The interrelationship between education and social change had a far reaching impact in the society, polity and culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India. The birth of a new social consciousness in the modern period and the resurgence of India were mainly the result of English education introduced by the British. In its wake, it disturbed the various social evils and practices of the 18th and early 19th centuries and sowed seeds of rationalism, renaissance and contributed for social transformation in Orissa.

The intimate interaction between education and social progress was very prominent during the second half of 19th century onwards. In India, the spread of English education which was secular in spirit, worked as a good precepter of the people about the existing social evils and awakened them to the need for social development. The progressive expansion of education helped in the faster realisation of people about the social conditions and assisted the reformers and socio-religious reform movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Orissa.

Orissa from the 19th century, till 1936, consisted of three coastal districts of Balasore, Cuttack, Sambalpur and one non-regulation district of Angul. The development of education in the province was not to the level of satisfaction by the first half of 19th century, though the British occupied it in 1803. The reasons for this state of affairs was due to the fact that the negligent attitude of the administration and miscalculation of the Government by equating it with Bengal, but both the provinces were at different stages of development.

The Wood’s Despatch of 1854 which provided a comprehensive outlook to the system of education, helped to a considerable extent in the expansion of education ion the province.
But the diffusion of education to all classes in Orissa was still a distant dream by 1880 due to indifference of the Government and lack of enthusiasm from the public towards the process of education. This backwardness in the field of education was manifested in the terrible famine of 1866, which demonstrated that how the lack of education and educated people aggravated the sufferings of the people.

After the great famine, the British administration woke up to the problem and seriously thought over to improve the standard of education in the province. Its objective was to improve the condition of the primary schools which was shaped through the Campbell’s scheme of primary education and Midnapur system. The Campbell’s scheme provided funds for the village schools and primary school scholarship, training to the teachers etc. This system could not take off, because of the lack of interest among the parents to send their children to the schools and due to the emphasis of the Government on quantity not on quality of the kind of education. The Midnapur system was called the system of payment by result and it turned out to be successful in Orissa.

The Indian Education Commission of 1882 gave a new emphasis and outlined the priorities in education. After 1882, the educational system in Orissa underwent great changes and there was perceptible improvement in both quantity and quality. As a result of the combined efforts of the individuals, institutions and government, educational expansion became much faster. The Laissez-faire system of education adopted by this Commission, continued till the end of 19th century, in which the government withdrew from direct control and management of educational institutions.

During this phase, there was a perceptible expansion in the number of schools and various segments of education like primary, secondary and collegiate education received importance. The technical education also registered progress during this period. In collegiate education the most important achievement was the coming up of the Ravenshaw College, which was a school to start with. Another major achievement of this
period was the emphasis on female education. Through the encouragement given to the
girl’s classes in primary schools for boys etc., promoted the female education as well.

This period did not register the required growth in education as it was expected. The
reasons attributed for this shortfall are, the general poor economic condition of the
parents, which debarred them from sending their children to the schools, lack of trained
teachers in the schools, particularly in the secondary schools. The growth in female
education was not upto the level, compared to other provinces. The traditional
conservatism prevalent in the society during that time did not permit girls to join
schools. Moreover, the funds allocated for the development of education was quite less
compared to other provinces. The lack of proper infrastructural facilities also hindered the
growth of education during this period.

The beginning of 20th century heralded a new era in educational development. The policy
of freedom in educational system advocated by the educational commission of 1882 was
reversed by Lord Curzon at the beginning of the 20th century. The political compulsions
and the anti-government agitation by the educated people, Curzon felt, were due to the
Laissez-Faire system. Therefore, he preferred strict rules of recognition, more controls,
adequate provisions etc., to officialise and control the educational system.

During this period, there were sincere efforts on the part of the government to spread and
popularise primary education in the province of Orissa. In order to attract and impart
meaningful academic instruction, the syllabi were changed from time to time. The other
factor for the slow and limited progress in primary education was due to the scarcity of
trained teachers. To overcome this shortcoming training centres for primary school
teachers in each sub-division were created, called the ‘Guru’ training schools. Extra
funds were allocated for the infrastructural development at the schools in order to create
an ambience for the education.
The period also witnessed the extension and improvement of secondary education in the province. The training for the teachers was upgraded and the grants-in-aid scheme was revised without changing the principle and thus the scope of government assistance was slightly enlarged.

In spite of the measures and the initiatives taken by the government, the development of education was not quite comparable with other provinces such as Bengal and Bihar. Some inherent factors hindered the progress of education. First, though the initiative taken by the government for the spread of education in the province was quite late, compared to the neighbouring provinces, due to several factors discussed in the chapter, the government never spent more than a paltry sum which hindered the growth. Moreover, the funds allotted for girl's education was abysmally low resulting in unequal distribution of progress of education. This was partly due to the government policy of not hurting the susceptibility of orthodox Oriyas.

Even more, it was because of female education which lacked immediate usefulness in the eyes of the foreign officials since women could not be employed as clerks in the government offices.

Third, the emphasis on English as the medium of instruction in place of vernacular language at the High School level prevented the spread of education of the masses. So in the subsequent stage of college education the number of students was very less.

Fourth, the local bodies, which could have carried the system to its natural size, themselves became factional in approach, political in motive and slow by nature. All these factors retarded the progress of education instead of its growth, actually planned. And to the government the weakness of the local bodies provided an opportunity to avoid the required attention.
Fifth, the remoteness of rural areas, lack of communication resulted in the improper supervision and inspection of schools by educational agencies. A number of schools virtually remained isolated due to the factor.

Sixth, the economic backwardness of the province and growing poverty of the people continued to be a stumbling block in the path of education.

Seventh, in the matters of female education the genuine conservation of the people in general stood in the way of progress.

Yet it may be said that the foundations of modern education were clearly laid during the period under review. These foundations were consolidated later after independence to be more fruitful. Through a series of experiments for the growth of education, definite conclusions were attained. The most notable conclusions were, the introduction of trained personnel to take charge of primary and secondary schools, revision of curriculum on modern basis, composition of text books on each subject, appointment of necessary inspecting staff at every stage and proper attention towards buildings and equipments. Side by side, female education and Muslim education were brought within the orbit of the educational system.

Thus, even though quantitative growth was yet a far cry by 1940’s, the qualitative growth had received an impetus. On the basis of those qualitative achievements, the quantitative growth became almost phenomenal in the post-independence period.

Female education grew at a slow pace throughout the 19th century and even in the first two decades of the 20th century due to the lingering social prejudice against it. It was believed that education of women brought misfortunes to the family. People did not consider education necessary for making women ideal housewives and mothers. On the contrary, there was an impression even in well informed quarters that education has a
tendency to make girls independent of their lawful guardians and less observant of established customs and domestic duties.

Moreover, girls were not normally sent to schools for co-education in conservative rural belts specifically because of conservatism of the higher castes. Therefore, special schools for girls were founded to encourage the enrollment of girls in primary and secondary schools. But the funds spent on such educational enterprise were too meager to be of any significant use. In terms of financial gains, female education lacked immediate usefulness, since women could hardly be employed in offices as clerks, the main plank of job-holders in the control system of employment.

Apart from the conservative attitudes of the parents and the society, there were other functional problems in the educational system. Due to lack of trained teachers, most schools were manned by educators who scarcely understood the basic elements of child psychology and the technique of teaching.

In Orissa where the per capita income was half as compared to West Bengal and one-third as compared to Bombay, the expansion of secondary and collegiate education should have been the responsibility of the government. But it was left to the private bodies, to the mercy of local landlords and power welding lackeys of the government. Most of them being uneducated, they did not take interest in the proper functioning of the system.

However, the introduction and progress of education in the province in its wake brought about several socio-cultural changes and reforms in the religious practices prevalent in the society. By the end of 1947, the impact of modern education was perceptible in the life and culture of Oriyas. The newly educated people in the urban sectors became gradually aware of the decay of the Hindu society and culture. The uniform pattern of education, curriculum, job opportunities, rationalism, individualism and scientific approach, which were the result of English education, gave birth to new forces, which had great impact on the social institutions in Orissa.
In the sphere of socio-religious reform movements, there emerged a progressive trend which tried to purify the evil practices prevalent in the society in the 19th century. The socio-religious movement of Brahmo Samaj is such a case in point which grew up in the 19th century and tried to purify the Hindu religion and counteract the spreading of Christianity and its tenets in Orissa, as elsewhere in India. The liberal, rational and scientific knowledge clubbed with the knowledge of Hinduism led to a decision to reform Hindu society. The Brahmo movement spread in Orissa mainly in Cuttack and Balasore districts in the second half of 19th century. It organised various samajas and promoted the cause of education. Apart from its reforming of Hindu religion, it also involved itself in humanitarian activities like setting up of different ashrams such as, orphanage, leprosy ashram and destitutes ashram etc., But the major lacunae of the movement was that it could not attract the masses to its faith. It remained confined to the urban elites of Orissa society. The high ideals of the Brahmoism could not be grasped by the common man. With growing political consciousness, after the birth of Indian National Congress, political activities took precedence over the socio-religious movements and young men joined the larger struggle against British Raj.

However, Brahmo movement in its endeavour, laboured to reform the religious practices of Hinduism. It also opposed and mobilised public on several social evils like Sati, child marriage, etc., Through their educational propagation it imparted education to the people. It posed a serious challenge to the spreading of the Christianity by providing reforms in the Hindu religious practices.

Another important religious cult called Mahima Dharma emerged in Orissa which was practised by the lower castes and tribes in the last quarter of the 19th century. Mahima Dharma was an autochthonous Hindu reform movement as a response to the supremacy of the Brahmanical and traditional order dominant in the Orissa society and religion. It is an indigenous movement arising out of the prevailing socio-cultural conditions of the 19th century Orissa. It believed in the worship of Brahma and discarded idol worship,
meaningless rituals and irrational social practices like casteism, child-marriage and polygamy. In the true sense, Mahima Dhanna synthesized the Vedic traditions with a reformative trend. Its aim was to purify Hinduism by denouncing the blind beliefs and irrational practices. Therefore, it can be considered as a reformist movement within the Hindu fold.

The another aspect of this indigenous movement was its social base which attracted the lower castes of the society. These castes and classes being sidelined from the main Hindu religion by the Brahmins and other upper castes found solace in this religion and readily joined it after its formation. So this movement can be called as a movement from below.

But this movement was not free from shortcomings. It failed to bring about any innovation in the socio-religious life of Orissa on a large scale. The slow rate of conversion made its numbers marginal at a given point of time. And in its endeavour to wipe out the age old traditions and practices of casteism, idolatory, polytheism, it could not succeed.

However, Mahima Dharma had some contributing factors, like it contributed in the raising of status of women in family and society through the practice of monogamy and advocating the marriageable age for both boys and girls, thereby reducing child marriages and number of widows. Being indigenous, in its origin, this religio-reform movement could check the spreading of Brahmoism and Christianity, especially among the lower classes.

The next vital change in the society brought out by educational development was the emancipation of women. As else where in India, so also in Orissa, the women members were subjected to the rigors of superstitions and tradition bound societal practices.

The entire spectrum of events represented a new social awakening among the educated elites of Orissa. The thickly populated coastal strip comprising of four districts was the
matrix where the western education worked as a catalytic agent to cause new social fermentation that ruffled traditional social system.

With the spread of education among the people and women themselves, the evil practices of the society against women underwent a transformation. The practice of sati, female infanticide, widow-remarriage though, put up by the government rules and laws, had the support and sanctions of educated and progressive minds of the society. The spread of education among women gave scope for their awakening and helped them to come up from their subordinate position, however little it may be.

The statistics of the education for women, both secondary and college education, during the thirties of 20th century reveals a steady, progressive increase of higher learning. This signalled a progressive change in the male attitude towards educating and giving women, social and cultural parity. The spread of western education fostered liberal humanism among the ranks of the educated people. Transport, communication, urbanization effected great change in the attitude of the literate. The women members of Orissa were joining more and more in the freedom struggle which has been discussed in detail in the fourth chapter. The freedom movement was not only having certain political objectives in its agenda. It was rather broad based, all encompassing movement that was tied to objectives of social reform that might in long run lead to a restructuring of Indian society. During the struggle for freedom, women leaders were organised to fight against social evils like untouchability and rigidity of caste system. Harijan activists and political workers from low castes began to increase along with the members of upper castes. This was due to the "Harijan Seva" works done by the leaders, particularly women leaders like Rama Devi, Sarala Devi, and a host of others.

The feminist and anti-caste movement in Orissa owed their genesis to the great days of nationalist movement in 30s and 40s of the present century. The untouchables and women had already come into the arena of politics surpassing all the hardships in the society.
However, in spite of the impact of the scientific and humanist ideology through the spread of western education and reform agencies, Orissa society still remained imbued with deep religiosity which stood as a barrier for further progress. The women leaders who were in the forefront of the political movements, social reforms and upliftment were a microscopic minority, coming from urban, elite families of Orissa. In spite of their tireless endeavours they could not fully emancipate the women of rural Orissa. The spread of education and consciousness, were rather slow among them. Even if they were eligible and conscious they were hardly allowed by the social system of male domination to come forward. The post-independence period witnessed a rapid development in this front when education became a national policy and priority.

The 19th century spread of education and subsequent development of modern Oriya literature ushered in an era of nationalistic spirit thus paving the way for social change and nationalist struggle. The literary creations of the period included the sufferings of the multitude as well as floods and famines that devastated Orissa and their reflections in the literary production.

With the spread of education, another development which took place was the growth of Oriya literature. The spread of new education, the impact of liberal humanism enshrined in the curriculum and social reform movements along with a national spirit inspired the newly educated Oriya authors to adopt the western forms in their literary production. During the period of national struggle for freedom, the most important phase in Oriya literature was known as "Satyavadi Age". It was well known for the patriotic commitment of the writers like Gopabandhu Das, Nilkantha Das. The women writers from Orissa were no less creative than their male counterparts and the herald of new age of feminism and psychologism in poetry. Kuntala Kumari Sabat wrote poetic strain which was lyrical and mystical.
The formation of various sabhas and samitis discussing various issues of society and political situation were the products of educational growth in the 19th and 20th centuries. These forums consisting of educated people involved in discussing and debating various issues, both social and political, brought consciousness among the people.

The spread of modern education was instrumental in bringing about these changes. The education and its effects enabled the people of Orissa to usher in changes in society, however less they may be, and also was able to fight against colonialism as elsewhere in India.