

PREFACE

Distance Education, which emerged as an alternative system of education, has today become the most dependable and convenient form of education for that section of the population who have been, by far, deprived of the luxury or privilege of getting higher education. While the enrolment in higher education is increasing, yet it is apparent that the enrolment in the tertiary level is lower compared to the primary and secondary level of education. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) at elementary level is 102 per cent, at secondary level 63 per cent, 36 per cent at higher secondary level, and 15 per cent in higher education (MHRD 2011). The low access in higher education is a problem that has persisted for a long time.

With the plan of making education inclusive in its approach, Distance Education was formally introduced institutionally in India in 1962 and since then there has been no looking back. A phenomenal growth has been witnessed in Distance Education since its inception. Notwithstanding the fact that the phenomena have become more visible and reliable for the large mass of people, complete with the need in the modern world of globalisation.

The present study focuses on the emergence and the subsequent growth of this phenomenon in Assam and gives a historical account from the time of the emergence of Distance Education till 2011. The aim of the present work was to understand the growth of distance education over the years and the trend that followed within the system. The work is based on both the primary sources and the secondary sources. It has been organised into eight chapters.

The first chapter "Introduction" consists of the background of the study along with the objectives of the study, literature reviews and methodologies.

The second chapter provides a historical background of the higher education scenario in India in general and that of North East (specifically Assam) in particular from a historical perspective. The chapter highlights the higher educational system in ancient, medieval, pre-colonial and post-colonial periods.

The third chapter provides another historical overview of the growth and progress of Distance Education in India in general and the North East (Assam specifically) in particular.

The next three chapters have been periodised into three parts. Chapter four recounts the progress of Distance Education in Assam from 1986-1996. As mentioned earlier the dates have been chosen due to its significance. In this period the entire emphasis has been on the emergence of Distance Education since the establishment of the first study centre by IGNOU in 1986 to the establishment of the first Regional Centre permanently particularly for Assam.

The fifth chapter tries to understand the growth of Distance Education in Assam from 1996-2006. From the coming up of a permanent base under IGNOU to the establishment of the first State Open University, the present decade makes for an interesting study.

The sixth chapter from 2006-2011, marks a radical turn of events. Most importantly, the chapter brings into light the transitional phase from Distance Education model to the Open and Distance learning model.

The seventh chapter is an attempt at analysing and interpreting the findings of the research work. The last chapter is a summary of the findings along with the suggestions and scope for further study.