

CHAPTER 4

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM: THE BEGINNING (1986-1996)

INTRODUCTION:

A historic development in higher education, after the recommendations and reviews of high level Committees like the Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) and Kothari Commission (1964-66) was the National Policy on Education of 1986. The Policy was aimed at framing a national pattern of education for India. It focused on modernizing higher education and thus, enabling the building of a positive environment for the growth of distance education.

IGNOU was established a year before the NPE of 1986. It had established itself as an Open University at the national level and with the aim of disseminating higher education to the doorsteps of the people, it started to establish study centres throughout the country. The IGNOU Act defines ¹“Study Centre” as a centre established, maintained or recognised by the University for the purpose of advising, counseling or for rendering any other assistance required by students. The study centre rather acts as the middle men between the main institution and the students.

In the North East part of the country, IGNOU established its study centre in Shillong. It is not surprising to note that Shillong was chosen as the destination for starting the non-traditional mode of learning. Shillong had for long been the most favoured destination in the colonial period. The British made it their summer holiday resort. In 1874, Shillong was made

1. IGNOU Profile of NERC Shillong (1989-90), New Delhi

the capital of Assam. When Meghalaya was created in 1972, Shillong was established as its capital².

In 1986, IGNOU first began its correspondence programme in the North East with an in-service personnel training programme at the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong under NEHU Centre for Distance Education. NEHU, being a Central University and the premier institute of excellence, was chosen for the purpose of spreading the ideology of Distance Education. However, within a period of two years, the Centre was shifted from NEHU to SankarDev College³. On 16 April 1988, the North East Regional Centre at Shillong became operative⁴.

The Regional Centre has been defined by the IGNOU Act⁵ as “a centre established or maintained by the University for the purpose of co-ordinating and supervising the work of Study Centres in any region and for performing such other functions as may be conferred on such centres by the Board of Management.”

From 1988 till 1996, the Regional Centre at Shillong held the jurisdiction of Distance Education matters for the entire North Eastern States. In 1996, most of the states established their own Regional Centres⁶. The Academic programmes under Shillong Centre for the year 1986-88 were⁷:

1. Diploma in Management- Module I
2. Diploma in management- Module II
3. Diploma in Distance Education

2. Bhatt, S.C. & Gopal K. Bharagava (2006). Land and People: Of Indian States and Union Territories, Kalpaz, Delhi, p. 30

3. IGNOU Profile of NERC Shillong (1989-90), New Delhi

4. IGNOU Shillong RC Handbook (2011), Shillong

5. IGNOU Profile, op. cit.

6. Ibid

7. Ibid.

4. Diploma in Creative Writing in English
5. Certificate Course in Food & Nutrition
6. Certificate Course in Rural Development
7. Bachelors Degree Programme (10+2)
8. Bachelors Degree Programme (Non 10+2)

DISTANCE EDUCATION IN ASSAM:

The earliest initiative was taken up by IGNOU in 1987, when Guwahati University was chosen as the study center of IGNOU for the benefit of the students of the state. The Department of Sanskrit got the honour of offering the correspondence course then, under Ashok K. Goswami as the Coordinator and in his duties he was assisted by Sabhapandit⁸.

This continued, till in 1996, Guwahati came up with its first Regional Centre having to cover besides Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim⁹. There were two regional Centres now, Shillong and Guwahati. By 2001, every state in the North East had its own Regional Centre. During this period, Shillong remained the Regional Centre for IGNOU. Hence, though the Gauhati University worked as a branch of IGNOU, it was still regulated from Shillong.

The enrolment during the year 1987 for the Guwahati centre was a total of 77 students in the diverse course, that IGNOU offered¹⁰. Thus, Distance Education had made a beginning. The start, however, was very shaky which was but natural as there was lot of skepticism surrounding the concept of "Distance Education".

By 1989, the enrolment number had crossed the 400 mark for the Guwahati centre alone. The leap in the enrolment in the very next year

8. IGNOU Profile (1989-90), op. cit.

9. Ibid

10. Ibid

was encouraging. The table below describes the enrolment trend of IGNOU learners in the North Eastern States for the year 1988-89.

Fig. 17: Total enrolment number of students under IGNOU in NE Region (1988-89)

Centres	Enrolment number
Guwahati	480
Itanagar	103
Shillong	177
Imphal	58
Aizawl	58
Kohima	45
Agartala	21
Total	942

Source¹¹: Office Records, IGNOU Shillong

Within a couple of years of its existence, distance education under IGNOU seemed to have made much headway with the enrolment number rising to 942 and interestingly, the Guwahati study centre had the highest number of distance learners. IGNOU offered a number of programmes through its study centres. The programmes offered at Guwahati Centre of IGNOU were – Bachelor's Degree, Certificate and Diploma. The programmes provided are given below in the table¹²:

Fig. 18: Programmes offered under IGNOU in Guwahati study centre in 1988-89

Bachelors	Diploma/ Advance Diploma	Certificate
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11. IGNOU Profile. Op. cit.

12. Ibid

BA	Diploma and Advance Diploma in Management	Food and Nutrition
B.Com	Diploma in Distance Education	
BLIS	Diploma in Creative Writing in English	

Source: Office Records, IGNOU Shillong

The programmes introduced were mostly a mix of traditional and professional courses. This approach of the National Open University has been encouraging and also the main reason behind the growing enrolment. While it remained to be seen if the growth of distance education could be sustained for a long time to come, the enrolments under the programmes as given in the table below hints at the encouraging start made by IGNOU¹³:

Fig. 19: Programme wise enrolment under IGNOU in 1988-89

Contrs.	BDP (10+2)	BDP (Non 10+2)	CRWE	DE	DIM	ADIM	Total
Guwahati	152	138	6	27	146	11	480
Itanagar	45	58	-	-	-	-	103
Shillong	52	71	5	5	38	6	177
Imphal	28	11	4	-	14	1	58
Aizawl	7	47	-	-	4	-	58
Kohima	10	28	-	-	7	-	45
Agartala	-	8	-	-	13	-	21
Total	294	361	15	32	222	18	942

Source: IGNOU Profile, Shillong (1989-90)

BDP: Bachelors Degree Programme

DIM: Diploma in Management

CRWE: Diploma in Creative Writing in English

ADIM: Advance Diploma in Management

DE: Diploma in Distance Education

Op. cit.

As per the data given in the table above, it becomes obvious that the demand for the conventional as well as career related programmes was high. The enrolment under the Bachelor Degree Programme was the highest of all the programmes at 152 while the next highest enrolment in the Guwahati study centre was the Diploma in Management at 146.

The other distinctive feature that is revealed from the table is the fact that the Guwahati study centre has enrolment in all the programmes offered under IGNOU and the highest too, followed by the Shillong study centre. This clearly implies that the demand for education and the willing acceptance of distance education in fulfilling the dreams of the people of Assam. Though the total number of learners was not high, yet their increasing numbers was a positive sign

The rest of the programmes like Diploma in Creative writing, Distance Education and Advance Diploma in Management received few learners.

During that same year, another programme was introduced by IGNOU specifically for the state of Assam. The certificate programme of six months was on Food and Nutrition. The Food and Nutrition Course seemed to be in popular demand as it alone had an enrolment of 129.

The high demand for the Certificate course in Food and Nutrition resulted in the establishment of three sub-centres for the course in Assam. The table below provides the study centres for the CPFN programme¹⁴:

Fig. 20: Sub-study centres for CPFN Programmes under IGNOU in Assam

Sl. No.	Sub- Centre	Est. Yr.	Host Institution	Coordinator/ Asst. Coordinator
1	Dibrugarh	1988	Anganwadi Training Centre, Naliapool Bazar	Ms. Abha Bora
2	Guwahati	1988	Handique Girl's College, Guwahati	Ms. Senehi Begum
3	Guwahati	1988	National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development, Regional Centre Beltola, Guwahati	Shri. S. A. Khan

Source: IGNOU Profile, Shillong (1989-90)

14. IGNOU Profile, Shillong (1989-90), Op. cit.

The above table elaborates the rush for the CFN course and it is not so hard to make out that the rush was due to the eligibility criteria. No formal qualification was required for admission to CFN course. Hence, any person above the age of 18 could enlist themselves in the course. As a post literacy level programme aimed at arousing the awareness of the people towards health and hygiene, the programme found many takers. The economic benefit of the course for the learners during the time is however is not known.

IGNOU had launched various courses at the national level, during this period, as mentioned earlier. The courses are mentioned below in the table:

Fig. 21: Programmes introduced by IGNOU at all India level

Programme	Programme Code	Year of its launch	Duration (Minimum)
Master of Business Administration	MBA	1987	3 y
Bachelor's Preparatory Programme	BPP	1988	6 m
Bachelor of Arts	BA	1988	3 y
Bachelor of Commerce	B.Com	1988	3 y
Bachelor in Library and Information Science	BLISc	1990	1 y
Bachelor of Science	BSc	1992	3 y
Bachelor of Science in Nursing	BScN	1994	3 y
Bachelor in Tourism Studies	BTS	1995	3 y
Bachelor in Computer Applications	BCA	1996	3 y
Diploma/Post-graduate Diploma in Distance Education	DDE/PGDDE	1987/1993	1 y
Diploma in Management/ Post-Graduate Diploma in management	DIM/PGDIM	1987/1988	1 y
Diploma in Creative Writing in English	DCE	1988	1 y
Post-graduate Diploma in Financial Management	PGDFM	1990	1 y
Post-graduate Diploma in Human	PGDHRM	1990	1 y

Resource management			
Post-graduate Diploma in Marketing Management	PGDMM	1990	1 y
Post-graduate Diploma in Higher Education	PGDHE	1992	1 y
Diploma/Post-graduate Diploma in Rural Development	DRD/PGDRD	1992	1 y
Diploma in Creative Writing in Hindi	DCH	1993	1 y
Post-graduate Diploma in Operations Management	PGDOM	1993	1 y
Diploma in Nutrition and Health Education	DNHE	1994	1 y
Post-graduate Diploma in Computer Applications	PGDCA	1994	1 y
Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education	DECE	1995	1 y
Certificate in Rural Development	CRD	1988	6 m
Certificate in Food and Nutrition	CFN	1989	6 m
Certificate in Guidance	CIG	1993	6 m
Certificate in Tourism Studies	CTS	1994	6 m

Source¹⁵: Reddy (2002)

Of the programmes mentioned above in the table, the IGNOU Regional Centre under Shillong provided nearly all of it. According to the IGNOU Profile Report of NERC (North Eastern Regional Centre), the programmes offered under IGNOU Shillong Regional Centre in all the North East States are given in the table below:

15. Reddy, Dr. M.V. Lakshmi (2002). *Development of Formulae for Studying the Students' Pass Rates of Programmes of Open Universities*, Paper presented in the PCF Conference 2, in Durban, South Africa. Accessed from www.col.org/pcf2/papers/reddy_1.pdf on 11-02-13

Fig. 22: Courses available at the study centres in the North East

Centre	Code	BDP (No 10+2)	BDP (10+ 2)	DI M	ADI M	CRW E	CR D	CPF N	BL S	D E
Itanagar	0301	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Guwahati	0401	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Imphal	1701	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N
Shillong	1801	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Aizawl	1901	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Kohima	2001	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Agartala	2601	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
Tura	1802	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Dergaon	0402	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

BDP- Bachelor's Degree Programme

DIM- Diploma in Management

ADIM- Advance Diploma in Management

CRWE- Diploma in Creative Writing in English

CPFN- Certificate programme in Food & Nutrition

CRD- Certificate in Rural Development

BLS- Bachelor's Degree in Library & Information Science

DE- Diploma in Distance Education

While most of the programmes were not available, it is impressive to note that the Guwahati study centre had all the programmes. It definitely projects that distance education had been able to attract learners in Assam and also at the same time, it emerged that the people of Assam were aware of the power of knowledge. Assam had for long been the destination for higher education with the establishment of Gauhati University in 1948.

IGNOU started with 7 study centres under Shillong Regional Centre. Guwahati had 1 study centre but with introduction of Certificate Programme of Food and Nutrition, three more sub-study centres were opened in Guwahati. In 1989, two other centres were established in – Tura (Meghalaya) and Dergaon (Assam).

With the establishment of these centres at Dergaon and Tura, IGNOU attempted to reach out to the interior areas of North East. A proposal for the establishment of study centres at every district headquarters was under review during 1989-90.

The area highlighted in the table helps to look into the scenario of correspondence learning in Assam. Assam had the highest enrolment under IGNOU within two years of its functioning. The enrolment course wise analysis reveals that management programmes had attracted students as did the bachelors programme. In CPFN, enrolment under Guwahati centre was 102 while for Dibrugarh it was 27.

As for the number of counsellors for the year 1988-89, Shillong had the highest number of counsellors at 25 while Guwahati had 21. However, the enrolment in CRD (Certificate in Rural Development) and BLIS (Bachelor's Degree in Library & Information Science) was negative for the year.

According to the Annual Report of IGNOU 1992-93, the enrolment under the different Regional Centres were scattered as given in the table below:

Fig. 23: Enrolment in IGNOU in different Regional Centres in 1992-93

Sl. No.	Region	Enrolment number	SL. No.	Region	Enrolment number
1	Ahmedabad	7567	9	Jaipur	3146
2	Bangalore	4150	10	Lucknow	4650
3	Bhopal	3638	11	Madras	4633
4	Bhuvaneshwar	5421	12	Shillong	3142
5	Kolkata	4684	13	Shimla	2202
6	Kochin	4292	14	Pune	3602
7	Delhi	11733	15	Karnal	3498
8	Hyderabad	3951	16	Patna	5357

Source: IGNOU, Annual Report 1992-93¹⁶

It is remarkable to note here is the fact that, while the enrolment under Shillong Regional Centre for the year 1988-89 was a mere 1071, it jumped to 3142 by 1993. The increase can be attributed to the growing interest of the masses in higher education and specially distance education. The growth of distance education under IGNOU in India during the period

16. IGNOU annual Report 1992-93, New Delhi

(1986-95) shows a growing enrolment trend. The table below gives a picture of it:

Fig. 24: Enrolment growth under IGNOU 1986 -1995 (all India)

Year	Enrolment number
1986-87	4381
1987-88	16811
1988-89	42324
1989-90	48281
1990-91	52376
1991-92	62375
1992-93	75666
1993-94	84200
1994-95	91398

Source¹⁷: Naidu (2005)

During this period, the programme offered by IGNOU also increased steadily. Starting off with 2 programmes, IGNOU was offering 31 programme in 1994-95. The number of Regional Centres too increased from 4 in 1986 to 16 in 1995¹⁸.

Specific information in regard to the distance education scenario in Assam is lacking due to the non-availability of data, which were mostly lost during the shifting of Regional Centre from Shillong to Guwahati.

Meanwhile, as IGNOU had started to give DE a strong base, there were other Institutions which had begun to establish its study centres in

17. Naidu, C. G. (2005). Funding and Costs in Open and Distance Education: A Case Study of India. In A. Hope & P. Guiton (Eds.) Strategies for Sustainable Open and Distance Learning. Commonwealth of Learning & RoutledgeFalmer. Retrieved from: http://www.col.org/colweb/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/docs/Ch8_C S-Naidu.pdf on 21/2/13

18. Ibid

Guwahati. They were the pioneers in the establishment of DE in Assam after IGNOU.

MADURAI KAMARAJ UNIVERSITY:

One such educational institution was the Madurai Kamaraj University. Established in 1966, Madurai Kamaraj University was originally known as Madurai University, named after the city of Madurai. In 1978, Madurai University came to be known as the Madurai Kamaraj University¹⁹.

It was in 1971 that the Institute of Correspondence Course and Continuing Education was started under Madurai Kamaraj University. It was renamed in 1996 as the Directorate of Distance Education. The objectives of DDE (MKU) were²⁰:

- To make higher education reach the unreached
- To provide life time continuing education
- To provide career development facility to the working people including teachers and officials
- To provide educational opportunity to those who have no basic educational qualification
- To provide education to the mass at a comparatively lower cost
- To open the doors of education to the drop-outs and the ones who are denied admission in formal educational system.
- To spread the beam of wisdom right from jawans to jail prisoners

MKU is the oldest Distance Education Institution in Assam apart from IGNOU. In Assam, it started functioning from 23rd September, 1994²¹. It has been continuing with its service till today. The University has been offering a number of courses from the beginning. MKU started its study center in Assam from Guwahati and the study center was established at

19. MKU Prospectus, Madurai

20. Ibid

21. Mr. J. N. Das (present Director of the Guwahati Study Centre)

the National College of Correspondence Education, MC Road, Opposite St. Mary's School, Guwahati Club.

The University has only one study centre in Assam and it is based today in Guwahati, housed at a leased place. The present Director is Mr. J.N.Das and he is being assisted by Mrs. Vijaylakshmi in the smooth functioning of the centre.

Fig. 25: Programme offered under MKU during 1994-95

Bachelor Degree	Master Degree	Certificate/Dip./PG Dip.
BBA	M. Ed	PGDCA
Political science	MBA	PGD in Marketing Management
Social science	JMC	
B.Sc.	Political Science	
B. Ed	Maths	
JMC	English	
Marketing Management	Gandhian Thought	
BLIS	Public administration	
History	History	
Maths (B. Sc.)	Social Science	
	Economics	
	BLIS	
	Philosophy and Religion	
	Commerce	

Source: MKU prospectus

The programmes under MKU soon attracted a lot of students and it was due to the fact that the choices for the courses were well planned. The programmes were mostly – Bachelor Degree and Master Degree. The subjects were both Arts and Commerce. The most noticeable fact was that science subjects too were offered by MKU to its learners. It was soon discontinued as per the announcements of UGC to further discontinue

such courses to be offered through distance. At the same time, there was a lot of debate centering round the subject of offering practical subjects like science through distance mode.

During the period from 1994-1996, the most preferred courses were- M. Ed/ B. Ed (Master's/Bachelor's in Education) followed by BBA (Bachelor in Business Administration) and then by MBA (Master's in Business Administration). These courses have been the most pursued ones due to their economic viability.

The characteristics of the learners under MKU (socio-economic status) are not known, due to the unorganized record storing system. However, one important fact that has emerged is that since MKU had only one study centre, the learners come from regions far and wide, within the state and even beyond. The institutional records have not been archived and the study had to be conducted on the basis of whatever documents that could be retrieved from the office of the University.

The beginning of Distance Education was thus ensured with the establishment of two study centres in Guwahati each under IGNOU and MKU respectively. But the progress of distance education in Assam or North East hardly made a distinctive mark in the national arena. The table below describes the status of Distance Education in India region wise.

Fig. 26: Region wise distribution of Distance Education enrolment from 1975-1989

Region	1975-76	1982-83	1988-89
East	2.5%	1.2%	1.7%
Central and West	2.2%	7.4%	4.6%
North	58.2%	21.4%	27.2%
South	37.1%	70%	66.5%

Source²²: Panchamukhi & Debi (2008)

In the table above, the authors have tried to represent the enrolment under Distance Education across the regions of India since 1975 to 1989. In this table, the eastern states present a sorry picture. The eastern region consists of states like Assam and other North East states, Bihar, West-Bengal, Orissa and others. The contribution of Assam towards DE barely counted as the roots of DE had yet to gather strength.

SUMMARY:

In the first phase of growth, Distance Education made its presence through the study centre of Indira Gandhi National Open University at Shillong and Guwahati while Madurai Kamaraj University began offering Distance Education since 1994.

An important feature of DE during this period was the increase in enrolment under IGNOU. The growth in enrolment was marked by the increase in the demand for the Certificate course on Food and Nutrition. In case of Madurai Kamaraj University (MKU), the enrolment trend reveals the demand for practical courses like the B.Ed./M.Ed. programmes.

With a majority of the population living in the rural areas (91% in 1971)²³ and the population of Assam growing at an increasing level since 1961²⁴, it only made distance education more viable amongst the mass for pursuing higher education. While Distance Education was still at its nascent stage during the period (1986-96), it was soon to witness new developments in coming times.²⁵

22. Panchamukhi, P.R. & Debi, Sailabala (Eds.), (2008). Educational Data Bank for Higher Education, Serials Publication, New Delhi, pg. 500

23. Economic Survey Assam 1982-83, Director of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, p. 4

24. Ibid, p. 35