

Women Education in Colonial Assam as Reflected In Contemporary Archival And Literary Records

Chiranjib Dahal

Assistant Professor, Department of History, J.D.S.G. College, Bokakhat
Dist.: Golaghat, State: Assam, Country: India 785612

Received Date: 15 May 2021

Revised Date: 21 June 2021

Accepted Date: 03 July 2021

Abstract - The present paper makes an attempt to trace the genesis and development of women's education in colonial Assam and its contribution to their changing status and aspirations. The contribution of the native elites in the process of the development of women education; and social perception towards women education as reflected in the contemporary periodicals are some other areas of this study. Educational development in Assam during the colonial rule has generally been viewed by educational historians to be the work of British rulers who introduced a system of education with the hidden agenda of initiating a process of socialization. The state agenda regarding education in Assam motivated mainly for the creation of a class of intelligent labour possessing some useful skills and practical knowledge rather than creating an enlightened community capable of questioning them by higher learning. This period also brought about essential changes in the mindset of Assamese society and the emerging intelligentsia began to be discussed and debated upon wide variety of issues including women education. This study is empirical in nature and descriptive in analysis and the survey of archival sources as well as various contemporary literary works have also been given due attention.

Keywords - Colonial Education policy, Christian missionaries, Assamese middle class, women Education

I. Introduction

The Nineteenth century particularly can be called an age of women, for all over the world their rights and wrongs, their nature capacities and potential were subjects of heated discussions. In Europe feminist consciousness began spreading during and after French Revolution, and by the end of the century feminist ideas were being expressed by radicals in England, France and Germany. The 'woman question' had become a central issue for Russian reformers and anarchists and in India also the wrongs of women began to be deplored by social reformers mainly in Bengal and Maharashtra. India had a rich tradition of women's education. For promoting women education among different sections of society in modern period, conscious efforts were made by the Christian missionaries, native male intelligentsia and the British Government (Srivastava, 2000:15). But the condition of women education was far from satisfactory

which can be inferred from literacy rate from 0.2 % in 1882 to 6% only in 1947(Kochhar,2009:225). It reveals that for centuries higher education for women has been neglected and the report University Education Commission 1948 exposed that they were against women education. In their recommendation they wrote "women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability" (University Education Commission Report, Government of India, 1948-49). Educational development in Assam during the colonial rule has generally been viewed by educational historians to be the work of British rulers who introduced a system of education with the hidden agenda of initiating a process of socialization (Acharya,1995:670-673). The colonial period brought about essential changes in the mindset of Assamese society and the emerging intelligentsia began to be discussed and debated upon wide variety of issues including women education.

II. Objectives of the study

This paper aims to trace the genesis and development of women's education in colonial Assam and its contribution to their changing status and aspirations. Further it also discusses the contribution of the native elites in the process of the development of women education and the role played by them in influencing colonial policy on education. The present work also tries to review the social perception towards women education as reflected in the contemporary periodicals.

III. Methodology

This study is empirical in nature and descriptive in analysis and data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The former includes survey of archival sources and internal records of the concerned departments of the government of Assam as well as various contemporary literary works such as autobiographies and articles published in periodicals, newspapers etc. Secondary source data consist of relevant literature on the topic.

IV. Women's Education as discourse of progress and modernity in Assam:

The history of Assam in the nineteenth century witnessed great socio-political and economic transformations and experienced a new awakening in the



Brahmaputra valley because three major simultaneous changes occurred during this period. The spread of British administration and its associated infrastructure was also assisted by the activities of the American Baptist missionaries and the impact of the Bengal Renaissance (Bora, 2005:8). The women's question became a part of the greater discourse of progress and modernity in the 19th century India and a movement for women education started as part of the 'colonized males' search for the 'new woman.' At the outset, the missionaries took up the cause of educating women, as a way of enlightening the poor, heathen women (Chakraborty, 2009:87-102). Later on, the educated Indian male reformers took up the cause of women's education and worked towards its proliferation. Thus, indigenous forces also represented for the upliftment of women which was responded very soon by the British government by setting up a host of new schools and institutions of higher learning for women. But it was primarily corresponded to the gendered construction of womanhood and the dicta of traditional prescriptions, i.e., the 'good mother', 'good wife' models (ibid).

V. Was Women Education a Civilizing Mission Agenda?

The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal commented in 1870 that the need of the hour in Assam was the promotion of primary education, not because this would ensure education for the masses, but because this would create a class of intelligent labour (Sengupta, 2012:53-60). The educational agenda of the state in Assam consisted in the creation of a class of intelligent labour possessing some useful skills and practical knowledge. There was no room in this schema for higher learning which had the potential to create an enlightened community capable of questioning the given paradigm (ibid). The 'woman's question' loomed large in the nineteenth century India as well as in Assam. This was not so much a question of what women wanted, but rather how they could be modernized. It became the central question in nineteenth century British India, because the foreign rulers had focused their attention on this particular aspect of society. The influential British writers condemned Indian religion, culture and society for their rules and customs regarding women (Forbes, 1998:12) enamored with their civilizing mission.

VI. Understanding the role of Christian Missionaries in Women Education

The Christian Missionaries rendered invaluable service in spreading modern education in Assam. The most important focus of their activities was women in the region and their untiring effort in furthering the cause of women's education deserves special attention. They observed the 'degradation' of 'heathen' women suffering from the disabilities of widowhood, child marriage and polygamy. Therefore, considered it their sacred duty to try and improve their status through education and through women working for women. With this in mind, they started schools for girls where, besides imparting lessons on general education, they also taught sewing, knitting, embroidery and handicrafts. They soon realized that for a

majority of girls, early marriage was the most formidable obstacle to getting formal education in schools. One of the solutions that they came up with was the concept of *zenana* education where women teachers went from home to home to teach women. These private efforts were socially more acceptable than formal education. They were progressive yet at the same time traditional, providing women with basic education while restricting them to the parameters of their homes (Sengupta, 2012:53-60).

In 1836 Rev. Brown and T. Cutter of the American Baptist Mission came to Assam. Though their purpose was the spread of Christianity they had to look after the education of the people as well. In June, 1839, Brown's wife established a school at Sadiya for boys and Cutter's wife too began a school for girls (Lahkar, 1987:2-3) which was considered the first attempt at formally educating girls in Assam. Gradually more attempts were made to establish schools for girls in Assam and in 1840 Mrs. Brown Miles Bronson, a pioneering American Baptist missionary to Assam established another girls' school in Sivasagar. The American Baptist Mission maintained the Chatribari Girls' M.E. School at Guwahati, the Girls' M. E. School with women's High school at Jorhat and the Mission Girls' High School at Golaghat. The Roman Catholic Mission maintained the St. Mary's convent, a M. E. School for Indian girls with kindergarten classes at Guwahati. Though the number of girls' schools rose from 679 to 789 in Assam Valley (ibid) but the expansion of girl's education faced obstacles due to the problem of dearth of qualified teachers for which more teacher training centers were urgently required.

Mary Carpenter, a great English Social reformer, visited India during the years 1865-1870. She found that the main obstacle to the progress of female education was the absence of female teachers. So, she suggested the establishment of female normal schools and decided to devote special attention to women's education which resulted that many girls' schools were started in different parts of Assam. But the main problem with these schools was that almost all of them were very ill-equipped. There were only 8 girls' schools in Assam in 1870 of which 5 in Kamrup and one each in Darrang, Nowgong and Lakhimpur districts (ibid).

Schools for native boys and girls had usually been sustained by the Baptists Mission and for several years a Boarding School for Eurasian children was conducted by Mrs. Ward. Rev. W.E. Witter and his wife were also the resident missionaries. Schools were held at each hill station and taught by Assamese, members of the Sibsagar Church. A girls' school was taught by a Naga girl. These schools were aided by a Government grant of Rs. 520. Rev. S.W. Rivenberg had also joined this Mission. Miss O. Keeler had been for some years an officiant helper in school and Christian work among the native women. This Mission had done a great deal of school work. There had been a large Normal school for boys and a boarding and day school for girls for several years. The labors of the missionaries had specially directed to the Mikeers, the hill

people of the district, and the Normal School sustained was intended to train Mikeer and Kachari youth to teach in schools and preach among their own people. Four Christian women were employed to visit women in their own homes and give religious instruction (Ward,1884, Reprint 2016: 207- 219).

Tezpur had been a Mission station of the S.P.G. Society for many years. The first Missionary Rev. Mr. Kesselmeyer had been worthily succeeded by Rev. Mr. Endle and their efforts had been chiefly directed to the Kachari tribe and been fairly successful. A Normal School for training Kachari youths for teachers and preachers was held in Tezpur. The schools were aided by a Government grant of Rs. 1,800. A girl's school was held at the Guwahti Mission of the American Baptists and in the village, schools were over two hundred pupils. At Cherra, a Normal school and scattered over the hills ninety schools for boys and girls and a larger number of girls are under instruction of this district (Shillong) that in any other in Assam (Ward,1884, Reprint 2016: 207- 219). It was possible among these people to have mixed schools, which was impracticable among Hindus or Mahomedans. In the Garo hills schools were opened and some elementary books issued in the Garo language but the Bengali language had been chiefly taught in the schools. A girls' Boarding school in Tura was taught by Miss M.Russell. In the villages there were thirty-five schools, numbering six hundred and sixty-two pupils. A Normal school was held in Tura. The Government made a liberal grant of Rs. 3,000 to sustain these schools (ibid.). Thus, the Christian missionaries played a significant role in spreading women education in Assam and mainly took up the cause of education among the tribal women which helped us to infer that their prime mission was to uplift the status of women but it can't be denied that spread of Christianity was another important objective.

VII. Women Education through government initiative

It is mentioned above that 'was women education a part of civilizing mission agenda'? The development regarding women education in Assam certainly give some clues for that question. The first attempt adopted by the Government of Assam to encourage female education in Assam was the system of giving rewards to teachers or *gurus* with an aim to bring more girls to schools. With the revision of the grant-in-aid rules in 1873, "*Gurus* were also encouraged to bring more girls to schools by offering rewards in cash. The reward ranged from Rs.5 to Rs.25, and was given to five to ten *Gurus* who could bring the largest number of girls to their schools. They had also to show that the girls in their schools could read with fluency from a vernacular textbook, and could write from dictation. Besides this they should be able to do sums of multiplication also (Lahkar, opcit:186). The teachers tried hard to bring girls to their schools in order to get rewards which resulted a gradual improvement in the state of female education.

However, the first elementary school for girls was started in Upper Assam by Utsabansanda Goswami,

Deputy Inspector of Schools, Sibasagar in 1860-61. This was followed by a few more schools in the next two years at Sibasagar, Nowgong and Guwahti(Dharapur). Within fifteen years, 44 schools were opened throughout the province with an enrollment of 552. But the Government efforts remained half-hearted and the result was far from satisfactory. Even after a lapse of twenty years the total enrollment in girls' schools did not reach 900, largely due to the Government's reluctance to spend more than a token amount (Phukan,2011: 41). While commenting on the condition of female education the Hunter Commission in 1882 reported, 'The proportion of girls' attending schools to the entire female population is, for all India, 1 in 843. In Madras it is 1 in 403, but in Assam it is as 1 in 2236(Bora, 2005:19). Even though the girls' schools were very few and the total number of girls receiving education was minuscule in relation to the total population, yet a shift in attitude towards female education was discernable.

Some of the recommendations of Hunter Commission of 1882 were implemented throughout India. Girls' Schools were given more liberal grants than Boys' Schools. In Bengal and Punjab separate standards were prescribed for girls. Since Assam followed Bengal, separate courses were prescribed for girls in Assam. The commission discouraged mixed schools for girls and boys but not accepted by many provinces including Assam. It was found that in Assam most of the girl students attended the mixed schools rather than the Girls' Schools (Mathur,1973:46). There was a large number of girls in the Boys school and also followed the curricula prescribed for boys. But later on, some modifications were introduced e.g. in the Bengal Regulation for vernacular schools, needle work for girls took place of agriculture for boys. But in the Girls school, most of the teachers were males who could not teach the girls needle work. Furthermore, most of the girls did not reach higher primary standard where the differentiation in course of studies began. So, in practice, the differentiation of curricula remained ineffective.

William Robinson commented on the status of women in Assam in his book that there was a state of dependence more humiliating than that, to which the weaker sex is here subject, cannot easily be conceived. Like most women of India, they are denied even the least portion of education and are excluded from every social circle. They are even accounted unworthy to partake of religious rites, except in conjunction with their husbands. Females are not included within the pale of education; every ray of mental improvement is kept away from the sex. As they are always confined to domestic duties, and excluded from the society (Robinson, 1941).

VIII. Beginning of Modern Higher Education for Women in Assam

Nalini Bala Devi mentioned in her autobiography that until 1930s, there was only one girl student in Cotton College, the first college of Assam. Although initiatives were taken to spread primary and secondary education, there was no college for girls in the state until 1939.

Cotton College was established in the year 1901, but there was almost no girl student in the college during the first two decades. When Sujata Roy took admission in 1929, she was the only girl in there (Devi, 1976:162). But the number of girls in the college was relatively very low. Moreover, there was the problem of accommodation for girl students. This problem was sorted out by the initiative of Rajabala Das, the most noted female educationalist of Assam. For the spread of higher education for women in the state of Assam, the contribution of Rajabala Das is second to none. Her autobiography 'Tinikuri Dah Bosorar Smriti' (Memories from last Seventy Years) has its most part dealt with her journey as an educationist. The first Women college in Assam was Handique Girls' College which was established in the year 1939 (Das, 1971:60). However, the Lady Keane College was set up in Shillong in 1936 in undivided Assam. Two more women colleges established during 1940-41, the St. Mary's College at Shillong, the Sylhet Women's College but these are not a part of present Assam. By the third decade of the twentieth century the number of girls attending colleges outside the state started increasing and with the establishment of new colleges in Assam girls' education became a popular practice.

In Cotton College, enrolment of girls rose from six in session 1931-32 to eighteen in 1932-33. In 1927-32 saw only twelve female students studying in the men's colleges of the province while in the year 1936-37, the number rose to hundred. It is noteworthy to mention here that one of the women graduates of MurariChand College during 1932 secured high second-class honours in Philosophy and won two gold medals under Calcutta University. Since Assam did not have a University and the colleges of the province were affiliated to the Calcutta University. Further, an Assam Valley girl headed the list of successful candidates for the I.Sc. examination and took admission to study medicine. She was Rajaniprava Dutta of Bajali in Lower Assam, the first lady M.B.B.S. from Assam (Barpujari, 1961:13). In order to see that girls' education received proper attention of the Government and of the public, the Assam Women's Education League was formed in May, 1940 with Lady Reid as its President. The objectives of the League were to invite all women in the province who were interested in education to join the League and to further the cause of Women's education in the province.

IX. Understanding the Contribution of Indigenous forces & Middle class

The position of women in the 19th century Assam varied on the basis of caste, class and religion. The social problems like polygamy, early marriage, and the denial of widow re-marriage especially among the upper-caste Hindus had greatly deteriorated the position of the women. A new awakening emerged in the Brahmaputra Valley due to impact of Bengal Renaissance which brought about essential changes in the mindset of a small but powerful group in the Assamese society. A significant development occurred in the realm of changing attitudes towards

women which gave them a visibility within the patriarchal set up of the society. They had remained in the periphery of society for centuries and their problems had always been relegated to the background. In their justification for the creation of a just social order of women, the reforms now brought issues like polygamy, marriage reforms and women's education to the public space (Bora, 2005:8). It is important to note that "Assam came under British rule nearly a century after East-India Company's contact with Bengal. Naturally Assam lagged behind Bengal in receiving modern education which was mainly responsible for the new awakening in Bengal. The renaissance in Assam was however different from that of Bengal. While in Bengal, it was a multi-dimensional movement, in Assam it was predominantly literary, though from the middle of the nineteenth century, individual efforts were made to eradicate some of the social evils and superstitious beliefs conforming Assamese society. It was colonial Assam that sought for changes largely within the Assamese society. The messengers of change were a handful of Assamese men belonging to the upper strata of society with close association with Bengal. These men were the first to cherish a new social outlook in the province which also included women in their agenda of social reform. The English East India initially had remained somewhat indifferent to the problems of Indian society, because of their preoccupations of trade. It is therefore not surprising, that official surveys on the state of indigenous education undertaken by the government revealed almost a total absence of women students. Though the majority of girls had not yet acquired the opportunity of entering the portals of schools, not all of them were illiterates. Women from 'respectable' families often studied at home (Chakravorty,2009:87). Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, an early exponent of women education in Assam emphasized the importance of imparting knowledge to girls and boys equally. Believing in practicing what he preached, Anandaram made arrangements at home to educate women in his family and initiated his daughter, Padmavati, to formal education at the age of five. His example was followed by Gunabhiram Baruah who made ardent pleas for equal educational opportunities for girls and boys. To prove his point, he himself got his daughter, Swarnalata, enrolled at Bethune School, Calcutta. Through the *Orunodoi*, he expressed his indignation at two sets of norms for education of boys and girls. He pointed out that the *Shastras* never discouraged women education and that corrupt practices which had crept in at a later date had deprived Hindu women from acquiring education. Gunabhiram and his fellow reformers saw uneducated women as one of the principal obstacles to progress. They believed that the gap between educated men and uneducated women resulted in a communication gap between the husband and wife and prevented the wife from being an intellectual companion of the husband. Since both were interdependent, Gunabhiram concluded that the Assamese nation could never hope to prosper until and unless the womenfolk were emancipated, and this was possible only through education (Goswami,2012:210-211). But as most of the agenda reform was male engineered and

mainly concerned with the caste Hindu social norms, it had very vague visions about the nature of the problems of the lower caste and lower-class women. Ratneswar Mahanta expected the Assamese women to initiate the ideals of the *Dharmashastras* and to ignore most of the new western learning (Assam Bandhu, 1885). The prevailing environment did not permit the propagation of progressive views on women and the failure in working out an alternative ideology of reform inevitably led the Assamese women to appropriate the ideals of the Aryan women, many of which were inventions of the late 19th century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, woman education became a major issue in the public sphere. The periodicals of the last decades of the nineteenth century along with the fictional narratives were occupied with the question of the proper sphere of women. Social reforms in the nineteenth century were mainly directed towards the sufferings and disabilities of women as the society's ills could in fact be traced to the oppressed condition of women. Female education and emancipation were seen as the first steps towards progress. The dawn of 20th century witnessed the progress of English education which produced many English educated Assamese youths. women education was neglected at that time as it was commonly considered to be pernicious to the society. But the educated Assamese realized the need of educating the female. This group of educated middle class played significant role in eradicating the then existing social evils. Practices of polygamy and the widespread addiction to opium were prevalent at that time. The Assamese middle class formed various societies for disseminating the ideas of social reforms. Kanaklata Chaliha, one of the founders of Ghar Jeuti, received extensive support from her husband Taraprasad Chaliha who was a learned man and had even gone abroad to study law, which he had successfully completed. It was in his stay in England when he saw and observed the Militant Suffragette Movement and took inspiration from it. He came back home after completing his studies. Being a member of the Local Education Board he along with his associate Phanidhar Chaliha came up with establishing a local school entirely for girls. His ideas and thoughts inspired the articles published in the first edition of Ghar Jeuti like women's education, the habit of reading books, the importance of exercise et.al. Taraprasad Chaliha had a way of writing and drawing upon issues that were as outward and significant as he was. The difference might be to do with the fact that he did his education in England and the air there had a lot to influence his perspective on women issues.

X. Women Education as reflected in Contemporary Periodicals

The position of women and social perceptions of their education could be understood in view of contemporary periodicals and newspapers. Nagendra Narayan Choudhury (Majumdar, *Awahan*, 1855 saka Fourth Year), in his article *Stree Xikhyar Proyujoniyota* talks about the development of society by providing the right kind of education for women. He focused that women deserve to have access to education as the men of the

society does. However, his understanding of women's education was limited to the fact that even if they be educated their foremost responsibility of serving their family should not be neglected. It is like accepting marriage as the destiny of a woman something that the society has to offer. It is an imposition the woman is expected to affirm it (ibid). Prabhatchandra Adhikary's *Axomiya Suwalir Xikhya* in *Awahan* (ibid, 1855 saka) stated about the implementation of coeducational institutions and also said that it was his personal opinion. He remarks "The school girl and the boy at educational institutions, thrown together to the atmosphere of vice, drug and cocktail indulge in the dissipations that have become part of school life (ibid, 1855saka). However, writers who wrote about women education had differences in opinion or stances and one has to analyze and criticize to get a whole picture of something from that.

The first magazine of women in Assam, the *Ghar-Jeuti* published many articles about women education as well as social perceptions in it, which was in circulation from 1927 to 1931. Tara prasad Chaliha's article *Stri Shiksha Eti Xomosya* (The problems to women's education) emphasizes that for the success of any nation it is important that the women of that nation get education and the right kind of education and also mentions about the lack of women teachers in girls' school. According to one of his counts, in the year 1923, only 4313 women received teachers' training throughout the whole of India. Most of the Teacher's Training Schools that were established then saw the admission of missionary women more in comparison than their Indian counterparts but this could not be argued upon because India women who received higher education were much less as compared to the former (Mahanta, *Ghar Jeuti*, 1849 Saka:3rd issue). Durga Prasad Majinder Barua wrote about the different ways of self-defense among women and remarked that education is one of the important weapons for self-realization. He stressed mainly physical education among the girls and suggested physical education of Baroda (Gujarat) girls' schools for Assam which he considered best. (ibid, 1849 Saka) Chandraprabha Saikiani's Report of the Goapara conference of *Assam Mahila Samiti* published in the *Ghar-Jeuti*, 1849 Saka, stressed that girl's education should be given due attention. It is mentioned that the development of nation can only be possible when girls would get education equally with boys. They proposed to form group of women teachers' for spreading education in villages (ibid, Saka 1849).

Dharmeswari Das's article *Strixikhyar Prayujoniyata* (Need for women education) compared the contemporary women with that of ancient India, when the women enjoyed high status and had accessed to education. She urged women folk to get access to education for the upliftment of the society (ibid). Aloka Patangia's *Tirutar Xikhya* (women education) stated about the importance of women education for self-respect as well as to equipped themselves according to the need of the society and

should learn mathematics, literature, history and English (ibid, 1851 saka: Third Year, 7th issue). *Stri-Xikhyar Bikhaye Ekhar* by Dibyalata Barua suggested a curriculum that should be followed by a girl in education. It contained a list of subjects and their duration of learning which includes home science, health education, Indian History, Travelogue, Mathematics, Religious education, Bengali literature, science and Sanskrit. Moreover, it is also suggested that English should be an optional subject (ibid). Dakheswari Brahmani wrote an article named *Stri Xikhyaru aru Samajik Unnati* (Women education & Social Development) mainly discussed the role of women in social development and the education for women in this regard. It further stressed on higher education for women after primary and secondary education (ibid, 1851 Saka: 9th issue). Another women writer who contributed in Ghar Jeuti was Nurjahan Begum. She stressed on good quality education for women irrespective of caste, religion etc. (ibid, 1852: issue 5th). Bidyawati Hazarika's *Stri Xikhyaru Awasyakata* (Need for women education) highlighted that women education help for the upliftment of the western society. She referred India's rich heritage of education and its revival. Many articles were published by both male and female writers in *Ghar Jeuti* on women education for example, *Strixikhyaru* by Tarunram Phukan, *Tirutar Xikhyaru* of Surendramohan Das, *Strixikhyaru* of Madhabchandra Das etc. Most of these articles highlighted the importance of women education. The prime aspect one can draw from it was that the awareness and consciousness among them to the upliftment of the position of women in the society (ibid) was appreciable. The most important point that can be noticed is that majority of the writers were female and they were conscious regarding the status of women and their education. Jagat Chandra Choudhury wrote on women education and the subjects a girl should learn during her educational life (ibid). Ramchandra Das and Labanyaprabha Borbora also contributed articles in *Ghar-Jeuti* on women education (ibid). Thus *Ghar-Jeuti* made significant contribution for the spread of women education during colonial period, especially during the second and third decade of the 20th century.

The success and failure of the above-mentioned government initiatives regarding women education can be judged by the attitude of the people of the state towards it. The autobiography of Nalinibala Devi is of immense help as it provides many information on the concerned issue. Devi has given ample information not only on the prevailing condition of female education but at the same time has shown the difference of attitude towards female education in different communities. (Gayan, 2016: 292) Nalini Bala could never attend school and she said that there was no well-equipped school for girls during that time. There was a higher primary school in Panbazar, Guwahati but her father did not allow her and her sister to go to school. But at the same time, she has mentioned that she attained education due to her father who was a supporter of female education (Devi, 1976: 50). Her father appointed the best teachers for his daughters. Sanskrit scholar Gopal Krishna De was their teacher and learnt Assamese, English, Bengali, Sanskrit, Mathematics,

Geography and History. Nishikant Sen and Jageswar Barua were also her teachers (ibid). According to the census reports female literacy of Assam in 1901 was 0.59 percent. One of the most fundamental reasons for this poor percentage is the prevailing social taboos. Girls were not allowed to attend schools with boys and neither were allowed to go to girls' schools as the teachers mostly were males. Moreover, only the affluent families could afford to provide home tutors for their daughters.

XI. Conclusion

The outcome that emerges from above discussion is that the progress of development of higher education for women in Assam was latecomer in comparison to other parts of India. Women education was constantly intertwined in the caste-class ethnicity divide that was even more fortified by gender discrimination. However, the colonial education not only emancipated women but also brought them into the vortex of another struggle i.e., empowerment. The establishment of British colonial rule in Assam saw the entry of girls into formal educational institution which was informal and largely limited to acquiring of practical household skills prior to the Colonial rule. The collective efforts of the Christian missionaries, the Colonial Government and the social reformers as well as the emerging intellectual middle class of the age led to the opening of educational facilities for women. Women became aware of the existing gender inequalities in Assamese Society as they became educated, and generated an urge to free themselves from the grip of prescribed belief systems and roles that had historically operated against their interests. The cue for the women's uplift came initially from men. This set an implicit limit to the aspirations of women. For the more sensitive women, however participation in the freedom movement meant a protracted struggle against two different badges of servility: colonialism and patriarchy. While education empowered women, to play a historic role in eradicating British Colonial domination as co-partners of men, their struggle against patriarchal domination remains an unresolved issue.

XII. References

- [1] Acharya, P Bengali 'Bhadralok' and Educational Development in 19th Century Bengal, Economic and Political Weekly, 30 (1995) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4402564>.
- [2] Barpujari, H.K(ed.) The Cotton College Diamond Jubilee Commemoration (1951) 1901-1951, Guwahati.
- [3] Bora, S., 'Presidential Address', NEIHA proceedings, Shillong., (2005).
- [4] Chakraborty, R., Women's Education and Empowerment in Colonial Bengal in Responding to the West edited by Hans Hagerdal, Amsterdam University Press. <https://www.jstor.org..> (2009).
- [5] Das, Rajabala., Tinikuri Doh Bosorar Smriti, Guwahati., (1971).
- [6] Devi, N.B., Ari Aha Dinbur, Guwahati., (1976).
- [7] Forbes, G., The New Cambridge History of India, vol.iv.2: women in Modern India, Cambridge University Press., (1998).
- [8] Gayan, C., 'Early Phase of Female Education in Assam', in IRJMST, 7(12) (2016).
- [9] Goswami, P., 'Keynote Address' proceeding volume of National Seminar on Status of Women in Colonial Assam, Pandu College, Guwahati.
- [10] Goswami, P., The History of Assam- from Yandabo to Partition, (2012) 1826-1947, Orient BlackSwan.

- [11] Kochhar, S.K(2006) Pivotal Issues in Indian Education, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi.
- [12] Lahkar,Bina(1987) Development in Women Education (study of Assam), Omsons Publications, New Delhi & Guwahati.
- [13] Mahanta, Aparna(ed.), Ghar-Jeuti(edited by Kanaklata Chaliaha & Kamalalaya Kakati, 2008 (1927-1932), Publication Board Assam, Guwahati.
- [14] Mahanta, Ratneswar., 'Ghainir Kartabya Aru Stree Shiksha, published in the Assamese news magazine Assam Bandhu., (1885).
- [15] Majumdar, Paramnanda ed., 2016, Awahan (edited by Dr. Dinanath Sarma), Assam Publication Board, Guwahati.
- [16] Mathur, Y.B., Women's Education in India, 1813-1966 (1973) 1973, Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
- [17] Phukan, M., Women and education in Colonial Assam, unpublished Ph.d Thesis, Gauhati University., (2011).
- [18] Report of the University Education Commission, Government of India, (12) 1948-491.
- [19] Robinson, W A., Descriptive Account of Assam.
- [20] Sengupta, M (2012) Some Aspects of Education in 19th Century Assam, Economic and Political Weekly,47 (2012) 29, www.jstor.org
- [21] Srivastava, G., Women's Higher Education in the 19th Century, New Delhi: Concept., (2000).
- [22] Ward, S.R. (1884, Reprint 2016)A Glimpse of Assam, Eastern, Guwahati.