919 when the staff under Pegister was strengthened and a more forward policy was decided upon. Since the year 1920 the number of societies, the number of members and the working capital had been more than doubled. At the end of the year 1924-25 there were 823 cooperative societies in the province of which 761 were agricultural credit societies with a membership 32,566 and a total working capital of Rs.12,03,875.

The Agricultural credit societies were financed by Central Banks of which there were 17 in Assam. There was also the Apex Provincial Banks with headquarters in Shillong. During 1924-25 the agricultural societies issued in loans to members a total sum of Rs.4,50,681/- and recovered from them a total sum of Rs.2,76,933/-. All these transactions were, however, short term crop loans as the Central Bank could not

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
issue loans to rural primary societies for long terms. The question of supplying long term credit for the liquidation of old debts or improvement of holdings could have been solved by the organisation of mortgage credit. A cooperative Land-mortgaged Bank was started in the Kamrup district in the Assam Valley.5

The total area of Assam during the period under discussion was about 77,500 square miles and the area under administration was about 53000 square miles.6 The population in 1921, was 7,990,000. It was very unevenly distributed.7 The density varied from 7 to 900 per sq. miles in rural tracts. There were no towns of any size. With the exception of the important tea industry there was very little organised industry in the modern sense. About 88 percent of the people were dependent on agriculture, the proportion, engaged in tea industry was about 11\% percent.8

The total area of the province excluding Indian states and tribal areas was 33,167,990 acres of which an area of 9,215,531, was represented by forest and other areas not available for cultivation.

The province could be divided broadly into three well marked divisions viz:

  (1) Brahmaputra Valley usually known as Assam Valley;
  (2) Surma Valley;
  (3) Hill Tracts.

6. Ibid.
7. Census Report of Assam 1921
The two valleys Brahmaputra and Surma were alluvial plains separated by a central mass of hill called the Assam range.

The Brahmaputra Valley was at a considerably higher elevation than the Surma Valley, a large portion of which went under flood every year. Of the population about 48 percent were found in Brahmaputra Valley, 39 percent in Surma Valley and 13 percent in the hills. The hills were very sparsely populated. In the Surma Valley the pressure of population on the soil was much greater than in the Brahmaputra valley, where however colonisation of waste area by immigrants from Bengal and elsewhere rapidly opened up the country.

In the hill districts the land usually belonged to the village or to the village communities, under a chief or headman who was directly responsible to the district officer. There was generally no land revenue or rent but taxation took the form of a house or hoe or poll tax varying from Rs.7/- to Rs.5/- a year.

In the Sylhet and Goalpara districts the permanent settlement prevailed. There were considerable areas of the temporarily settled land in both the districts.

In the rest of the province Ryotwari system prevailed the rayots or peasant proprietors having usually a permanent, heritable and transferable right in their holding, subject only to liability to periodical reassessment of land revenue.

9. Ibid.
and to the right of the government as the ultimate owner of the soil.\textsuperscript{10}

Tea garden lands were held on various terms, some in simple fee, some on special terms and some as ordinary revenue paying estates.

In the rayotwary areas the revenue demand was assessed so as to press lightly and there was no extensive sub-letting. In the permanently settled tracts sub-division of tenancies did not prevail to the extent to which it was found in the adjoining Bengal Districts, but rents taken from tenants by land lords sometimes ruled high.

The area under forest in Assam under reference was 21,525 sq. miles of which 5905 sq. miles reserved forest, 15,592 sq. miles were "unclassed state forest" or land other than reserved forest at the disposal of the Government.\textsuperscript{11}

The holdings in Assam were generally small. In most cases they were close to the homestead plots of the owners. The average holding of an ordinary cultivator was about 10 to 14 bighas (3 to 4 acres) of cultivable land while that of big farmers is 50 bighas (16½ acre).\textsuperscript{12} The number of big farmers was very small. Generally speaking there was no system of cultivating large blocks of land by any capitalist with the help of paid labourers. The ordinary way of ploughing

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Agriculture A; Sept. 1926, Nos. 1-60.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
land with the help of the plough and cattle was followed in the plain portion of the state while in the hills mixed cropping in the Jhum system of cultivation was introduced among the hill tribes. The agriculturists mostly depended on nature. Irrigation was almost unknown to the people except in rare cases growing seedlings and at the time of transplantation. Even now the most primitive form of cultivation such as jhumming has not altogether disappeared. They were quite ignorant of the scientific improvements made in agriculture in the civilised world during the last half a century preceding the Reform.

The agriculture department in Assam with Mr. Stack as the first Director was created as early as 1882. The Agriculture Department had practically nothing to do with agriculture itself beyond organising some crop culting experiments (then called agricultural experiments) on rice, mustard and sugarcane. The department was really concerned with the organisation and maintenance of village land records. Agriculture research and experiments, however continued to be a minor side show of the department till 1907 when after the constitution of the new province of East Bengal and Assam a separate department of agriculture was created. H.G. Harts, I.C.S. became the first Director. The Veterinary department was placed under the control of Agriculture Department and Mr. W. Harris was appointed as Superintendent, Civil Veterinary Department. An inevitable back-sliding, however,

13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
followed the reformation of the separate province of Assam after the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1912. The department of Agriculture was combined with the Department of land Records. This continued to be even in the period of dyarchy. The Director was holding charge of combined departments, with Deputy Directors, Botanists, agriculture inspectors. Experimental centres were established, at Upper Shillong, Jorhat, Titabar and Karimganj and seed depots at Gauhati, Jorhat and Sylhet. Financial stringency, however, firmly stood in the way of agricultural development. There is no denying of the fact that agricultural development always had a retarded development and not much weight and importance were given to it though the province's all round growth and development largely depended on its improvement. Till the end of dyarchy Assam remained as one of the three provinces in India without an agricultural college and the system of education that existed tended to foster dislike for technical jobs.

Growth of Education:

Another important aspect that demands attention and scrutiny was the education in the province. The financial condition of the province during Dyarchy retarded the progress of education. Funds were not available to finance education. The non-cooperation movement resulted in the closure of some schools.

Primary and Middle Vernacular Education

The authorities responsible:

Primary and middle vernacular education was free in Assam since 1914. These schools were managed by the local bodies who depended for more than half their income on government grants. The Boards had full power of management under the government. The dependence on government grants led to wide differences in the educational facilities afforded, depending upon the resources and the enthusiasm of the locality. In the plain areas the number of square miles per primary school varied from 23 to 16.7, the population per primary school from 1,062 to 3,007 and the percentage of population at schools from 1.8 to 4.3.\(^\text{16}\) To begin with literacy, the census figures, which define literacy as ability to read and write friendly letters, showed an increase from 4.7 to 6.2 percent of the population between 1911 to 1921. The slow growth of census literacy as compared with enrolment in the institutions, there were, 630,000 new admissions to schools between 1911 and 1921, yet the number of literates increased by 161,120 only. This was mainly due to the fact that a very large number of children left school before they became capable of reading and writing. One cause of this was that the primary education was valued by the parents rather as a social token than as an end in itself. The percentage of literate males no doubt increased but at a very slow rate. In Assam the number of adult male literates per square mile progressed from 94 in 1901 to 121 in 1911 and 150 in 1921.

\(^{16}\) Poll. A, Sept. 1928, Nos. 278-98
When the literacy of various castes is examined much wider differences are found. Out of 35 castes tabulated at the census of 1921, though most showed an advance, only 12 showed a literacy rate of 10 percent. Except in the Assam Valley, in other parts of Assam the caste was confused with race and as a result of that feeling, the castes which represented in the council were, Badya, Brahmin, and Kayastha and the number from other castes were too few to find a place in the list.\textsuperscript{17}

The educational statistics were affected by the fact, that the period preceding the introduction of Reforms was one of economic trouble and of some disgust that the money and time spent in education did not in a majority of the cases led to a commensurate return in the matter of employment. At the end of 1926-27 these were 228,649 boys reading vernacular and anglo-vernacular schools of whom 207,637 were in the primary stage, while there were 34,311 girls of whom 33,314 were in the primary stage.

The total expenditure on education increased by 34 percent between 1920-21 and 1926-27 while the government share increased by 43 percent. There was difference in cost between the education of pupils in different standards. Eight pupils could be educated in the primary course for everyone in a high school and four for everyone in a middle english school. Two pupils could be educated in a middle vernacular school for every one in a middle english school.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} Poll. A, Sept. 1928, Nos. 278-98 
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
The cost of primary education per head remained stationary owing to the improvement made in the pay of Government and Local Board teachers. Education at the Primary level was given less importance than the middle and high school education. Moreover there was differential treatment between government and non-government schools of the province. The average pay of a teacher in a government high school was Rs.111/- in the middle English School Rs.57/- while the pay of a teacher in the non-governmen high school was identical with the pay of a teacher of government middle English School and that of non-government middle school ranged from Rs.20 to Rs.25.19

The total net cost of education to the province till the completion of the second Reformed council was over 27 lakh.

The enrolment in collegiate education increased by 27 percent, in the high school by 13 percent in case of males and 62 percent in case of female and in the middle English School by 33 percent in case of males and 75 percent in case of females, in the middle vernacular schools by 25 percent in case of males and 37 percent in case of females and in the primary schools by 19 percent in the case of males and 25 percent in case of females; over the pre-reformed period. The expenditure in the case of collegiate education increased by 44 percent; high school education 35 percent and for special education 18 percent. The special education included, training of teachers, vocational education, in the technical and

19. Ibid.
industrial schools. There was no doubt an expansion of education at all levels, but this was found lacking in vernacular education.

During Dyarchy, Honours classes in certain subjects were introduced in the Murarichand college of Sylhet. The Cotton college had been affiliated to Honours in Persian and to the intermediate standard in Botany and M.A. in English. The expenditure on the Murarichand College building amounting to some nine lakhs in all, spreading over four or five years was a large item in the provincial budget. The affiliation of the Cotton College in the Persian Honours at the demand of the Council was made at a time when the Murarichand College, Persian Honours class was practically empty. During the period of first two reformed councils the enrolment in the Arts Colleges rose from 752 to 1072 and the expenditure from Rs.2,71,055 to Rs.3,43,901, while the fee receipts rose from Rs.41,300 to Rs.75,095.20

Secondary Education:

The expenditure on Secondary schools of all kinds increased from Rs.10,88,944 to Rs.13,12,097/- and the fee receipts from Rs.3,54,390/- to Rs.4,52,149/- till the end of the second Council.

Prior to Reforms it was decided as a matter of policy that a government high school should be established at each sub-divisional headquarters stations in the plain districts. This policy was implemented in all the sub-divisions except two. In response to a resolution funds were provided in the year 1928 for the completion of the programme.21 In addition

20. Ibid.
21. ALCP. March 1928.
Government established two high schools for girls in each division. In all twenty two high schools were provincialised. The cost of these government schools was borne by provincial revenues to the extent of 72 percent of the total cost. There was a considerable increase in the number of high schools, both girls and boys during dyarchy. They were given maintenance grants by the government which were not adequate enough to maintain them in good condition.

There was no increase in the number of government middle English school during Dyarchy, while schools maintained by local authorities dropped from 10 to 9 while the number of aided schools increased from 76 to 103 and unaided schools from 46 to 54. Enrolment increased from 11,278 to 15498 or by 37 percent and expenditure increased by 26 percent; the amount paid in fees by 17 percent and the cost to provincial funds by 25 percent.22

There was development of primary education. It was by 8.5 percent in institutions, 19 percent in pupils and 35 percent in expenditure but the development was not in proportion to the growth of population. The government schools increased by 7, schools maintained by local bodies by 132, aided schools by 75 and unaided schools by 165. The most noticeable feature was that the immigrants from East Bengal started many schools sometimes at their own expense, roofed their buildings with C.I. sheets with Assamese as the Medium of instruction.23

The chief event, during Dyarchy was the passing of the Compulsory Education Act, 1926. By this Act the local authorities were asked in 1926-27 to furnish details of their requirements for vernacular education. They submitted schemes involving an expenditure of Rs.5 lakhs in non-recurring and 3.5 lakhs in recurring expenditure. Their schemes included the financing of 400 primary schools of which 377 had been started as private schools. An allotment of Rs.70,000/- was made in the budget of 1927-28 for taking over of 300 boys, 73 girls and 42 Moslem schools by the local Board. The D.P.I. urged that the system of educational control by local Boards should be replaced by a more adequate authority, capable of compelling proper methods and of developing the spread of compulsory education by stages. While education was a transferred subject, European and Anglo Indian education were in the reserved list. The number of European and Anglo-Indian schools was four. The Local Government gave Rs.20,300/- annually as grants for their maintenance. There were 12 pupils other than Europeans or Anglo-Indians in these schools in 1921 and 21 in 1927. An attempt to correlate Anglo-Indian education with Indian by substitution of the Calcutta for the Cambridge examinations failed to secure support from parents and guardians, and was dropped. On two occasions the grant was attacked in the Council on the ground that the expenditure Rs.852/- per pupil, was disproportionate in comparison with the average for all schools which was Rs.16, but

24. ALCP, April 1927.
25. ALCP, August, 1928.
but the attacks were withdrawn on explanation that the percentage borne by private sources, viz. over Rs.82 was vastly higher than in the case with other schools, viz less than 30 percent and that 50 percent was paid by fees as against the general level of 17 percent. The percentage of expenditure met by government steadily decreased from 37 in 1918 to 18 in 1927.

The only institution in the province which trained students for legal career was the Earle Law College at Gauhati. This College was affiliated to the Calcutta University upto LL.B. A majority of the students were from the Assam valley. The insufficiency of hostel accommodation was one of the causes for the comparatively small number of students from the Surma valley.

Medical Education:

As regards Medical Education for the Bachelors Degree in Medicine and Surgery Assam depended upon Bengal. Seven seats in the Calcutta Medical College (including one for a woman candidate) and three in the Carmichael Medical College were reserved for Assam students. In addition, two women candidates were sent annually to the Campbell Medical School for training as sub-assistant Surgeons. The total contribution paid to the Bengal Government towards Medical Education in 1921-22 and to the authorities of the Carmichael Medical College was Rs.31,038/-. In 1926-27 the corresponding it was

26. Ibid.
Rs.55,299/-. The training of medical students in the province to qualify as sub-assistant surgeons continued in Berry white Medical school at Dibrugarh. The total cost of this institution in 1926-27 was Rs.70,300/-. Of this Rs.4,500/- was borne by the Government.28

Technical and Industrial Education:

In the pre-Reformed period education in the technical and industrial line was given only in two small technical and two small weaving schools, all situated in the Hill districts and intended only for Hill tribes. Of the two technical schools the Fuller Industrial school at Shillong gave instruction, extending over three years, in blacksmithy and carpentry.29 There was another similar institution at Kohima in the Naga Hills.30 Of the two weaving Schools, the one at Tura in the Garo Hills was closed down in 1926 as it failed to attract the class of pupils for whom it was intended. The Shillong one continued. More institutions were started in the plain districts of the province since the beginning of Dyarchy. They were three in number - the Weaving institution at Gauhati, the school of Handicrafts (now in Sylhet) and the Prince of Wales Technical school at Jorhat. The weaving school at Gauhati was opened in July 1920 in a hired building giving one year's course. Two years advanced course was added in 1923-24 and a permanent building was created in 1927, costing Rs. one lakh. The School of Handicraft in Sylhet was opened in 1923. The technical school at Jorhat,

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
the establishment of which was encouraged by a donation of Rs.1 lakh by Jaganath Barua, was opened in 1927. The building and equipments costs nearly Rs.2 lakhs.

The only agricultural education given in the province was that given to demonstrators at government farms. For higher training, the men required for employment under the department were sent to agricultural schools or colleges in other provinces. The government of Assam had to bear the cost of scholarship contributions towards the maintenance cost of the College. The average annual expenditure during the Reform period was Rs.2300/- which was approximately the same as was in the pre-Reformed period. The average number of students thus trained was between one and two a year.

Veterinary Education:

Assam did not have a veterinary college in the Pre-Reformed and Reformed period. It used to send a small number of stipendiaries to the Bengal Veterinary College at Belgachia for training. Prior to Reforms both government and Local Boards used to send such stipendiaries. The Board ceased doing so, for some years, as they could not afford to pay the contribution for each student required by the Bengal Government. The rate of stipend was Rs.15/- per month at the beginning of the Reformed period. This rate was raised to Rs.70/- per month in 1926. The Government also bore a portion of the cost of maintenance of the College prior to the Reformed period and this was a fixed amount of Rs.10,000/-. This system was changed during the Reformed period itself. The province

32. Ibid.
began to pay at the rate of Rs.600/- per student per annum.\textsuperscript{33}
In 1920-21 the number of students under training was six.
In 1926-27 the number was seven and after that it was raised
to twelve. The course extended over three years and the
seats were distributed among students in different years.

There was no notable change in the arrangements for
the training of engineers during the Reform period. As in
the case of several other branches of vocational training the
local government had to depend on concessions in this matter
from the government of other provinces, who reserved places
in their institutions for Assam students. The local govern-
ment had to pay a proportionate share of the cost of main-
taining their institutions.

To allow local young men an opportunity of qualifying
themselves for service in the higher grades of the P.W.D. two
scholarships were awarded annually to Assam students tenable
in the Civil Engineering department of the Bengal Engineering
College, Shibpur which was affiliated to the Calcutta Univer-
sity for degree of engineering and four scholarships were
granted annually tenable in the Dacca School of Engineering.\textsuperscript{34}

In addition, two scholarships were granted annually
in the mechanical and electrical engineering department of the
Bengal Engineering college and one scholarship was granted
at Indian schools of mines, Dhanbad, for a term of three years
with effect from 1926. Students from Assam also took admi-
ission to the Engineering department of the B.H.U.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
Since the commencement of the Reforms two overseas Scholarships (one in Mechanical and electrical engineering and one for training in mineral oil extraction) had been granted by government at a cost of Rs. 70,000/-. Four students working in America, England and Germany received help from the discretionary grants of Rs. 5,000/- each which were annually votable by the Council and placed at the disposal of the Minister.

By an order issued under Section 27 of the University Act 1904, Assam was included within the territorial limits of the University of Calcutta. The connection existed without interruption since the University was established in 1857.\textsuperscript{35} The growth of education was naturally bound up with the working of the system of administration.

University and Secondary education in Assam was thus under the University of Calcutta which affiliated the colleges of the province and recognised the high schools. This was a nexus which was not possible to dissolve. For financial and other reasons it had not been possible to consider the establishment of a University in Assam. Under the circumstances, the Local Government endeavoured to secure for Assam, a place in the Councils of the University and to make the influence of the representatives felt, when questions affecting the local interest arose.

Prior to 1921, the government of India was in control of the University. In that year an Act was passed by the Indian

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
legislature transferring the control to the Government of Bengal. The government of Assam was not consulted in the matter nor the interest of the province considered. The Act was prejudicial to Assam since it left little scope for the voice of Assam and wider privilege for the influence of party politics in Bengal.

The constitutional position of the Government of Assam with reference to the University and the degree in which the government could hope to exercise control over high educational policy had been in doubt throughout the period of Reforms. The matter was placed before the Government of India in 1923, in connection with two private Bills for the reform of the University which were introduced in the Bengal legislative council and other Bills which the Government of Bengal had it in contemplation to introduce. All these Bills vitally affected the educational interest in Assam and with reference to none of them the government of Assam was consulted. The Government of India thereupon arranged for a conference in which all parties interested represented to consider the issues affecting this province along with more general issues of reforms. The conference met several times in Calcutta, but came to no conclusion.

Since 1923, the government of Bengal as the Government of the University had consulted the Government of Assam on any questions affecting the constitutions or the regulations of the University which came before them for decisions and gave due weight to the opinions expressed.36

36. Ibid.
Neglected Public Utility Services:

Public utility services like medical facilities and aids and water supply also did not get much attention from the side of the Government. Neither in the pre-Reformed nor in the Reformed period these aspects remained neglected. Registration of vital statistics in the rural areas was not compulsory. In Cachar, Sylhet and permanently settled areas of the Goalpara district registration was done by police agency. Police Chowkidars wrote the village birth and death in (hathchitas) village register. The hathchitas were brought by them to the police stations or out posts. The entry in hathchitas were copied in the police thana (station) registers and an monthly return was made to the district Civil Surgeon. In Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur and Khas Mahal areas of Goalpara, registration was done by revenue personnel. Gaonburahs (village head men) of village kept the hathchitas. The hathchitas were submitted to Mauzadars and copied into their register. The Mauzadar compiled a monthly return from report of gaonburahs and submitted it to district Civil Surgeon. In tea Estates vital statistics were collected by garden authorities. Registration was carried out only in certain parts of Hill districts. Vital statistics for the province was compiled in the office of the Director of Public Health. All Public Health work in the province was based on these statistics.37

To protect the rural population against small pox staff of public vaccinators visited every village which was

entertained by each Local Boards. There was provincial Cadre of one Inspector for each sub-division for supervising the work of vaccinators under the general supervision of Civil Surgeon.

When Cholera epidemic broke out in a village, chowkidars in the Surma Valley and Coalpara and Gaonburahs in other Assam Valley districts were held responsible for reporting the outbreaks immediately by wire to the District Civil Surgeons, for remedial measures through the district magistrate.

Kalaazar was another epidemic disease which ravaged the hills and plains of Assam. Special Kalaazar dispensaries under the control of the Public Health Department were opened where there was no medical department or local Board dispensaries. Epidemics occurring in tea gardens were controlled by garden authorities.

Local Boards provided villages, within their jurisdiction, with water supplies by constructing public tanks or wells in suitable places. The Boards were given grants by the Government for the improvement of water supply. A grant of ₹3,00,000/- was given to the Local Boards in 1925-26. The same amount of grant was also given in the next year. Local Boards were responsible for the sanitation of villages under their jurisdiction. The third Council agreed an enhancement of the court fees and 10 lakhs of rupees to be spent in the improvement of water supply in rural areas.38

38. ALCP. 18 April 1928, Governors' address.
As regards hospitals, dispensaries and Medical facilities Assam was very nearly at the bottom of the list. Assam had of course the smallest number of these institutions, but even relatively to the size of the province, the number was utterly inadequate. Up to the close of 1926, the Bengal had one for every 71 square miles of area, Punjab one for every 125 square miles area, Bihar and Orissa one for every 128 square miles, Assam one for every 215 square miles the Central Province one for every 318 square miles.39

The position of the Sadar Local Board hospitals in relation to government was anomalous.40 Although they were all started by government in the first instance, they were gradually handed over to Local Boards for maintenance. The male Medical staff from Civil Surgeon downwards, was however, employed and paid by Government and Government was not naturally to see that these institutions were maintained at a high standard. The resources of the Boards were, however, inadequate to maintain a reasonable standard of efficiency and even if they had such resources they were naturally reluctant to spend largely on institutions which were not fully under their own administrative control. The unsatisfactory result of the dual responsibility led government to consider the provincialisation of the hospitals at sadar stations. The hospitals at Gauhati and Sylhet (besides Dibrugarh where there was a medical school) were provincialised during the Reformed period.

40. Budget A, March 1936, No.19-20. Memorandum on the financial position of Assam under the new constitution by C.S. Mutlar Reform Officer Assam.
The State of Assam was peculiarly liable to tropical diseases of various kinds as well as to recurring floods and earthquakes. The reform government had to incur from time to time heavy expenditure under each of these heads. The campaign against Kalaazar entailed a heavy cost on the provincial budget. The effort of the government, which according to an estimate made by Shri John Kerr, the then Governor, in 1926 was the means of saving at least 200,000 in five years, drew forth a remarkable tribute from the school of tropical medicine in Calcutta, but it cost a good deal of money over Rs.31 lakhs. The floods of 1929 in the Surma Valley cost the Assam Government Rs.35 lakhs in gratuitous relief and agricultural loans. The earthquake of 1930 though not so disastrous in its effects as the great Assam earthquake of 1897, the government had to spend 5 or 6 lakhs in repairing the damage.

The tale of opium habit of the Assamese:

Another factor that told upon the people of Assam was the damaging habit of opium smoking. Relatively to its population, Assam was the largest opium consuming province in India. According to the experts of the League of Nations, the amount of raw opium required for the medical and scientific needs of the country was computed to be about 450 million grains or about 7 grains per head of the population per year, which gave for Assam a figure of a little over 100 maunds per year. The actual consumption among the opium consuming people was

41. Memorandum submitted by Faiznur Ali, President Assam Legislative Council to Joint Select Committee, 14 Sept. 1933.
far in excess of this quantity, being about 400 maunds even if the illicit supplies were kept out of account. The province, of course, derived a considerable revenue from this source. The Government of Assam, on the pressure of the Council adopted the policy of registering the consumers and of decreasing their rations steadily. This brought down the amount of revenue accrued from opium. The rate at which the opium revenue was dwindling can be gathered from the following figures which was given by the Secretary of state for India in the House of Commons:

1925: Rs.35 lakhs; 1926: 30.8 lakhs.
1927: Rs.30.9 lakhs; 1928: Rs.27.4 lakhs;
1929: Rs.25.5 lakhs; 1930: Rs.22.8 lakhs;
1931: Rs.21.8 lakhs.

This fall in the revenue from the opium could have been well compensated by crediting the excise duty which was taken away by the leaving the oil royalty to provincial revenue. The Oil royalty for the year 1931-32 was Rs.4.78 lakhs whereas Excise amounted to Rs.110.63 lakhs. In other words, the centre took more than twenty times as much as the province. In fact, the amount taken by the centre in 1931-32 from these excise duties was nearly one half of the total revenue of the province.

Communication: Another retarding factor for development:

Assam had another big problem and it was the problem of communication. Everywhere there were complaints and justifiable complaints about roads and absence of roads. The

42. Ibid.
condition of roads and the absence of bridges and their 
ability to motor traffic was really a most serious handi-
cap to trade.

Nodoubt Assam had a great degree of advantage for 
waterways and before the construction of Assam Bengal Rail-
ways, Brahmaputra was the only means of external transporta-
tion.

The earliest Railways to be constructed in Assam were 
the Dibrugarh Sadiya Railway and Jorhat provincial Railways. 
The first sections of these lines were opened to traffic in 
the year 1922-23. The Dibrugarh Sadiya Railway served the 
interest of trading company and surrounding Tea Estates as 
an outlet for their products to the steamergaths at Dibrugarh, 
lateron a two-foot gauge served the interest of agriculture 
and tea districts in providing an outlet to the steamergat 
at Kokilamukh.

The Tezpur Balipara Railway another Light Railway 
on the two-foot gauge served the interest of a large tea and 
agricultural area by providing outlet to the steamergat at 
Tezpur, was opened in 1894-95.

The Brahmaputra river at that time was the only means 
of transport to the markets of the world. It was not until 
1896 that the first section of the Assam Bengal Railway in 
Assam from Akhanra to Badarpur was opened to traffic, followed 
two years later by the branch to Silchar and 5 to 7 years 
later by the opening of the Hill section to Badarpur and of 
the Upper Section in the Assam Valley proper to Tinsukia 
where the link joined the Dibrugarh Sadiya Railway.
Assam was served at that stage, for external communication, by three main outlets, viz. the Brahmaputra River, the East Bengal state Railway and the Assam Bengal Railway. The rail communications did not assist to any great extent in providing facilities for internal transport. The agricultural population of Assam, more specially in the Assam valley, depended almost entirely on roads for making the produce, and the trader depended on roads for collecting and transporting such produce and imported commodities for the purpose of distribution throughout the scattered parts of Assam.