

Women Education in Colonial Assam and the Role of British Women

Papari Das

Research Scholar, Department of History, Bodoland University, Assam, India

ABSTRACT

Education is the most important think which promotes personal growth by expanding knowledge improving cognitive abilities and critical thinking which brings changes into the society. Education of women is crucial for social progress and modernisation of the society. Education is the only key which brings equality into the world. The history of the Modern Education in India began under the British rule. In 1854 Wood's Dispatch advocated female education stating that government should take steps for insure women's literacy. While in Assam Modern Education of women starts from the beginning of British rule in the state by the mainly constant efforts of British women.

KEYWORDS: *Modern education, literacy, Wood dispatch, progress, equity.*

How to cite this paper: Papari Das
"Women Education in Colonial Assam
and the Role of British Women"
Published in
International
Journal of Trend in
Scientific Research
and Development
(ijtsrd), ISSN:
2456-6470,
Volume-10 | Issue-
4, August 2026, pp.200-202, URL:
www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd141997.pdf



IJTSRD141997

Copyright © 2026 by author (s) and
International Journal of Trend in
Scientific Research and Development
Journal. This is an
Open Access article
distributed under the
terms of the Creative Commons
Attribution License (CC BY 4.0)
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



INTRODUCTION

The history of women education in Assam was one of the most remarkable part of social development in Colonial Assam. There are no evidence available which provides any information about women education in Kamrup during the ancient period. During the medieval period in Assam informal education was accessible for women. Royal families arranged home based education for their wives and daughters, and common women were encouraged to spiritual knowledge from religious texts like the *Krittana Ghosa* and *Bhagavata*. The chief queen of Siva Singha queen Phuleswari established one of the first Sanskrit pathsala within the campus of the Royal palace. Moreover, Sarveswari third wife of Ahom king Siva Singha personally supervised the education and vocational training of young women under the royal palace. The queen of Ahom king Suklengmung Chaoching Konwari has great command over Ahom script. During the neo Vaishnavi movement common women got spiritual education through the *Satras* and *Namghars*. While the formal education was only accessible for women after the establishment of colonial rule in Assam. Vital contribution was provided by the British administration and

missionary, but role played by British women by the efforts of ground level working was make it possible to achieve the goal.

OBJECTIVES:

- To find the introduction of the formal education among the women of Assam.
- To study the contribution of British women towards the growth of women education in colonial Assam.

METHODOLOGY:

The study will follow the descriptive, analytical mode of historical inquiry based on both primary and secondary sources. While, the facts collected from edited books, journals, and internet files of the relevant area of the subject.

DISCUSSION:

Assam became the part of British Empire after the treaty of Yandaboo, from where several new developments and changes were made by the colonial administration, introduction of formal education was one of them. Ativan of America Baptist missionary in 1836, opened the door of modern education in Assam though their main focus was propagating Christianity,

yet they also realised the poor conditions of education among the local population. They setup their first education in Sadiya, with separate classes for boys and girls.

In 1838 Mrs. Brown wife of missionary Nathan Brown established girls school in Sadiya. Then in 1839 Mrs. Kattar wife of O.T. Kattar established another school for girls in Sadiya. According to the report of Morphet Mills, in 1841 another school for girls established by Mrs. Warker in Sivsagar. In 1847 under the effort of captain Francis Jenkins a school was established in Goalpara for the purpose of educating Garo community. Additionally in 1897 The Goalpara mission formally setup school under the guidance of Rev. A. E. Stephenson for both male and female education along with an attached hospital. Despite the setup of several girls schools the percentage of the female students in these schools were not very high because of the social barrier, thus the female workers of Christian missionaries begun, another set of school named *zenana* school, in which they went door to door to teach and encourage girls for education, but did not get much success.

In 1854 for the first time in India, officially female education advised in Wood Dispatch. After which eight schools were established, five of them were established in Kamrup for girls by government initiative in 1870s, which marked by the officially began the primary education for girls in Assam.

Bengal Renaissance started in 19 century, in which one of the main motive was female. Education began by the notable personality like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Some of the progressive Assamese educated youth also influenced by them. For example Haliram Dhekial Phukan, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunaviram Baruah and so on. Some of them taught their wives at home and some of them also sent their daughters into the school. Even Gunaviram Baruah bought her daughter Swarnalata to Calcutta (Kolkata) for study when she was nine years old. While, Durgaprabha is known as to be the first Assamese woman to passed matriculation examination and sister Hemprabha was also the first Assamese women who passed FA. Moreover, Sudhalata Duwarah and Sukhalata Duwarah were the first Assamese women to get bachelor of arts degree from Calcutta University in 1920. Another milestone of the women education in Assam was that the Dr. Rajaniprabha Saikia (Das) MBBS degree from Calcutta Medical College in 1933. During the 20th century higher education of women was began in Assam with the establishment Handique College which was the first girls college in Assam, affiliated to the Calcutta University as did not

have its own university by built by the effort of Rajbala Das.

However, after the effort of developing female literacy during the colonial period of Assam was marked by the rise of first generation of the educated woman in Assam, who were later contributed towards the growth of Assamese literature, social reform, alimnet of the condition of women, political participation, and played crucial role in national movement.

CONCLUSION:

The study concludes that the women education in Assam is not only about to provide formal education but also convince them to take step towards the modern education. The efforts of Christian missionaries towards the growth of modern education, not only for the education of woman in Assam, but also make education accessible, for marginal tribes and native communities. Although they had their own religious motives but their efforts broke the social taboos related to the women education. Several British female missionaries even tried their best to make the education accessible for women in each and every section of the society. Despite that newly immersed educated middle class also played vital role towards the growth of modern education among the women of Assam. Moreover, first generation of the educated woman of Assam, make several attempts to empower woman education and promoting female literacy along with the political participation.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Barpujari, HK, *The American Missionaries and North East India (1836-1900)*, Spectrum publication, Guwahati, 1986.
- [2] Barpujari, H. K, *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (Volume: I,II,III), Guwahati, Publication Board of Assam, 2004
- [3] Baruah, S. L., *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publication Pvt.Ltd., New Delhi, 1986.
- [4] Baruah, Birinchi Kumar, *History of Assamese Literature*, Sahitya Academy, Delhi 1964
- [5] Borboruah, H, *Ahomar Din*, Guwahati, Publication Board of Assam, 2013.
- [6] Gait, Edward, *A History Of Assam*, Global Net Publication, New Delhi, 2014.
- [7] Phukan, Bimal, *Missionaries of Assam*, JSTOR, vol.65, 2021.
- [8] Rajguru, Sarberswar, *Medieval Assamese Society*, Nagaon, Assam, 1988.

- [9] Saikia, Nagan, *Asamiya Manuhar Itishas*, Katha Publication, Guwahati, 2013.
- [10] Sarma, Satyendra Nath, *A Socio. Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800 A.D)*, Guwahati, Bina Library, 2001.

