

Development of Women Education in Assam

***Poli Konwar**

Abstract

Women education was encouraged and supported in early India. There is ample evidence in support of the fact that women had achieved prominence in philosophy, poetry and used to participate in learned education with men in ancient days. But the education of women was restricted during the Muslim rulers in India. Women's educations play an important role for promoting socio-economic development of a state. Education for women is a prerequisite for creating a good family and a good nation. Education would empower women to achieve social, economic and political right which are denied to her traditionally. We know that Assamese women are not yet empowered. Women are essential as their thoughts lead to the development of a good society and economy. After independence, the state government has made different measure for development of women education in the state of Assam.

Key words : Women education, Literacy rate, Education of girls, Christian missionaries, Girls enrolment, Gender gap

Introduction :

Women constitute almost half of the total population in the world. In earlier times, women were confined to the four walls of house performing household activities. But situation changed during the medieval period. The Renaissance in Europe brought education as a luxury to the privileged classes, including their women folk. Gradually, the girls have been offered formula education in different countries in the world. It is interesting to note here that even in advanced countries the number of girl's competing secondary education is lower than the boys. Women education was encouraged and supported in

*Assistant Professor of Education, Gargaon College, Simaluguri

early India. There is ample evidence in support of the fact that women had achieved prominence in philosophy, poetry and used to participate in learned education with men in ancient days. But the education of women was restricted during the Muslim rulers in India In 1854; women's education was recognized as a branch of state system of education for first time by the wood's Dispatch in India. Bethune College was the first women's college in India which was established at Kolkata in 1879. Women education has an important role for promoting socio-economic development in the underdeveloped state like Assam. It may be mentioned here that as per population census, 2011, the population of the state stands at 3, 11,69,272 of which 1,59,54,927 are males and 1,52,14,345 are females. The sex ratios in terms of females per 1000 males for Assam are 954 in 2011. The sex ratio rank in Assam was 15th among the states of India in 2011.

Objectives :

The broad objectives of the study are –

1. To study the historical perspective of women education of Assam.
2. To discuss the female literacy trends and enrolment of Assam.

Methodology :

Women education is selected for our study as the women education is more valuable for the society and economy. The study is based on secondary data. The secondary data were collected from both government and non-government publications. In addition to secondary data, a large number of discussions were held with knowledgeable persons regarding the women education in Assam.

Findings and Discussion :**a. Historical Perspective :**

Women had a very dignified place in society in early Assam. Education among was not denied and many women had attained great proficiency in earning in older times. In Assam women education was encouraged and supported in medieval days. Rain Phuleshwari of wife of Siva Singha (1714-1744) established

the first school in Assam. There was a purely indigenous system of education for women during the Ahoms days (1228-1826) in Assam. The history of modern education for women starts in Assam after 1826 when Britishers, occupied the state. In Assam, David Scott, the first agent of the East India Company, tried to improve and develop the indigenous system of education soon after his arrival in 1826. Side by side, with the activities of the company, the Christian missionaries also started schools for girls in their religious interest. It was the women Christian missionaries, who took up the cause and establish schools for girls at Sivasagar, Nagaon and Guwahati in 1840,1843 and 1850 respectively (Baruah, 2002). It is seen that by the middle of the nineteenth century some progressive men made efforts to spread female education. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (1829-1869) Hemchandra Barua (1835-1869) and Gunadhram Barua (1837-1894) were in favor of women education in Assam. Anandaram also advocated the emancipation of women in Assam (Barpujari,1996). Anandaram was associated with the Bethune society which popularized women education in Bengal. The missionaries also played an important role for the development of women education in the hill areas. The Wood's Despatch of 1854, however, gave due importance of women education in India, In spite of the recommendations of the Wood's of the Wood's Despatch, the progress of women education was not satisfactory in Assam. Later on, according to the recommendations of the Hunter Commission of 1882, some schools for women were opened with government grant. The percentage of girls attending the schools in Assam was 0.45 percent in 1881-82, which was much lower as compared to 0.84 percent in India (Saikia, 19980). A girls' high school was started in 1885 at Dibrugarh. The women were more illiterate than men at the close of the nineteenth century in Assam. The number of female literates per thousand in 1891 of all ages was only 2 in the Sivasagar district of Assam (Sivasagar District Gazetteer, 1967). The number of school's for girls were very slowly increased in the state. In 1880-81, there were 44 primary schools for girls in Assam Valley. In spite of the efforts made by the missionaries and grants given by the government, the number of primary school for girls at the close of the nineteenth century stood at 202 in the state (Barpujari, ed., 1993). The Bengali language was used in the school from 1836 to 1873 in Assam. The introduction

of Bengali as medium of instruction in the school affected the progress of women education in the state for well over 30 years. The development of women's education in Assam was very slow because, education of girls was not favored by the common men (Sailia, 2001). On the other hand, some affluent families had the practice of giving the lesson of the alphabet to the daughters at home. From the above it is clear that education among women was far from satisfactory in the nineteenth century in Assam. Assam lagged behind in the nineteenth century in respect of the higher education.

Up to the nineteenth century opportunity of education in Assam was limited to the high school only. Later, on public demand cotton college was established at Guwahati in 1901. Cotton College became the premier institution both boys and girls in Assam. In 1905, the Department of Education was created for all round development of education in Assam (Assam,2000) . It is to be noted that from the beginning of the twentieth century the education of girls received great attention in India. Annie Besant took a historical step for women education by starting the Central Hindu girls in Varanasi in 1904. In 1916 Lady Hardinge Medical College was started in Delhi. In Assam, we find that St. Mary's college was the first girls started at Shillong in 1922. In 1935 mother girls college Lady Keane Girls College was started at Shillong. Since the opening of the twentieth century some progress has been made in the field of women education in the state. But the numbers of matriculates were very limited. Two sisters, Sudhalata Duara and Sukhaluta Duara were the first women graduates in Assam . Sudhalata Duara (1896-1928) did her M.A. from Calcutta University in 1923. In this connection, it may be mentioned that Rajabala Das (1892-1985) and Chandra Prova Saikiani (1901-1972) also played an important role in the field of women education in Assam. The freedom movement has positive role in the field of women education in the state. The number of educational institutions for girls was doubled in between 1921-1922 and 1946-1947 in India (Shariff, 2009). It is essential to note that M.K. Gandhi continued to agitate for more and more education to women. In Barak Valley Christian missionaries started a girls' school in 1895 in Silchar (Goswami,1998). Dinanath Nabakishore Balika Vidyalaya was established in Silchar in 1921. The first girls' high school in Karimganj district

was set up in 1935. G. C. College is the oldest college in Barak Valley, which was established in 1935. There were only two girl's students in this college in 1935. Despite an increase in enrolment of girls in School and colleges, the proportions of boys and girls in terms of enrolment ratios remained very wide before independent in Assam. The spread of women's education was slow because, custom, tradition and so city have been and continue to be the main problems in the way of their progress in the state.

After independence government of Assam has taken various steps for the expansion of women's education. As a result the number of literate women is increasing in Assam year after year. Before independence, there were only three girls' colleges in the state. But, now the number has increased to more than twenty in the state. Many schools and colleges are still co-education of institutions. Since the establishment of the Guwahati University in 1948, a large number of girls have been prosecuting post-graduate. Many girls have been receiving their education in some other states of India also. The National Committee on Women's Education (1957-1959) recommended that the state government should establish state councils for the education of girls and women (Aggarwal, 2005). The State Council for Women's Education was also formed to advice the government on the expansion of Women's education in Assam. In 1963, the State Council mentioned that due to the economic pressure in Assam, education of women was in longer a luxury but an imperative necessary in the rural areas. A Girls' polytechnic was also set up at Guwahati in 1964. A Women University is established by Govt. of Assam at Jorhat in 2009. It is quite clear that the educational attainment has increased during the post decade and now in Assam. Twelfth Five Year Plan has different targeted to increase the literacy rate of children of seven years of age in the state.

b. Literacy Trends :

Literacy is one of the important development indicators. Educational development means increase in literacy level. It is to be noted that any person aged seven and above who can read and write with understanding in any language is literate in our country. Literacy is the most essential perquisite for women

empowerment. When women are empowered, the benefits can be seen immediately (Yadava,2009). Since independence considerable progress has been made in women's literacy in the state, still there is a gap between the proportion of boys and girls in terms of literacy rate. The data regarding the literacy rates among males and females, and the gap between the two in India are presented in Table-1.

Table-1
Female Literacy Rates in India (In Percentage)

Census year	Person	Male	Female	Gender Gap
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.3	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source : Census of India

It is clear from the Table-1 that the female literacy has increased and gender gap has decreased in India. This trend of rising female literacy from 8.86 percent in 1951 to 65.46 percent in 2011 will have far reaching consequences which may lead to development of the society and economy. It is to be noted that the female literacy rate was only 0.60 percent in India in 1901. The female literacy rate was below one percent in every province of British India (Dreze and Sen, 1999).The data regarding female literacy rate in Assam are presented in Table-2.

Table-2
Female Literacy Rates in Assam (In Percentage)

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Gender gap
1901	4.20	7.50	0.60	6.90
1911	5.60	10.00	0.80	9.20
1921	7.10	12.20	1.40	10.80
1931	8.60	14.40	1.90	12.50
1941	13.10	20.80	4.40	16.40
1951	18.20	27.40	7.90	19.50
1961	32.58	44.28	18.61	25.67
1971	33.32	42.96	22.31	20.65
1981	-	-	-	-
1991	53.42	62.34	43.70	18.64
2001	64.28	71.93	56.03	15.90
2011	73.18	78.81	67.27	11.54

Source : Census of India.

The Table-2 reveals that the literacy rate of women has gone up from 0.60 percent in 1901 to 67.27 percent in Assam in 2011. The male female gap has increased from 6.90 percent in 1901 to 11.54 percent in 2001. The rate of literacy among males is higher (78.81%) than females (67.27%) in Assam in 2011. It is encouraging to note that the gender gap in literacy rate of Assam (11.54) is lower than that in India (16.68) as per census 2011. The target set by Eleventh Five Year Plan to reduce the gender gap by 10 percent in 2011-12 has not been achieved yet in Assam as well in India. Assam is the most important state of the North-East region in India. The female literacy rate is lower in Assam except Arunachal

Pradesh as compared to the hill states of the North-East India. The female literacy rates and gender gaps in the most North-Eastern states are satisfactory in compared to national average. The female literacy rates are generally higher in all the states of the North Eastern region except Arunachal Pradesh as compared to the all India average literacy rate in 2001. The data regarding district wise female literacy rate in Assam is presented in Table-3

Table- 3
District wise Female Literacy Rate in Assam (In Percentage)

District	1991			2001			2011		
	Persons	Males	Females	Person	Males	Females	Person	Male	Female
Dhubri	38.38	47.38	28.79	48.21	55.19	40.04	59.36	64.20	54.26
Kokrajhar	40.47	49.46	30.83	51.63	60.32	42.40	66.63	73.44	59.54
Bongaigaon	49.06	58.67	38.72	59.33	67.67	50.44	70.44	75.48	65.18
Goal para	46.81	55.47	37.58	58.03	64.86	50.85	68.67	72.67	64.53
Barpeta	43.24	52.61	33.20	56.24	64.83	47.07	65.03	70.72	59.4
Nalbari	55.90	66.95	44.19	67.23	76.56	57.26	79.89	85.58	73.85
Kamrup	65.04	73.67	55.01	67.73	75.89	58.95	72.81	77.64	67.69
Darrang	42.00	50.80	32.53	55.44	63.91	46.40	64.55	68.36	60.40
Sonitpur	48.14	56.70	38.60	59.00	67.54	49.73	59.07	76.98	62.53
Lakhimpur	58.96	68.28	48.85	68.56	77.06	59.59	78.39	84.66	71.91
Dhemaji	53.84	65.43	41.12	64.48	74.41	53.86	69.07	75.66	62.13
Morigaon	47.99	56.17	39.19	58.53	65.15	51.51	69.37	73.66	64.99
Nagaon	54.74	62.49	46.30	61.73	68.27	54.74	73.78	78.19	69.21
Golaghat	58.54	66.50	49.75	69.38	77.14	60.99	78.31	84.20	71.91
Jorhat	65.51	73.29	56.88	76.34	83.62	68.49	83.42	88.38	78.22
Sibasagar	64.46	71.91	56.14	74.47	81.53	66.81	81.36	86.75	75.69
Dibrugarh	58.32	66.72	48.89	68.96	77.30	59.95	76.22	82.59	69.52
Tinisukia	50.28	59.27	39.99	60.95	70.15	50.78	70.92	77.89	63.54
Karbi Anglong	45.57	55.55	34.35	57.70	67.22	47.30	73.52	82.12	64.62
N.C. Hills	57.76	66.39	47.34	67.62	75.67	58.39	78.99	85.34	74.62
Karimganj	54.71	64.05	44.76	66.24	74.69	57.28	79.72	85.70	73.49
Hailakandi	53.07	64.08	41.04	59.64	68.24	50.46	75.26	81.61	68.54
Cachar	59.16	68.79	48.76	67.82	75.73	59.41	80.36	85.85	74.64

Source : Statistical Hand Book Assam, 2005 and 2011.

The Table-3 reveals that there is a change in the rate of literacy in almost every district in Assam. Among all the districts of Assam, the female literacy rate is highest (68.490/0) in Jorhat and it is lowest (40.04%) in the district of Dhubri in 2001. The female literacy rate is highest in the Kamrup Metro as per census 2011. Even though Dhubri has shown 54.26 percent of female literacy rate but still it is below the state average in 2011. Since 1947 there has been accelerated growth in the enrolment of girls in Assam. The progress of education is reflected in enrolment figures in general (Konwar, 2007).

c. Girls Enrolment :

The development in educational attainment means increase in enrolment level. It should be clearly noted that the trend of rising girls enrolment will have far reaching consequences which may lead to development of the society and economy. Enrolment is an important indicator for development of education. The class wise girl's enrolment school of Assam has been presented in Table-4

Table-4
Girls Enrolment to Total Enrolment by Classes in Assam (In Percentage)

Classes	1999-2000		2003-2004		2010-11	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Girls	Boys
Class - I	53.54	46.46	0.10	49.90	49.65	50.35
Class - II	54.31	45.69	50.78	49.22	50.07	49.93
Class -III	54.34	45.66	51.57	48.43	50.34	49.66
Class - IV	55.18	44.82	51.19	48.51	50.36	49.64
Class - V	58.22	41.78	51.77	48.23	50.94	49.06
Class - VI	56.15	43.85	51.42	48.58	51.28	48.72
Class - VII	56.05	43.95	51.39	46.61	51.71	48.29
Class - VIII	58.43	41.57	57.97	42.03	52.20	47.80
Class - IX	57.46	42.54	6.93	43.07	45.60	54.39
Class - X	57.49	42.51	54.87	45.13	45.28	54.71
Class - XI	64.70	35.30	64.66	35.34	41.83	58.17
Class - XII	62.80	39.20	162.80	37.20	43.21	46.79

Source : Statistical Hand Book Assam, 2001, 2005 and 2011.

It is seen from the Table- 4 that the enrolment of girls in classes' I-XII has gone up in Assam. It is to be noted that the enrolment of the girls in primary and middle school has been more than at high school stage in the state. The participation of girls' degree and above stage of education has been increasing steadily through the years as may be seen from Table-5.

Table-5
Girls Enrolment to Total Enrolment by Stages in Assam (In Percentage)

Stage	2002-2003		2010-11	
	Males	Females	Male	Female
Ph. DID-Phil/M.Phil/D.Sc	57.20	42.80	50.40	49.6
M.A	55.30	44.70	54.32	45.68
M.Sc	66.85	33.15	66.37	33.63
M.Com	80.09	19.91	81.12	18.88
B.A and B.A. (Hons)	59.91	40.09	56.26	43.74
B.Sc. and B.Sc. (Hons)	83.07	16.93	81.71	18.29
B.Com. and B.Com. (Hons)	85.70	14.30	85.35	14.65
B.E. and B.Sc. (Engg)	90.83	9.17	80.91	19.09
B.Ed.	60.47	39.53	59.50	40.50
M.B.B.S (Allopathiy) Including Ayurvedic/Home				
Dentistry/pharmacy)	69.12	30.88	58.09	41.91
L.L.B. and L.L.M.	78.10	21.90	77.57	22.43

Source: Statistical Hand Book Assam, 2004 and 2011.

It is seen from the Table- 5 that the girl's participation is still below fifty percent at degree and above stages of education in Assam. Although enrolment among females has increased gradually if the degree and above stages, much remains to be done. Till recently, technical and professional education of girls is favored by the parents. The girls student who are career oriented has shifted

from arts facilities to engineering, medicine law and other professions. The feminists opine that women lawyers can better represent the case of women (Desai, 2004). In 1939, adult education was first started in Assam. In the post independence period, the impact of adult education scheme is very marginal in Assam as 43.97 percent of total women remained illiterate in 2001. A large number of girls drop out before completing the formal education. This is mainly because of several socio economic factors. Early marriage against girls pursuing education after marriage against girls pursuing education after marriage. Economic hardship lasses is one of the reasons which force girls to drop out with a view to supporting their families (Arya, 2000). It is to be noted that poverty of the parents, lack of employment opportunity, absence of a suitable curriculum, absence of separate schools for girls, lack of women teachers, lack of personal guidance, unfavorable social attitude are some of the factor responsible for the slow progress of women's education in Assam. It is very essential to pay attention to the education of girls at all stages as an integral part of general programmes for the development of education in Assam.

Conclusion :

It is quite clear that the growth women educational development in the state has shown an encouraging sign after independence. The women educational development is key factor influencing the demographic variables like fertility, mortality and migration. Although education is most important for everyone but in case of women it is particularly significant. Education for women is a prerequisite for creating a good family and a good nation. Education would empower women to achieve social, economic and political right which are denied to her traditionally. We know that Assamese women are not yet empowered. Employment of women is essential as their thoughts lead to the development of a good society. In the context of the present liberalized economy, it also recognized that women's education is the key to all aspects of development. Narrowing the gender gap in literacy is very much necessary in Assam. There is an urgent need to ensure gender sensitive targeting and create social consensus about the significance of women's education in the under developed state. It is hope that

different positive measures must be laid for narrowing the gender gap in literacy in the state of Assam.

References :

- Aggarwal, .J C.(2005) : *Landmarks in the History of Modern Indian Education*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
- Arya Anita (2000) : *Indian Women, Education and Empowerment*, Vol. 11, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi.
- *Assam District Gazetteer, Sibsagar District (1967)* : Govt. of Assam, Shillong.
- *Assam (2000)* : A Hand Book, Directorate of information and Public Relations, Gov. of Assam, Guwahati.
- Baruah, S.L.(2002) : *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manonarlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
- Barpujari H.K. (1996) : *Assam in the Days of the Company*, NEHU Publications. Shillong.
- Barpujari, H.K (ed.,1993) : *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol., V, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati .
- Buragohain, P.P. and Mahanta, A.(2013) : "Status of Education at Primary Level in Assam: A Distric Level Study," *Assam Economic Journal*, Vol.,XXIII, Department of Economics, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh
- Desai, Neera and Thakkar, Usha(2004) : *Women in Indian Society*, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi
- Dreze Jean and Sen, Amartya (1999) : *India Economic Development and Social Opportunity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Goswami, Pranay Jyoti(1998) : "Education Movement in the Barak Valley with Special Reference to Women," in Karna M. N. (ed.), *Social Movement in North East India*. In dus Publishing Campany, New Delhi.
- Konwar, Poli(2014) : " A Study of the Developmental Plans and Programmes of Primary Education in Assam," *Social Science Journal of Gargaon College*, Vol., 11, Gargaon College, Simaluguri.

- Konwar, Poli (2007) : *Present Status of Primary Education in the Sivasagar District of Assam*, Unpublished M. Phil. Dissertation, Periyar University, Salem.
- Maulick, Barna (2011) : " Literacy Trends in the Country," *Yojana*, Vol., 55, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, A New Delhi.
- Saikia, Siddheswar(1998) : *History of Education in India*, Main Manik Prakash, Guwahati.
- Saikia, Ranjan(2001) : *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)*, Manohar, New Delhi.
- Shariff, Abusaleh(2009) : "Human Development During the Last Century," *Yojana*, Vol, 51, Ministry of Information and Broad Casting, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
- *Statistical Hand Book Assam* (2001, 2004, 2005 and 2011) : Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam, Guwahati.
- Yadava, Promila (2009) : "Literacy and Women's Empowerment," *Yojana*, Vol, 53, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi.

