Cotton College: the road to varsity

The conversion of historic Cotton College into a full-fledged university is a natural step forward. However, the initiative to effect this metamorphosis should reflect a broad vision that not only pays tribute to the stellar contributions this august institution has made over a period of more than a century and also projects it into the league of excellent institutions of higher learning.

As the twenty-first century unfolds, ideas, innovations, and knowledge have become the hallmark of progress and human development, and at no other time in history, the role of higher education institutions has become as important as it is now. It would be a missed opportunity if all those who are involved in this process of upgrading Cotton College into a university do not take stock of these broad developments and clearly lay out the path for its future.

Cotton College University should be the incubator of ideas, and promoter of innovations and knowledge. It cannot simply be another university that simply dispenses degrees and diplomas.

As the Cotton College State University Bill, 2011, awaits the Governor's signature to become an act, I would like to share some of my thoughts on the process and vision of creating this new university. There have been words and preparations for this upgrade for a while now. I wish it had stirred more passionate public discussions and debates among the stakeholders of Cotton College: current and past students and teachers, and the people of Assam. In a democratic society, such exercises usually do not generate much consensus but often produce good ideas that are useful for creating a vision for the future.

Unfortunately, I have not heard much discussions and debates baring a few newspapers who have made significant contributions to almost all facets of our national life: academics, politics, arts, science, and technology, literature, sports, business, entertainment, and the list goes on. Thus, a national level status is needed in the region. Cotton College symbolizes higher education in this part of the country. In its 110 years of history, the college has produced many luminaries who have made significant contributions to almost all facets of our national life: academics, politics, arts, science, and technology, literature, sports, business, entertainment, and the list goes on. Thus, a national level status is needed.

Besides the recognition for its contributions to the national life, there are more to this status of a national level university. This will help the new university recruit students and teachers at the national and international levels. This will be very important for the academic quality and the growth of the university. A fitting tribute in recognition of the college's contribution to the nation. Of course, it will involve legislation at the parliament. But I do believe that the Assam Government can work with the Central Government to make this happen.

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I am not sure if the proposed Cotton College State University will have an open recruitment policy that will look beyond Assam and the northeastern region. Even if it opts for a national search for faculty recruitment, this university status may be a deterrent in this effort. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most state universities end up recruiting students and teachers from within the state. This is partly due to the fact that state universities are created primarily to promote higher education in respective states and, therefore, it seems politically difficult to justify an open policy for student and faculty recruitment.

Behind most of what I have said in this article is a hope that the proposed Cotton College University becomes a widely recognized name in the field of higher education and research at the national and international levels. In the twenty-first century, Assam needs more than just tea and wildlife to her identity in the world. Let Cotton College University (and higher education in general) be a major part of this new identity.

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