

**DEVELOPMENT
OF
SECONDARY
EDUCATION
IN ASSAM**

LAKSHAHIRA DAS

The book "Development of Secondary Education in Assam" for the first time presents an overall picture of secondary education in Assam from 1874—1947 useful to educationists, social scientists, planners and workers. The author has drawn from all available sources, primary, secondary and tertiary in her attempt to present a comprehensive and vivid history of secondary education in Assam preceeding the British occupation and ending in 1947 when the country won independence. The history is accompanied by immensely interesting and coherent account of socio-cultural events in so far as they affect the present state of secondary education in the state. In its perusal may be sustained multiple avenues of future research.

Rs. 250

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Development of Secondary Education in Assam

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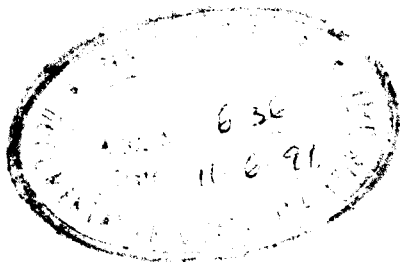
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A Short Historical Background of Education in Assam Prior to 1874

Assam has a rich legacy of culture and civilization behind her. The beautiful valleys of Assam have long been the meeting places of varying types of people belonging to diverse cultural and ethnic groups. To her goes the credit of developing a composite culture of variegated colour and splendour being the homeland of different races of men, Austric, Mongolian, Dravidian and Aryan that lived in peace and tranquillity in her hills and plains in different periods of her history. "Assam in fact had a significant history of her own and had intimate connections with a wider world beyond – that the special Assamese characteristics resulted from the absorption of varied elements and conditions of life, travelling to this land at different periods of its history and that Assamese culture constitutes a strong vitalizing force in Indian Life."¹

Assam though situated at the extreme point of North East India has never been cut off from the mainstream of the cultural life of India. As a matter of fact from the very ancient times she participated in the affairs of Northern India which was the heart of the country and where Indian civilization took its birth.²

Assam is one of the foremost regions of India where there has taken place a fusion of races and synthesis of cultures leading to the evolution of the characteristics of a composite people and composite culture which inspite of its regional peculiarities is never the less an inseparable part of the common Indian heritage.

Assam has to her credit some works of art of no mean order in the realm of language, literature, architecture, sculpture, epigraphy, music and dancing. Because long before the 13th century of the Christian era the whole valley was occupied by a Hindu population

far advanced in civilization than many present civilized nations of the world. In the country's sphere of economy also Assam contributed a great deal due to her great commercial assets i.e. Crude Oil, Coal, Tea and Silk, the last two of which are exported abroad and the first two help the country in the industrial expansion.

The earliest reference to Assam is found in the Epics and Puranas of Gangetic civilization. From "Tantras", "Puranas" and other writings it appears that though bulk of inhabitants came from the Non-Aryan stock, civilization of the parts of the valley by the Aryans began at an early date and probably earlier than the period of the Mahabharat war. Assam was known to the ancient and mediaval India as "Pragjyotishpura" and "Kamrupa.". The kingdom of Kamrupa included not only the whole of Assam valley but also parts of Eastern and Northern Portions of Bengal, Parts of Bhutan, Khasi and Garo Hills and the Northern portions of the Sylhet district.³

Under the patronage of rulers of Kamrupa especially king Bhaskar Barman who ruled for few years between 594-650 Pragjyotishpura became a great centre of learning as is evident from the Nidhanpur grant.⁴ The grant states "he was born to dispel darkness from the Kingdom and to establish religion by making provisions for the proper organization of classes and stages of life and ministering to needs of life." Hieun Tsang who visited this country in the 7th century A.D. provided the first authentic account of Assam and stated that men of high talents and scholastic fervour visited the kingdom. Learned scholars from Kamrupa went to Nalanda in search of learning and entered into religious discourses with the erudite Buddhist Scholars.⁵ He also mentioned that the softer arts of peace were not neglected and artistic talents were developed in Assam under the Patronage of the rulers. There is reference of singing and dancing at Bhaskarvarman's Court when the pilgrim was received. The grants of Bhutivarmana also informs us that the art of writing in Assam was known as early as the 6th century A.D.⁶ The inscriptions of 11th century also speak of pragjyotishpura as a great centre of learning which was "adorned by learned men, religious preceptors and poets who have made it their place of resort just as the sky is adorned by mercury, Jupiter and Venus."⁷ In the 13th century two great epics were translated into Assamese at the Court of Kachari King Mahamanikya and Koch King Naranarayana in the 16th century.⁸

Education in Assam in ancient times was carried on according

to the directions of “varnasrama dharma” and the art of learning was transmitted orally in ‘Gurugriha’s and hermitages.⁹ The ‘Agrahara’s created for the maintenance of Brahmanas speak about the existence of ‘Gurugriha’s, Sanskrit ‘Tol’s and village schools in Assam. The Brahmanas endowed with ‘Agrahara’s maintained schools or ‘Chhatrasala’s of their own for the diffusion of Sanskrit learning and culture.¹⁰ The village shrine was also a centre of popular education and by constant recitation of the ‘Mahabharata’, the ‘Ramayana’ and the ‘Purana’s and organisation of festive and religious gatherings and communal rejoicings these village shrines played a distinct and significant role in the cultural life of the society. It is also evident from the records of the scholars such as Sankaracharya (788-820 A.D) Nanaka (1469-1538 A.D.), and Guru Teg Bahadur (17th century) that learning flourished well in Assam and made her an object of attraction to scholars of other countries.¹¹

It is understood that the Sanskrit language had established itself as a living perennial source of national literature. At that time though various people spoke different languages in their daily lives yet a central provincial language was used for publishing and preserving the records of contemporary events. Things which were considered as of lasting importance or such events and news items which were considered necessary to be preserved for eternity were inscribed on stones, stone plates, copper plates or were written in Sanskrit on the walls of temples. Important communications from one king to another were also written in Sanskrit.¹² Under each pandit there was either a ‘Vidyalaya’ or a ‘Chatuspathi’. Pupils acquired knowledge in various ‘Sastra’s by residing in the house of such Preceptors. The following were the salient features of the state of education in ancient Assam.

1. The fooding and lodging expenses of the pupils were met from either the royal exchequer or from public patronage.
2. The students in the upper grades gave instruction to those in the lower forms.
3. Though there was no regular examinations as we understand it now yet competitive debates and seminars were held for ascertaining the knowledge of the pupils in the Sastras taught.

The Ahom who ruled Assam for 600 years identified themselves with the Assamese people and helped in the emergence of a common culture, patronised Hindu priests and erected Hindu temples which

later on developed into centres of Sanskrit learning.¹³ There is a lack of epigraphy and literature to prove that Assam possessed a regular school system with well organized courses of study and fixed hours of schooling. Of course the existence of 'Chhatrasala's and 'Tol's in ancient Assam was proved by the fact that Sankardeva, the great religious saint of Assam received his early education from a Brahmin Guru Mohendra Kandali who maintained 'Tol's and gave instruction in all branches of traditional learning. It is said that in recognition of his proficiency in Sanskrit language his Brahmin teacher conferred upon him the title of 'Deva'.¹⁴ There is also mention of 'Samavartana ceremony' in the Nowgong Grant. That the study of 'Jyotisha' and 'vedanga' was wide spread in Assam is indicated not only by the names of different places like 'Pragjyotisha', 'Navagraha', 'Srisuryya pahar', 'Mangaldai' etc. but also by the old manuscripts including the works on 'Kamrupa Nibandhaniya Khandasadhya'. The local epigraphs also mention about the study of "Vidya", "Kalavidya" including four "Vedas", four "Upavedas", the six "Vedangas", "Itihasas", "Purana", "Smritis", "Arthsastra", "Kamasashtra", "Silpasashtra", "Kavya" etc.

The Ahom preserved their passion for the country's past and they recorded all the important events that occurred and published these under official patronage. These published records are known as 'Buranjis'. Many Ahom kings tried to create favourable conditions for the evolution of a broad based Assamese culture through the diffusion of learning. The system of education prevalent during the Ahom period was practical rather than theoretical or bookish. The 'Guru Kula' system was gradually becoming decadent. 'Tol's and domestic system of education was prevalent among the priestly class, scribes and few others connected with Government and education was by no means extensively diffused.¹⁵ There was provision for military training, medical education, training in various types of cotton and silk industries, moral education, Sanskrit learning, instruction in Ahom language and instruction in historical education.¹⁶ Rai Bahadur Gunabhiram Barua wrote about the opening of 'Pathsala's and 'Chhatrasals's for Sanskrit learning and sending of some Brahmin scholars to Navadwipa, Baranasi and other places by Ahom rulers for the same purpose. Pundits were appointed by rulers for giving instruction in the 'Tai' language. The chief pundit used to get 700 puras of land and 20 servants for his service from the royal court.¹⁷ King Rudra Singha brought masons, architects, artists, artisans, tailors etc. from other parts of India¹⁸ and trained up local

people under them. There is a class of literature known as 'Vamsawalli' composed during the Ahom rule from which various informations about the Assamese society can be gathered. Original Sanskrit works dealing with medicine, Astronomy, Astrology, Arithmetic, dance, music and painting were translated.¹⁹ Another noteworthy work 'Hastividya' (elephant lore) compiled under the patronage of Siva Singha and his queen Ambikadevi also proves how the Assamese rulers were men of enlightenment and inquisitive about scientific knowledge. As pointed out by Prof. Liden the attainment of some of the pundits of the 'Tol's were on the whole respectable.²⁰

The period from the 15th to the 16th century is the period of world wide reformation. The vaisnavite movement initiated by Sri Sri Sankaradeva ushered in a new life and culture to Assam and helped in the growth of a unique type of institution called the 'Satra' which became a great centre of learning along with 'Namghar's. These 'Satras' contributed greatly to the spread of the light of learning in medieval Assam. "The cultural history of Assam in respect of fine arts, crafts, education and learning since the beginning of the 16th century till the advent of the British largely developed centering round the Vaisnavite movement which in turn found expression through the Satra institution."²¹ In the field of literature, music, wood and ivory carving also the satras contributed a great deal.²² These institutions were placed under erudite scholars and were centres of the religious and educational life of the people. Dr. B.K. Kakoty observes 'Namghars combined the functions of a village parliament, a village court, a village school and a village church.'²³ All the principal satra's used to maintain Sanskrit 'Tol's and services of reputed scholars were requisitioned to run them.²⁴ Every 'Satra' again maintained a library for the diffusion of learning among the village folk. Biographies of saints (Charit puthis) and 'satra' chronicles (Satra Vamsavalis) etc. are important contributions of the 'satra's besides classical music, dancing, painting etc. "Through the network of 'Satra's and 'Namghar's spread all over the country knowledge permeated to the masses of Assam. Illiteracy was no handicap to the acquisition of knowledge as there were arrangements everywhere for reading allowed portions of the scriptures and explaining their purpose to audiences of household members and large congregations of villagers."²⁵

Temples situated in different places were also the centres of occassional festivals attended by all sections of the society. Besides

organising musical and dramatical performances these temples used to hold religious discourses which helped greatly in the diffusion of knowledge and spread of culture among the mass. The science of music, dramatic performances and dancing were well cultivated and the art of painting was also in a developed condition in Assam.

Captain Thomas Welsh who came to Assam as a leader of expedition at the instance of Lord Cornwallis wrote in his Despatch that the Assamese people were lovers of learning.²⁶ The Burmese led several invasions into Assam during the period from 1816-1824 by taking advantage of the intrigues in the royal court and the Assamese nobility. The British forces conquered the whole valley and the Treaty of Yanda-boo was signed in 1826. Mr. David Scott was appointed as Agent to the Governor-General for the whole of Eastern Frontier from Cachar to Sylhet in the South and Sikkim to the North.²⁷ At that time the state of the country was deplorable because of civil and internal wars and people had almost given up cultivation and lived on Jungle roots and plants.²⁸

It was a gloomy period when Vaisnavite movement was on the wane and traditional indigenous learning was in a decaying condition and the social structure destroyed by the critical political situation, civil dissensions, internal rebellion and the use of opium. The prevailing sentiment of the Assamese people in favour of the British administration is evident from the remarks of the most anlightened gentlemen of the time Anandram Dhekiyal Phukan (1829-1859) who said that "our country hailed the day on which British supremacy was proclaimed in the provinene of Assam and entertained sanguine expectation of peace and happiness from the rule of Britain."²⁹ The British officers entrusted with the task of civil and administrative duties in Assam during the initial years were much pre-occupied with bringing peace and tranquility to the devastated country. But with the return of peaceful conditions the officers took up some measures to stir up new ideas in the minds of the people. The old revenue system based on the principle of personal service was substituted by the system of cash payment.³⁰

Besides the revenue system few other notable measures were (1) introduction of Post and Telegraph (2) opening of routes of communication in the country by land and water (3) expansion of trade and industry (4) circulation of enlarged currency (5) establishment of hospitals (6) diffusion of education and culture.

In the implementation of these developmental schemes the

early officers were faced with some difficulty due to the absence of a middle class Assamese gentry, worth the name in Assam. So they brought some people from Bengal who were trained for maintaining official documents, files and accounts in order to help the British officers in the day to day work of administration. This measure of the early British administrators resulted in the creation of the new 'Amolahs' leading to a cleavage between the rulers and the ruled.³¹

Until 1874 Assam was administered as a part of Bengal but finally it was formed into a separate province under a chief Commissioner with Shillong as Capital. Lieut. Col. R.H. Keating was appointed as the first Chief Commissioner of Assam. By Acts VIII and XII of 1874 the legal powers were transferred from the Lieut. Governor of Board of Revenue, Bengal, to the Governor-General in Council who was again authorised to delegate powers to the Chief Commissioner.

Mr. David Scott after taking over charge as Agent of the Governor General for the North East Frontier advocated as the expansion and improvement of the indigenous system of education in Assam. He applied to the Government for the establishment of 'Pathshala's in Assam for catering to the needs of the Assamese gentry.³² In 1837 Lieut. Mathie, the collector of Kamrup also proposed to establish some village schools throughout the Zilla, principally with a view to rearing up a class of qualified village and 'Pargana' officers.³³ Again in 1837 Lieut. Vetch officiating Magistrate of Darrang also wrote to Capt. Jenkins to sanction his scheme of starting three schools at Chatguru, Darrang and Charduar and a grant of Rs. 64/- for each of these schools.³⁴ Jenkins sanctioned the above proposal and accordingly three schools were established in Darrang district. David Scott's "Pathshala" scheme also secured approval of the East India Company and accordingly eleven schools of the 'Gurukula' style were established at Gauhati, Nilachal, Naduar, Patte-Darrang, Hajo, Bajaali, Sheela, Biswanath, Nowgong and Desh Darrang. In these schools the medium of Instruction was Sanskrit. The curriculum consisted of perusal of 'Ramayana', 'Bhagabata', study of Arithmetic, Medicine and Astronomy.³⁵ The teachers received 3 'pura's of rent free land as their remuneration.³⁶

BEGINNING OF NEW EDUCATION

By various such educational activities the British officials tried to please the Assamese people. David Scott also made special

provision for the appointment of local people in different jobs in order to win the confidence of the people. After this David Scott wanted to introduce English education to satisfy the needs of the section of the Assamese society who have lost much of their political, economic and social prestige. Captain Jenkins who succeeded David Scott in his Despatch submitted to the Government of Fort William advocated the establishment of English schools in Sadar Stations.³⁷

Just at this moment Lord William Bentinck declared his policy of the establishment of English schools for teaching western literature and sciences through the medium of English language in the principal towns under the Presidency of Fort William. By this time a section of the Assamese society also grew desirous of giving western type of education to their children.³⁸ Anandaram Dhekial Phookan started an English School at his own residence and appointed a teacher to teach English to some pupils. Sri Gangaram Phookan started an English School at his own residence and appointed a teacher to teach English to some pupils. Sri Gangaram Phookan an opulent and a very cultured man was also a great supporter of the establishment of the English schools in Assam. All these events led the officers of the Company stationed in Assam to decide in favour of starting an English school at Gauhati. The administrators needed some educated persons for some petty jobs like copyists, clerks, accountants, pundits, revenue officers, Garden mohorrors ect. under them. Therefore the officers stationed in Assam adopted several measures for implementing the new scheme of education for the systematic instruction of all sections of people in the western line. As a result the first English school saw the light of the day in the year 1836 in Assam. It was known as "The Gawhatti Government seminary" and its first Headmaster was Mr. Singer, an European who drew a salary of Rs. 150/- pm.³⁹ In the first year the school had an enrolment of 58, it rose to 150 in 1838 and 340 by the end of 1840. It was proposed to collect money by subscription – the major portion being paid by the Government itself. The main aim of raising subscription was to give responsibility to the people in the education of their children. Maharaja Harendra Narayan of Koch Bihar state offered a contribution of Rs. 1066/-. Donation of Rs. 1000/- each had been made by Dayaram Barua, Gangaram Khargharia Phookan and Rs. 500/- by Brindaban Chandra Goswami, Satradhikar of Dihing Satra.⁴⁰ One unique feature of this school in

its earliest years was that the students were not required to pay fees and they were supplied with books and stationeries at the cost of the school. That the 'Gawhatti Government Seminary' continued to exist under one popular designation or other is evident from the fact that no less than 41 scholars educated at the said school were shown in the report of the Collector of Kamrup as holding Government appointment as Head clerk, Second clerk, Peskar, Mohorer, School master, Chowkidar and Nokal Nabis.⁴¹ That it was known as "Gawhatti Zilla School" with fixed assignment of Rs.2616/- is borne out in the Director of Public Instruction's proposals to the Government of Bengal to augment the assignment to Rs. 12,000/- in order to place the institution on the footing of a collegiate school as a preparatory step towards the foundation of a college for the province of Assam.⁴² So it was "Gawhatti Zilla School" wherein the seed of all future educational Progress in Assam was sown. In fact it was the fore-runner of the Cotton College, the Earle Law College, the Jorhat Normal School, the Jolukbari Survey School and the Department of Mahammedan Education in Assam.

British officials stationed in Assam took keen personal interest in the spread of English education in Assam. But they found that the only stimulus to learning was the hope of getting employment and the higher and the respectable section of the Assamese society kept themselves aloof from educational activities.⁴³ In 1840 another English School was established at Sibsagar with Mr. D.Sauaza as Headmaster.⁴⁴ By 1856 English schools had been started in Sylhet, Gauhati and Sibsagar and seven Anglo-Vernacular schools in Sylhet and Government Vernacular schools at the headquarters of the five districts of Assam proper.⁴⁵ The Assamese people can never forget the zeal and enthusiasm of David Scott and Captain Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, for the enlightenment and education of the Assamese people. For instance, Rai Gunabhiram Barua Bahadur (1837-1896), a distinguished scholar and judicial officer was granted a special allowance to prosecute his studies.⁴⁶ Anandaram Dhekial Phookan was also encouraged to proceed to Calcutta for higher education in a college and subsequently placed him in civil service as a junior assistant.⁴⁷ Colonel Jalnur Ali Ahmed also refers to the help which he received from this gentleman.⁴⁸

Thus the early British officers began to establish secondary

schools at different places and encouraged scholars to receive English education. There were no fixed hours of schooling, prescribed books except religious ones. As a result of the beginning of the formal institutional education and the decadence of the old indigenous system of education there occurred several reactions in the Assamese society. Some people grew suspicious of the real intention of the rulers and they cherished a fear that the society will be polluted by imparting instruction to the children of the soil in English in these schools. We come across such a situation in the autobiography of Harakanta Sadaramin (1813-1900). He has put on record there that one Bapudeo Sarma Rajkhowa was ordered to start a school at Hajo. But he having thought it to be an undignified affair made slight of it, when one Kanuram Purohit was directed to do so in his stead.⁴⁹ Similarly we have seen that Sri Jadav Chandra Barua (1851) and Sri Hem Chandra Barua (1835-1896) had to learn English secretly. Because their family elders did not like that a Brahmin's son should learn English,⁵⁰ which was considered a 'Mlechha Bhasa' and taboo for high caste Brahmin. The orthodox Assamese muslims also created many obstacles in the way of Ahmed's endeavour to learn English.⁵¹ Major Butler in his book "Travels and Adventures in the province of Assam" stated "Another great obstacle to the spread of knowledge throughout Assam is the influence of the Priesthood who employ the most oppredssive modes of keeping the people in subjecton to themselves through gross ignorance and superstition."⁵²

On the other side of the picture many people of Assam either for securing employment under Governmnet or for some other reasons praised the British officials for their positive encouragement of English education. In this connection William Robinson said about the English School at Gauhati - "The native began to appreciate the advantages to be derived from it. They were willing to give it a trial and, it is presumed, will quickly draw the desired conclusion for themselves. We would, therefore, confiently anticipate that this instituiton in course of a few years will become an important provincial college and the means of disseminating knowledge in neighbouring districts."⁵³

Again a certain section of the Assamese people remained non-committal. Major Butler remarked about this "One of the greatest impediments of education in Assam is the indifference with

which it is received by the respectable classes. They show no wish whatever to see the rising generation educated or made wiser than themselves".⁵⁴

When the rulers were busy in founding schools in suitable places for winning the confidence of the native people, the Missionary workers also began their educational activities side by side with the officers during the first half of the 19th century. History of the Missionaries takes us back to the first Mission station at Sadiya. Rev. Nathon Brown and Rev. A.T. cutter were the pioneers among the missionaries. In 1836 Col. Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam asked the Calcutta Baptists to start a mission in the frontier to work among the Shan or the Khamti tribe.⁵⁵ The American Baptist Missionaries were the first to enter the province for mission work subsequent to British occupation.⁵⁶ The Missionaries started schools for the native boys and girls in hills and plains of Assam. During the initial stages they had to face a number of obstacles, indifference and apathy of the local people towards education.

The missionaries who came from Sadiya to Sibsagar first tried to spread the light of knowledge through the opening of Sunday schools.⁵⁷ They approached the people through the medium of their own tongue, learnt the language of the soil and established 14 schools at Sibsagar by 1844.

But inspite of the efforts of the Government and the missionaries the state of education in different districts remained in a very backward condition during the first half of the 19th century. The number of schools in different districts were, Kamrup—24, Goalpara—10, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar—6 and 9, Nowgong—10, Darrang—9, Cachar—Nil.⁵⁸ As regards hill areas i.e. the Khasi and Jaintiya Hills, the Garo Hills, the Naga Hills and the Lushai Hills, prior to 1900 educational institutions were practically non-existent. In 1853 the Missionaries who were working hard in the district of Khasi and Jaintia Hills drew a very gloomy picture of the state of education in that district.⁵⁹

The year 1857 witnessed the first freedom struggle of the people of India when the whole country was in a state of ferment. On the eastern front also people were discontented and critical of the British regime. Moniram Dutta Dewan (1806-1858), a distinguished Patriot of Assam was executed by the British officials. Socially and

politically this was a period of uncertainty and discontentment on the part of the Assamese community. Consequently the movement effected the prevailing state of education to a certain extent. But happily for the people of Assam "the Gawhatti School" was affiliated to the Calcutta University after the inauguration of that University in 1857.⁶⁰ In the year 1861 two students passed the Entrance Examination from the "Gawhatti School" for the first time.⁶¹ In the year 1864 such celebrities as late Anandaram Barua, Zalnur Ali Ahmed, Sivram Bora and Madhav Chandra Bordolai passed from this school.⁶²

During this time a new scheme of awarding scholarships not exceeding Rs. 10/- each per month for passing the Entrance Examination and prosecuting higher studies outside the Province was introduced.⁶³ Students who went to Calcutta for collegiate education were awarded such scholarships. But inspite of the efforts of the Government officials, the Missionaries and few private individuals there occurred very little progress in respect of institutions and scholars and the standard of instruction given left much to be desired. A rough picture of the state of secondary education in Assam can be drawn from the following tables taken from the statistical Account of Assam by W.W. Hunter in respect of several districts of Assam from 1856 to 1871.⁶⁴

Table 1

Position of Secondary Education in Kamrup District

Class of school	Number of Schools			Number of pupils		
	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71
Government English School	—	—	1	—	—	222
Aided English schools	—	—	4	—	—	173
Government Vernacular Schools	26	13	6	1539	525	347

Table 2**Position of Secondary Education in Sylhet District**

Class of school	Number of Schools			Number of pupils		
	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71
Government English School	1	—	1	179	—	183
Government Vernacular School	—	—	3	—	—	97
Aided English School	—	2	8	—	260	464
Aided Vernacular School	2	3	3	88	119	135

Table 3**Position of Secondary Education in Goalpara District**

Class of school	Number of Schools			Number of pupils		
	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71
Government English School	—	1	1	—	180	90
Government Vernacular Schools	15	10	—	194	119	—
Aided English School	—	—	3	—	—	147
Aided Vernacular School	—	—	24	—	—	585

Table 4**Position of Secondary Education in Darrang District**

Class of school	Number of Schools			Number of pupils		
	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71
Government English School	—	—	1	—	—	59
Government Vernacular School	9	6	2	339	235	131
Aided English School	—	—	1	—	—	65
Aided Vernacular School	11	17	22	274	299	176

Table 5**Position of Secondary Education in Nowgong District.**

Class of school	Number of Schools			Number of pupils		
	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71	1856-57	1860-61	1870-71
Government English School	—	—	1	—	—	91
Government Vernacular School	12	8	1	679	331	179
Aided English School	—	—	3	—	—	74
Aided Vernacular School	—	—	31	—	—	941

By the year 1874 some influential members of the Assamese society began to take active interest in the spread of education in Assam.⁶⁵ Babu Pratap Chandra Barua of Gauripur founded the first Anglo-vernacular school in Assam. The Missionaries also took keen interest in the education of girls and started the first training school for teachers at Nowgong.⁶⁶ The Zamindars of Goalpara also started some higher English schools in that district with the help of the civil officers.⁶⁷ But inspite of the fact that several schools were established in Assam in different districts only one person out of 136 of school-going age in 1875 was attending a school in Assam.⁶⁸

In the year 1874 the Province of Assam was constituted by a proclamation of the 7th February when the eleven districts comprising it were separated from the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal and placed under Col. Keatings as a Chief Commissioner and made an independent unit of administration in respect of all legislative enactments in the province. The main aim of this measure was to invest the local authorities with the power to follow a vigorous policy in matters of administration and to bring the hill tribes under submission.⁶⁹ A separate Directorate of Public Instruction was constituted in Assam in the same year with Dr. C.A. Martin as the Inspector of Schools.⁷⁰

The following table shows the state of secondary education in Assam in 1881-82⁷¹

The decisions of the administrative authorities to introduce a new system of education in Assam was felt in the contemporary society. Due to the conservative nature of the Assamese people the early administrators had to face opposition from the general population during the initial stages. When a new plant was raised in place of the old one the people grew suspicious about the intention of the rulers and they cherished the fear that the society will be polluted by imparting instruction in western system of education. As a result the higher and respectable families kept themselves aloof from associating themselves with such types of educational activities of the early administrators. But the attitudes of the society towards western system of secondary education slowly changed due to the Government policy of giving employment to the educated youth of Assam. Gradually the people grew conscious about the utility of

English education and began to welcome the new scheme and offered to give it a fair trial. Naturally the demand for the western system of education increased due to the Government policy of giving positive encouragement to scholars educated in English schools and opening of the Portals of public services for the educated youths of the province.

Table 6

**Table Showing Number of Secondary Schools From
1871-72 to 1880-81**

	High schools		Middle English and Middle Vernacular Schools	
	Schools	Pupils	Schools	Pupils
1871-72	9	1134	85	385
1872-73	9	1109	64	3322
1873-74	8	950	82	3260
1874-75	9	1135	26	1443
1875-76	9	1452	32	1971
1876-77	9	1499	31	2192
1877-78	9	1469	90	5469
1878-79	9	1284	86	5452
1879-80	10	1351	85	5420
1880-81	11	2264	81	5922

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