

CHAPTER 2

HIGHER EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1. INTRODUCTION:

While understanding the concept of Distance Education in the national and regional context, the very fact that it grew out of the traditional education system cannot be denied. Hence, a peep into the history of higher education in India and Assam becomes necessary.

Considered as one of the largest educational systems in the world, the Indian Higher Education system has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. With increasing number of colleges and Universities, higher education has massively expanded both qualitatively and quantitatively. Higher Education in Modern India implies education beyond the 10+2 level. The higher education institutions comprise of the colleges and universities that provide Under-Graduate, Post-Graduate, Diploma/Certificate, and Doctoral course, post-doctoral courses. In India, the institutes are basically categorized under the following categories in India¹:

1. Central Universities, established by Parliamentary Acts
2. State Universities, established by the State Legislature
3. Deemed Universities, recognized as a University to award their degrees, authorized by the notification of Central Government
4. Institute of National importance, prestigious institutes awarded the particular status by the Parliament
5. Institutes established by the State Legislative Act and colleges affiliated to the Universities (both Government- aided and - unaided)

1. Country Summary of Higher Education (n.d.), Available Online. Accessed from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1121703274255/1439264-1193249163062/India_CountrySummary.pdf on 22/05/2012

Higher Education is meant to nurture the mind for attaining the highest goals in life. It aims at fulfilling the socio-economic needs of an individual. By opening the floodgates of opportunity to an individual, it prepares the individual for the future by offering him skills and knowledge that can enable him to make a living and earn a respectable position in the society. It is a tool of empowerment that provides on with considerable economic and social mobility.

2.2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIA:

“Education is no exotic implant in India”

F.W. Thomas in
The History and Prospects of British Education in India (1891)

Learning was never unknown to the people of India since the earliest time. It was originally imparted verbally through hymns and chants. For long, India has been the home of learned pundits. It has embraced intellectuals and by all means promoted the highest forms of learning. But it was limited only to the upper castes. Learning remained concentrated amongst the three classes- Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishyas as the hierarchical order of the society placed the Brahmins at the top and the shudras the lowest level of the society².

India had been considered as the seat of learning. Many foreign travellers have come to India in pursuance of higher learning and others have written in detail with regard to the love of knowledge amongst the people of India. Between the 1st and 8th century A.D. Universities of repute existed in ancient India. Nalanda, Takshashila, Vallabhi, Vikramshila, Kanchipuram were some centres of higher learning.

2. Hameed, Syeda S. (1995). *Other Schools when Modern was Born in A Dream Turns Seventy Five* by Khuswant Singh & Syeda S. Hameed, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, p. 20

F.W. Thomas in his “The History and Prospect of British Education in India” in 1891³ wrote, “There is no country where the love of learning had so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and so powerful an influence. From the simple poets of the Vedic age to the Bengali philosopher of the present day, there has been an uninterrupted succession of teachers and scholars”.⁴

2.3. EDUCATION IN ANCIENT INDIA:

The education system in ancient India had a dual trend. There were two systems that were prevalent- (i) the Vedic system and (ii) the Buddhist, Jaina system of education. The ancient education system heavily depended on religious and philosophical teachings of the mystic world.

VEDIC EDUCATION:

Learning during the Vedic age was confined amongst the privileged class of the society and Sanskrit was the medium of instruction. In ancient India, the most traditional form of learning began at home. Higher education was mostly religious in nature and it involved the study of *shastras*, *smritis*, etc. Traditional education implied that the student should acquire knowledge while residing with his teacher and helping the teacher in his day to day work thereby making it a private affair⁵. This restricted education to the upper section of the society. The aim of education in ancient India was *savidyayavimuktye* which meant knowledge for the emancipation of soul. This form of education was meant to prepare the student for the role as a member of his caste⁶.

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3. Ghosh, Suresh Ch. (2009). *The History of Education in Modern India: 1757-2007*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, p. 6
 4. Ghosh, Suresh Ch. (2009). Op. cit., p.6
 5. Hameed, Syeda S. (1995). *Other Schools when Modern was Born in A Dream Turns Seventy Five* by Khuswant Singh & Syeda S. Hameed, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, p. 21
 6. Ibid.

Brahmasanghas were institutions of higher learning for those who were keen to pursue higher form of knowledge. Prior to that for a period of 12 years, the students led a celibate life of *brahmacharya* in the *ashrama* of his guru. Highest form of learning was acquired through *parishadas*, which was an academy of learned scholars. Large assemblies were held in which learned pundits and scholars of repute would share their thoughts and thus knowledge was disseminated.

But in contrast to such learning institutions and assemblies, that was restricted for the propertied class, the villagers and laymen in the rural settings had to depend on the *pathsalas* for their children. In these *pathsalas*, children were taught the very basics of education.

Professional education was provided in ancient period by the “srenis’ or “guilds”⁷, which were actually organizations of professionals, artisans, merchants who joined hands for mutual benefit.

The other institution that offered Brahmanical education were *ghatikas*, institutions attached to temples. Temples also served as an institution of learning. *Matha*’s in the 8th century patronized by the Hindus were also a centre of learning in Ancient India⁸.

BUDDHIST/JAINA EDUCATION SYSTEM:

Buddhist form of education brought the trend of monastic education and it prepared the learner not only for education but also for priesthood. In later years, Vedic rituals became complex and education became restricted to the upper class⁹. However, during the Buddhist and Jaina period, education was thrown open for the laity as well¹⁰.

Learning was conducted in monasteries or caves¹¹. This is the earliest reference to the organized form of education, derived from the Jaina and the Buddhist sources. The monks or celibates of both the religion

7. Thapar, Romila (2002). *The Penguin History of Early India: From the origins to AD 1300*, Penguin New Delhi, p. 306

8. Ibid., p. 344

9. Kochar, S.K. (2005). *Pivotal Issues in Indian Education*, Sterling: New Delhi, p. 2

10. Ibid

11. Thapar, Romila (2002). Op.cit. p. 257

---- Altekar, A.S. (1934). *Education in Ancient India*, Isha Books, Delhi, p. 245

propounded education as a means of keeping together in-faith¹². It has been suggested by some scholars¹³ that Buddhist education offered professional training (e.g. carpentry, painter, sculptor, and so on)".

2.4. EDUCATION IN MEDIEVAL INDIA:

The Medieval period is characterized by the coming of the Muslims and the beginning of Islamic era in India. The politics and culture had a profound influence on every aspect of the society. Education was no different.

The institutions of learning during this period were attached to mosques and shrines often supported by state grants. Maktabas and Madrasas were the centre of learning too. Maktabas were meant for the primary level of education and the Madrasas were the place for acquiring higher learning.

The word "Madrasa" has two meanings in Arabic. It means in common terms "school" where instructions are imparted in subjects that deal with Islam and religious subjects, besides following Koran¹⁴. Historically Madrasa is an institution for religious elites. As a key element of the social fabric, they also played a major role in shaping the moral and spiritual development of the students in these societies¹⁵.

Memorizing of Koran, learning of Arabic script, Persian language and were taught in such institutions¹⁶. Grammar, rhetoric, logic, theology, etc also formed a part of the subjects that was taught to the learners.

Education during this period laid stress on subjects that were practical in nature. The core element of Islamic education was its conventional spirit with religious content.

12. Scharfe, Harmut. (2002). *Education in Ancient India*, Die Deutsche Bibliothek, Boston, pg. 131-132

13. Abdeljalil, Akkari (2008). *Socialization, Learning, and Basic Education in Islamic Contexts* in Pierre R. Dasen and Abdel Jalil Akkari (eds.) *Educational Theories and Practices from the Majority World*, Sage: New Delhi, p.227

14. Ibid., p. 228

15. Jayapalan, N. (2000). *History of Education in India*, Atlanta: New Delhi, p. 40-41

16. Abdeljalil, Akkari (2008). Op. cit.

2.5. EDUCATION UNDER COLONIAL RULE:

Howell aptly sums up the state of higher education in India during the British period, “Education in India under the British Government was first ignored, then violently and successfully opposed, then conducted on a system now universally admitted to be erroneous and finally placed on its present footing”¹⁷.

However, it is widely recognized that higher education in the modern sense, all began with the colonization of India. However, introduction of higher education in India by the British had its own self-professed agenda.

The views of the British administrators and policy makers in offering higher education to the natives reveal the ulterior objectives. Education, according to Macaulay, could shape India’s image¹⁸. The Europeans considered India, as a savage nation, uncultured which needed to be civilized.

It was the “white man’s burden” to make a man out of the natives. The rich cultural heritage failed to impress them, who were so deeply drowned in the glory of their culture and civilization. Education was used as a tool by the colonial rulers to uplift the natives from their lowly status (cultural inferiority) and cement the knowledge of western superiority¹⁹.

The British never took any serious interest in the education of the native Indians till 1794. Prior to that reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised his voice for the introduction of western education for only western education could bring prosperity for the people.

In 1794, with the initiative taken by William Wilberforce and some compassionate people living in England tried to add clauses in the Charter Act of that same year, wherein they tried to send school teachers to India.

17. Metcalfe, Thomas R. (1998). *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge: New Delhi, p. 39

18. Jones, Rachel B. (2011). *Postcolonial Representations of Women: Critical Issues for Education*, Springer: London, p. 67

19. Ghosh, Suresh Ch. (2009). Op. cit. p 10

They had the aim of bringing the benefits of education to the ‘natives’ of India. But the proposal was outright rejected.

The earliest initiative of the Company towards education was to persist with the age old traditional or rather the oriental education that still existed. In 1813, when the Charter of the Company was renewed, an additional clause in favour of education was inserted. By this clause an amount of Rupees of One Lakh was to be set aside for educational purpose. The purpose was more specifically, to maintain oriental colleges, pay scholarships to students and publish excellent works of oriental literature.

This approach of the colonial rulers towards Indian education created a flutter. But, in the wake of the beginning made in the direction of higher education, many institutions came up.

The institutions that came up during this time were: (i) the Calcutta Madrasa for Mohammadans founded by Warren Hastings in 1781, the main objective was to “qualify the sons of the Muhammadan gentlemen for responsible and lucrative offices in the state even at that time largely monopolized by the Hindus²⁰.” (ii) a Sanskrit College established in Benares for the Hindus by Jonathen Duncan, (iii) a Sanskrit college established in 1821 in Bombay by Mount Stuart Elphinston, the Governor of Bombay, to win over the Brahmins adversely affected by the change of Government²¹. Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy too had a great contribution in the introduction of English education in India. He established the Hindu College. The focus of the early colonial rulers was to give indigenous education to the natives. Hence, religious education was continued. English education till then was not introduced as they did not want to jeopardize their stake in the soil of India.

The educational policy of the Company under the General Committee of Public Instruction between 1823 -1826 was confusing and messed up²². It

20. Ibid., p 53

21. Ibid., p 23

22. Ibid., p 47

was Auckland who first set up a real policy of education for India. According to his scheme education would comprise of schools (to be set up in every district) linked with central colleges (at every important station)²³. In order to execute his plan Beadon in 1845 drew a plan for establishing five central colleges at Krishnagar, Moorshidabad, Chittagong, Bhagaulpur and Cuttack and accordingly the schools should be established in subordinate ties with these colleges²⁴.

The Missionaries were instrumental in opening new floodgates of English education to the “natives”. Initially the Company restricted the pursuit of the missionaries as they propagated Christianity amongst the natives. However, with renewal of the charter in 1813 and 1833, the missionaries were allowed to pursue their endeavors²⁵. The spread of literacy can be credited to the missionaries who found it as a means to enrich the lives of the natives.

The contribution of the missionaries cannot be denied despite the fact that their proselytizing work created trouble amongst the natives. Translating the bible and other Christian tracts in Indian languages was some of the work not appreciated by the natives²⁶. But on the other hand, they opened the gates of western knowledge to the people. In Bengal in 1818 the Baptist Missionary

Society founded the Serampore College to train Indians, both Christians and non-Christians, in the arts and sciences of the West, and obtained a Danish Charter in 1827 for conferring degrees. The Church Missionary founded the Bishop College in 1820 at Shibpur (Howrah) in honour of Bishop Middletom, the first Bishop of Calcutta²⁷.

23. Ibid., p 50

24. Jones, Rachel B. (2011). Op.cit. p. 6

25. Ibid., p 7

26. Ghosh, Suresh Ch. (2009). Op. cit. p 24

27. Ibid., p 79

The German and the American missions were prominent in India. Some of the colleges established by them were²⁸:

- 1832- a college founded by Dr John Wilson (Bombay) which later bore his name
- 1837- The General Assembly's school (Madras) founded by Anderson and Braidwood which later became Christ college under Dr Miller
- 1841- Robert Noble founded Noble College at Masulipatam
- 1844- Hislop College at Nagaon by Stephen Hislop
- 1853- St John's College (Agra) by the Church Missionary Society

However, the year 1854 was significant for the Woods Dispatch, which finally saw the Company take responsibility of the education of the Indian masses. It assigned to the Company to create a department of education in each presidency. The education dispatch of 1854 pointed for the establishment of Universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Vernacular was to be encouraged alongside professional & vocational education²⁹.

Western education however did not develop in a uniform manner across the country. In Bengal, education was widespread through Hindu schools and some private institutions, while in Madras, the missionaries played an active part. Bombay (present Mumbai) had more Government schools that provided education to the people³⁰.

In the table below, the status of higher education prior to the independence (1947) is mentioned. A glimpse into the scene tells us that higher education had emerged and grown in a wide scale, but it had been

28. Ghosh, Suresh Ch. (2009). Op. cit.

29. Whitehead, Clive (2003). *Colonial Educators, The British Indian and Colonial Education Service 1858-1983*, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd: New York, p 6

30. Deka, B. (2000). *Higher Education in India: Development and Problems*, Atlantic: New Delhi, p 10

crippled by some problems. It was still an elite form of education and not widespread.

Fig. 2 HE (Higher Education) Institutions in pre-Independence India

| Sl. No. | University | Year of Establishment |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Bombay University | 1857 |
| 2. | Calcutta University | 1857 |

| Sl. No. | University | Year of Establishment |
|---------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 3. | Madras University | 1857 |
| 4. | Punjab University | 1882 |
| 5. | Allahabad University | 1887 |
| 6. | Benaras University | 1916 |
| 7. | Mysore University | 1916 |
| 8. | SNDT University | 1916 |
| 9. | Patna University | 1917 |
| 10. | Hyderabad University | 1918 |
| 11. | Lucknow University | 1921 |
| 12. | Dacca University | 1921 |
| 13. | Aligarh University | 1921 |
| 14. | Delhi University | 1922 |
| 15. | Nagpur University | 1923 |
| 16. | Rangoon University | 1923 |
| 17. | Andhra University | 1926 |
| 18. | Agra University | 1927 |
| 19. | Annamalai University | 1929 |
| 20. | Trinavcore University | 1937 |
| 21. | Utkal University | 1943 |

| | | |
|-----|----------------------|------|
| 22. | Saugarh University | 1946 |
| 23. | Sindh University | 1947 |
| 24. | Rajputana University | 1947 |

Source³¹: Deka, B. (2000)

2.6. HIGHER EDUCATION (POST-INDEPENDENCE):

Higher education in India post-independence took a drastic turn, as the leaders of the nation were determined in their aim of making India more strong and stable by enriching its human resource. Post-independence, higher education became the top priority of the government as it was considered as the most important factor that could determine the nation's future.

It was under the direction of the great visionary, Nehru, that higher education makes a great leap. The Nehruvian era is marked by total dedication towards the popularizing higher education³². The history of higher education after 1947 is mostly wrapped under the five year plans, Government appointed Commissions, etc.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 also emphasized the importance of higher education due to its potential of contributing to "national development through dissemination of specialized knowledge and skills"³³. The importance of higher education was well propounded by the UNESCO World Conference in 1998. It proclaimed that education is a fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy, sustainable development and peace³⁴.

31. Bazeley, Brinda R. (2006). *Development and Problems of Higher Education in Barak Valley and KarbiAnglong Areas*, Regency Publication: Bew Delhi, p 2

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., p 3

34. Deka, B. (2000). Op. cit. p 14

The table below shows the growth of higher education since 1947 to 2010³⁵.

Fig. 3 HE (Higher Education) Institution in Post-Independence India

| Year | No. of Universities | No. of Colleges |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1951-1961 | 22 | 695 |
| 1971-1981 | 123 | 4722 |
| 1982-1991 | 131 | 4886 |
| 1991-2001 | 176 | 7121 |
| 2001-2010 | 523 | 33,023 |

Source: Deka, B. (2000)³⁶ and UGC Report, 2010-11³⁷

From 22 Universities and 695 colleges in the early decade of the independence of India (1951-1961), higher education in India had grown to 523 Universities and 33,023 colleges in the recent times (2001-2011).

The table below demonstrates the enrolment of students under different faculties in the field of higher education:

Fig. 4 Faculty wise enrolment of student's in Higher Education (2009-10)

| Sl. No. | Faculty | Enrolment | Sl. No. | Faculty | Enrolment |
|---------|------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Arts | 6143959 | 6 | Medicine | 508950 |
| 2 | Science | 2822623 | 7 | Agriculture | 80438 |
| 3 | Commerce Management | 2607638 | 8 | Veterinary Science | 20475 |
| 4 | Education | 366621 | 9 | Law | 343688 |
| 5 | Eng./Technology | 1510762 | 10 | Others | 220836 |

Source³⁸: *Statistics of Higher & Technical Education, 2009-2010*

35. Deka, B. (2000). Op. cit. p 14

36. UGC Annual Report, 2009-2010. Accessed from http://ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/pub/annualreport_0910.pdf on 18-11-12

37. *Statistics of Higher & Technical Education, 2009-2010*, Government of India. Accessed on 12-11-12 from http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/mhrd/files/Abstract2009-10_0.pdf

The enrolment in Higher Education had been titling more towards Under Graduate courses. The report reveals that there was very less enrolment at the research level, while UG courses and diploma courses found many takers. The Statistical report on Higher and Technical Education, 2009-2010, gives the following conclusion in the enrolment under the programmes:

Fig. 5 Programme wise enrolment in Higher Education (2009-10)

| Sl. No. | Course/Programme | Enrolment |
|---------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1 | M.Phil./PhD | 9119 |
| 2 | PG | 2021840 |
| 3 | UG | 1677239 |
| 4 | Post School Diploma | 219400 |
| 5 | PG Diploma | 6253 |
| 6 | Total | 2114191 |

Source³⁹: *Statistics of Higher & Technical Education, 2009-2010*

The problems in higher education are many fold:the share of higher education has declined from 25% during the fourth five year plan (1969-74) to 8% in the Eighth Five year plan (1992-97). The Government has identified higher education as a non-merit good which resulted in the decline of funding for higher education⁴⁰.

In a paper "Government Subsidies in India" (GOI, 1997a) primary education was pronounced as "merit good" as its benefits spread well beyond immediate recipients", while higher education was been considered a "non-merit good". It states that "a specific portion of subsidies on higher education is appropriated by the middle to higher income groups because shortages of seats in this sector are cleared by quality-based

38. *Statistics of Higher & Technical Education, 2009-2010*, Government of India. Accessed on 12-11-12 from http://mhrd.gov.in/sites/mhrd/files/Abstract2009-10_0.pdf

39. Powar, K.B. (2002) *Indian Higher Education: A Conglomerate Concepts, Facts and Practices*, Concept: New Delhi, p 39

40. Powar, K.B. (2002). Op. cit.

clearing in the shape of entrance, examination, interview, group-discussion etc., where the poorer section of society are easily competed out.”⁴¹

Neo-liberalism has made a deep impact in every sphere of our lives. Education has also undergone much transformation. While education is now looked upon more as a commodity, it has lost its earlier sheen as an institution of learning or as an important social unit. The Universities and colleges are seen as factories that churn out products which are thrown open in the market⁴².

The Governments tilt towards privatization in the higher education sector has been obvious in recent years. In August 2005, The Supreme Court of India through its judgment made it clear that⁴³, Private presence in higher education is inevitable and that the ‘private players’ must be given the right to “establish and administer”, thus hinting at the viability for a high fee paying system, where “appropriation” of seats by Government is taken as nationalization⁴⁴. The rights to regulate must be exercised in a manner that implies reasonable restriction that does not question the foundation of private provision of educational services.

2.7. HIGHER EDUCATION IN ANCIENT ASSAM:

Even though source materials throwing light on the educational history of ancient Assam is meager, yet writings in earlier texts have revealed some form of education. Even though source materials throwing light on the educational history of ancient Assam is meager, yet writings in earlier texts have revealed some form of education. Emergence of educational system in Assam is credited to the coming of the Aryans⁴⁵. The *KalikaPurana*

41. Kumar, Ravi (2010). *Market, Deprivation, and Education in the Age of Globalization* in Anastasia Nokolopoulou, TaishaAbrahama and FaridMirbagheri(eds.) *Education for sustainable development: Challenges, Strategies and Practices in a Globalizing World*, p. 103

42. Ibid., p 107

43. Ibid., p 101

44. Barpujari, H.K. (2004). *The Comprehensive Hisotry of Assam*, Volume 1, 2nd edition, Publication Board of Assam: Guwahati, p 285

45. Ibid.

mentions the legendary king Narakasura as making provision for the study of the Vedas⁴⁶. However, there is no reference to any educational system prior to the coming of the Aryans⁴⁷. The Brahmanical system of education was followed in ancient Assam⁴⁸.

Three agencies were chosen for the diffusion of education in ancient Assam. These agencies were the *gurukula* system, the second was the hereditary system and the third was through the *parishad*⁴⁹. Under the *gurukula* system, the learner would get formal education under the Guidance of a *Guru* and would have to live for a fixed time period with the guru and work for him too.

Under the hereditary system, the learner received education from the learned members in his family. Learning also took place when there was huge congregation of learned scholars. Such congregation was called *parishad* in *Dharmasashtra*, and it continued till the early decades of the twentieth century⁵⁰.

The curriculum varied according to the different castes. Epigraphic and literary texts of ancient Assam, refer to the study of Hindu philosophy, tantric studies and literature (classical literature), which formed the curricula of education in ancient Assam⁵¹. The Brahmins opted for religious studies, like the studies of *Vedas*, etc. However, the Khsatriyas chose martial arts education from trained professionals and gave secondary importance to vedic studies. The vaishyas chose vocational education with a superficial knowledge of the vedas and vedangas⁵².

46. Ibid., p 286

47. Ibid., p 288

48. Ibid., p 287

49. Ibid., p 288

50. Ibid., p 296

51. Barpujari, H.K. (2004). Op.cit. p 289

52. Ibid., p 299

Kamarupa, Pragjyotishpura, Hatapesvara etc. were known place for learning⁵³.

2.8. HIGHER EDUCATION IN MEDIEVAL ASSAM:

During the medieval period in Assam, formal education took place in the *tols*, *pathsalas* or *catuspathis* under the *gurukulasytem*⁵⁴. Such formal education was basically mean limited to the upper strata of the society. The existence of *tols* is mentioned in the *Katha gurucharita* and the personal biography of Niranjan Deva, founder of the AuniatiSatra⁵⁵.

Traditional subjects basically dealt with the *smritis*, *puranas*, *mimamsa*, grammars, etc. Barpujari also mentions the study of astrology, medicine, etc. With the re-emergence of Vaishnavism under the able leadership of Sri Sankardeva⁵⁶, *namghars* served as educational institutions and this later developed into *satras*⁵⁷, which became the learning ground for the learners to acquire mastery over Vaishnavite religion, lores as well as the arts related to music and dance⁵⁸.

Namghars were actually congregational halls for mass prayers and discussion on religious topics, debates on various issues as well as aforum for scholarly talks. This congregation too provided education but rather in an informal manner. However, with the transformation from namghars to satras, education was now open to all the classes as opposed to brahmanical learning, which was restricted in nature. Thus, it attracted many people within its fold.

53. Barpujari, H.K. (1994). *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume 3, Publication Board of Assam: Guwahati, p 299

54. *Ibid.*, p 301

55. Goswami, M.C. (1978). *The Institution of Satras in Assam* in S.M. Dubey (ed.) North East India: A Sociological Study, Concept: Delhi, p 189

56. Bhuyan, Abhijit (2008). *Sankardeva and Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam* in Ishani, Vol 2, No 3. Accessible from <https://www.indianfolklore.org/journals/index.php/Ish/article/viewArticle/469> on 23-07-11

57. Barpujari, H.K. (1994). p 303

58. Saikia, Yasmin (2005). *Assam and India: Fragmented Memories, Cultural Identity and the Tai Ahom Struggle* Permanent Black: Delhi, p 109

2.9. HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLONIAL ASSAM:

During the colonial rule, the British agents did not pay much attention to the educational factor. They believed that the Assamese were "ignorant, stupid and bigoted people" for whom "abstract studies are often difficult and unattractive even when communicated in the most common language" An English lady who was the wife of a tea planter also writes that the environment in Assam was such that "education was not very necessary"⁵⁹. Thus, the people were deprived of higher education, which only relegated them to a more pitiable condition of poverty and exploitation.

During the British rule in Assam, after 1826, higher education did not make much headway, as they were too cautious not to jeopardize their position in the region. However, the missionaries did play an outstanding role in disseminating education to the people. Interesting to note was the fact that they targeted the hilly people, who could be easily converted to Christianity. The missionaries imparted religious teachings and it was their proselytizing work that created an uproar leading to which the Government urgently asked them to withdraw from their position.

However, it has to be mentioned that the people of Assam were not very keen towards education and as mentioned earlier it was limited to the upper class of the society. As the Assamese were not educated in the modern sense of the terms the British had to bring the Bengalis from Calcutta for employing them in clerical positions. This created resentment among the natives as they considered themselves to be sidelined and kept away from jobs. The *amolahs* were enjoying the privileges.

During this time, a section of the Assamese society realized that they must take the advantages given to them by the British government so that they remain in power and hence they started pursuing for better education for

59. Directorate of Higher Education, Assam. Official website. <http://dheassam.gov.in> accessed on 13-6-12

their wards. However, the state had no colleges for higher education and so the well-off families sent their ward off to Calcutta for their higher studies and thus when they came back they got absorbed in the British services.

However, it was not feasible for every person to go to Calcutta as it meant huge expenditure, so a curious section of intellectuals started pressing for demands of a college in Assam. It was due to their constant efforts that Cotton College was established in 1901.

2.10. HIGHER EDUCATION IN POST INDEPENDENCE ASSAM:

With the independence of India, Assam too saw the beginning of a great legacy in the name of Gauhati University which was established in 1948. The University became the hub of intellectual minds from all parts of Assam and also its neighboring states. It opened the doors of higher learning for all.

From 1947 onwards the development of higher education in Assam has been staggering to maintain a distinct recognition, sometimes failing sometimes achieving, but many a time faltering in its attempt. The higher education scenario of the state and the progress it has made in the last few decades is a positive sign. In present day, Assam has 10 Universities, of which there are 2 central universities, and 8 state universities. With privatization making inroads, Assam is also opening up its support, with 2 private universities.

Fig. 6 Post-Independence Higher Education scenario in Assam

| Year | No. of Colleges |
|-------------|------------------------|
| 1947-48 | 16 |
| 1970-71 | 99 |
| 1980-81 | 139 |
| 1990-91 | 186 |

| | |
|---------|-----|
| 2000-01 | 189 |
| 2011-12 | 376 |

Source⁶⁰: <http://dheassam.gov.in/colleges.asp>

The table above reveals the post-independence scenario of higher education in Assam in terms of the number of colleges. The new constituted Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) created under the Sixth Schedule (7 December, 2003) has 1 State University, the Bodoland University, 8 provincialised colleges⁶¹. The Universities in Assam is mentioned in detail under the following categories⁶²:

Fig. 7 University in Assam by Types

| Institute of National Importance/Deemed Universities | Central University | State University | Private University |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| *IIT, Guwahati | *Assam University, Silchar | *Gauhati University | *Don Bosco University |
| | *Tezpur University, Tezpur | *Dibrugarh University | *Down Town University |
| | | *K.K. Handiqui State Open University | |
| | | *Kumar Bhaskar Barman University | |
| | | *Womens University(proposed) | |

Source: <http://dheassam.gov.in/colleges.asp>

Assam has the highest number of colleges in comparison with the other NE states. Assam has 481 colleges.

Fig. 8 Number of Colleges in North East India, 2009-2010:

| Sl. No. | State | Colleges |
|---------|-------------------|----------|
| 1 | Arunachal Pradesh | 16 |
| 2 | Assam | 481 |
| 3 | Manipur | 78 |

60. Ibid

61. Ibid

62. UGC Annual Report, 2009-10. Accessed from www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/pub/annualreport/annualreport_0910.pdf on 8-9-12

| | | |
|---|-----------|----|
| 4 | Meghalaya | 70 |
| 5 | Mizoram | 32 |
| 6 | Nagaland | 52 |
| 7 | Sikkim | 13 |
| 8 | Tripura | 32 |

Source: UGC Annual Report, 2009-2010⁶³

The enrolment in higher education in Assam is markedly higher, however, the enrolment of women in higher education is not satisfactory, with Meghalaya taking the first position with 51% of women enrolment, while Assam is better than Sikkim, which has the least number of women enrolment.

Fig. 9 Enrolment in University Teaching Departments and affiliated Colleges (2009-2010):

| Sl. No. | State | Enrolment | Female Enrolment | % of women enrolment |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Arunachal Pradesh | 15864 | 6504 | 41 |
| 2 | Assam | 310011 | 133305 | 43 |
| 3 | Manipur | 34204 | 15392 | 45 |

Source: UGC Annual Report, 2009-2010⁶⁴.

| Sl. No. | State | Enrolment | Female Enrolment | % of women enrolment |
|---------|-----------|-----------|------------------|----------------------|
| 4 | Meghalaya | 39536 | 20163 | 51 |
| 5 | Mizoram | 13223 | 6215 | 47 |
| 6 | Nagaland | 23185 | 10897 | 47 |
| 7 | Sikkim | 7778 | 3033 | 39 |
| 8 | Tripura | 27691 | 12184 | 44 |

Source⁶⁵: UGC Annual Report, 2009-2010.

63. UGC Annual Report, 2009-10. Accessed from www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/pub/annualreport/annualreport_0910.pdf on 8-9-12

64. Ibid

65. UGC Annual Report, 2009-10. Accessed from www.ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/pub/annualreport/annualreport_0910.pdf on 8-9-12

Higher Education in Assam is making a speedy growth with the demand for higher education growing and with the emphasis of the Government on establishing new colleges and higher education institutes.

However, the Higher Education sector has been going through rough patches as a result of which the Government has put on much emphasis on Distance Education. Understanding Distance Education in isolation would be unjustified if not situated within the Higher Education contexts of the nation and the state.

2.11. SUMMARY:

Though the education system of India is a reflection of the colonial times, yet since the time of Independence, there has been a constant zeal for formulating a national pattern or structure of education. The importance of higher education has definitely been understood by the authorities and hence, the policies and plans have always prioritized it.

Education remains a thrust area in the Five Year Plans. It was from the fifth five year plan that education really got a huge coverage. Prior to it, the Government stressed on economic development and hence the focus was more on industries and other allied sectors. The trend was to build the society on a socialistic pattern hence, economy was given due priority. But since the fifth five year plan, the focus has shifted to the development of the human resource along with the economy. Similarly, the Higher Education Commissions, the NPE of 1986 (modified in 1992), the NKC, etc. have helped in shaping the higher education system in India.

Higher Education in Assam started off slowly with inhibitions but in the post-colonial period, the wide appeal for education soared up as an off shoot of the socio-economic transition that was undergoing in the state.