

History of female education in Assam

Niharika Moran

Research Scholar, Department of Assamese Gauhati University

ABSTRACT- *There was no formal education facility for girls in ancient India whereas boys had the gurukul system. However a few aristocrat families used to arrange home education for their daughters. Educated women like Gargee, Moitreyee, Lilawati, Khana etc can be found in ancient Indian history, but they are very few. Most of the parents got their daughters married at a very tender age of 9-10 years. Women had to be busy in household works only. It was the same scenario in Assam like the rest of India.*

Date of Submission: 30-06-2019

Date of acceptance:20-07-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

Assam also had gender based education system. No evidence of female education is found in ancient Kamrup. In fifteenth-sixteenth century, after the period of Vaishnavite movement, common women could get spiritual education through satras and namghars, but formal education was still out of reach for them. We get a few Assamese women of this period who got educated at home with their own efforts. In Vaishnavite period, Gopal Ata's daughter Padmapriya, Harideva's daughter Bhubaneshwari, Sankardeva's granddaughter-in-law Kanaklata are a few examples of them. Education got a great boost during Ahom rule. The Ahom kings made facilities for education in various places of Assam, but commoners could not go there as they were available only for royal people. Borroja Phuleswari Konwari of the Ahoms emphasized on education. Chaoching Konwari could write Ahom script with both her hands and legs.

Aim and objectives of the study

- This kind of research is very necessary for complete modernization of female consciousness.
- This kind of discussion is necessary for strengthening women socially and economically.
- Every man and women should be aware to that woman do not loose their identity in the grasp of patriarchy. It is necessary to discuss that women are still not completely free from superstition, exploitation, oppression, rape etc.
- This kind of discussion is necessary to eliminate the mentality of thinking women as commodity, from the society.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on secondary data collected from different sources like research articles, research papers, etc. published in journals, periodicals, books and internet. The paper is descriptive research.

III. DISCUSSION

After the treaty of Yandaboo, Assam came under British rule in 1826. The social and political scenario of Assam was very complicated at that time. As there was chaos everywhere, people could not even think of education. East India Company came only to rule and exploit Assam, and did not take any step for promoting education. Charter Act of 1813 stated that providing education to Indian people was one of the moral responsibilities of the Company and advised to spend one lakh rupees per year for education, but it was never implemented in reality.

American Baptist missionaries came to India in 1836. They have a great contribution towards education in Assam. Their main motive was to preach their religion, yet they realized the poor state of education of the local people. They were the pioneers of female education in Assam. Only after a few months of their entry to the state, they set up their first school in Sadia, which had separate classes for boys and girls. Mrs. Brown established a girls' school in Sadia in 1838. We can find in her diary about starting the first girls' school in Assam - "Mrs. Brown commenced the girls' school today, with ten scholars."

In 1839, Mrs. Kattar, wife of O. T. Kattar established another girls' school in Sadia. Although it had a short life, this was a bold step for female education in Assam. Mrs. Warker set up another girls' school in Sivasagar in 1841. According to the report of Morphet Mills,

"And three school in the station one for boys numbering fifty and one for girls numbering ten. Mrs. Brown has also a girls' boarding school of thirteen scholars."

In 1850, day school was established in Guwahati, in which number of girl students was only 13. Girls did not come to school at that time for various reasons. Very few girls were able to go out of their homes. The patriarchal society considered that it was better for the girls to remain at home. Also particular subjects were selected for the girls in the few schools they could study. They were First Book, First and Second Mathematics, Arunodoy and Young Assam alongwith handicrafts for girls. The fabrics, threads and slates required for that were imported from the USA.

As the girls' schools established by the missionaries did not grow, their female workers started another set of schools named Zenana School. They went door to door to encourage the girls to study but did not get much success. East India Company took the responsibility of female education only in 1858. Earlier on 19th July 1854, the need for female education was declared officially in Wood's Education Despatch. It came from Charles Wood, which was the first letter sent from the English government about education in India.

Female education was not expanding due to various reasons. Not only the carelessness of East India Company, but also the narrow-mindedness of the Assamese people was major barriers of female education. Some other factors were -

1. Grant policy of the government.
2. Carelessness of the parents.
3. Poverty.
4. Superstitions.
5. Transportation problems.
6. Child marriage.
7. Lack of enough girls' schools.
8. Lack of female teachers.
9. Making the girls to do most of the household works.

The Company rule in India came to an end after the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. The Wood's Despatch in 1859 emphasized the need of female education and advised to provide huge grants for the same. Eight girls' schools were established with government initiative in 1870. Five of them were set up in Kamrup and one each in Darrang, Nagaon and Lakhimpur. The missionaries with their own initiative had already founded a few schools in Sivasagar, Nagaon, Kamrup and Khasi-Jaintia hills. The first girls' primary school in Sivasagar was founded in 1860-61. In 1874-75, the number of girls having primary education was 875. According to the statistics from 1875-76, the number of girls' schools and educated girls is shown in the table.

District	No. of Schools	No. of Female Students
Cachar	5	59
Sylhet	2	20
Goalpara	2	31
KG Hills	12	390
Garo Hills	----	10
Kamrup	6	109
Darrang	4	70
Nagaon	6	76
Sivasagar	3	133
Lakhimpur	-----	8
Total	40	906

In 1889, there were 2414 girl students in total 185 schools. In 1897-98 no. of primary schools in Assam including both hills and plains was 185 and no. of girl students was only 3823. There were 3 middle schools for girls in Dhubri, Dibrugarh and Shillong, where no. of girl students was only 235.

The Bengali Renaissance started in the nineteenth century. It's one of the main motives was to promote female education. Notable personalities like Raja Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar etc. lead this renaissance. In nineteenth century, Assam had almost no impact of female education. In that period, a few progressive Assamese youth who had gone to Calcutta forstudy also thought of female education in Assam. They included Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Jajnaram Khargharia Phukan, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Barua etc. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan taught his wife at home and started his daughter

Padmavati's education at 5. Gunabhiram Barua also stood for female education and tried hard for expansion of the same. In 1880 he brought her daughter Swarnalata to Calcutta for study when she was 9. He believed that –

“Boys and girls both should have education, even shastra tells this to us. It is the main responsibility of the parents to look after and educate both boys and girls equally.”

An ambience of female education was tried to be formed in Assam in the later period of nineteenth century. But the girls were not able to come to learn that easily as they were leered and criticized for doing that. Even Balinarayan Bora, an England-returned engineer of that time and editor of the magazine named 'Mou', commented badly about female education in his magazine. Another notable person Lambodar Bora also had the same view. However amidst all this, a few people tried their best to educate the girl children. They understood that a home can progress only if the females progress, and a society can progress only if the homes progress. Deviprava Dutta from Dibrugarh stayed in a rented house to make her girls Durgaprava and Hemaprova study in Bethune School. Durgaprava is known to be the first Assamese woman to pass matriculation examination. Similarly Hemaprova is the first Assamese woman to pass FA. Sudhalata Duwarah and Sukhalata Duwarah, daughters of Rotnokanto Borkakati, were the first female MA BT from Assam. Principal of Handique Girls' College Rajbala Das, Puspallata Das etc. were from the first batch of the Assamese women who studied in Calcutta or Kashi University.

Female education increased at a slow rate like this until the end of nineteenth century. With the start of twentieth century, female education started to expand rapidly. A few reasons are –

1. Implementation of Sarada Act.
2. Non co-operation movement by Mahatma Gandhi.
3. Awareness of the people.
4. Spread of western education.
5. Government initiative.
6. Demands by the women organizations for female education.

In fact a new sense was developed in India through the Swaraj movement in twentieth century. The impact of the independence movement by Mahatma Gandhi reached Assam also. Gandhi emphasized a lot on female education. Everyone, whether they were literate or not, participated in the movement. Women also came forward to the movement in the strong leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. It changed the scenario of female education in Assam to a great extent. At the same time Cotton College, the first college in Assam, was established in 1901 in Guwahati. The parents also got rid of a few superstitions to some extent. Even after a long wait, the girls were permitted to take admission in Cotton College for the first time in 1929. Only from the twentieth century, the higher education was available for women in Assam.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, we can say that education takes the society forward in the true sense. The superstitions and evil customs rooted in the illiterate societies can be abolished only through education. Education provides self-consciousness, self-confidence and true sentiments to a person through which he can separate the good from the evil. Therefore the history of education is related to female consciousness in Assamese society. The awareness of the ignored section of women improves with the increase of expansion of rate of female education. Hence the women get courage to protest against the patriarchal mindset of the society. In this way, the history of female education in Assam is naturally related to the continuous increase of the female consciousness.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Baruah, Birinchi Kumar: History of Assamese Literature, Sahitya Academy, Delhi 1964
- [2]. Baruah, Birinchi Kumar: Modern Assamese Literature, Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati 1957
- [3]. Beauvior, Simande : The Second Sex (1949), Pan Books, London, 1988.
- [4]. Gogoi, Hridayananda: Aadhunikatar Sandhanat Mamoni Roisom, Jyoti Prakashan, Guwahati, 2001.
- [5]. Devi, Mira : Asomiya Upanyasat Naribaad, Lokayat Prakashan, guwahati, 1996.

Niharika Moran" History of female education in Assam" International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI), vol. 08, no. 7, 2019, pp.40-42