Chapter VII
PROGRESS OF COLLEGIATE EDUCATION

Assam did not have any College till the end of the nineteenth century. This was partly responsible for the importation of school masters and even subordinate officials from outside at a high salary. Therefore, in October 1864, the Inspector of Schools insisted that collegiate education be imparted inside Assam itself with a view to training the natives for offices of trust and responsibility. It was acknowledged that establishment of a separate college would involve heavy expenditure and so, he proposed that the Gauhati School be upgraded with facilities to provide instruction in the F.A. course of studies prescribed by the Calcutta University. Acting on this proposal, the Government of India, on the recommendation of the Government of Bengal, sanctioned a sum of Rs 1,200 per annum with the result that the collegiate section of the Gauhati School was started in May 1866.

But the results of the collegiate section proved very frustrating. Very few students came forward to study at that level and even those who came could not show much promise. During 1872-74, no student came out successful in the Entrance Examination. Further, the cost of imparting instruction at the collegiate section turned out to be prohibitive. Government's expenditure per capita on a pupil in the Presidency College, Calcutta, was calculated at Rs 210 based on average daily attendance; the corresponding figure for the collegiate section of the Gauhati School was worked out at Rs 1,086. Under such circumstances, the Government of Bengal abolished the collegiate section. After the constitution of Assam as a separate province, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, acting on the suggestion of the Inspector of Schools, approved of a scheme...
of awarding scholarships of Rs 20 per month to each student from Assam studying in Calcutta colleges. In 1887, it was decided to limit the number of scholarships to fourteen, the selection of the scholars being made in order of merit. Further, scholarships earmarked for the Degree course were made convertible for students offering Medical or Civil Engineering courses.

The few scholarships available for College-going students from Assam failed to meet the needs of the situation which called for greater facilities for collegiate education. A section of the Assamese educated community demanded the establishment of a college in Assam while another section felt that an increased number of scholarships for Assamese college students in Calcutta could meet the ends of justice in the existing circumstances. Gradually, however, public opinion crystallised in favour of establishing a college in Assam. Manick Chandra Barooah, a prominent man of Assam, submitted a memorial to the Chief Commissioner urging that steps be taken to fulfil the popular demand. Henry John Stedman Cotton, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, however, expressed himself in favour of a hostel in Calcutta for the Assamese college students. He circulated his views on the subject among officials and non-officials and invited their opinions thereon. The majority favoured the establishment of a college in Assam. Henry Cotton accepted the majority opinion and decided to establish a college in the province. He said: 'I resolved to be guided by public opinion, and I abandoned my scheme and decided to establish a local college'. Thus, Assam's first college came to be established; it was opened formally by Henry Cotton on 27 May 1901, thereby fulfilling a long-cherished desire of the people of Assam. This Cotton College, named after the Chief Commissioner, began its career as a second-grade college
preparing students for the F.A. examination of the Calcutta University.\textsuperscript{10}

The Cotton College came to be lodged in a temporary building and Frederick William Sudmersen was appointed its first Principal. He was sorely disappointed to have come to 'an abandoned corner of India' which could flaunt only 'a long range of mud huts declaring these to be the hostels of the college'.\textsuperscript{11} Sudmersen made untiring efforts to improve the College in all respects. His devoted service till 1926 constitutes a glorious chapter in the history of the Cotton College. It was during his tenure of office that the Cotton College grew into one of the best first-grade colleges under the Calcutta University.

The second college of the province came to be established at Sylhet in the Surma Valley due to the efforts of Raja Girish Chandra Roy. The Raja maintained the institution by and large. Naturally enough, it faced financial crisis after the Raja's death. A part of the crisis was sought to be relieved through Government grant. In 1912-13, the college was provincialised and it became a first-grade college in 1915-16. The college was granted affiliation by the Calcutta University up to the B.A. stage in the following subjects: English, Vernacular, Mathematics, History, Philosophy, Sanskrit, and Persian.\textsuperscript{12}

These two colleges imparted collegiate education up to 1930 when another college, the Jorhat College, came to be established by private enterprise and with the gift of a good site and large building by Muralidhar Borooah, a leading planter of Upper Assam. The Brindaban College at Habiganj was started in 1931; it was affiliated to the Calcutta University in 1932 up to the I.A. standard in English, Bengali, Mathematics,
History, Logic, Civics, Sanskrit and Persian. By 1935, several new colleges had come to be founded: the Guru Charan College at Silchar; the St. Edmund's College, the St. Anthony's College, and the Lady Keane College at Shillong. During the period of our survey, there were three Government colleges, these being the Government Sanskrit College at Sylhet, the Cotton College and the Murarichand College; the aided institutions were the St. Edmund's Arts College and the Lady Keane College for women; and, the four unaided institutions were the Intermediate Colleges at Jorhat, Silchar, Habiganj, and the St. Anthony's College, Shillong. Government colleges naturally attracted more students than the aided ones did. The number of students rose from 97 in 1904 to 2,258 in 1937.

Considered in the background of the conservatism of the age, it was very remarkable that in 1929 a girl student was admitted to the Cotton College for the first time. By 1932-33, the number of college-going girls rose to 14; it increased to 36 by 1935-36. Evidently, co-education was slowly but steadily making some headway.

Accommodation: The Indian Universities Act, 1904, while enlarging the functions of a University, laid down stricter conditions for the affiliation of colleges to a university and provided for the periodical inspection of all affiliated colleges by the Syndicate with a view to maintenance of a proper standard of efficiency. A college applying for affiliation to the University had to satisfy the University on the following points:

(a) That the college will be under the management of a regularly constituted governing body;

(b) Appointment of a qualified teaching staff;

(c) suitable college buildings with provision of hostel
accommodation for students, and for their supervision and physical welfare;

(d) provision for library, and a properly equipped laboratory or museum for purposes of imparting instruction in experimental science subjects;

(e) provision for quarters for some members of the teaching staff and the Head of the College in or near the college or the place provided for the residence of the students;

(f) sound financial position of the college as would ensure its continued maintenance;

(g) 'that the affiliation of the college, having regard to the provision made for students by other colleges in the same neighbourhood, will not be injurious to the interests of education or discipline'; and,

(h) 'that the college rules fixing the fees (if any) to be paid by the students have not been so framed as to involve such competition with any existing college in the same neighbourhood as would be injurious to the interests of education'.

Following the Act of 1904, imperial grants to the tune of Rs 5 lakhs in the form of recurring grants were released for the colleges and Universities in India during 1904-05. In the years that followed, more moneys were earmarked for higher education with the result that provincial governments were encouraged to spend more on the improvement of colleges. In Assam, the Government made available large sums of money for the construction of the buildings for the Murarichand College and the Cotton College. A sum of Rs 881,399 was spent for the Murarichand College and hostel buildings. Besides this, special grants were made for the purchase of laboratory apparatus, fittings, chemicals, furniture and other necessary materials. As for the
Cotton College, construction of buildings started after 1904, and by 1912, the college had added to it two additional blocks; one of the blocks consisted of ten rooms, with two glazed recesses for Physics and Chemistry with accommodation for laboratory work; the other block was used for purposes of the library, classes, and relaxation. A quarter was provided for the Principal and two hostels were constructed for the students. In 1912, J.R. Cunningham submitted a scheme to the Government for the construction of several blocks in the hostels and a hospital building; these were completed by 1914-15.

As the premier institution of its kind in the province, the Cotton College naturally received more attention from the Government in the matter of provision of facilities. Even then the progress of the college failed to keep pace with the requirements of an increasing number of students. The Principal had to work without a proper office. The Physics Department did not have sufficient equipments and accommodation with the result that a number of students had to be refused admission. Lack of accommodation led to a restriction in the number of enrolment for Honours subjects. To ease the situation within the limitations of the existing resources, a large godown was purchased at a cost of Rs 2,500 and this was improvised to serve the purpose of an examination hall. In 1926, the old Curzon Hall was converted into a Physics laboratory. In 1929, a new Arts building with two lecture halls, three large rooms and four seminar rooms was constructed at a cost of Rs 73,900. Thereafter, other plans of construction had to be kept in abeyance due to lack of funds. Further, Cunningham made the point that the needs of the sister colleges also should receive adequate consideration while considering the needs of the Cotton College. Anyway, no new
construction was undertaken after 1930. As for the other colleges, they continued to function from rented houses or houses donated by generous gentlemen; these colleges did not have adequate equipment and furniture.

Curriculum: Most of the colleges imparted instruction in Arts subjects for the simple reason that science teaching was very expensive and it depended on specialised equipments and laboratories. It was only in established colleges like the Cotton College that some science subjects - Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics - were taught to a limited number of students. Further, science teaching was confined to the under-graduate standard.

Subjects taught in the Colleges were English, Mathematics, Philosophy, History, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Vernacular. These covered courses up to the first Degree standard. Honour courses were introduced in the following subjects: English, Mathematics, Chemistry, History, Sanskrit, Political Economy and Political Philosophy. Each subject was assigned a Department, but no such provision was made for teaching Assamese under a separate Department. It was tagged to the Department of Sanskrit and the importance given to the matter could be realised from the fact that it was a part-time lecturer only who taught Assamese. It appears the rulers were not much interested in according its rightful status to the regional language. A whole-time teacher for Assamese came to be appointed in 1927 after protracted agitation. But up to the end of the period of dyarchy, no separate Department for Assamese language and literature came to be established.

Extra-curricular activities: Of all the colleges, it was the old colleges - the Cotton College and the Murarichand College - which could boast of students' extra-curricular activities. The Cotton
College held the line in this regard. The Principal of the College, Sudmersen, took great interest in promoting youth welfare activities in the College. The Cotton College Union Society of the students organised different branches of activities under the swimming club, social service centre, music section, gymnasium section, etc. Literary interest was cultivated through the annual publication of the COTTONIAN, a magazine published by the students' Union Society. Besides this, two organisations, the Assamese Students' Literary Club and the 'Asamiya Bhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha' (Society for the advancement of the Assamese language) were founded in the College. In course of time, some products of the College succeeded in life as renowned writers. Students from the Cotton College as well as the Fururichand College developed political interest in the wake of the rising nationalist movement despite prohibitions to the contrary imposed by the rulers.

Opening of M.A. Classes: The declaration on educational policy made in 1913 for the expansion of higher education and promotion of research led to the demand for opening of Master Degree (M.A.) classes in Assam. This demand gained increasing momentum and a popular magazine, ASOM BILASINI, pleaded for the opening of post-graduate classes in History and Economics.

The Government readily conceded the demand and agreed, to begin with, to open M.A. classes in English only as an experimental measure. Enrolment for the M.A. classes began in 1917-18, but the number of students undertaking post-graduate studies was woefully small. Not more than $\frac{2}{3}$ students were admitted and none took the examination for a long time, the general practice being that students attended the classes without bothering about the examination. However, there had been a solitary success in Class II in
1932. Such a situation led Goffin, Professor in the Department of English, to the conclusion that post-graduate classes in English at the Cotton College were not serving any useful purpose. The only student of the fifth year classes took transfer in 1932, it was the last straw on the camel's back, as it were, and the M.A. classes were abolished in 1932-33 as a measure of economy.

Results: While at the beginning of collegiate education student performance at examinations was not as it ought to have been, there had been in evidence better results as collegiate education began to acquire a firmer footing. In 1904-05, in the F.A. examination, 23 out of 46 candidates from the Cotton College came out successful while from the Murarichand College, 8 out of 20 candidates came out successful. In 1917-18, 47 candidates out of 60 or 78% of the candidates were successful in the Arts examination while all the 26 candidates taking the Intermediate Science examination came out successful.

The following table would serve to indicate student performance at different examinations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>province</th>
<th>I.A.</th>
<th>I.Sc.</th>
<th>B.A.</th>
<th>B.Sc.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table also shows that students from Assam gave a good account of themselves in the examinations compared with their counterparts from Bengal.
Expenditure: The expenditure on collegiate education was mainly borne by the Government, though fees collected from the students also formed a source of income. During 1901-04, a sum of Rs 11,494 was spent on the government-managed Cotton College; out of this sum, Rs 4,491 came from fees. The Murarichand College started its career as a private college; in 1901-02, its total expenditure was Rs 4,370 out of which Rs 869 came from fee income. After the provincialisation of the College in 1912, its total expenditure rose to Rs 142,938 in 1915-16; this included Rs 29,195 collected as fees from the students. By 1936-37, total expenditure on colleges amounted to Rs 434,418; while government funds contributed the major share of the expenditure, this being Rs 293,315, a sum of Rs 167,899 came from fees collection; the share of donations in the total expenditure was Rs 23,204.

In the figures quoted above for 1936-37, certain grants made by the Government are also included. Thus, the Government made a grant of Rs 5,000/- to the ST. Edmunds College for opening B.T. classes. Further, a grant of Rs 12,686/- was made for the Government Sanskrit College.

Expenditure on collegiate education was not commensurate with the needs of the situation. The private colleges had to fend for themselves. But compared to the needs of primary education even in those times, it appears that expenditure on education had a bias in favour of collegiate education. The official reports made by the D.P.I. seized upon this imbalance in government expenditure; one such report considered it unfair to the general tax-payer that two-thirds of the cost of education in government colleges should be borne by the government! College education meant higher education for those coming from the upper strata of society. The
financial need for general education was indeed very great, and when out of the funds made available for education, a sizeable sum was spent on collegiate education, there might be some excuse for the kind of criticism made in official reports. The average annual cost per scholar in Government Arts colleges was worked out at Rs 243 in 1936-37, while the per capita expenditure on a pupil in primary schools was Rs 4-8-5p. Thus, expenditures on collegiate education and primary education were poles apart and this gave edge to the argument of 'excessive' expenditure on higher education to the neglect education at other levels. Otherwise, the fact remained that enough funds were not made available by the rulers for the desirable expansion of education at different levels.

Conclusion

The centres of collegiate education in Assam up to 1930 were the Cotton College and the Murarichand College. Though new colleges came to be established, it was the Cotton College which continued to attract a good number of college-going students. Frederick William Sudmersen, the first Principal of the Cotton College, Guwahati, made invaluable contribution for raising the standard of the College as a centre of higher learning. Strict supervision over students with a view to make them academically inclined, regular system of tutorials and monthly examinations helped establish a standard which made the Cotton College the premier institution of its kind in the whole province. The College became worthy of emulation.

When other Colleges also came into being, problems of housing them in good buildings, adequate staff, hostel accommodation, provision of teaching aids and laboratory equipment, adequate space, furniture, etc., mounted with increasing frequency.
colleges came to be established to minister to the increasing needs of collegiate education. But these colleges could not prosper due to lack of official response to their needs. Naturally enough, such a state of affairs told on the general state of collegiate education in the province.

Absence of good aided colleges led to concentration of students in government colleges, chiefly the Cotton College. By 1936-37, the Cotton College appeared to be too big for its resources and accommodation. The Principal became far more concerned with attending to routine administrative matters with the result that he could not continue to make his presence felt in all spheres of college life as he used to be. This naturally affected discipline in the College. Further, teaching through the tutorial system was no longer as individual as it used to be. 33

Lack of adequate accommodation even in a government college like the Cotton College especially told on teaching of science subjects. It was more than lack of accommodation also. Sometimes certain experiments could not be done due to lack of gas and water supply. Many departments did not have their separate wings or buildings till 1935. And the Library decidedly needed expansion. 44

Absence of an adequate number of teachers was a common feature of practically all the colleges. In the Cotton College, tutors were appointed on a temporary basis; they were discharged usually before the vacation, to be re-appointed in the next term; sometimes rival candidates were accommodated on re-appointment. 35 Such practices might have done the good to the authorities in the matter of accommodating many conflicting interests of persons seeking employment; this might have saved some money for the
Government because of break in continuity of service and consequently lesser financial commitment, but it was misplaced economy. Insecurity in conditions of service could not encourage teachers to discharge their duties properly. In fact, the short-sighted practice of appointing teachers for brief periods only tended to lowering of the standard of education.

As Assam did not have a separate University, colleges in the province were affiliated to the Calcutta University. This University had a very wide jurisdiction and hence it could not be expected to give the time and attention needed to look after the needs of the growing colleges. Further, it could not inform itself of the particular needs, if any, of the colleges in Assam because there was no representative from Assam in the Syndicate of the Calcutta University. Therefore, the need arose for a separate University in Assam. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, education was made a provincial subject and this appeared to create a favourable situation for the establishment of a separate University. J.R. Cunningham was entrusted with the task of submitting a report on the establishment of a University in Assam. He submitted a favourable report based on facts of the situation. This was in 1936. But Assam came to have her University in changed circumstances years later in 1948.