1.1 Emergence of the study:

Higher education in modern society seeks to preserve, transmit and advance knowledge, and is committed to change. The importance of education as an instrument of change and progress has been underlined by various educational experts, committees and commissions in India. It was also recommended that framers of educational policy should try "to relate it (education) to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of the national goals."^1

India's National policy on education 1986(revised in 1992) states that "higher education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical, social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills."^2

As the aim of higher education is to realize the national goals, through the social, economic and
cultural transformation, so the quality of higher educational institutions is to determine by the ability to meet the stated purpose for which the service is offered. Unless the objectives of an institution are clearly defined, it is difficult for the institution to move towards quality. Quality education is only possible when the goals and objectives of the institutions are reflected through the strategies, methodologies and process adopted by the institutions to raise the worth of its product in terms of national goals.

Higher education in India has expanded very rapidly in the last five and half decades after Independence, and has emerged probably as one of the largest education system in the world. In spite of this expansion of higher education we have not yet succeeded in achieving quality education relevant to the needs of the time. With the rapid expansion of knowledge and the unprecedented scientific and technological progress world over, a new quality culture in education has become order of the day to attain sustainable development and standard of higher education. To add to this, “globalization and new economic changes have resulted drastic socio-economic transformation all over the world. Highly market
oriented society evolved as a result of neo-liberal policies and competitions are very much conscious about quality in every field, and also in education."^3 Educational planners and policy makers all over the world are engaged in finding ways and means of achieving high standard of education.

India recognizes that the new global scenario poses unprecedented challenges for the higher education system. The UGC has appropriately stated that a whole range of skills will be demanded from the graduates coming out from the colleges, and so, "India can no longer continue the model of general education as it has been persisting for the last few decades, rather; general education will require a major investment to make the students productive by coupling the older general discipline of humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and commerce to their applications in the new economy and having adequate field based experience to enhance knowledge with skills and develop appropriate attitudes."^4

However, in our system of higher education one of the major problems is narrow focus on knowledge, which is not necessarily integrated or updated, and the exclusion of development of skills, attitudes, and
values. Another problem is the total absence of stated mission for the institution and vision of what it wishes to achieve. The aim of higher education should be not to produce educated unemployable youths, but to prepare them to be relevant to social, regional and national need.

The expansion in the higher education system has been phenomenal. There were 21 universities and 700 colleges in the country when it attained freedom, having student enrolment of only 1.06 lakh. But after Independence, the Indian higher education has undergone a remarkable transformation marked by the rise of university level institutions comprising of 300 universities, about 13,000 colleges and above 7.5 million students. There has been an increase of 11.5 times in universities, 12.35 times in college, 60.21 times in student enrolment and 2.5 times in teachers since Independence.

A cursory look will help us to notice the various types of colleges developed in India in post Independence period, viz. government colleges, Government aided colleges, private colleges, constituent colleges and autonomous colleges. Of these types of
colleges, majority of the colleges are affiliated to or permitted by universities.

It is also noticed that the expansion has taken place in the area of collegiate education imparting education in liberal subjects of Arts, Science and Commerce. Over the years these colleges have grown up as affiliated college either directly funded by the government or funded by the government as grants-in-aid. There are many such colleges, which, in fact, do produce graduates whose academic competence is on per with the expectations of high quality institutions. But it is also true that there are many such colleges, which fail to provide their students' with expected level of academic knowledge and training.

The similar scenario in the domain of collegiate education can be noticed in Assam. There is visible growth of colleges in Assam since Independence. Before Independence there were only 4 colleges in Assam (including South Assam). After Independence more colleges came up in different districts and “till 2001 the number reached to 321.” Of these only 3 are affiliated Government College and the rest are affiliated grants-in-aid and a few are permitted private colleges.
The five districts, which are geographically situated in the Southern Assam, is an integral part of the state of Assam. Of the total 321 colleges, which came up in different districts of Assam, 42 are in Southern Assam spread over different parts of the five districts. Again, of the total 42 colleges, 2 are government-affiliated college, 18 are grants-in-aid affiliated college and the 22 are permitted private (venture) colleges.

As majority of the government and Grants-in-aid College were established many years back and are recognized by UGC, these colleges have been successful in developing various infrastructure facilities and are managed by statutory bodies, and have requisites number of qualified teachers and experienced administrative staff. On the other, most of the permitted college (venture) are not recipient of any financial grant either from government or from UGC and have not been successful in developing necessary infrastructure and also suffer seriously from lack of qualified teaching staff, efficient management and experienced administrative staff. However, the establishment of so large number of colleges in different parts of the five districts has created an
opportunity of collegiate education to a substantial number of populations of Southern Assam. Every year a significant number of graduates are produced by these colleges and the number is increasing year after year.

As the aim of higher education is to realize the national goals and the quality of higher educational institutions is determined by their ability to meet the stated goals; and when the new global scenario poses unprecedented challenges for the higher education system and in such situation, India can no longer continue the model of general education as it has been persisting for the past few decades, hence it is necessary to investigate whether

(I) The colleges of Southern Assam are in a position to fulfill the national goals through the services that are offered by them,

and whether

(II) The colleges have been successful in realizing the impact of global educational scenario and are in a position to meet the contemporary expectation of higher education.

With this background in view, the investigator feels the need for a study on the colleges of Southern Assam keeping in mind some crucial aspects, which are
necessary and integral part to demonstrate highest standard of quality in their work. Hence, the present study entitled **"A Critical Study of Higher Education in Southern Assam."** was designed.

### 1.2 Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are the following—

1. To find out available facts of the colleges in terms of mission and goal, courses and programme of studies and academic related aspects to fulfill society’s need of education.
2. To find out basic facilities in terms of infrastructure and learning resources available in the colleges which are necessary and integral part for Quality enhancement.
3. To find out facilities offered by the colleges for professional development of the teachers.
4. To find out financial status and resources of the colleges necessary for all-round growth and development of the colleges.
5. To suggest measures for Quality improvement in the colleges.
1:3 Operational definitions of the terms:

1.3(a) Higher Education: In terms of general sense higher education means, the education and learning which begins at a stage starting from collegiate education in undergraduate level after the completion of 10+2 courses in schools. It begins with two distinct branches of studies -- professional and general course ending in post-graduate level. However, there is a broad sense of the term 'higher education' with a meaning close to that of post secondary education.

Encyclopedia Britannica has referred higher education, “any of various types of education given in post secondary institutions of learning and usually affording, at the end of course of study, a named degree or certificate. The institution includes not only universities and colleges but also various professional schools that provide preparation in such fields as law, theology, medicine, music and art, and in addition, separately organized teacher-training schools, junior colleges and various kinds of institutes of technology”6

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica “The best short definition of higher education may be one devised and accepted in 1962 by 44 nations participating in a UNESCO conference on higher education in Africa.
Higher education is defined "as all types of education (Academic, professional, technological or teacher education) provided in institutions such as university, liberal arts colleges, technological institutes and teachers college, for which__

(a) The Basic entrance requirement in completion of secondary education,

(b) The usual entrance age is about 18 years, and

(c) In which the courses lead to the giving of a named award (degree, diploma or certificate) of higher studies."\(^7\)

The term 'higher education' is variously understood. However, under the education Act 1988, higher education is defined as "higher courses in any institution—broadly those of a standard than general certificate of education. Advanced (A) level or its equivalent and further education as all other post school courses."\(^8\)

Higher education is defined in the international standard classification of education (ISCED) Handbook as "more specialized study normally undertaken after successful completion of a good basic education lasting for at least eleven years."\(^9\) In our country, higher education starts after 12 years of schooling. Higher
education can take place in a variety of institutions only some of them are called universities. Others are colleges, which provide higher education for basic sciences, applied sciences, technologies, humanities, social sciences, commerce etc. Universities provide for a wide range of subjects with opportunities for post-graduate work, while range and level of work at other institutions varies. A higher education stage in our country having a course of three years or more for first degree and followed by a course for the second degree or research degree of varying duration.

A recent UNESCO document of the International Commission for the Twenty first century, titled “Learning the Treasure within” states “higher education at one, and the same time one of the driving forces of economic development and the focal point of learning in a society. It is both repository and creator of knowledge. Moreover, it is the principal instrument for passing on the accumulated experience, cultural and scientific, of humanity. In a word where resources of knowledge will increasingly predominate over material resources as factors in development, the importance of higher education and of higher education institutions can only grow. Moreover, the effect of innovation and
technological progress means that economics will increasingly demand competencies that require higher-level studies."\textsuperscript{10}

Modified National policy of Education 1992 defined higher education as "It provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical, social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity. It contributes to national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills."\textsuperscript{11}

1.3(b) Critical Study:- The word "critical study" means "an analytical evaluation, comment, judgment of some works, statement, text, article, essay etc."\textsuperscript{12} Thus, the present study aims to analyze various aspects of colleges of Southern Assam and to evaluate them in terms of Quality enhancement in higher education.

1.3(c) Southern Assam:- By "Southern Assam" we mean the Southern part of Assam comprising of the three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi in the valley of Barak, and the two other in the hilly areas, called the North Cachar Hills and KarbiAnglong.

1.4 Scope and limitation of the study:

Higher education comprises all types of education academic, professional, technical and teacher education
provided in the higher institutions of learning. Its scope is very wide. The investigator proposes not to include all these in her study. There are so many aspects of higher education. In a study like this it is neither possible nor desirable to study all these aspects. So the present study will be confined to

1. The field of general higher education after the plus (+2) stages, i.e., only the undergraduate level where science, arts, commerce is taught.

2. The area under review would cover the five districts of Southern Assam i.e., Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi, N.C Hill and Karbi Anglong.

3. Historical background of higher education and the status of general colleges affiliated and permitted under Assam University.

4. The period under study covers the period from 1900 to the present i.e., up to 2002.

5. The scope of the study would cover the affiliated colleges and permitted colleges (general) under Assam University.

6. The study would restrict to the 25 principals, 690 college teachers and 7727 students of 25 colleges of Southern Assam.
(7) The tools of the present study are two instruments, namely the Questionnaire for the college teachers and for the students, and Questionnaire cum information schedule for the principals.

(8) The data collected through the different sources will be tabulated according to the Questions. The data will be analyzed only in terms of frequencies and percentage.

(9) The study will deal with the facilities available in the colleges for quality improvement of academic related aspects, organizational and the financial resources of the colleges.

1.5 Assumption of the Study:

The present study is based on the following assumptions –

1. There is exponential growth of colleges both in urban, rural and hill areas of Southern Assam with traditional concept of higher education.

2. Courses and programme of studies are not compatible to the contemporary need of higher education in the colleges of Southern Assam.
3. Infrastructure and learning resources in all the colleges developed without systematic planning to keep pace with the academic growth.

4. Academic related activities in all the colleges are more or less stereotyped and are related very little to Quality enhancement.

5. Financial status and resources of the colleges are not stable to meet the financial crisis of higher education in the context of prevailing situation.

6. There are significant differences between the affiliated colleges and permitted colleges in terms of infrastructure, finance, organization, management and academic related aspects. Affiliated colleges are in better positions as compared to the permitted colleges.
References:


6) Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol -18, Pp I

7) Ibid vol. 5, Pp917


