

UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION
IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

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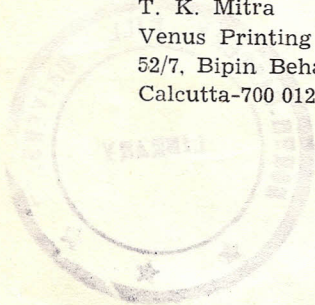
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PREFACE

By the year 1973 four Universities had come into being in North Eastern India, though we had none in 1947. Out of these, one is exclusively for the study of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and the remaining three are traditional Universities. The establishment of University in this region makes interesting reading as Assam had to strain every nerve to set a University in motion, nearly unparalleled in the history of education of our country. To unfold the history of this painstaking yet highly commendable achievement to the people at large is a task which has not caught anybody's fancy before. As such to fill up this vacuum, the origin of all the Universities of the region has been traced systematically and chronologically.

To-day, the Gauhati University which was set up in 1948 and the first of its kind in our region, has three sister Universities to keep company in the North Eastern India. No longer the sons and daughters of the people of the region have to send, willy-nilly, their offspring to study in a far-off place at considerable expense. The Universities themselves have made rapid strides forward to bridge the gap of non-availability of higher institutions of learning in this part of the country. A deep inroad has been made into the working of the Universities through their various authorities and bodies and an honest attempt has been made to unfurl the intricacies of university administration. Last but not the least, the study reflects the task and responsibilities of the University to bring about a system of education so that society at large could be enriched.

The study is based on both published and unpublished works—published works like University Acts, Statutes, Ordinances and the like, the Reports of the various education commissions, meritorious articles on education and its problems and also insight drawn from the various eminent

In the later half of 1977 I was under a cloud—man-made or to be correct men-made. Again, my work languished as I dawdled over it. Out of this morass, I was uplifted by my friend Dr. Atul Goswami, Reader, Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University. In his own inimitable nature and quiet ways he used to spur me on and I should be failing in my duty if I do not express my sincere thanks to him. I have also been fortunate in that I had the benefit of the advice of my wife, Sarita. Her reassuring presence and nods of approval made me work always a little harder.

I cannot thank Shri Babul Gogoi enough for rendering me with invaluable secretarial assistance, with all smiles. I can hardly conclude without mentioning how much I owe to the kindness of Justice S. K. Dutta in inspiring me with his wise counsel and words of advice.

Dibrugarh, June, 1982

D. H. Goswami

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INTRODUCTION

North East India comprises of five States and two Union Territories. The States are Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura and the Union Territories are Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. Although the Darjeeling district in West Bengal is geographically a part of North East India, politically it is a part of West Bengal.

The total area of North East India is 255,037 sq. km. as per 1971 census. The total population of North East India was 19,582,296 according to 1971 census. There is a marked variation in density of population area-wise as is palpable from the following, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh 6, Assam 186, Manipur 48, Meghalaya 45, Mizoram 16, Nagaland 31, Tripura 149 per sq. km. according to 1971 census. The average density of the entire region is 77 per sq. km. as against the All-India average of 167. The total tribal population in North East India is about four million.¹

Institutions of higher education consist of Post-Graduate Classes in the Universities, First and Second grade Colleges, Professional Colleges like, Engineering, Veterinary, Medical, Law and Teachers' Training. There are four Universities in North East India, one Post-Graduate centre at Imphal, Manipur and another in Agartala, Tripura. The total number of Colleges of all categories is 200 comprising of : Arts and Science Colleges 158, Commerce 5, Law 6, Teachers' Training 13, others 9, Agriculture 1, Veterinary 1, Engineering 3, Medical 14, Ayurvedic 1.

The successful students of the High School Leaving Certificate Examination or the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination are qualified to enter the University for higher education. The general higher education is of three layers.

1. Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region, North Eastern Council Secretariat, Shillong, 1977, p. 163.

The duration of the various courses is as follows :

- (a) Pre-Degree/Pre-University—two years.
- (b) Under-Graduate Degree in Science, Arts and Commerce including Honours—two years.
- (c) Master Degree in Arts, Science, Commerce, Agriculture, Medical and Law—two years.
- (d) The Under-Graduate professional course in Engineering—four years, Medical—four and half years and Agricultural and Veterinary—four years, while graduation in Law is three years, Bachelor and Master Degree in Library Science and Teachers' Training (B.T.), are one year each. Under the circumstances, if a student starts his education career at the age of five, he can complete the Master Degree in Arts, Science and Agriculture before he attains the age of twenty-two.

BEGINNING OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Sir Charles Wood's Educational Despatch of 19th July, 1854, could be considered as heralding a new era of higher education in modern India. In 1853, the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to investigate thoroughly the position regarding educational development in India. The upshot of this inquiry ushered in the Despatch, known as Wood's Educational Despatch, after the name of Sir Charles Wood (Later Lord Halifax), who was then the President of the Board of Control. It was called by some as "the Magna Carta of English Education in India" as considerable historical and educational importance was attached to it. The Despatch ran into a lengthy report of hundred paragraphs.¹ It clearly enumerated the kind of education it contemplated in India.

"We must emphatically declare that the education which we desire to be extended in India is that which

1. Report of the Calcutta University Commission, 1917-19, Vol. 6, Appendix III.

has just for its object the diffusion of the improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe; in short, of European knowledge.”¹

A noteworthy feature of it was that the Despatch attached considerable importance to the languages spoken by the vast majority of Indian population and further it also recognised the merit of the modern Indian Languages. It could not be said that the Despatch set little store by them and wanted to supplant the modern Indian Languages by English.

The Despatch said,

“It is indispensable, therefore, that, in any general system of education, the study of them (i.e. the vernaculars) should be assiduously attended to and any acquaintance with the improved European knowledge, which is to be communicated to the great mass of the people whose circumstances prevent them from acquiring a high order of education and who cannot be expected to overcome the difficulties of a foreign language can only be conveyed to them through one or other of those vernacular languages.

We look, therefore, to the English language and to the vernacular languages of India together as the media for the diffusion of European knowledge, and it is our desire to see them cultivated together in all schools in India of a sufficiently high class to maintain a school master possessing the requisite qualifications.”²

Two recommendations of the Despatch were of very vital educational importance. One important recommendation was made with regard to the institution of the Department of Public Instruction, at that time a novelty,

1 Wood's Educational Despatch, Paragraph 7.

2 *Ibid.*, Paragraph 13.

in Bengal, Madras, Bombay, the North West and the Punjab. The department had the Director at its head who was to report annually the progress made in the field of higher education under his jurisdiction. The other was concerned with the establishment of University, an epoch-making event so far as higher education in this part of the world was concerned.

Wayback in 1845 the establishment of a university at Calcutta was suggested by the Council of Education which was, however, not accepted by the Court of Directors. It seemed providential that it was left to be accepted by Wood, and the Despatch of 1854 stated thus :

"The rapid spread of liberal education among the natives of India since that time (1845) the high attainments shown by the native candidates for government scholarships and by native students in private institutions, the success of the medical colleges and the requirements of an increasing European and Anglo-Indian population have led us to the conclusion that the time is now arrived for the establishment of universities in India, which may encourage a regular and liberal course of education by conferring academic degrees as evidences of attainments in the different branches of art and science and by adding marks of honour for those who may desire to compete for honorary distinctions."¹

The public opinion of the country at the relevant time must have considerably influenced Wood as could be apparent from the Despatch itself. There was a perceptible surcharge of feeling in the Presidency towns where some associations, consisting of prominent public men demanded the creation of universities. Particularly, it could be mentioned that the Calcutta Association seemed so inclined and tried to enthuse over the Court of Directors

1 *Ibid.*, Paragraph 24.

the necessity and the desirability of establishing a university in each Presidency.

It was rightly felt that London University, established in 1836, should be the beckoning light for setting up universities in India though to suit local needs and conditions there might be some variations here and there. The type of universities to be established in India should be affiliating ones and they should confer degrees upon successful candidates from affiliated institutions recognised by the university.

To start with, the upper class or upper middle class would enjoy the fruit of education as contemplated in the Despatch which was then supposed to percolate downwards. The Despatch therefore believed in the "downward filtration theory" in education which was in vogue in this country for a long time.

No sooner was the Wood Despatch received by the Government it constituted a Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir James Colvile to prepare a scheme for all the three universities: Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The Government of India acted with right earnest and on 12th December, 1856, it accepted the recommendations of the Committee and the Calcutta University Bill was passed by the Legislative Council as Act II of 1857. As stated earlier, the London University was the model of the Calcutta University when it was set up and therefore there was little wonder that it was made a purely affiliating university and continued to be so till the establishment of Post-Graduate Teaching Departments in 1915.

The Preamble to the Calcutta University Act, 1857 said that "for the better encouragement of Her Majesty's subjects of all classes and denominations within the Presidency of Calcutta and other parts of India in the pursuit of a liberal and regular course of education, it has been determined to establish a university at Calcutta for the purpose of ascertaining, by means of examination, the persons who have acquired proficiency in different branches

of Literature, Science and Art and of rewarding them by academical degrees as evidence of their respective attainments and marks of honour proportioned thereto”.

The wording of the Preamble follows closely the wording of paragraph 24 of the Wood's Despatch indicating that the university was intended to be an examining body whose main function was to award Degrees to those who attained the prescribed intellectual standards. The Despatch clearly said that the University was not to be a place of instruction as to test the value of education obtained elsewhere.

The University of Calcutta, according to the Act of 1857, was a body corporate, capable of holding and disposing of property. The Senate was entrusted with the entire management of and superintendence over the affairs, concerns and property. It was also authorised to make and alter any regulation and bye-laws not inconsistent with the Act, to regulate the examinations for degrees and the award of the degrees, prescribe the qualifications of the candidates for the degrees, courses of instruction to be followed by them, appointment and removal of examiners, officers and servants of the university. The Senate was authorised to award the degrees of Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Bachelor of Laws, Licentiate of Medicine, Doctor of Medicine and Master of Civil Engineering. In 1860, the Senate was authorised to confer degrees other than those mentioned expressly in the Act of 1857 which might be instituted by regulations passed by the Senate and approved by the Councillors.

One out of many flaws of this arrangement was that teaching was wholly concentrated in the colleges but the University had complete control over the course-contents. The colleges had neither control over the curricula nor had they any control over examinations conducted by the University. The control of the University was extended even over the staff and equipment belonging to the colleges. Curiously, however, there was no means by which

the University could guarantee that the standard of efficiency prescribed by it was maintained by the colleges. Far worse, it had no voice in the maintenance of the standards of teaching in its colleges.

Under the circumstances, the Calcutta University was not a true university in the strict sense of the term. It could hardly be considered a place of learning where a corporation of scholars labour in comradeship for the training of men and the advancement and diffusion of knowledge. The Calcutta University as constituted by the Act of 1857, could hardly be considered as a corporation of scholars. It could, at best, be a corporation of administrators which had nothing to do either with the training of men or with the advancement of learning. In such a state of affairs it could hardly inspire or give encouragement to independent thought among the teachers or the students. Emphasis was laid squarely on examinations.

The value of even the affiliating system in existence at that time could not, however, be ruled out. It served as a useful means by which young aspirants were selected for public service, and to a large extent, it could satisfy the needs of administration.

DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE EDUCATION

As could be well imagined the Calcutta University held sway and jurisdiction over the entire North East India. From the year of the establishment of the University, i.e., 1857 until 1898, there was neither a first grade nor a second grade college in North East India. It was no doubt true that college classes were started in the Gauhati High School as back as 1867. But due to financial loopholes these were abandoned by 1877. During the period from 1877 to 1898 even the luxury of having college classes was non-existent in this region. Ultimately it was left to the Zaminder of Sylhet, Raja Girish Chandra Roy, to set up a second grade college better known as Murarichand College in the year 1898.