The Educational Despatch of 1854 made the Government responsible for conferring upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from general diffusion of useful knowledge and which India may, under Providence, derive from her connexion with England. The educational policy as determined by this despatch laid down that higher education should grow under private enterprise and that lower or primary education should be developed through the direct instrumentality of the Government. It also made provision for grant-in-aid to be given to private or indigenous schools capable of imparting good and secular education. This policy was implemented in all provinces with the result that the provincial governments took the initiative in establishing and aiding primary schools.

Determination of educational agency

The Indian Education Commission of 1882 favoured the transfer of control of the primary schools from the Government to the local bodies. It accepted also the fact that there should be no withdrawal whatever from the government's indirect but efficient control. Following Ripon's reforms and the Indian Education Commission, the Government of India passed a resolution in 1884 accepting the recommendations of the Commission, and directed the provincial Governments to implement them. In 1882, a resolution of the Government of Assam was passed whereby the administrative area of a local board came to be known as sub-division. After 1884, a school board in every sub-division was formed under the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission with a view to controlling primary schools. But separate primary school funds were not created.

The Commission recommended...
In most of the local bodies. The Hunter Commission recommended that 'primary education be declared to be that part of the whole system of public instruction which possesses an almost exclusive claim on local funds set apart for education, and a large claim on provincial revenues'. But such a policy did not materialize because local bodies spent an extremely small sum on education, neither did they raise separate funds by levying education cess. On the other hand, imperial grant as such was not given by the Central Government to the provincial government up to the end of the nineteenth century as there prevailed a policy of laissez faire in the field of education as well. Naturally, therefore, the provincial government could not manage to contribute a large amount for the expansion of primary education.

The newly established local bodies in Assam were not financially strong to establish and maintain all the primary schools. At an early stage, they adopted the policy of aiding primary schools instead of accepting direct responsibility for them. Gradually, however, attempts were made to convert some of the aided schools to local or municipal schools. But the handing over of the charge of the aided schools was considered more nominal than real as these schools were aided without any additional support from local subscriptions. During the period of dyarchy, local bodies adopted the policy of converting aided schools increasingly into schools maintained by local bodies. Thus, by 1937, the bulk of the primary schools in Assam came to be maintained by them.

Primary Schools maintained by different agencies

Besides the schools managed by the local bodies, there were other primary schools maintained by different agencies. Some description of such schools may be given.
(1) **Departmental Primary Schools**: Under the recommendations of the Commission, these schools were established and maintained by the State in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Garo Hills, Mikir Hills and in the backward places in the Darrang District. Some pathsalas attached to Normal schools were maintained in Kamrup, Sibsagar and Tezpur for practice-teaching work.¹⁰

(2) **Aided Schools**: These were maintained by the missionaries who received lump sum grants from the Education Department. Other schools managed by private bodies received results-grants from local bodies. Up to 1917, these schools were known as combined schools as they were supported by a very small amount for fixed payments to teachers and certain specified rewards earned under the reward rules. The payment-by-result was introduced in Assam in a modified form, and it was abolished in 1917 only.¹¹

(3) **Unaided Schools**: These were schools started by individuals or private bodies without any aid from local bodies. Some of these schools followed the prescribed curriculum and courses of studies of the Department, and were upgraded to the aided list when they applied for grants.

(4) **Indigenous Schools**: These were schools conducted by the local people and they taught through 'native methods'. The Indian Education Commission strongly recommended the improvement and expansion of this type of schools by extending the payment-by-result system to them.¹² But in effect these schools were neglected completely and so they were in a decayed condition.¹³

There were two grades of primary schools - upper and lower. The upper primary schools had seven classes while the lower primary ones consisted of five classes. Extension of the primary course by two years without giving any complete course came to be considered a 'superfluit'.¹⁴ and, therefore, the upper primary type of schools
disappeared by 1915. Preference was now given to the establishment of Middle Vernacular (M.V.) schools.

Management of primary schools by different agencies naturally led to partnership. However, partnership among the many agencies did not lead to enjoyment of parity of status. It was in the scheme of things that government schools or schools run by the local bodies enjoyed more facilities and commanded a greater amount of finance than the aided or unaided schools could ever hope to do. Most of the aided or privately managed schools did not have their own buildings or furniture 'except a few planks for the boys and a stool for the teachers'. Naturally enough, schools with poor facilities failed in the race while trying to compete with the better equipped schools. Such differences among the primary schools continued up to the end of the dyarchy.

Attempts for the improvement and expansion of primary education

With the beginning of the twentieth century, the Central Government adopted a new approach to education at the instance of Lord Curzon. He abandoned the policy of withdrawal from the field and made the provinces as well responsible for the improvement and expansion of primary schools. Such an attitude naturally encouraged the provinces to frame schemes for educational improvement. In 1905, the Chief Commissioner of Assam promulgated a scheme for the improvement of primary education. He increased the provincial grants by Rs. 50,500 and an additional grant of Rs. 24,000 was given to the local bodies to supplement private efforts in securing better buildings for village schools.

Out of the sum of Rs 35 lakhs released by the Central Government for primary education, Assam received Rs one lakh in 1904. Now 491 village schools and one Model School for girls were established.
Grants for buildings and furniture were made to impecunious schools. As the local boards received large amounts of imperial grants channelled through the provincial government, they could devote more funds and attention to the cause of expansion of primary education.

Unfortunately, the amalgamation of Assam with Eastern Bengal in 1905 gave a death-blow to all endeavours for the improvement of primary schools. Aside from differences socially and culturally between Assam and Eastern Bengal, in educational endeavours also they differed. In Eastern Bengal, the bulk of the lower primary schools was under private management while the majority of them in Assam was under the control of the local boards. Different again were the principles followed in the two regions in the matter of payment of grants. In Eastern Bengal, residual grants along with result-grants were given annually while in Assam local bodies gave fixed grants and a capital allowance determined by the number of enrolled pupils above the infant stage. Such then were the major differences and these created problems in the administration of common rules and regulations, thereby causing delay in the disbursement of grants.

As the Department of Education was situated in Dacca, Eastern Bengal secured more attention than Assam. In Eastern Bengal, a scheme was prepared for utilising the major portion of the imperial grants of 1905-06 in the establishment of a number of well-equipped model Board Schools with a view to improving primary education. But no such plan was taken in Assam. On the other hand, allotments from provincial and imperial grants to local bodies were fewer by far in Assam than in Eastern Bengal: it was Rs 288,784 in Eastern Bengal while the figure for Assam was Rs 16,610. This
showed that in Eastern Bengal the amount spent was more than double
the amount spent in Assam on primary education. Thus, the adminis-
trative changes introduced by the imperial rulers resulted in slowing
the pace of progress in the field of primary education.

After the creation of Assam as a separate province in 1914, the
Government of Assam felt the need of defining the duties of the
local boards in respect of education once more. An Act of 1915
empowered the local boards to establish, maintain and manage all
the primary and M.V. schools; they were to appoint all teachers,
bear the cost of construction and repair of buildings, and arrange
for giving grants to primary schools. The main purpose of this Act
was to convert all aided primary schools into local board schools
because the aided schools with meagre facilities failed to provide
good primary education. As the Act of 1915 did not cover the munici-
palities which incidentally spent little on education, another
Act was passed in 1923. This Act made each municipality respon-
sible for the establishment, maintenance and management of all pri-
mary and M.V. schools under public management within its area. These
two Acts made the local bodies directly responsible for the spread
of primary education in Assam.

Introduction of compulsory Primary Education Act

Within three years of the Municipality Act, the famous compulsory
Primary Education Act was passed in 1926. The main provisions
of this Act could be summarised in the following way:

(1) Any local authority may resolve, by a majority of two-
thirds of the members present, at a meeting specially convened for
the purpose, that this Act shall be applied to the whole or any
part of the area within its jurisdiction or to the children of
either sex or both sexes resident in the area within its jurisdic-
tion, with or without the exemption of any particular community or communities;
(ii) The local authority shall at the same time submit to the Government a statement showing all particulars relating to the proposal including details concerning the total existing expenditure incurred by the local authority and by the provincial Government on primary education in the area in question, and the additional cost to be incurred for the introduction of compulsory education;
(iii) The local authority of any area which decided to introduce primary education under the Act should provide one-third of the educational cost while two-thirds would be borne by the Provincial Government if the scheme were sanctioned. An educational cess was to be levied for the purposes;
(iv) On the failure of a local authority to submit a scheme for introducing compulsory education within a reasonable time, the Government might, after due enquiry, appoint a person or persons to prepare the scheme or to bring it into operation or to continue to keep it in operation as the case might be;
(v) The Government could exempt children of either sex or both sexes of any particular community or class in any part of compulsion from the operation of the Act;
(vi) No tuition fees was to be charged from any pupil of recognised primary schools maintained or aided by the local authority;
(vii) The children of necessitous guardians, too poor to buy books and writing materials, might, if the education committee so recommended, be provided with the use of necessary books and writing materials free of cost by the local authority; and,
(viii) The local authority and the education committee concerned should be responsible for the enforcement of the provisions of the
Act; they should provide for all such facilities of accommodation, equipment and staff as might be considered necessary by the Director of Public Instruction.24

The above provisions coupled with the power conferred on the bodies to proceed with the prosecution of parents failing to send children to schools, brought great hopes for the expansion of primary education. But those that mattered directly, i.e., the local bodies, did not seem to be that enthusiastic as they should have been. They accepted the introduction of primary education on a compulsory basis as a matter of routine work and did not come forward with the necessary vigour in action to fulfil the provisions of the Act. The result was that the Act failed of implementation due mainly to the attitude of the local bodies.

Failure of the Act

The Government entrusted the Inspector of Schools of the Assam Valley with the special responsibility of scrutinising the schemes submitted by the local bodies with a view to introducing compulsory primary education. The Golaghat Local Board submitted a scheme applicable to the Ghiladhari area: the Ghiladhari scheme received the sanction of the Government and they paid their share of the scheme in 1930-31. But when it came to implement the scheme, the Local Board hesitated at every step because the scheme was associated with the levying of the education cess. Members were afraid of imposing the cess lest they should thereby incur the displeasure of the voters who were also not educated in the spirit of voluntarily sending their children from the fields or sundry other household errands to the schools. The Government had to extend the time of implementation by another year without, however, any result. Schemes were also submitted from the concerned
bodies from Sibsagar, Tezpur, and North Sylhet for the consideration of the Government. The schemes were returned to the local bodies for certain modifications. However, the concerned boards failed to submit modified schemes. Neither did other local bodies submit any scheme. Thus, the failure of the local bodies to complete the necessary preliminaries and to take follow up measures resulted in the failure of the Act. This led the Government to consider seriously the necessity for the formation of a Provincial Board for Primary Education. It was proposed that this Board with a Minister in-charge of it should regulate, stimulate and encourage the educational activities of the local bodies; it was to outline the policy, control expenditure, insist on the appointment of qualified teachers, etc. It would have been a new venture to experiment with such a Board. But no concrete step was taken to establish such a Board up to the end of dyarchy. Neither was there any comprehensive plan or any long-term scheme to introduce compulsory primary education. If this were done, it would have led to tremendous growth in the field of primary education. Anyway, even with the existing facilities, there was in evidence an increase in the number of schools and pupils. To this we now turn our attention.

Increase in the number of schools and pupils

During the period 1889-90 to 1936-37, the number of schools controlled by different agencies increased at varying rates of growth. To cite one instance, the number of Government primary schools increased from 24 in 1889-90 to 343 in 1936-37. This growth had its impact in hilly areas also, because the Government expanded their educational work in those places during the period of dyarchy. The local bodies contributed their share to the general growth by converting some aided schools into their schools with
full responsibility. During the period under review, unaided schools also increased their number as schools came to be established under private auspices with the hope of securing grants. The following table serves to indicate the trends of progress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of schools</th>
<th>1889-90</th>
<th>1936-37</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Pupils</td>
<td>Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33⅓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Board</td>
<td>1243</td>
<td>36,261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aided</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>15,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaided</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>4,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>56,224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The progress was made possible due to a variety of factors. The non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements roused the patriotism of the people who in their turn evinced keen interest in education. Then, although the compulsory Primary Education Act failed of implementation, it made the local bodies more conscious of their responsibility in the matter of expanding the base of education. Another factor had been the spread of women's education: the old barriers of early marriage, prejudice against sending girls to boys' schools under male teachers, etc., were overcome by stages, and girls' schools came to be established in rural areas also. Further, improvement in the means of communication with the construction of new roads and bridges facilitated movement of students from village to village and from villages to the towns.
At the same time, it deserves to be noted that the progress attained was hardly commensurate with the needs of the situation. A number of factors were responsible for such tardy progress. First, besides inadequate funds, the local bodies were not quite efficient in discharging their responsibilities. Natural calamities and diseases contributed their share to the slow progress. Secondly, the local bodies made improper use of certain funds at their disposal. It was found that some local bodies, in their anxiety to distribute their grants to better advantage, withdrew aid from a certain number of schools without sufficient consideration. The result was that schools were closed causing a decrease in the number of pupils as well. In 1904-05, the number of schools fell from 2,592 to 2,431. In the year 1909-10, schools and pupils decreased respectively by 716 and 13,000 or by 1.9% in Eastern Bengal and Assam. Such fluctuations naturally affected the rate of progress.

Curriculum at schools of the primary stage

The curriculum at primary schools was modified from time to time. This position continued generally up to 1904. The course of study at lower primary schools included reading, writing, dictation, simple arithmetic, and the geography of Assam. In upper primary schools, the course of study included parts of the first book of Euclid, mensuration, and a little of history. Lord Curzon made an attempt to differentiate the curriculum of rural schools from that of the urban schools by introducing agriculture, nature study, gardening, and physical exercises. He believed that the instruction of the masses in such subjects as will fit them for their position in life involves some differentiation in the courses
for rural schools. But the all-India policy in this regard could not be implemented satisfactorily in Assam for reasons of lack of equipment, land, and trained teachers.

Actually, however, a scheme for a new curriculum came to be prepared in Assam at the instance of the Government with a view to teaching the pupils to think for themselves, to train their faculties of observation, and to impart practical knowledge that could be of use to them in their everyday life. This course of study was introduced on New Year's Day, 1912. This new curriculum included reading, writing, arithmetic, object lesson, geography, drawing, hand-work, and physical exercise. It was provided that in the lowest sections, i.e., Classes A and B, no book was to be used except illustrated reading sheets containing letters and simple word formation, followed by easy sentences. Afterwards, reading of books, writing, arithmetic, object lessons, geography, physical exercise and drawing were to be introduced. Instruction was to proceed from the lower to the higher; for instance, teaching of geography was to start from the measurement and drawing of houses and thence to the study of Assam, India and the world in the last class. This type of curriculum continued all throughout the period of our study with slight modifications here and there from time to time.

But the success of the course of study naturally depended to a considerable extent on the teachers and their method of teaching. The Director of Public Instruction rightly stated that 'it is to be feared that as with the curriculum which it replaces, the want of qualified teachers will prove a stumbling block'. In spite of the literary character of the modified curriculum, it introduced a number of new steps in teaching which needed trained teachers.
But even with trained teachers, their future in the form of emoluments depended on the performance of the students in the tests conducted by the Inspectors. Thus, teachers had no other way than preparing their pupils for examinations which encouraged, in the main, learning by rote. Thus, the modified curriculum failed of its purpose in bringing about the desired changes.

**Examinations**

The lower School Leaving Certificate Examination held at the district level at the end of the primary school course came to be introduced with effect from 1883. Its purpose was to scrutinise the achievements of pupils, improve the standard of primary education, and to award scholarships to meritorious students. But an overall assessment was not possible as the standard of examination differed from district to district. This opinion was in fact expressed by the Director of Public Instruction. Naturally this form of examination came to be abolished and a general departmental examination to be held at the end of every five years was introduced in 1888: it increased the responsibility of the Department without giving any satisfactory result. Afterwards, no departmental or general examination was held at the end of the primary course. Only certificates were awarded to school-leavers who could make their way to the top class. Scholarships were awarded to meritorious students securing top places. In 1936, two sub-divisions of the Surma Valley introduced a new system of examination to improve the standard of primary schools. Common question papers set by a qualified Board were meant for the annual examinations of primary schools. The purpose was to set a uniform standard of test which in its turn was expected to secure a uniform standard in attainments. Though this experiment was not extended to other places, schools were allowed to promote pupils on the basis of performance in annual examinations.
Expenditure on Primary Education

The expenditure was met from such sources as provincial funds, local funds, fees, and other sources.

The share of provincial funds in 1879-80 for primary education was Rs 174,448. The amount of provincial expenditure decreased from Rs 135,595 to Rs 13,998 in 1902-03 as expenditure from local funds increased. But the amount increased to Rs 467,957 in 1919-20 as the Resolution of 1904 paved the way for the release of imperial grants by raising the rate of provincial contributions to primary education from one-third to one-half. The result was that the amount of provincial expenditure on primary education increased by Rs 453,959 between 1902-03 and 1919-20. During dyarchy also such expenditure continued to increase: for instance, expenditure from provincial funds on boys' primary schools increased from Rs 7,77,010 in 1931-32 to Rs 8,46,645 in 1936-37.

Expenditure from local funds also increased. Between 1904 and 1915, it increased from Rs 220,316 to Rs 560,321 due to increased grants from provincial funds. But then it decreased to Rs 254,956 in 1919-20 due to financial difficulties faced by the local bodies after World War I, difficulties which were further aggravated by floods and natural calamities. After 1930, however, the contributions had increased: on boys' primary schools, the increase was from Rs 268,294 in 1931-32 to Rs 310,141 in 1936-37.

Fee income did not constitute a big source as fees were not charged in many government or aided schools.

The amount from other sources was not very encouraging. It was Rs 66,171 in 1902-03, Rs 91,821 in 1919-20, Rs 176,473 in 1931-32, and Rs 162,928 in 1936-37.

It is evident that during the period of our survey, there
had been an increase in the amount of expenditure for the expansion of primary education. But this could hardly be regarded as sufficient. Taking 15% of the total male population as the basis of calculation, the number of boys of school-going age in Assam in 1936–37 was 680,580: out of them, 253,080 boys only were in primary schools. This meant that about two-thirds of the children of school-going age remained to be educated.

Wastage and Stagnation

Our discussion on the progress of primary education served to show how it expanded at a very slow rate. Even in 1937, 5 per cent of scholars to the total population of 8,622,251 was found in institutions. The extremely low percentage of scholars was due to several defects that crept into the system which caused wastage and stagnation in primary schools. Philip Hartog gave three reasons for waste in primary education—wastage, stagnation and the small proportion of literate mothers. Generally speaking, 'wastage' refers to the premature withdrawal of children from any of the classes before the completion of the last grade of a particular stage of education. And 'stagnation' refers to the retention of a pupil in the same class for more than one year leading to the disproportionate size of the classes.

Stagnation was caused by a variety of factors: lack of interest of pupils in studies, indifference of the parents to the proper education of their children, ineffective teaching, lack of proper environment for study at home, irregular attendance of pupils, excessive involvement of children in domestic work for reasons of indigent circumstances of the family and, last but not the least, lack of balance between the educational and economic needs of the community.
Wastage was caused by a number of factors, viz., existence of a large number of single-teacher schools, untrained teachers, prevalence of general illiteracy with the result that parents often withdrew their children to utilise their services in household affairs, the formal curriculum which paid little attention to the needs of life, frequent absence of pupils from schools, general economic backwardness, and improper distribution of schools from the point of view of their location; ineffective supervision and inspection also led to wastage.

The figures for certain years will serve to indicate the extent of wastage. The wastage in 1913-14 was 67 per cent, in 1914-15 it was 69 per cent while in 1915-16 it rose to 76 per cent. In 1914-15, 81,109 pupils were enrolled in Class A: out of them, 38,342 pupils only were promoted to Class B in 1915-16. This dropping out of pupils could be seen in the higher classes as well. Wastage was a phenomenon witnessed in practically all types of schools. By 1919-20, the number of pupils rose from 186,473 to 194,991; cases of dropping out were also there - 1,232 in Class II, 969 in Class III, and 1,209 in Class IV. A telling example of the heavy wastage could be had from the fact that out of 104,213 pupils enrolled for Class A in 1932-33, there remained 48,960 pupils only in Class B in 1933-34; 44,006 in Class I in 1934-35; 35,404 in Class II in 1935-36; and, 23,962 pupils in Class III in 1936-37. The wastage in the number of pupils over four academic sessions between Classes of the range of A-III is indicated in the following table.
The above table shows heavy wastage in the number of pupils between Classes A & B when they were not fully literate. That was the stage when they did not know how to read and write correctly. Naturally, they forgot what they learnt and relapsed into illiteracy. Such wastage not only reduced the number of literates but caused wastage in the literal sense of the word in the matter of efforts made and money spent on schools. Dropping out of pupils by thousands in every year was clearly an unhealthy sign and it told heavily on the general state of educational advance.

Defects of the system and concluding remarks

The defects in the existing system could be enumerated as follows.

First, the transfer of control of primary education to local bodies did not produce the desired expansion due to the fact that these bodies suffered from financial difficulties year after year. Allotment of a definite portion of the funds for primary education as recommended by the Education Commission of 1882 was not seriously taken up, neither was there any like response to the increase in the amount of provincial or imperial funds, thereby resulting in almost perennial financial difficulties of the local bodies.

Secondly, the local bodies did not discharge their
responsibilities properly. No attempt was made to raise additional revenues for education by the imposition of cess for fear of loss of popular support in the elections.

Thirdly, the approach to the problem of implementing schemes of primary education was undoubtedly defective. About 85 per cent of the people lived in villages and any system of education, to be effective, ought to have been attuned to their needs and requirements. But the formal type of education that was imparted was more in conformity with the needs of city-bred people. The agriculturist parents wanted their children to follow the traditional profession and, hence, they were afraid of sending their children to the schools lest they should turn out as 'babus'! Primary schools in many villages worked as 'a sort of creche where children of all ages are sent out of their mother's way while she is engaged in her household morning duties'.

Fourthly, the literary character of the curriculum did not suit the rural environment. The formal type of education appeared to turn a village lad's attention away from the occupation of working on the farm. It is well known how parents were more interested in supplementing the family 'labour force', as it were, with the aid of their children's labour. There was hardly any recognisable connection between the villagers' requirements and instruction at schools. In this connection, Mayhew deserves to be quoted at some length: 'what the villager requires of a school, if a school is to be forced on him, is sound instruction in the three R's for protection in bazar transactions and on railway journeys or pilgrimages, for the understanding of the mysterious demands of tax-collectors, for the outwitting of extortionate officials, and for the writing of petitions and reading of the replies thereto.' The villagers' apparent
antipathy towards formal instruction at schools could have been overcome, it is possible to think, by integrating the cultural background created by classics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata with the new learning. The Hartog Committee went a step further and stated that the aim of every village school should include not merely the attainment of literacy but the larger objective, viz., the raising of the standard of village life in all its aspects. The Committee hoped that a well attended school could train the young generation in the ways of hygiene, physical culture, improved sanitation, thrift and self-reliance. Schools could take the lead in providing medical relief, adult instruction, vernacular literature, and attractive recreation. But such aims remained a pious wish in rural areas where one teacher in most cases had to impart instruction to about 80 pupils of different grades. Practical activities like gardening, drill, manual work, physical education, etc., were introduced in some schools on an experimental basis, but no reforms were introduced in the curriculum to meet the requirements of the community even by 1937.

Fifthly, Most of the primary school buildings were in dilapidated conditions making them wholly unattractive to children. Almost every annual report mentioned the poor conditions of buildings and half-built pucca houses. In 1930-31, it was reported that in North Sylhet, 71 schools only had semi-permanent buildings out of 320 lower primary schools maintained by the Local Board; the remaining 249 schools had school 'houses' by apology only, because they were run in sheds. Deplorable indeed became the conditions when even these sheds were blown off in storms. Such a state of affairs led an outsider to remark that he would not even keep his horse in the type of building that was used
Sixthly, there was no even distribution in the matter of location of schools. The result was that beginning with late and irregular arrivals, withdrawals were frequent ultimately. About 55 per cent of the population lived in small villages with a population of under 500; it was not possible for them to establish schools mainly with their initiative. In certain cases, however, more than one elementary school came to be established in the same village due largely to rivalry among groups (Khels) while the neighbouring villages might have carried on without any school at all. Oftentimes, a horrible state of lack of communications barred children of distant villages from regularly attending schools, particularly in the rainy season. To cap it all, as the Hartog Committee reported, sometimes even boys living within the easy reach of the schools did not attend their classes regularly and left schools without completing the course of studies.

Seventhly, religious, communal and linguistic differences and, last but not the least, the caste system acted verily as a damper on the expansion of primary education. Children of reputedly higher castes were not allowed to sit with those of the castes regarded as the lower ones; then, for reasons of economy, different sections for different communities could not be opened in the same school. All this resulted in retarding the pace of educational advance.

Eighthly, the Hartog Committee reported that difficulties arose in the matter of establishment and improvement of schools due, among others, to the following reasons: meagre amounts contributed by local bodies for establishment of schools, the small size of the school units, involvement of a heavy sum of money in
the matter of adequate staffing of schools, and unattractive conditions of life and work for trained and experienced teachers; further, women teachers could not, as a rule, live in villages except under exceptionally favourable conditions. Teachers were isolated and relationship with the administration, and supervision and inspection of schools could be made with great difficulty. Above all, it was difficult to secure regular and prolonged attendance of children. These findings related to the villages in Assam. But conditions in towns also were not radically different, at least in the matter of financial provisions on an adequate basis.

Ninthly, there had been neglect for adult education. It goes without saying that in all developing countries, adult education was started along with primary education, the reason being that the banishment of illiteracy depended on education for the adults also. But in Assam as in other provinces of India, the cause of adult education was not taken up with due seriousness. Some attempt was made by holding night classes, lantern lectures, and classes for women. But this was only for a short period and not on a sustained basis. In the Surma Valley, the number of adult education schools rose from 69 to 83 schools; in the Assam Valley, the number rose from 5 to 6 only, and the figures relate to the year 1935. The Government sanctioned a grant of Rs 1,000 for adult education; this sum was not large. But when denominational education began taking shape and the need arose to promote Muslim education, the Government, instead of making new grants, diverted a portion of the small sum of Rs 1000 to the cause of Muslim education. Lack of systematic endeavour led to tardy growth of education, both general and denominational.

Tenthly, lack of trained teachers was a great handicap. The Hartog Committee reported that 44% only of the primary teachers in
India were trained. In 1937, the percentage of male trained teachers in Assam was 28.2 while the figure for female teachers of the trained category stood at 15.3 per cent. These trained teachers were absorbed in the schools located in the towns, leaving the village schools to fend for themselves with untrained teachers. The Hartog Committee rightly remarked that a teacher who was untrained and of meagre qualifications and who could obtain little or no assistance from the inspecting staff, could not be expected single-handed to teach in several classes with a large number of pupils very unequally distributed among the classes.

Lastly, there was an evident lack of understanding among the important agencies connected with the cause of educational expansion. The Department of Education laid down rules for the inspection of the schools by sub-inspectors three times a year. But the inspecting staff was hardly sufficient to go round the 148 schools. Further, the method of inspection itself was defective. The inspectors were more prone to finding faults with the teachers than demonstrating what they thought to be the correct methods of teaching. A gulf appeared to divide the inspectors and the teachers and, naturally enough, the visits of inspectors were not welcomed. The Local Boards, in their turn, developed a hostile attitude to the inspecting staff as the latter tried to establish their superiority; there was a lack of meaningful dialogue between the local bodies and the inspectors, and this resulted in ignoring many suggestions of improvement of the schools. The Local bodies appointed, more often than not, untrained or unqualified teachers. It was on record how many of the local boards refused to pay any heed to departmental advice on the subject of appointment of teachers. Some local bodies went to the extent of closing down some primary schools without consulting the Department. The local
boards drew their grants and sometimes did things which were not in conformity with rules. For instance, at times they did not pay teachers' salary for months together, and during that period, they utilised the government grants for other purposes. The Minister-in-charge of Education had no effective control over the situation: he could have stopped the grants, but that would have meant the closure of schools which he could not possibly have done! Anyway, what was lacking was a sense of partnership among the concerned agencies, and this certainly militated against the healthy growth of primary education. The Department of Education brought forward a proposal for the establishment of a 'Provincial Primary Education Board'. But this was opposed by many local bodies on the ground that it would be a retrograde step and an infringement of the principle of local self-government.

Throughout the period of our survey the progress of primary education was not of that extent as it ought to have attained. Resolutions, Acts, and programmes have been there, what was lacking was any sustained attempt to implement the accepted provisions. Elementary education had for its aim the spread of literacy, preparation of children for secondary education, and also to help secure jobs at the lower rung of administration for those who could not go further in the educational ladder. Literacy could not be spread widely for the simple reason that many areas were left outside the pale of educational institutions. The Government failed miserably in the matter of providing compulsory primary education. When the will was not there to educate the masses, even the passage of the Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1926 failed to bring about the desired changes in the field of primary education.

Finance proved to be a stumbling block on the path of advance. The central and provincial governments must receive their share of
blame for the sorry state of affairs caused by financial difficulties. Local Bodies were also to blame for their failure to raise whatever resources they could within their limitations; they are further to blame for diverting the meagre educational funds in many cases to other purposes. The State was not a welfare State for the period of our survey. No wonder then that education became a casualty. The Hartog Committee undoubtedly recommended the policy of consolidation as a way out of the impasse created by widespread illiteracy: but consolidation could come only after expansion had taken place on the basis of a definite policy. This expansion did not take place commensurate with the needs of the situation.