CHAPTER-6
CONCLUSIONS

As has been said above in the unit on methodology, the study is based on an analysis of historical documents from which the nature of the various social institutions like society’s organizations, population compositions, economy and occupational structure, political system and education has been derived. Thus a brief historical account of Assam focusing on such institutions has been given in Chapter 2 and the Barak Valley, the Southern most region of Assam, has been placed in context within the State of Assam as a whole.

6.1: Development of education till Independence

The said documentary analysis leads to the following facts about educational development in Assam and Barak Valley till Independence.

6.1.1: Education in Assam: A Socio-Cultural, Historical Perspective.

Assam, being located on the great migration routes of the mankind, saw a lot of settlers from China, Burma and Bhutan through the Assam-Burma route which runs through Cachar and Manipur. Ahoms and other Tibeto-Burmans followed the Patkai route. The Hill passes of Bhutan were also probably used by certain waves of Tibeto-Burmans. However, the most frequently used route was on the West, the valley of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra through which the Aryans penetrated into Pragjotisha-Kamrupa (present Assam).

The geography of the region, as everywhere else, moulded the character and destiny of people and the physical division led to the emergence in Assam of two distinct ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups namely the dwellers of the hills and those of the plains. The records suggest that the process of Aryanization or Sanskritization was nearly complete in the valley of Brahmaputra by 1200 A.D. However, those who have been living far away in the relatively isolated and inaccessible and less fertile and agriculturally less productive regions of forests, hills, and mountains were not touched by this main stream socio-cultural development. Thus, these hill men continued to retain their identity in speech, traditions and customs, usages, institutions and religious beliefs and the terrain and the nature of the soil forced them to practice ‘Jhumming’ or shifting cultivation and the meagre production made it necessary for
them to supplement their food supplies by hunting and fishing. This kind of isolation fostered in them exclusiveness and a spirit of independence intolerant of hegemony or outside influence resulting in the tendency to develop autonomous or self-governing communities; while institutions of this kind almost died in the plains but in the tribal regions they continue to exist till today.

Because of the hill men’s dependency on the plainsmen for certain requirements, some interactions between the two took place and some kind of assimilation - racial, linguistic and cultural also took place, although on a small scale, especially at the foothills- the contact point between the hill tribes and the plains men, the hill tribes remained largely isolated and resisted outside influence and asserted their independence which ultimately led to their forming separate states after independence of the country. Thus, emerged the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura, reducing Assam mainly to Brahmaputra Valley to which Cachar and the adjoining areas were added.

Thus, while the Brahmaputra Valley got Aryanised, it developed into an organized Hindu society and having fertile land and plenty of water and conducive climate, agricultural production grew producing a variety of rice crops and other forest produce. The region developed a common communication tool, the Assamese and as this language was used by priests gradually the tribes of this region also adopted it. The priests, who essentially came from the mainland India like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal to spread Hinduism had to resort to preaching and thus a system of education however rudimentary began in this region which became more elaborate and complex gradually as the need arose, the hill people were left behind in this respect and continued with their tribal traditions, customs and economy and dialects which developed their scripts very late, some even as late as after the independence of the coutry.

In early 13th Century, the Ahoms, an offshoot of Shan Stock of South East Asia under the leadership of Sukapha, established their own kingdom in the present district of Sibsagar and repulsed the attacks by the Mughals in the West, ultimately expelling them, and ruled the region for about 600 years. Having a sound administrative system Ahoms established institutions like Bureaucracy, Army, Systematic economy and
being influenced by Hinduism which they ultimately embraced, the society in Assam also got Caste-bound like the main land India.

However, during the 600 years of Ahom rule, the region prospered economically as it had extensive trade relations with the neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Tibet and China and through Bhutan with Kabul (Afghanistan). But Assam’s largest trade was with Bengal. During this period a lot of literature was produced as the kings patronised the literatures and intellectuals thus leading to the spread of education. However, the society being predominantly caste–ridden Hindu in nature, this education was accessible only to the Upper Castes to the total exclusion of the Lower Castes of cultivators, artisans and other servant castes.

Assam was also inhabited by the Muslims for centuries even before the advent of the Ahoms. To a large extent, they adopted and acquired the native culture, language, etc. and mingled with the multiethnic social fabric of the then Assam that made them rooted along with their own identity. They were initially engaged in non-agricultural occupations like King’s security guards, workers in king’s fire arms manufacturing and minting workshops. Being good at making copper utensils, they monopolized this industry. They also carried out fine artistic works in temples. They were good at tailoring and carried out this profession. Because of their Bengal origin they carried out trade across Bengal and Assam. They also had their traditional system of religious education.

Thus, while during ancient times Assam was essentially tribal in nature and as a result there was no formal training, not even in religion, as it was only animistic, during the medieval times the two traditional systems of education – Hindu and Muslims were prevalent though both mainly religious.

The early rulers of Kamrup who were not of Indo-Aryan racial stock were taken into the Aryan fold and granted the status of Kshatriya. With the zeal of a neophyte these Aryanized kings not only patronized Aryan culture and civilization but actively contributed to its spread. They even exercised some kind of state control and supervision of education. Thus, ancient Assam turned into an Indo-Aryan cultural zone and spoke Indo-Aryan languages and later took a strong form of Hindu culture. The ancient Indian education thus got accessible to the Upper stratum of the society represented by the twice born classes, princes and nobles. Later in the 16th century
A.D. Sankar Deva, the great Vaisnavite reformer, introduced a new type of educational institutions called the Satras which admitted students from all varnas (caste groups) without any discrimination.

Along with these Hindu traditions Muslims imparted their own Quranic education to their children from the early 13\textsuperscript{th} century. This system was more organized and planned and aimed to prepare a man fit to live in this world and the world hereafter.

The Ahoms also continued with these patterns of education. However, during the closing years of their rule the monarchy fell into decadence, the Burmese took over Assam before they were driven out by the British. Though short lived, the Burmese occupation resulted into total ruin of the country of Assam and its people. The Anglo-Burmese War came to an end with formal signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo on February 2, 1826 and with this the British sovereignty got established in Assam. With this change of administration, the socio-economic conditions of the war ravaged people started improving, education suffered a terrible set back and although modern education had become familiar towards the close of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the status of Assam as an appendage to the administration of Bengal delayed its advent. At the initial stages the endeavour of modern education in Assam started with the efforts of some enlightened individuals and as the British administration did not venture to replace the indigenous education, controlled by the priestly classes, by the secular one for fear of affecting the monopoly of the Brahmmins’ control over the masses as it would be productive of great dissatisfaction and resentment which might have proved prejudicial to the British interests. In fact, in the earlier stages the British administrators in Assam, as in the rest of India, encouraged the indigenous education, making land grants to them and in fact helped open more such schools. However, with some private effort some school of Western type were opened and some students from these schools were rewarded by placing them in the government service. As the state did not have people with a Western secular education, the British Bengal administration posted Bengalis in government service to the total exclusion of the indigenous Assamese. Fearing a rebellion from the indigenous people for not employing them in government service, the British decided to impart the Western secular education to the indigenous people. However, finding the masses in abject poverty and unable to afford the cost of their children’s education, they opened schools with funding from the Government / Municipality sources.
Further with Macaulay’s Minutes on education, government support of Anglicist education got a further boost as in the rest of the country. However, while the rest of India was introduced to Western secular education much earlier Assam had a very late headstart in this respect.

As the administration was manned mainly by the Bengali speaking people and again as the Assamese speaking teachers were not available, nor were the textbooks in this language, the government made Bengali as the medium of instruction at the primary stage but at the higher stage i.e. the middle stage there were two types of schools, one, the Bengali medium where the masses sent their children and the second, English medium where the elite specially the Upper Castes, rich landlords and the Bengali officers sent their children. It must be noted that while the Bengali medium schools catering to the education of the poor were exclusively funded by the Government or Municipalities, English medium education was funded mainly through private sources of the recipients.

Following Assam’s separation from Bengal and its formation as an independent province in 1874, a separate Directorate of education was created and Assamese was introduced as the medium of instruction at the primary stage. One important effect of these changes was a great increase in the enrolment in primary and secondary schools. With the foreign missionaries taking a lead in the establishment of schools in hill regions of the state, education spread fast and by the end of 19th century the percentage of literacy had risen and was 12.2% in 1901.

However, considering the fact that most of the masses went to indigenous vernacular medium schools where they got ‘poor quality’ instruction, remained practically ignorant and incapable of employment in government offices, while the few belonging to Upper strata who got ‘better quality’ English education got employed in government offices and the ones’ who had a high school education were appointed to senior positions as well. Thus, began the great divide between the illiterate and poor and poorly educated masses on the one side and minority of the well to do English educated on the other hand and this divide continues till date. It is interesting to notes that having got Aryanised very late and not having been fully transformed from their tribal culture and also having been influenced early by Sankar Deva’s ideals the atrocious caste system has not been of much significance in Assam in this regard.
The amalgamation of Assam with the East Bengal as a result of the Partition of Bengal in 1905 literally gave a death blow to the entire educational endeavour at the primary level. Since the entire system of primary education in Assam was either under the government or local bodies it suffered a terrible setback because of the apathy of the government of East Bengal. Again, while East Bengal initiated a lot of new and improvised schemes, these were not implemented in Assam. As a result of all this ‘poorly educated’ poor got a further set back.

The popular demand for primary education resulted in passing the famous Compulsory Primary Education Act in Assam in 1926, under which the local bodies began to get adequate financial support from the government. The pupils were not charged any tuition fee and the poor pupils were provided with text books and writing materials free of cost. Although the local bodies did not pursue the goal of free and compulsory education with zeal it should have, the state made noticeable progress in enrolment of boys, but the girl’s education did not progress much.

Enrolment Tables by religion, caste (race) and gender at the dawn of independence do not indicate any disadvantages to any particular group on the basis of religion and caste. However, the girls appear to be disadvantaged as despite forming about 50% of the population their enrolment at the time of independence was about 1/8th of those of boys and the number of separate schools for them was about 1/17th of that for boys. Even being a tribal in this state has not been a great disadvantage.

Thus, the divide here has been mainly between the rich and the poor, between males and the females, with poor and females, in general and female poor in particular being disadvantaged. Among the tribal’s those living in far flung inaccessible areas are at the greatest disadvantage. Religion and caste as such, unlike in the mainland, has not been a disadvantage.

6.1.2: Education in Barak Valley: A Socio-Cultural-Historical Perspective:

At present the three districts of Southern Assam viz. Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi are together called Barak Valley. Historically this region was independent of Assam and was a part of Bengal till 1874 when it was separated from Bengal and tagged with Assam. In the ancient and part of the medieval period it was predominantly inhabited by Kachari tribes. In the 10th century A.D. Sri Chandra of
the Chandra dynasty of Eastern Bengal annexed a major portion of it with his kingdom called Srihatta Rajya within which the whole of modern Sylhet and major portion of Cachar and Karimganj were incorporated. In the 14th century A.D Hazrat Shah Jalal conquered Sylhet region and subsequently it was conquered by the Koch King Chila Rai who put it under the control of his officials who made the entire plains of Cachar as one administrative zone. After the death of Chila Rai, the officer-in-charge of Cachar freed himself from the overlord and functioned as an independent ruler and about the middle of the 18th century A.D. the Kachari King received the valley, then called Surma Valley, as part of dowry. During the Kachari rule numerous emigrants of Bengali origin came to Cachar from Tripura, Mymonsing, Rongpur and Sylhet and settled here permanently. The successive waves of migration at different times from different directions made the population of Cachar diverse with a multiplicity of races, religions, and cultures. Having made Khaspur the permanent capital as a result of being chased away by Ahoms, the Kachari kings took the initiative to attract more settlers from adjacent Bengal to make this fertile land economically more viable and socially more advanced and as a result the dominant Mongoloid ruling class also came within the fold of Hinduism through the process of Sanskritization. Gradually, both Hindus and Muslims from Bengal poured into this fertile agricultural region. The Upper caste Bengali Hindus were employed in the Royal Court and played a decisive role in shaping the society and polity of the pre-colonial Cachar. The Royal Court accepted Bengali as the official language. Royalty having embraced Hinduism and being influenced by Brahminical cult, the process of Sanskritization spread very fast and at the initiative of the kings the Vedic scriptures and Upanishadas and Puranas were translated into local dialects for the benefit of the masses. However, although the Hindus acquired the majority status in Cachar, the Kacharis continued to follow some of the rituals and practices of the local origin. Further the Pan-Indian Bhakti movement led in this region by Sree Chaitanya helped further detribalization and assimilation of different groups. Muslims, who originally emigrated from Bengal, also influenced local culture and as a result the socio-cultural fabric of the valley became complex and all the groups lived in harmony.

Sylhet, a sub-division of Dacca and consisting of lower valley of Barak or Surma river passed into the hands of the British in 1765 A.D. The Cachar plains were
annexed in 1832 and the Cachar Hills in 1854 A.D. and put under the administrative control as a part of Sylhet Division of Bengal.

In 1874, Assam was separated from Bengal Presidency and made an independent Province under the British. At this time Cachar (which then included Hailakandi also) and Karimganj were also separated from Sylhet and annexed with Assam. Thus, it is seen that today’s Barak Valley, comprising Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts were part of Bengal till 1874 and had distinctly Bengali culture different from the rest of undivided Assam. As a part of Bengal and being dominated by Bengalis the region had an earlier headstart in modern education, than the rest of Assam. Traditional religious education was not in vogue here for as long as in Assam, because while it was being detribalized it was getting westernized almost at the same time. But once it became a part of Assam province its travails began because of its being predominantly Bengali in culture.

Bengali character of the region was recognized by the British as early as in 1834. The official language of even the Kacharis and Hidamba kings was Bengali and even the coins were inscribed in Sanskrit in Bengali scripts. The officials and ambassadors were also Bengali. King’s court was adorned by Bengali Scholars and some of the Cachari Rajas mastered the language and were well known for their contribution to Bengali Literature.

Thus, the character of the system of education in Barak Valley from very early times must have been like that of Bengal only and as such different from that of Assam, as that was the only education that could integrate the natives of Cachar into modern civilization and as a result the aboriginals’ own culture and languages could not develop any more so much so that they could not develop a script and grammar of their language, and only very recently a beginning has been made in this direction.

Modern western education was introduced in this region in the early 1930’s which was mostly funded out of the State exchequer either through establishing government schools or through providing aid to the privately established schools. Though local dialects were attempted as the medium of instruction in the beginning, these were soon replaced by Bengali. Students were encouraged to pursue high school and higher education at Calcutta, and the high schools established in this region were also affiliated to Calcutta University after it was established in 1857.
Towards the end of the 19th century women’s education at the middle and the high school stages made a good beginning with the establishment of a Girls’ school in Silchar by Wales Presbyterian Mission which was later taken over by the government. But it is interesting to note that while primary education for both boys and girls was funded mainly out of the public exchequer, at the middle stage there was significant private effort in boys’ English education but for girls no English schools were available. Probably the reason for having only boys’ English medium middle schools was that the boys only were expected to be employed in the government service and not the girls. This was the position at the time of independence also and even today it remains the view with most people especially in rural areas.

With India attaining independence in 1947, Barak Valley i.e. Karimganj and Cachar including Hailakandi were separated from Sylhet Division and made a part of the state of Assam, as the Sylhet Division became a part of Pakistan.

Again after independence, the states were reorganized on linguistic basis and the language spoken by majority of the state’s population became the official language of a state and as such the medium of instruction at the elementary stage. After independence, therefore, Assam declared a policy of education beginning with the Assam Education Act of 1947 which had to be applied uniformly throughout all the regions of the state including the Bengali dominated region of Barak Valley where even non-Bengali indigenous tribal’s, Manipuris etc. had also adopted Bengali as the language of discourse outside home and as medium of instruction at the elementary stage.

Under the Assam Education Act of 1947, Free and Compulsory education was to be implemented first in the towns and the plains and then gradually extended to rural areas and hilly regions inhabited by the tribals. The majority of the population of Assam as a whole being Assamese speaking, this language was declared the official language of the state without any consideration for the sizable population of speakers of other languages, especially Bengali.

Thus, the British while formulating the educational policies for different regions took into consideration the factors of race, language, economy, polity, culture and history, etc. of the people the independent state of Assam did not care to consider them important and tried to homogenize, rather Assamise the entire population. The
immediate reaction to this came from the Barak Valley which had hardly any Assamese speakers as till independence it was only an extension of Sylhet although administratively a part of Assam state since 1874. It was geographically, culturally, linguistically, racially and even economically and politically different from the rest Assam. After a long struggle, which turned severely violent at times, the people of Barak Valley could force the state government in 1961 to accept Bengali as the medium of official communication and of education in the region.

Although this prevented Assamization of the Bengali speaking linguistic minority, a sense of bitterness continues to haunt the two communities even today. Gradually, after the Bengalis, other tribal groups speaking tribal languages, the Manipuris etc. also raised the demand for recognition of the cultural identities and some of these groups have either been granted autonomous district status or at least been provided the facilities of educating their children in their own languages.

6.2: Development of Education since Independence:

6.2.1: Development of Elementary Education in the State of Assam:

Assam Government in its attempt to revamp the education system enacted the Assam Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1947, which provided for Free and Compulsory Primary Education for all children between 6 and 11 years of age. Following this the scheme of Basic Education was put into operation in 1948 with the grant sanctioned by the Government of India; as a result the number of Basic Schools in Assam rose to 147 in 1951-52. This Act gave the responsibility of implementing Compulsory Primary Education to the newly created State Board of Elementary Education instead of Local Authorities.

This Act was followed by another Act viz. the Basic Education Act in 1954 with the provision of making education compulsory, universal and free for all children between 6 and 14 years of age. Based on the Act two separate boards was created (1) State Advisory Board of Basic Education and (2) District or Regional Board of Basic Education and the functions of which are mainly advisory to the Government in the matter of education. As an effect of the Act, steps were taken by the Government of Assam to convert all Lower Primary (L.P) and Middle Vernacular (M.V) Schools into Junior Basic Schools (JBS) and Senior Basic Schools (SBS) respectively by a gradual
process. The Primary Teachers’ Training Centres were also converted into Junior Basic Training Centres (JBTC).

In 1948-49, the total number of Primary Schools (including Basic Schools) in Assam was 7,574 with an enrolment of 4,56,972 pupils and 10,015 teachers which increased to 11,720 schools with 6,80,732 pupils and 16,605 teachers in 1951-52 and grew progressively to 19,611 schools with 15,20,947 pupils and 34,983 teachers in 1968-69.

The expenditure incurred in 1954 for Basic Education was Rs. 7.06 lakhs. In the First Five Year Plan (1952-57), the Assam Government made a provision for an expenditure of Rs. 3.06 lakh for construction of Basic Training Schools and Rs. 1.62 lakh for training of teachers.

In 1962, the Assam Elementary Education Act was passed, again with the provision of providing free and compulsory education to all the children of 6-14 years of age in gradual stages. Under this Act, all the government aided and maintained M.V. Schools, Senior Basic Schools, Middle Madrassa, Primary Schools, and Junior Basic Schools would be treated as elementary schools. It provides the responsibility of primary education to the Local Authority/Local Boards in their respective areas.

In 1968, the government of India formulated the First National Policy on Education (NPE) based on the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission 1964-66, the first commission constituted by the government of India to review the educational system in its entirety and to make it relevant to the demands of National Development. That is why the report was titled “Education and National Development.” As the government of India decided to implement the major recommendations of this report, the States also felt the need to review and reformulate their policies and programmes of Education. Thus, Assam enacted another Act viz. the Assam Elementary Education Act 1968. It focussed mainly on management and control of education and the provision for free and compulsory elementary education in Assam. Based on the provisions of this Act, the State Board of Elementary Education was constituted for management, improvement and expansion of elementary education. The administration and control of primary schools in the plain districts of the state was entrusted to the Regional School Board. The few schools which were under the direct control of the State Government were also handed over to
these School Boards. Primary Education in the Autonomous Hills Districts used to be the responsibility of both the District Council and the Department of Education. In pursuance of the amendment of the sixth schedule of the constitution of India as incorporated in the Re-organization of Assam (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 more functions were transferred to the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District Councils in 1970.

There were a few Primary Schools managed by the Railways and other industrial undertakings. The Tea gardens/boards also established Primary Schools for the children of their employees. Primary Schools managed by the Tea Garden authorities in the Districts of Cachar and Sibsagar were taken over by the School Boards in 1967-68. The state Government proposed to take over gradually primary schools under the management of Tea Garden authorities in other plains districts also.

There has been a practice of opening schools by the people themselves and run them as a purely voluntary effort. Such schools are not provided any funding by the State and are called ‘Venture schools’. Some of these schools in course of time find it difficult to continue due to financial constraints and as such approach the State government for takeover. The State government, if it finds it feasible considering the status of the assets of such a school and the need for the school in the area, it takes over and the process is called provincialisation. To regulate this process and to make it more transparent, in 1974 an Act viz. the Assam Elementary Education (Provincialisation) Act 1974, was enacted. In order to run elementary education smoothly, a separate Directorate of Elementary education was constituted in 1977.

In the year 1977, the Janata Government declared its new policy with regard to Primary education. The Centre had asked the States to prepare plans for the universalisation of primary education. The Government of Assam declared its decision to open 350 more schools during 1977-78, and make special provision for enforcing compulsory primary education. In the same year the state Government also decided to provincialise the lower primary schools of Assam in a phased manner with immediate effect. Prior to that, all Middle Vernacular (M.V) schools were provincialised by the Government with effect from 5-9-1979.

In terms of the number of elementary schools, the progress was stupendous as there was an increase of 47% in the decade from 1950-51 to 1960-61 i.e. during the first two Five Years Plans. Thereafter, also the progress made in increasing the number of
elementary schools has been steady at least 16.47% during the decade 2000-2001 to 2010-11. In other words the State has been making serious effort to expand the facilities for elementary education to cover increasingly larger number of children of the age group 6-14. Though the numbers of elementary schools has been increasing rapidly but it seems the population has been increasing faster and the number of schools per lakh population has remained almost constant from 1970-71 and the number of schools is still inadequate.

The enrolment of students shows a rapid progress up to 1990-91 – 1999-2000 decade, the decade which shows about 78% growth in enrolment over the past decade. However, the progress in 2000-01 - 2010-11 decade was not so impressive and remained almost constant.

The number of teachers in Assam has constantly been increasing in the decades following independence. In the first decade it shows highest increase in proportion which declined in the next decade. Again in 2000-01, the progress over the past decade was not impressive, but the 2001-11 decade shows a steady increase in the number of teachers over the previous decade.

The Teacher School Ratio (TSR) in the different decades following independence shows that the number of teachers per school has been progressively increasing and a Primary school on an average has almost three teachers and a Middle school about eleven. However, the teaching staff is not evenly distributed among the schools. There are still a large number of single teacher Primary schools along with others that are over staffed.

The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Assam during the decades following independence shows that in 1950-51, there were about 35 pupils per teacher which increased to about 36 in the following decade and about 42 students per teacher in 1990-91 and finally in 2010-11, it reduced to roughly 25 students per teacher. Over all, the data reflect an improving trend in the Pupil Teacher Ratio through the successive decades since independence.

The expenditure per student has not been adequate in the decades following independence and the decline from 2000-01 to 2010-11 was to the tune of 50%. This only shows that while the number of teachers and schools appear to be near adequate,
the expenditure per student being low must have been affecting the quality of education adversely.

Besides the general or normal types of schools some special types of schools called “Ashram Schools” have been established to cater to the needs of wandering or migratory weaker sections especially in the far flung and inaccessible areas inhabited by tribals. These schools are of residential type where children are provided with food and accommodation besides fulfilling their other needs. These are primarily government and aimed to cater to the need of some disadvantage groups.

Again, there is in existence of a network of religious Madrassas of different types, some are government aided and the rest are private unaided. These madrassas accommodate a sizeable percentage of Muslim children and provide liberal education along with the education in Islamic scriptures.

Repeated attempts were made from time to time to reconstruct the curriculum by SCERT for Primary and SEBA for Upper Primary to fit education to the latest philosophy and scientific approach adopted in developed States and Countries involving a wider cross-section of people like students, teachers, teacher educators, guardians, educationists, psychologists, linguists, National award winning writers, etc.

The introduction of Social Studies instead of History and Geography, the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE), the weightage to Co-Scholastic activities with Scholastic activities, and again the replacement of Social Studies with Social Science, a combination of History, Economics, Civics and Geography are the major changes undertaken in the curriculum.

The present elementary school curriculum rests on three basic pillars built on the principles of (i) Equity, (ii) Relevance and (iii) Excellence.

In 2011-12, in Assam 6.59% of primary school teachers had less than Secondary education and that the majority i.e. 93.5% of them had educational qualification between Secondary and Graduation while the country as a whole had only 74.09% of the teachers with this level of education but only 1.94% with less than a Secondary education.
While in India as a whole over 23% teachers had studied beyond Graduation, in Assam the corresponding Table was only 0.23%. Thus, on an average, teachers in Assam had lower educational attainments compared to those of teachers in All India. Over all there were 34.1% teachers who had lower qualifications than Higher Secondary and those with qualification above Higher Secondary were 63.13% and those with Graduation was about 30.73%.

In 2011-12, in Assam, the Student Teacher Ratio (STR) was higher than the All States, but Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) was lower than All States in that year. The proportion of female teachers teaching in the elementary schools in Assam (31.88%) was much lower compared to that in those of All States. However, the Pupil Teacher Ratio (24.51%) was better in Assam than in All States (29.76%). The proportion 9.27% of SC Students at this stage of education was higher than that of SC population of about 8% in the state. This is also true of other States. Again while the proportion (10.92%) of ST’s to total enrolment in All States was much higher than the ST population of 7.5% in Assam the corresponding proportion of 15.10% was only commensurate with the population of this group in the state. The SC Girls and ST Girls enrolments to total enrolment were nearly 50% in Assam, a little more than (about 49%) in All States.

In terms of different ancillary facilities in all aspects in 2011-12, Assam was lagging behind compared to the country as a whole. In 2011-12 in Assam 35.01% schools were in pacca houses, 17.92% were in partially pacca houses, 21.93% were in Kuccha houses 0.29% was in tent houses, 16.98% were in multiple types of houses, 7.87% schools did not respond to the survey. It shows that the largest proportion of schools were in partially pacca and kuccha houses and only 35.01% were in pacca houses and still some schools were running in tents and multiple types of buildings.

The data shows that, the progress in literacy in Assam in the decades following India’s independence is almost in tune with the national progress. In the first decade i.e. in 1951 -60, the literacy rate in Total and Male literacy was higher than the national average, but lower in Female literacy. In the very next decade i.e. in 1961 -71 Assam was ahead of national average in Total, Male and Female literacy rates. Again, from 1971 onwards Assam’s progress in Total and Male literacy was lower than the
national average, but in Female literacy, Assam was ahead of National average in all the decades following independence except the 1951-61 decade.

6. 2. 2: Developments of Elementary Education in Barak Valley:

All the Acts, provisions, etc. in Elementary education in Assam were equally applied to Barak Valley also since it is a constituent part of the State. Thus, in terms of the number of elementary schools in Barak Valley in the decades following independence the progress was remarkable. In the initial decades it remained steady at least at 17.71% till 1970-71, but, during the decade 1980-81 to 1990-91 the progress was significantly slow, only an increase of 1.78% over the previous decade. During 1990-91 to 2000-01, the progress was highest 73.22% over the previous decade and in 2010-11, the progress was 10.59% over the previous decade. It can be said that the state has been making effective efforts to expand the facilities of elementary education in the valley, as in other parts of the state, to cover the increasingly larger number of children in the age group 6-14. Though the number of elementary schools had been increasing rapidly in Barak Valley as well as the State of Assam as a whole, but it seems, as in the case of Assam as a whole the population of the valley has been increasing faster and the number of schools per lakh population has remained almost constant up to 1990-91, and during the very next decade i.e.1990-91 to 2000-01, it increased to 175.55 schools per lakh population and then again decreased to 160.46 schools per lakh population in 2010-11. In case of Assam state as a whole, except the first two decades 1950-51 and 1960-61, the proportion of schools per lakh population remained constant in the preceding decades.

As has been the case with absolute number of schools in Assam as a whole and in Barak Valley particularly which increased stupendously during the decades following independence, still the number of schools is inadequate considering the increasing population.

A comparative analysis of the data on the number of schools shows that, the number of schools per lakh population in Barak Valley was always lower than that in Assam as a whole except 2000-01 - 2010-11 decade, but the number of schools per lakh population in Barak Valley was more than the State of Assam till 2000-01. During 2000-01 - 2010-11, the number of educational institutions here grew at slower rate compared to the state of Assam as a whole.
It is evident that, though in the initial decades following India’s independence, in Barak Valley the increase in enrolment at elementary stage was not so high only 19.69% in 1960-61, 57.84% in 1980-81, an increase in two decades and 20.89% in 1990-91. The number of students grew by 59.88% in 2000-01 from 1990-91. Again in 2010-11 showed an increase of 53.06% over the previous decade. It implies that the government’s initiatives in education were very effective.

The data on the number of teachers shows that with the increase in the number of educational institutions in Barak Valley the number of teachers was also increasing, which was highest during the decade 1990-91 to 2000-01, about 99% increase over the past decade while during the other decades it remained almost constant.

A perusal of the data shows that the teachers per school, in the early decades following independence, in Barak Valley was higher compared to the state of Assam as a whole, but in the recent decades the number of teachers per schools in Barak Valley has been lower than that in the state of Assam as a whole, implying the scarcity of teachers in the elementary schools of Barak Valley.

The Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) shows that in Assam in 1950-51, there were about 35 pupils per teacher which increased to about 36 in the following decade and to about 42 students per teacher in 1990-91 and finally in 2010-11, it reduced roughly to 25 students per teacher. While in Barak Valley it has been continually declining from 35.28 in 1960-61 to about 25 in 2000-2001, but increased to 27 in 2010-11. Over all, the data reflect an improving trend in the pupil teacher ratio through the successive periods since independence and is certainly better than that in the state as a whole.

As regards the qualifications of teachers the data shows that in Barak Valley the proportion of teachers with lower qualifications than Higher Secondary has been declining over time from 56.56% in 2002-03 to 42.15% in 2011-12, while the proportion of teachers with Higher Secondary and above has been increasing from 43.44% in 2002-03 to 57.85% in 2011-12. Again, while in 2002-03 there were only little over 16% teachers with qualifications of Graduation and above, in 2011-12 this proportion was about 27%. Thus, over the years more and more qualified teachers have been getting in to the system in the Valley.
Regarding the medium of instruction, the data revealed that, as the region is Bengali dominated, with about 80% of the total population speaking this language, it is obvious that the number of students in this medium will be high, but the data shows an overwhelmingly larger proportion of Bengali medium students than expected, implying thereby that the minority language speakers in this region are also gradually opting for Bengali as a medium in education. Again the increase in the proportion of students in English medium schools shows an increasing preference for this language as it is the language of communication worldwide especially in the macro-economic system. The data also shows that the proportion of SC / ST enrolment in total enrolment is increasing in Cachar district while SC enrolment in Karimganj and Hailakandi are decreasing gradually, the proportion of ST’s is gradually increasing in all the three districts of Barak Valley. The proportion of SC/ST Girls to total SC/ST enrolment has also been increasing over time.

The data on Student-Classroom Ratio and Pupil-Teacher Ratio show that the number of classrooms 2 (2.2) per Primary schools is lower in Barak Valley compared to 3 (2.87) in Assam as a whole and hence the Students per Classroom at Primary school stage was higher 41 (41.11) in Barak Valley compared to 25 (25.09) in Assam. The number of students per teacher at Primary stage in both Barak Valley and Assam were almost equal, but at Upper primary stage Barak Valley shows a progressive Teacher Pupil Ration 18 (17.90) compared to 21 (21.3) in Assam as a whole.

The data on school infrastructure and basic amenities shows that, the state of Assam lags behind the country as a whole and Barak Valley being a constituent part of Assam is far behind in some facilities like drinking water, separate toilets for Boys and Girls, Pacca houses than Assam as a whole. It is also evident that, in terms of some specific infrastructure elements like- drinking water, common toilet, girls’ toilet, electricity connections in Elementary Schools, the proportions were much lower in Barak Valley than the state of Assam as a whole. A perusal of the data shows that, in Barak Valley most of the schools have partially pacca houses which were followed by kuccha houses and pacca houses. The proportion of pacca houses was gradually increasing, reducing the number of kuccha houses, but still some schools in Barak Valley have no buildings at all.
The data shows that, the rate of literacy in Barak Valley has been increasing progressively through the decades following independence just like in the State of Assam and India as a whole. The gap between Male and Female literacy was also reducing gradually. In Barak Valley, in 1951 the percentage of Male literacy was 33.0% and Female literacy was only 10.2% which gradually increased to 72.9% for Male and 57.2% for Female in 2001, in a 50 years period. Again, the gap was reduced tremendously during the recent decades and in 2011 Male literacy was 84.4% and Female literacy was 72.3%. It shows that in Barak Valley female literacy was increasing faster than the male literacy.

Compared to the state of Assam, the percentage of literacy in Barak Valley in 1951 was higher in Total, Male and Female literacy, but in the immediate next two decades i.e. in 1961 - 1971, the literacy rate for Total, Male and Female declined as compared to the State of Assam. However, since 1991 the literacy for Total, Male and Female in Barak Valley has been growing and was higher than the State of Assam in 2011.

Again, comparing the rate of literacy in Barak Valley with the nation as a whole, it is seen that in the initial decades following independence i.e. 1951 to 1961, the literacy rate in Barak Valley was higher in Total, Male and Female literacy. But, in 1971 this rate was below the national average, but in 1991 the Valley showed a higher average in Total, Male and Female literacy than the nation as a whole. In 2001 to 2011, the Barak Valley region was ahead of the nation in literacy for Total and Female literacy, but the Male literacy was lower compared to the national average. This shows that, the Female literacy in Barak Valley was higher than that of Assam and India as a whole in 1951, but it suddenly declined and in1961 and 1971 it was lower than that of State and National average in this decade. However, from 1991 onwards Female literacy rate in Barak Valley has been constantly increasing surpassing the State and National averages.

The rate of literacy in both Rural and Urban areas has also been improving progressively with a trend of reducing the gap between the Rural and Urban rates. In 1971, the rural literacy in Barak Valley was 27.79% while urban literacy rate was 62.89%, which increased to 52.80% and 85.42% respectively for Rural and Urban areas in 1991. Further, in 2011, the rural literacy was 76.1% and urban literacy was 88.75%. It shows that, the gap between the Rural and Urban literacy has been
reducing gradually with the progressive expansion of educational facilities in rural areas over the decades. Thus in comparison to the state of Assam as a whole Barak Valley has been ahead of the state of Assam in both male and female literacy in rural as well as urban areas through all the decades following independence.

6.3: Factors that Shaped the System of Education in this Region.

Nicholas Hans (Hans, 1958) delineates some important factors which shape national systems of education. According to him chief among such factors are: (1) Natural factors of geography including climate, land resources etc., (2) Racial factors, (3) Cultural factors, (4) Linguistic factors, (6) Historical factors, (7) Political factors, (8) Economic factors and (9) Gender. The progress or otherwise of education anywhere depends on these factors individually and their interaction patterns. However, it must be noted that all these factors may not affect all at the same time in all situations.

From the account of the educational development of both Assam and Barak Valley, given in earlier sections of this report, it can clearly be discerned that educational development in this region has also been determined by a variety of such factors, interacting continuously.

Natural factors of location of the state of Assam (undivided Assam) kept the region isolated an inaccessible which resulted in its remaining away from the civilisation and culture of not only of the world at large but even of the mainland India. The region got exposed the Aryan civilisation comparatively recently. Its population remained divided into distinct tribes who not only lived completely isolated from each other but entertained hostilities against each other. They were also divided as the hill men and the plains men with very little interaction. Each tribe having developed their own dialect, communication between the neighbouring tribes and races also was rare till very recently. This also impeded the evolution of a common language. The economy was agrarian which developed faster in the plains region who became economically independent and powerfull while the hilly regions continue to practice jhum cultivation even today. In the plains land being fertile and the population sparse the people were well off and did not have work very hard and as such did not work for others. This made them somewhat lazy and vulnerable as well. However with their Aryanisation these plains men developed an organized political and economic organization and with the advent of the Ahoms, who ruled the land for six hundred
years, they prospered further and during this period they also developed a common medium of communication, the Assamese language which was adopted by most of the plains tribes although with the retention of some words from their respective tribal dialects. However, these developments remained more or less confined to the plains region and more so to the Brahmaputra valley. Because of these developments the plains men became culturally more complex and therefore generated a need to transfer their culture to their children through some form of formal mode and hence the beginnings of rudimentary formal education. This, together with the Aryanisation of the rulers created a demand for educators with the result that Brahmins from the mainland especially from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal, came and settled here. Aryans having been a more advanced civilization than the indigenous people dominated the region culturally, economically and even politically and hence even the local kings took upon themselves to spread the Aryan ways of life. Again while the learned Brahmans who settled here accorded the status of Kshatriyas to the local rulers. The Brahmanic varna system did not get established in this region mainly for two reasons: one, despite the processes of Aryanisation the the indigenous people had not completely stripped themselves of their tribal culture and social formation, and, two, the emergence of Shankardeva who preached equality of all individuals and having emerged from the local stock Shakardevas teachings had a tremendous influence in shaping the culture and society in this region especially in the Brahmaputra valley. Thus while the majority of the plains men accepted Hinduism as a religion and as a way of life, Assames society did not get caste-ridden. Thus, the education system that emerged, though religious in nature and based mainly on the Vedic learning it became equally accessible to all sections of the civilized society except the tribals living in the inaccessible hilly areas as they preffered cultural isolation from the influence of the Aryanised plains men. Even the Muslims who settled here imbibed some elements of the local culture and provided their children Quranic education. Gradually as the economy of the region demanded some secular elements were also added to the mainly religious education.

As in the rest of the country modern education was introduced in Assam only after its annexation by the British. The British admininistrators formulated educational policies to meet their social, economic and political exigencies. Thus, in order to antagonize the traditional local elite they patronized the indigenous religious educational
practices in the beginning and the missionaries to fulfill their purpose of proselytisation opened schools in the tribal regions, the result is, for everybody to see, almost all tribal groups especially those of the hill regions are Christians and have very high rates of literacy. To run their administration they required personnel with secular education and skills, so they imported modern western educated people from Bengal region. They had even to import labour to work in tea gardens from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, etc. as the indigenous people being self sufficient did not like to work for others. In fact they did not even resent outsiders coming, clearing the jungles and cultivate the land and become the owners. But in course of time as the population grew especially of the educated Bengalis who were in the British government service a demand for modern western education grew to provide the children of these elite Bengalis with the skills which they required for entering the administrative jobs under the government. Thus began modern western education with Bengali medium in Assam. Gradually, the rich among the indigenous Assamese population, having got enamoured by the power and the life style enjoyed by the government officials, resented the domination by Bengalis and fearing reprisals by them, Assamese was introduced as medium of instruction so that the indigenous inhabitants also qualified for government employment. As competent teachers in Assamese medium were not available in desired numbers, the standard of the children who studied through this medium was poor, so return to Bengali medium and for the elite even English medium schools also came into existence although through private effort of the rich Bengali administrative staff. These arrangements having social and political and administrative repercussions the medium of education shuttled between Bengali and Assamese several times till independence of the country in 1947.

The hill tribes that remained completely isolated were not affected by these developments in Assam and they were helped by the missionaries and got education through the medium of English and gradually their dialects also developed scripts. Having remained independent of any hegemony they asserted their independence and ultimately became independent states of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh and some autonomous districts within the state of Assam.

Barak valley, till the medieval time was an independent Kachari kingdom and had trade links with Bengal Region and gradually it developed closer ties with Eastern Bengal. Here also the rulers invited educated people from Bengal who filled
important positions in the kings’ administration and educated the indigenous people. Since the indigenous population did not have a script for their language, there was no much opposition to accepting Bengali as the medium of administration as well as education. Again because of its physical proximity and accessibility to Bengal region and the land being fertile with plenty of water for irrigation and river Barak (then Surma) providing the navigational link a large section of the Bengali population migrated to this region and settled down here without facing any resistance from the indigenous people nor from the kings ruling the area. The migrants comprised of both the Hindu and Muslim groups and engaged in both agricultural and non-agricultural occupations. While the Upper caste Hindus because of their learning were employed in administration especially at the higher levels including the diplomatic ones, the lower castes and the Muslims engaged in agriculture and crafts. Although, among the Bengali Hindus there was an elaborate caste system it did not affect the interaction among different sections of the society essentially because such a system did not have any royal patronage and also because the indigenous population despite having got Aryanianise under the influence of the Bengalis retained the essential nature of their tribal culture. Thus, as in Bramputra valley here also education initially religious was equally accessible members of all castes. Muslims provided Quranic education to their children. After the British annexed this region they made it a part of Sylhet district of Bengal Province for its having connectivity with that region and although it did not develop as fast as the rest of Sylhet because the Bengal administration did not pay so serious an attention on this region although education system followed was the same as that in the rest of sylhet district. However, with the intervention of the British officers posted here, efforts were made to expand the educational facilities and the high school established here was affiliated with Calcutta University and students from this region did not have any great difficulty in continuing with their post high school education in that university.

The problems of the region began only when this region was separated from Bengal and made a part of Assam, consequent upon the partition of Bengal, as the Assamese administration did not pay much attention to the development of this region. The problems got further aggravated after independence due the Assamese political class’s zeal to Assamise the entire population of the state of Assam without any regard for the concerns of the culturally and linguistically diverse groups who inhabited the different
parts of the state. While the isolated and independent tribes got a separate state or the autonomous district status, Assames was thrust upon the Bengali majority district of the then Cachar (Today’s Barrak valley) leading to protests which at occasions got violent resulting in martyrdom of some young men. However after a long struggle and much sacrifice the region was accepted as the Bengali region and was allowed to use this language as the language for official communication and as medium of education.

The brief account of the changes in the system of education in the region given in this section is to highlight the fact that the system of education in the region has been shaped by the factors enunciated by Hans on the basis of his studies of development of education systems in various countries in Europe and Africa. Thus, these factors appear to be universally shaping national systems of education. Because these factors conglomerate differently in different nations and at different times the educational systems of different nations are different not only among the nations but the system in the same nation is also different at different times as the influence of the factors in the conglomerate differs.

It is interesting to note that unlike the rest of the country membership of any religious or caste or tribal group has not been a disadvantage in access to education, but living in the hills has been a disadvantage in this respect. Similarly females have had lower access to education compared to males as has been the case with not only India but in the entire world. However, in the post independence period these gaps are getting bridged fast in this region. Another disadvantage here as elsewhere is the rural residence.

6.4: Implications of the study:

The conclusions of the study detailed above have significant implications for educational policy and planning. During the British rule education was planned mainly to produce workers, clerical and administrative, for the government offices of the British administration. They also used it to serve the purpose of proselytisation. Besides, serving these purposes, this education also became a means for earning livelihood for many and as such a mechanism for upward social mobility. It also helped the British in fulfillment of the objective of creating Indian nationals loyal to the British administration and in the long run this educated class also developed a
consciousness and craving for independence from the British rule, although we have yet to come out of the ‘fair skin complex’ and the attitudes associated with it.

The educational expansion took place as a result of the demands for manpower for the economy and as the skill requirements of this economy got more complex further expansion of education together with the content becoming more complex, beginning with the transition from religious to secular education to the introduction of Western Science in the curriculum.

Again, racial stock, stages of development of the economy, nature of polity, culture, language situation etc. were taken into consideration while planning the schemes of education during the British rule. In ancient India, education was provided to an individual in accordance with the calling of his caste occupation requirements, thus corresponding to the needs of the economy, culture, polity and philosophy of the society of the time.

In other words, the history of educational development shows that a scheme of education becomes popular only if it is relevant to the economic, political, cultural needs of the society. If a system fails to be relevant, it only becomes a waste of resources and it does not generate a demand for itself.

Thus, while planning education in modern times the factors which have been delineated in this study as the forces shaping an educational system need to kept in mind. Thus, the planners need to decentralize educational planning and plan education at the micro level, taking into account economic needs and available resources, cultural requirements, political processes, languages etc. of each region and community. This cannot be done without the involvement of the people themselves. This decentralized democratic planning of education can make it relevant to the needs and aspiration of the people and therefore generate a demand for it. Only through such an approach to educational planning can we preserve the cultural, linguistic, economic, political diversity for which India is known and again without preserving this diversity, unity cannot be established.

As has been said above all the factors may not be affecting all the time in all situations, it is necessary to analyse the influence of the various factors before devising schemes and strategies for educational development. Through such an
analysis factors that hinder the progress of education or cause hardship to any section of the society can be indentified and action can be initiated to eliminate them. Similarly factors that accelerate the process of providing quality elementary education can also be identified and schemes can be designed to further the cuase.

6.5: **Suggestions for further research:**

The present study is confined to a small geographical region of Assam and Barak Valley within it. Although this region exhibits a great diversity, its study is only a micro study and as such may not lead to findings with implications for the whole nation. Therefore, it is necessary to make such studies in other parts of the country and it is suggested that the studies may be conducted on each district and on each racial and cultural community. This is necessary because each region has a different culture and is inhabited by a somewhat different racial stock, has different history and the people speak different language(s) and being located in geographically different region with different climates, having different soil types and as such different economic conditions. Juxtaposing the data from such micro studies can help delineate the forces that mould a national system of education and keeping such factors in view while planning will lead to the establishment of a people’s system of education which will cater to their needs and aspirations. An education system developed in this way alone can become an instrument of the wholesome development of the nation.