CHAPTER IV

Education— Its impact on changing status of housewives in Assam and Kamrup

Education is the best provision for old age— Aristotle

Education and society are interconnected and complementary to each other. By and large, even in the comparatively conservative and traditional Assamese society, education has brought about tremendous changes in the attitude of housewives towards traditional marriage, family set up, children, employment, way of living and the like. Education and women have been the two sides of the same coin regarding changes and development. The meaning and the concept of education have changed with time. There were— glorious periods for educated women during the epics, the upanishadic ages and the Vedic period but somehow deteriorated during the smriti ages. Women's status along with their literacy rate were at the lowest state during the Buddhist period when women were regarded as the sources of all evils by the protagonists of that religion. However, at the initiation taken by certain leaders about 500 women were admitted to the 'Vihars' with certain restriction. The Medieval period also depicts a high and satisfactory picture of educated women. The prevalence of child marriage, and patriarchal set up again confined women to the farewells of the households.

With the start of the 'Bhakti Movement' the social atmosphere was liberalised to a great extent. The gates of religion opened for women, they were also allowed to have education by the protagonists of the Bhakti Movement. Objection against Purdah was raised. Women were encouraged to listen to 'Kathas' and the 'Kirtana'. Mira Bai and Jana Bai joined the Bhakti Movement and became saints during that period. Thus the Bhakti Movement only contributed to make the religious atmosphere liberal by allowing the women to exercise their right to worship.

* Religious awakening movement in India after medieval period.
1. Singha Dr. Niraj: A study on the impact of religion through education on women's status, p. 9, 1989
With the fall of the Mughal power in the 18th Century the country further suffered set back in the field of woman's education. 'As Neera Desai' puts it - "Ideologically woman was considered to be a completely inferior species, kept in a state of utter subjection, denied any right, suppressed and oppressed. As a whole, the neglect of education of women, coupled with child marriage, customs of polygamy, seclusion, brought about a tremendous degradation in the status of women.

The wave of the reformists thought in the nineteenth century initiated by—Raja Rammohan Rai, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Dayananda Saraswati, Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884) and others, led to significant legislative, social and educational changes. Finally "Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Movement" led to the great emancipation of the Indian women in the twentieth century. Consequently, the earlier views on the meaning and concept of education widened. The aim of education in the welfare democratic set up also underwent changes as follows:

> Traditional view, on the aim of education encompasses the motto of enabling the ruling elite to occupy positions of power and govern the people so that there is harmony in society. This was the aim of Indian education in the middle of the 19th century.2

> Down the ages, the aim of education in India, was to transmit the knowledge inherited from the past to the new generation.

> Industrialization also brought about tremendous changes in the aim of education. The new aim was by and large the establishment of dyarchy, assimilation of tradition and enabling the individual to work in the economic fields.

> In the advent of Western political thinker, John Dewey3 a new trend started in educational thought and practice. On the other hand "Alfred North Whitehead" drew a distinction between information, knowledge

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2. Ibid, p. 62
3. Democracy and education, p. 26
and understanding while interpreting education as Do to learn and learn to do.4

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the great Indians who systematically applied the mind to the complex problems of Indian education, firmly believed that Indian education was unequal to the task of social changes and development. Gandhi’s philosophy of basic education could be summarised as follows5:

- Education is an instrument of socio-economic progress, material advancement, political evolution and moral development of the individual in the society.
- To him, formal literacy did not mean real education. Education meant an all round drawing out of the best in the child and the man, the body, mind and spirit. Literacy in itself was no education.
- To Gandhi, true education was a life long process. He emphasised that the goal of education was not merely to produce good individuals, but to turn out individuals who understand their social responsibilities as integral elements of the society in which they live. He was pragmatic to emphasise the practical aspect of education rather than theoretical foundations. According to him the goal of education included character-building through the development of such values. It also developed courage, strength and personality under all circumstances. The virtue of compassion, magnanimity fair-mindedness and the ability to give all that one has, while working towards a noble objective could be possible only through education.
- Gandhiji encompassed religious education, to form a crucial segment of moral instruction in educational institutions. He said our “educational system without the cardinal moral and spiritual values could be compared to an individual without a soul.
- Education according to him needs to build up an understanding about life role of individual in the development of their nations. Education had to be a major tool to eradicate poverty, ignorance and superstition.

4. Jayaswal Dr. Sitaram : Sociological foundation of education, p. 21, 1983
5. Patil V. T. : Studies on Gandhi, pp. 177-178, 1982
Gandhiji's primary emphasis concerning the concept of education was on the three H's (Head, Heart and Hand) rather than 3 R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). His concept of basic education was meant to make the individuals self-supporting. His idea was to make education need-based so that the problem of unemployment could be eradicated at the earliest opportunity. To him: "real education is self sufficiency." Some of the striking features of Gandhiji's concept of education was its abiding universal values. They were expected to raise the quality of people by emphasizing moral values. The constitution of India also incorporated similar ideas which were as follows:

a) Equalization of opportunity and social justice to all.
b) to aim at national integration as "Indian society is probably the most pluralistic society in the world."
c) To develop children and a favourable receptive attitude towards social changes.
d) To eradicate social evil relating to women in household.
e) Human Resource Development through education to sensitize the citizens irrespective of sex, caste and creed to the ethical, social and cultural values which go to make up an enlightened nation.


"Education Commission in India observed that the destiny of India is now being started in her classroom." The importance of education in bringing about qualitative improvement of human being and thereby to bring about national development was gradually gaining ground. According to the Commission, education process in India should try to help in the achievement of the following goals:

> The most important national goal is the functioning of democracy through the realization of the values of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. As the Constitution framers themselves emphasized the Directive
Principles, a democracy can function only with the spread of elementary education among the whole population and with the liquidation of adult illiteracy.

> Another important national goal is to bring about equality and social justice by educating all sections of people in the society including the minorities, the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.

> The third great goal set by the nation is economic development, elimination of poverty and the improvement of the standards of living among the masses in the rural and in the urban areas. This goal implies that education should help in the economic development through the modernization of agriculture and also rapid industrialization. Economic growth will not be possible unless the upbringing at home and education at school inculcate the habits of hard work and attitude of "cost mindedness". Also there must be a change in the attitude towards physical work. Even now one hears complaints that because of unemployment an educated man has been forced to take up menial labour. This implies that there is hardly any realization that when every citizen is educated all menial workers would be educated persons.

Finally, education must help the children to develop the attitude of saving so that there is capital formation which promotes economic development.

> The fourth important national goal is national integration. The aim of education should be to promote values which will help these diverse groups to lead a harmonious life and to developed the feelings of patriotism.

> Education should help the students to be proud of their rich cultural heritage. National integration also implies the development of the regional languages so that the gulf between the educated classes and the masses is reduced. It also implies the development of Hindi as the link language between various regions of the country.

> Finally, the most urgent national goal is the reduction of population growth from 2.5 per cent per annum to about 1.2 per cent in the next 10 to 15 years. The educational implication of this is that the children in schools
and the youth in the colleges should be aware of the dangers of population explosion and internalize the small family social norm.

The necessities of studying the new meaning of education highlight the fallacy of using the word literacy as similar to education. This has raised a few questions in the mind of people like:

* What should be the scale to measure an educated housewife?
* Should a merely literate woman be called educated? Does education imply the necessity of moral ideas as stated by Gandhiji?
* Should one add the new ideas in defining the concept of education?

**Feminist concept on peace education**

In this aspect in our analytical study on various latest concepts of education, more related to families, the concept of peace education, a very new concept, alien to many, gives a new dimension to our study on the educated housewives. The concept highlights the following:

Birgit Brock Utne, an Associate professor, at the Institute of Educational Research at the University of Oslo, Norway contributed a lot to the study of peace education. In her book Feminist Perspectives on Peace and peace education, she incorporated certain new meaning of education in order to enhance the nature of women in general and the housewives in particular. About peace education she said, – "There are some analytical advantages to limiting the concept of education to the study of the formal education going on in schools. The concept of "education" and "peace education" has widened the areas, for the social and intellectual growth. Formal schooling is not enough, the imparting of informal education like "Peace Education" is also necessary. It was also observed that 'The educational influences of the formal educational institutions is often overlapping with the 'socialization concept of education'. Hence retaining the socialisation concept orientation of that concept along with its strong connotation of informal learning had been imperative.

> Peace education includes the concept of education for peace and education about peace

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The concept itself has definitions problems but the concept can be analysed as follows:

Peace education is education about peace which can be found under the lamp-pole while it is education for peace. It is education on socialization that results in peace in the world without which the world might be heading towards more restlessness.

- Feminist perspective on approaches to Peace Education is essential.

In 1983 Mario Borrelli and Magnus Haavelsrud, were undertaking a study of the development of the concept of peace education within the archipelago of peace research. Important approaches to the study were:

- The Structural Approach
- The Dialectical Approach
- Evolutionary Approaches believe in the following:

  (a) Peace education deals with the effect of physical environment on the person.

  (b) When emphasis is given to the physical environment as a determining factor in the development of human behaviour peace is identified with ecological balance. Education for peace becomes the same as environmental education.

  (c) In the development of human behaviour, peace education considers sociocultural factors as determining factors. It can be a methodology for the change of behaviour to create non-aggressive sociocultural structures.

- Peace Education aims at breaking the stereotype role of a housewife.

Thus in the light of the latest concepts on education, studies on Assamese women seek meaningful and wide guideline —

The history of spreading of formal education and the realization of educating women and the housewives for the greater benefit of the society goes back to the first half of the nineteenth century when education was limited to only a small group of women. Accordingly the 'Charter Act of 1813, the East India Company was entrusted with the responsibility for the education of the Indian
people. Yet education was restricted to boys only. The famous Woods Despatch of 1854 had the report that there were 65 girls' schools in Bombay, 256 in Madras and 288 in Bengal. Assam did not come into the map of formal education during that period. Although the woods despatch of 1854 was one of the most significant features of the history of Indian education, it also referred to the difficulties as well as importance of female education. By the years of 1870 and 1882, the Education Commission discussed the problems and prospects of woman's education with great insight. In the last quarter of the 19th century, programme was made for girls' education. The report of the National Committee on women's education 1959 observed the following:

> "There is a wider gap in boys and girls' education"

1854 – 25,000 girls in India were enrolled the 1881 – 117,000, the 1992 – 127,000.

In 1883 in the history of women's education for first time two women were graduated from Calcutta University. Towards the end of the 19th century due to the opening of women's training college, a large number of women became trained teachers as well as trained nurses. Education as a weapon was used not only for education alone, but also against social injustice by Raja Ram Mohan Ray, who came to be regarded as the promulgator of the Modern age in Indian history. He was one of the greatest forces in the Indian renaissance. The Brahma Samaj which was formed on January 23, 1830, had been another passionate champion of humanism Raja Ram Mohan Ray led a crusade against the Satee custom opposed polygamy, favoured widow remarriage and championed the cause of Hindu females right to inheritance. It was on his insistence that Lord Bentinck the then Governor General of India banned the inhuman practice of satee. According to Rabindra Nath Tagore– Raja Ram Mohan Ray inaugurated the modern age in India.

Another powerful religious and social movement was started in the 19th century. The Arya Samaj which was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati

[1824–1883 A.D.] aimed at humanism spreading of knowledge of the Vedas and the Vedanta. It strongly advocated for the protection of women and the educate them along with the children.

The Ram Krishna Mission & Swami Vivekananda. The contribution of Ram Krishna Mission which was formed in the memory of Ram Krishna, Paramhamsa, a great devotee, was felt by all sections of the Indian society. His disciple Swami Vivekanda infect for the first time gave a scientific touch to the concept of education. According to him—"Real education is that which enables one to stand one one's own legs. The education that you are receiving now in schools and colleges is only making you a race of dyspeptic. You are working like machine merely and living a jellyfish existence. He was in-fect another champion who's tried to give women a true pace in the society. He said, — "Why our country is the weakest and most backward of all countries? Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. The Mother has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India, and making her the nucleus. Once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world. O' India forget not the ideal of thy womanhood in Sita, Savitri, Damayanti. Forget not that the God thou worshippers in the great Ascetic of ascetics. The all renouncing Shakara, the Lord of Uma. Forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for self pleasure. Forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the infinite Universal Motherhood.""

The Prarthana Samaj and the theosophical society led by Mrs. Annie Besant, spearheaded the propaganda against early marriage they also insisted on the education of women. In the aftermath of western system of education, which was introduced during the time of Lord Bentinck strengthened the position of women in the sphere of education. Women who were responsible for the sea change in the overall status of women were* many.

11. Mumukshananda Swami: The message of vivekananda, pp. 17, 18, 19 1999
* 1957— Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi
  1922– Pandit Rama Bai
  1922– Rama Bai Ranade, who's educated after marriage with the help of her husband Mahadev Govind Ranade.
  1936– Madam Cama
  1877– Toru Dutta
  1896– Karve Although a man, he has started the “Hingue Women's education institution in Poona in 1896 and imparted training in domestic economy to unmarried, married and widow and deserted women.
The Indian National Congress established in 1885 the auspicious leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindra Nath Tagore and the horrendous events of gradually made 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh, the Indian women politically aware.

Sister Nivedita, Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins the three western ladies stepped up the passage for women's education. In 1917 "Indian Women Association in South Zone of India was formed. Margaret Cousions aimed at the mobilisation of public opinion in favour of women. She also attempted to educate the women about their rights. In 1917 under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, demand for the right to vote, spread of education and health facilities were demanded. In 1932 Lady Irwin College at New Delhi was founded to give a solid foundation to the education of women. The Act of 1929 raising the age of marriage of girls to 14 years was passed. Housewives from all strata joined the 1930's Satyagraha led by Durgabai Deshmukh, Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Vijoy Lakshmi Pandit. They were the educated leaders under the guidance of whom majority of Indian women came out got the open air to fight for freedom. After India's independence in 1947, the Constitution of India incorporated provisions for education. Article '45' of the Constitution of India provides for free universal and compulsory elementary education in the country.

With the spread of education the number of literate women in India increased. More and more housewives became educated. They became less superstitious and socially and politically more aware, The history of legislation on education is a never ending chapter. Parallel to the march towards education the Assamese women and the housewives became inspired by their leaders. The history of the Assamese women and the housewives presents a rich heritage of Assamese culture where progress and equality of sexes had been a firm ideal since the time of Sri Sankardeva and the six hundred glorious rule by the Ahoms.

A glimpse of the history of education, literate women and the housewives in Assam

The history of Assamese literature, bears a glorious and deep rooted past like that of any language all over the globe, popular folk compositions of wisdom and light hearted mirth like the Bihu songs, bar-geet, the cradle songs
and the pastoral ballads, characterised by spontaneity and simplicity were the early specimens of unwritten Assamese literature.

* Fox, donot come in the night, baby's sleeping, you will get punished

** O dear moon, give me a star)
Nothing to fold, how do I gift?

Again about women and girl, the aphorism of 'Dak Mahapurush' was reflect in the composition in Assamese, like—

*** Like, ....rising sleep, bettlenut with knife,
if you want to select a bride, see her while fishing!

"Lyric, has a predominance in that period before religious and tantrinism has crept Assam." Lyrics like,

Like a star above the moon, Mom got married off me to a dwarf. Donot scold me my dear dwarf husband, I'll go back to my mom, mom will greet me, cook rice for my return, papa will arrange duck meat for me!

These depiction of Assam housewives even prior to written language came to the surface, proves the freedom of choice of the housewives.

Assam has an unbroken heritage of written literature starting from at least the 13th century. The earliest known patronage of such efforts had come from the Kamata royal court since two of the earliest poets Harihara Vipra and Hema Saraswati, wrote benedictory verses in praise of Roja Durlabh Narayan.

By the end of 12 century, the Silalipi Borgonga, was the oldest record of written language in Assam. Harihara Bipra in the 13th century had given a clear picture of Chitrangada and Ulupi the two main characters of the Mahabharata. In

* Stali ei, Nahibi Rati
Tore Kane Kati Logame Bati.

** Junbai ee, tora eti dia,
pat nai sut nai kihotkoi dia,

*** "Tuponi Sikun Pua, Kotari Sikun Guwa,
Jokai Bautee, Chaulee Sabar Dekhi Kenekua?""

12. See foot note 10, p. 50

$ 'জেলমাইব আসে একটি তুলা, আমে বিয়া দিলে গাঢ়া দেবা, হেব গাঢ়া নাপাঙ গালি, আইইব ঘুলে পটাবে তুলিবগালি
আয়ে তুলিব মোর জী আহিছে, তাল তাত ... বাংলা
বোনায়ে তুলিব মোর জী আহিছে, ছুকবে হাহি নী মায়া।
the 14th century emerged Madhava Kandali an extremely powerful and sensitive poet on whom was bestowed the patronage of the 'Barahi king Mahamanikya'. Kandali rendered the Valmiki Ramayana into most graceful and elegant Assamese verse. It is interesting to note that of all the versions of Valmiki’s great epic into other Indian language, Madhava Kandali’s was the earliest. Madhava Kandali’s depiction on women like Sita in Ramayana, had an in-depth journey to the core of a heart of woman. Like :*

like the flower Champa is my figure

Assamese people cannot exist without Sankaradeva, the history of Assamese people, the history of its national awareness is the life of Sankaradeva. He is the pulse of the people said – 'Dimbeswar Neog. The most glorious period of Assamese literature, was the 15th and 16th centuries that extended to touch almost all aspects of the Assamese people. Even women were also included into the fold of the renaissance in Assam. Sankaradeva regenerated the Assamese people single-handed. The influence of no other saint of India had been so overwhelming, thorough and complete. He was the first doyen of Assamese cultural. "As a religious reformer Sankaradeva’s greatest achievement was his capacity to bring the people from a debased form of Sakta Tantricism to the pure monotheism of the Vaishnava faith. He did not accomplish this through polemics or organized propaganda." The Striking contribution of Sankaradeva to the field of Assamese literature had been Kirtana-Ghosa, Ankiya-Nata, Namghar, Bargeets and Satriya Dance

The influence of Grandmother "Khersuti" in Sankardeva’s like was also established depicts the influence of women, too. In Kirtan-ghosa Sankaradeva depicts–

Even if wives and lower caste worship God with devotion, Gyan or knowledge, will be poured in by God** Humanism in Sankaradeva’s religion is

* চঞ্চল কলিতা যেন মোহ কলেবব
** "Stree-Sudreu, kara jadi Amat Bhakti,
Tahako, dibaha etu Gyan Mahamati,
another striking feature. His idea of religion was fully democratic as he himself wrote:

Sankaradeva appeared at the juncture and began the process of assimilation among the various rival classes of people to create a unified social order. His 'Ankiya Nata or Bhaona' was the basis of his common interaction with people. He propagated a synthesis that produced greater understanding in a broader social spectrum. The Kirtan-Ghosa Sankaradeva's literary masterpiece, was open even to women. Women devotees were called 'Namoti' or Namlagowa. The Kirtan-Ghosa had resemblance with the Grantha Saheb of Guru Nanakji. Sati Radhika, a lower caste woman, was another disciple of Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva's Ankiya Nats were – Kali daman, Keli Gopal, Rukmini Haran, Parijataharana and Ram Vijaya. Interestingly female role were essayed by teen-aged youth, having a feminine appearance.\[16\]

There was no bar for women to learn Satriya Dance, and Bargeet the devotional song. Thus like Gautama Buddha, Sankaradeva rescued the Assamese from the sakes of ignorance with a brilliant touch of humanity.

While religious education and Eksarana Namdharma had their impact on the Assamese women and their status, it was Aai Kanaklata, the first woman saint and Sankaradeva's grandson's wife, who was the 'first woman champion of a new era. Aai Kanaklata was a religious leader. A widow from the lower caste was also could be accepted as the supreme figure of religion. Aai spread the Vaishnava religion and more than 14 persons became her disciples. Inspite of strong opposition from few religious Brahmin fanatics, Aai's excellence was

* "Brahmanar Chaandalar nibicdarikula,
Datata Chorata yeno dristi eka tula,
Nic hata Sadhuta yare bhaila eka
jrana Tahakese pandit bolola sarvajana"

tested by "Bhagawan Atta" who was deeply influenced by Aai's religious excellence. She was the last religious Guru from Sankaradeva's clan.¹⁷

**The role of the housewives in the 600 years of Ahom period:**

Historical literature is yet another wealth of Assam. The tradition of writing history was the contribution of the Ahom dynasty. Sir G.A. Grierson, the eminent scholar commented that the Assamese were justly proud of their national literature. In that department have they been more successful than in a branch of study in which, India, as a whole, is curiously deficient. The historical works are numerous and voluminous. The great Royal Ahom family ruled successfully over this valley for almost six hundred years, perhaps the longest period of rule in history by a single dynasty, which culminated in the transfer of power to the British under the Treaty or Yandabo 24th February, 1826. Women played a significant role during the Ahom period which was displayed by their deeds of valour, patriotism, self-sacrifice, ideal womanhood and power of endurance. In every aspect of day-to-day life as well as public life, the womenfolk contributed immensely for the all-round welfare of the society in general and the Ahom kingdom in particular. As the writing of history was devolved on a special category of persons, perhaps, no special mention was found about the literary talents of the women during the Ahom period. The Ahom king Taochukhangpha 1215 Saka or 1291 A.D. invaded the kingdom of Kamatapur of Durlava Narayan, but the king of Kamatapur made friendship with the Ahom king by offering the hands of his two daughters princess Rajani and Bhajani. These were the historical phenomena which exhibited the existence of strong bond of friendship among the people of neighbouring kingdoms. This shows that women played the role of torch bearer of peace and harmony.

The role and status of women in the society during the Ahom period may be broadly classified into three aspects, viz., economic, social and administrative sum political.

According to the writings of Mr. Bukanun Sahib, women of all classes from princess to the common women were engaged in the production of four varieties of cloths of silk, known as pat and muga, three-fourths of which were kept for personal use and substantial quantities of yams pat and muga were also exported to other countries. It was customary to have one loom for every two women and eight to ten looms for large size families. During the Ahom period, elderly men and women had to spin yarns for a few hours every day and its violation resulted in punishment. Legend has it that if a warrior goes to war wearing a cloth made during a single night starting from spinning of yarn to weaving of cloth, he is sure to win the battle. The kind of cloth is known as "Kabas", a protected armour. This amply demonstrates that the women during the Ahom period were not only expert in the art of weaving but also were capable of performing the assigned task dutifully. They had vocational training.18

This kind of rare dexterity of womenfolk in handloom weaving in the Ahom period appears to have been reflected in the present-day Assamese society also. This is borne out by the observation of Mahatma Gandhi during his visit to Assam in 1929 when he said that Assamese women were capable of weaving fairy tales on their handloom fabrics.

The name of Mulagabharu is well known in the history of Assam. She set a glaring example of women chivalry and patriotism during the seventh invasion of the Mughals when she fought bravely against the Mohammedans after the death of her husband, Frasenmung Borgohain, one of the Chief Army Staff during the Ahom period at the time of Dihingia Raja 1419 Saka or 1495 A.D.. Though Mulagabharu lost her life in the battle, her extraordinary courage shown in the battlefield led the Ahom soldiers to victory. Offering of the hands of Romani Gabharu, the daughter of king Jayadhavaj Singha 1576 Saka or 1652 A.D. to the Muhammedan rulers during the Assam invasion by Mir Zumlah 13th invasion

provides an example of making friendship for peace and harmony through exchanging women and making marriage ties. The name of Joymoti Kuwari will be written in letters of gold in the Assam history and in the history of the world for her unique example of ideal womanhood, patriotism and courage. She tolerated inhuman physical torture inflicted on her body by the police officials rather than disclosing the whereabouts of her husband Langi Godapani who took shelter in the Nagahills as fugitive on apprehension of persecution by Sulikpha, generally known as Lora Raja 1679–1681 A.D. The latter entered into conspiracy to maim or kill Godapani in an attempt to eliminate all eligible descendants of former kings so that they would not be able to usurp his throne. According to customs, any prince with physical disability or injury was debarred from becoming a king. Likewise during the reign of Chandrakanta Singha 1732 Saka or 1810–1818 A.D, when the Burmese invaded Assam, the Ahom king gave the hands of princess Hemo Aidew alias Bhamow Aidew for matrimonial relationship with the Burmese king which helped to establish international friendship during the Ahom period. Reportedly the naming of a city as Bhamow city by the Burmese king bears a testimony to the love and friendship between the Burmese and the Assamese people.19

Administrative aspect of the housewives during the Ahom period:

Women, specially the housewives, played a significant role in the administration during the Ahom period. It is evident from the fact that Raja Mau (mother of king Chandrakanta Singha 1810–1818 A.D. took active part in conjunction with Minister Purnanda Buragohain, as the prince was only 13 years old at the time of his accession to the throne. Raja Mau's decision at the helm of affairs in administration during that period was very vital. The role of Pijou Aidew niece of General Lachit Borphukan and Tusi Aidew daughter of king Gaurinath Singha 1702 Saka or 1778 A.D. is well known in the history of Assam. Their role occupies a predominant place in the crucial phase of Assam history. The name of Phuleswari Kuwari was written in the history as a housewife who reigned Assam in Raja Shiva Sinha's period. Her violent outburst against Vaishnavism

The history of modern Assamese literature and the role of the housewives:

The history of modern Assamese literature begins with the merging of Assam with British India in 1826. The initial years were difficult, especially with the British making Bengali and not Assamese the language of the schools and courts from 1835 to 1871. This situation was reversed and Assamese was restored to its rightful position, with the American Baptist Mission taking a lead role. The Mission brought out the first Assamese newspaper. "Orunodoi in 1846, Hemchandra Barua, Anandi Nath Dhekialphukan, Gunabhiram Barua, Lakshminath Bezboroa, Chandrakanta Agarwala and few personalities. Orunodoi era's works and writing directly influenced the Assamese women and the housewives.

Hemchandra Barua in his Kaniyar Kirtana and Bahire Rong Song Bhitare Kua Bhaturi has given a glimps of his literal attitude to woman. In 1861 in the April issue, with the pseudo name, Ha, Cha, he wrote an article on "Women education."

Extracts from the article written are* –

20. ibid p. 193
24. Dr. Prafulla Kumar : Ghar Jeuti, May, 2001,
Take out the bondage that hide women from outside, let them, freely exchange with male courier part.
Again in support of women education he wrote –
As long as woman become literate, our country can't march forward!)
He, about his decision after the demise of his lovely wife wrote in Article named Anek Bia Ajugut, Monogamy is not resonable.
In his Autobiography he wrote–
I have decided not to remarry, I thought twice what would have depped if I would died, ... widows desired to get married, she would have boycotted by the society, would treated as unouchable. This is unreasonable!
He again wrote, "Yuktittina–Bicharena–Dharmattani Prajajate" (both man and women and equal, hunger, sleep, willpower, organs, birth death are also same and equal in nature. Widow should get married. According to Hindu sastra's a wife is Ardhangini while the marriage slokas chant like- "To your soul to my soul to your flesh to my flesh, to your skin to my skin, we are two body residing in the same soul, so women and husband are equal, why on earth wives should be deprived of the right to equality. (Also see Das Lakhya Hira education in Assam.)
A contemporary to Hemchandra Barua was Gunabhiram Barua, who was pioneer of woman education. He was Progressive, and a forerunner of widow marriage and equality of women. The most striking fact lies in his personality who married a widow and got his widow daughter married. Durgaprasad Mazindar, Benudhar Rajkhowa, Chandradhar Barua, Ananda Chandra Agarwalla and Ambikagiri Roychoudhury were the scholars and preachers of education for women. In 1871 the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, SIR George Campbell restored Assamese to its position originally occupied with the efforts of Missionaries led by Mr. Bronson and Mr. Cutter. Hemchandra Barua compiled "A Dictionary in Assamese and English and published it in 1867 at Sibsagar. Another landmark contribution of Hem Chandra Barua was a dictionary in Assamese named "Hemkosh". Thus the missionaries' deal to spread education benefited Assam immensely. The number of magazines published on Assam in earlier times were many during that time and had immensely contributed to the conscience of the housewives*.

In 1928 the first women Magazine "Ghar Jeuti" edited by Kamalaloya Kakoti and Kanaklata Chaliha was published. Kanaklata and Kamalaloya, both were educated housewives and with the help of their husbands. They took up the work of spreading education among women. The striking features of the first women magazines were as follows :-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of Magazines &amp; newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Aasom Bilasini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Asam Mihir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874-75</td>
<td>Asam Darpan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-76</td>
<td>Gowaipara Hit Sadhini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Asam News</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Asam Tora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Lora Bandhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Jonaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Asam Banti (N.P.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>Advocate of Asam (N.P.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Usha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Bahi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Asam Bandhu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Asomia (N.P.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>International Times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annual price of the magazine was 3 rupees

It was published in Rongpur Press, Sibsagar by Siddheswar Barua.

The articles that were incorporated in the magazine were regarding

* Moral education of children husband and love
* Suggestions to pregnant women,

A group of male writers like Ratnakanta Borkakoti, Anandachandra Barua, Rohini Barua, Jnadayabhiram Barua, Padmadhar Chaliha, Prafulla Goswami, Munin Bortotiki and women writers like Chandraprabha Saikiani, Alaka Patgiri, Promila Devi were the regular contributors of the articles of 'Ghar Jeuti'.

In 1928, Ghar Jeuti stepped into two years of glorious circulation.

In 1930, in the 4th year publication of this women magazine incorporated subjects like –

> Relevance of women education – by Nagendra Narayan Choudhury
> Swami & Love (serial) by Dharmeshwari Devi Baruanee
> About Mahila Samities – by Charnalata Saikia
> Grihashram by – Pratap Chandra Goswami.

Over the years by 1932, "Ghar Jeuti" became the torch bearer of all educated housewives in Assam. In 1935 Kanaklata Chaliha became the first woman editor in a women magazine. It was "Padmavati Devi Phukononi' who wrote "The first Assamese Novel – "Sudharmar Upakhayan", she wrote another book called "Hitsadhika". In 1884 Bishnupriya Devi wrote Nitikatha, followed by other women writers who came into the picture. Amongst them the name of "Chandraprabha Saikiani, is taken with respect. Her life, missionary zeal to

* "mahila saaskar pratham ak ekak maaheshree alacooni bih jeevita ko bishay chopnor din nitee utkaro laah kohi bichai, bhadresh pratham patachari bhalabar shabder eiyak nirbale jah plant jeevai ak dey" (mahila saaskar pratham ak ekak maaheshree alacooni bih jeevita ko bishay chopnor din nitee utkaro laah kohi bichai, bhadresh pratham patachari bhalabar shabder eiyak nirbale jah plant jeevai ak dey)"

"Ghar Jeuti" 1st Assamese and only women magazine aim at compete with the 1st class magazines from Banga.
spread women education and moral courage, had been a matter of research till today.

Chandraprobha Saikiani & her contribution to education and over all status of Assamese housewives

The study of the history of women and education remains a halfway, if "Chandraprobha Saikia" and her ..... a role model of Assam are not discussed, A living embodiment of Rabindranath's sentiments immortalized in .... ekla chalore – Chandraprobha was born in a small interior village Doisingini of old Kamrup district of Assam on March 10, 1901. In 1901 – Chandraprabha for her sharp intellect won a scholarship and a silver medal in the L.P. examination. She further showed her determination to pursue her education against the conservative norms, that was harsh to the needs of girls and the women. Braving all obstacles she enrolled her name alone with her sister. Rojaniprabha who later became "The first woman physician in Assam". She by the encouragement of the then inspector of schools Nilakanta Barua, emerged with a scholarship to study at the Nagaon Girls Normal School. Having completed the Normal School Course, she joined as a teacher at the Tezpur M.V. school. In 1916 Chandraprobha raised her voice against the communal injustice and inequality faced by women in the society. In 1917, at the age of 17 her fire-eating speech in the "student's conference of 1917, held at Tezpur under the presidentship of Acharyya P.C. Roy in defence of the rights of women and against social injustice, child marriage and all forms corruption, stunned the audience and was highly applauded by all. The year of1925 is the mile stone in the history of women empowerment when attending the Sahitya Sabha Session held in Nagaon under the presidentship of Rajanikanta Bordoloi, the first novelist in Assamese literature, she threw her first challenge to conservative norms in Assamese society. She urged women to break the 'bamboo net barrier segregating the women from men attending the conference. 25

She was the first to fight for the entry of women into the Hayagriba Madhaba temple of Hajo and also into Barpeta Kirtan Ghar. While she succeeded in the former, the latter till today is not opened for women. In 1926, it was for the first time with the co-operation of some "Educated housewives and forrunner of Assam literature, like Hemoprabha Das, Kanaklata Chaliha, Kamalalaya Kakoti, Narayani Handique, Kiranmoyee Agarwalla, formed the nucleus of the "Assam Mahila Samity." 29-29-30 - 1928 Chandraprobha, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's, non-co-operation movement actually participated and motivated women and housewives against the evil of the British Raj. In 1931-32 Chandraprobha's belief in scientific socialism enabled her to take part in the labour movement, and mount protest to prohibit child marriage in Assam. In 1937, she published the 98 pages "Pitribhitha" a novel, before that her novels like –Ghar Jowai, Biar-Bis, Gourisankar, were published in May magazines of Assam – A forrunner of "Renaissance in Assam", Chandraprobha Saikiani was a regular writer for various newspaper and magazines questioning the evil practices of society In "Asomiya" she questioned a scholar Budhindra Bhatta who commented on women liberation and challenging evil effects of western education.*

In 1947 Chandraprobha singlehandedly under the banner of "Asom Pradesik Mahila Samity" spread the literature march and more than 50 thousand women and housewives became literate. In that year she became the editor of "Abhijan and Abhijatri." 1949, Sucheta Kripalini declared "Assam Pradesh Mahila Samity" as the greatest and one of the most powerful organisation all over India. In 1957 Chandraprobha, contested as a Congress candidate from her

Chandraprobha replied.

"এইমে এছাড়া বহন হলেই ভাঙ্গ হল বুলি মহোদা সুলো নরঘাটারে সুই মায়ের একাকী রাখা। যা বাহন নহিলে আলিপুরটী ও নিদিয়ে অন্য ইংরের সত্তারে অন্য ইতরের সত্তারে অন্য ইতরের সত্তারে অন্য ইতরের সত্তারে অন্য ইতরের সত্তারে কি ? এই পার্থ প্রথা নাই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই এই 

That it is said that no purdha system prevails in Assam, then why a girl of 11 years is forced to get married and even the old ladies are not allowed to roam in the street. Is not that a purdha? Again if those who believe in free movement of women, was insulted as Mem Sahibis, was not that a superstition? .......We women don’t seek a westernised feminism. We want to take part in educational process with the help of generous male counterpart only!
village but was not elected. She was the first Assam Woman to be arrested by the British. In her personal life, she was one who dared to bring up her love child, Atul Saikia, who later became one of the prominent trade union leaders of India. Earlier in 1917 she fall in love with young idealist Dandinath Kalita and secretly married him. Social taboo and ban on intercaste marriage did not permit a formal marriage of both while her husband was forced to marry another girl belonging to a respectable family. Chandrabroba left the house of her husband with their love child in her womb and singlehandedly bore the responsibility as a single mother. In 1972 she was offered "Padmashree" by the Government of India and in the same year she died on her birthday e.g. 16 March after a prolonged illness.

"Chandraprobha Saikiani" a living legend of her times, has left her powerful impact on all walks of life of the Assamese women and the housewives. As a freedom fighter, crusader against social injustice, single mother, powerful reformist and organiser, humanist, as a writer, novelist, and social reformer, one hundred years ago, Chandraprobha Saikiani by her utter charm and charisma and bold personality tirelessly marched ahead to empower, educate and to provide women with moral courage to fight against child marriage, purdah, casteism prevalent in Assam. Therefore she was fondly crowned as the pulse of the Assamese society.*

* "It is "Abhiyatri" a novel based on Chandraprobha, published in 1993 is awarded "Sahitya Akademi Award," various discussion and research work on Chandraprobha still unfold some lesser known fact about the legendary figure, -

"যদি আমি হয় শক্তিহীন, দুর্বল হারে, পত্নীর কাবণে নাই কর্তব্য একোবে, মনে সাধ বাজ সিংহাসন, সত্য এখি মিথ্যা ভজ, নিবা কবে প্রসাদ তোবে, হেন আমি তাপ্ত কথা, ... কর্তব্য।

If your husband is powerless, weak and coward, don't perform duty as his wife, don't go astray, leave that husband, it's the duty of a sati.
After Chandraprobha, a host of "educated housewives both from village and town areas took to writing as a powerful medium to express their fight against injustice". In Kamrup and Sibsagar became the centre of all literary development and research. Contrary to the "female literary tradition, as expressed by "Virginia Woolfe", who was not given access to freedom to roam around publicly in England, a few Assamese housewives, at that time, tirelessly contributed to the literature of Assam. Among them the name of Nalinibala Devi, is taken with respect. Padmashree, Sahitya Akademi Award Winner, and the president of "1947's Pradesik Mahila Samity" Nalinibala Devi, was a poet, writer and forerunner of women's rights in Assam. Her autobiography "Eri Aha Dinbor" "Bygone days", depicts the picture of a widow, a dedicated housewife and a mother, who being inspired by her own father "Karmabir Nabinchandra Bordoloi" a freedom fighter and famous social worker of Assam proved her mettle against all odds. She was born in 1819, in an elite family. In the first chapter of her biography she described in details about the "Purdah of Assam".

During the British rule she contributed to the freedom movement, by actively participating in various non-co-operation programmes. She said that "Service to the nation was the ultimate peace. Womens' education need to be spread to the nook and corner of our country." Despite the tradition, Nalinibala Devi, opposed child marriage and decided not to marry off her daughter, only

26. "ড়ি সমাজত রোবার্বীস্কলে বাহিবীলে গ'লেও 
জাপা আক লি বা ওবশি আক লি ওলাই যাব লা হৈছিল,.......... 
"In the time of my childhood women and housewives from upper class were not allowed to go outside without veil, even in marriage ceremonies they were covered by "Choudhuli". About education in her autobiography she wrote, "There were no provision for women's education in Assam at my time, but we were given higher education under "Gopal Krishna Deva, Mathematics, history, poem, English are the subjects we had to learn. I got married at the age of eleven" as during that time Brahmin girls were supposed to get married before attaining paberty". Soon after, at the age of twentyone I became a widow". Nalinibala's return to her parents, opened another chapter of her personality. She began to write poetry and became a celebrated women writer.

source : Devi Nalinibala : Eri Aha Dinbur, pp. 12-13
after she attained 18 years of age. In 1954 she was selected the president of 'Asom Sahitya Sabha' the top most literary organisation of Assam. Throughout her life, she actively participated in all progressive activities of Assam and identified herself with manifold problems of Assam. The "problem of Assamese language, protest against federal act and the like. Her personal letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and the then President of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, evoked positive response from Delhi as well as from the President of All Indian Association of Poets". Nalinibala's life and works in totality reflect the revolutionary zeal and spirit of her strong personality. Nalinibala Devi was not a human figure only but an organisation, who brought awards, laurels and recognition to Assam and the Assamese women. As a powerful public speaker, Nalinibala's contribution to the establishment of schools for girls in Assam and Kamrup District, made Assam indebted to her for all time to come.

Few other poets and housewives in pre and post independent era contributed tremendously to the literary world, several other male writer used 'pseudonym' like- Bina Barua, Cha, Kha, (etc.)--The tradition of writing poetry by "literate housewives" start with "Padma Priya"--followed by for other progressive poet housewives who decided to spare their time and energy in creative writing. "These poets has definitely, providing a solid base for healthy composition and enhanced a sense of patriotism during that time no doubt." After Padma Priya it was three Missionary wives* followed by a host of poets. *** To mention that 'due to lack of women employment in no-stereotype areas, the earliest way of expressions for 'educated housewives were only creative writing.'

27. 1965 "for her collection of poem "Alakananda" she was awarded Sahitya Akademi", the collection of her other book of poetry includes : Sandhyar Sur, Sapunar Sur, Paras moni, Yug Devata/Zagriti, Alakananda,  
** Anee Goldsmith, Subarna Goldsmith and Eri goldsmith, who in order to spread Christianity activity was working hard to educate women in Assam  
*** Padmavati Devi Phukonani, Himola Baruane, Induprabha Deka, Dharmeshwari Devi Baruani, Nalinibala Devi, Jamuneshwari Khetoniar, Chandraprobha Saikiani, Ajolitora Neog and host of 'educated housewives'.
**Slow progress of women's education in Assam**

During the period as the slow progress of women's education was observed. On May 27, 1901 Cotton College was established at Guwahati. There were only two colleges in Assam upto 1930. Upto 1935 Assam did not have any college for girls. In 1936, Lady Keane College in Shillong was established for women, Smti Usha Bhattacharya was the first principal of that college. Earlier despite resistance in 1929 only one girl got admission in the Cotton College. Co-education in Cotton College was introduced in 1936. In 1938 Handiqui College was established in Guwahati only with two students.

**During 1904–1947**

The number of colleges in Assam were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1904</th>
<th>1947</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of boys and girls student</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>5439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source*

After Independence the number of girls schools and colleges increased and by 1970 it was as follows:

1. Primary and Basic schools 640
2. Middle Schools 238
3. Higher and Higher Secondary 163
4. Colleges 10
5. Polytechnic 1

* Source**

From 1995 to 2002 the number of colleges paved the path for higher studies of women.

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* Bharatar Shiksha Itihas
** Education in Assam by Lakshyahira Das.
Jyotiprasad Agarwalla and his contribution towards Assamese women

The message of humanism got its wide and deep expression in the writings of Jyotiprasad. After Sankaradeva, it was Jyotiprasad, who was in the truest sense, the maker of modern Assam. The maker of the first motion picture in Assam, Jyotiprasad was a writer, novelist, dramatist, poet and a social reformer. His concept of humanism had been strongly reflected in his dramas. For the first time due importance was given to women character in 'Sonit Kunwari', a drama written by him. Usha was painted as a rebel lover who became successful in taking decision to marry Aniruddha. His "Karengar Ligiri" also depicts the picture of duality that resides in Indian male, In all his major works, Jyotiprasad gave the pride of place to women. His "Labhita" the pivot character in the play is not an ordinary village girl but she had the courage to oppose in justice, strongly protest the derogatory and barbarous behaviours of the British police officer. Labhita, was the symbol of a lady who's dared to oppose the feudalistic behaviour of the wife of village landlord. 1921, after coming back from England, with a higher study, a degree on film technology he actively participated in the freedom movement of India and was arrested many times. 1934, was the golden era of Assam cinema Jyotiprasad made the 1st Assamese motion picture 'Joymati'. A lady, 'Aaideu Handique' who played the role of Joymati was later boycotted by the society for acting in films. She had to remain a spinster throughout her life. In 1939, he made another film 'Indra Malati'. 1944, he actively advocated for the establishment of Gauhati University. Thus Jyotiprasad, in his poems and revolutionary struggle to establish equality and humanism in the society occupies a glorious position in the history of Assam as one of the leading leaders of women liberation29.

29. Jyotipradar rachanawali by Assam prakashan parishad, 2000
Asom Lekhika Sanstha and its contribution towards women

The 'Asom Lekhika Sabha', formed in late seventies, had the aim of establishing equality among women. In the words of Preeti Barua, the 1st secretary of the Sabha*, it aim was to encourage women against all sort of bondage, and superstition is our prime aim.

Last 25 years, this organisation actively published various important works and writing of few prominent writer after independence. A group of progressive women writers emerged in Assam. Most of them contributed to enrich the socio-cultural scenerio of Assam. Few women writers from Kamrup districts too have been contributing in the literary field through writing. Mention should be made of daughter of the East Jnanpith Award winner Mamoni Roysom Goswami was another rewarding personality. A housewife from Kamrup, Sri Goswami despite and despite the many personal tragedies, Gyanpith Award winning author's 'joie de vivre' is exemplary.*0 Her contribution to both Assamese and Indian literature compendable. Her moral courage both a writer and a women to fight against the tide has made her a living legend in Assam. She fought all

* * "সকলো ধর্মর নিয়মবদ্ধতা, সংকোচ আক সমত প্রকাশ চিভাবে পরবর্তী ওলাই এডন মান অনুপ্রেরণা যোগারা এই সংস্থার ধর্ম উদ্দেশ্য।"

* Nalinibalal Devi : Biography - 4, drama - 6, book of poems - 8
  Dr. Nirmalprobha Bordoloi, Ex-president of Asom Sahitya Sabha : Translated work - 2, poem - 10 and poems collection of articles - 11, among that Devi and Shiva was more prominent, children book - 15 and other works on lyrics, short stories etc.
  Dr. Lakshyahira Das : collection of geet - 12 nos, poem - 10 nos., story & translation - 8 nos.. Her novel 'Aparichitar Prem and "Derian Grer Chabi was quite popular.
  Nirupana Borgohain : Story - 16, Novel - 35 and more. Her novel "Abijatri' got Sahitya Akademi Award. Besides it was a long list of women writer, Dr. Pemi Devi, Nilima Dutta, Dr. Kunja Medhi, Sachibrata Roy Choudhury, Preeti Barua, Dr. Anima Guha, Anuradha Das, Anu Barua, Anupam Dutta Saikia and upto 2002 a list of writer like Anuradha Sharma Pujari, Akashitora (the researcher), Arupa Pathangia Kalita, Dr. Anuradha Barua, Ilu Devi Barua, Eli Ahmed, Kunja Medhi, Karabi Deka Hazarika, Gita Hatikakoti, Jahnabi Khound, Dipika Bhatta, Meera Thakur and a lots of more than 500 prominent writer from Kamrup district are contributing to a healthy atmosphere to the whole state, source : Progya souvenir, ALS.

odds and started writing on issues like women's rights, the plight of widows, injustices of the caste system, cruelty to animals in the grab of Tantric rites, were unfolded in her novel*

**Education in the last five years in Assam and the Literary Campaign in Kamrup district: A gulf between rural and urban women**

The last few years have shown a rapid increase in the educational institutions for girls both in urban and in rural areas. Majority of women resides in villages. The total about rural urban, male-female ratio districtwise is as follows:

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* Her "Datali Haatir Une Khaoa Howdah" is one of her best selling novel is an Assamese classic now. At the age of 25, her "An unfinished Autobiography, depicts in details about her tragic life as widow. In his visit to Vrindavan to further her research on the Ramayana, he was stirred by the dismal condition of the widows. Her "Neelkanthi Braja" was conceived at that moments, her portrayell of 1984 riots in Delhi, in "Tez Aur Dholire Dusarita Pristha, on insurgency yatra won the Katha Award in 1993. She grieves that for decades the rest of the country was completely ignorant about our rich heritage." A tireless worker for women right and humanity, and head of the department of 'Modern Indian Languages at Delhi University.'- Strong women were the central character of her many novels. It was 'Giribala' the protagonist in (D.H.U.H.) Narayani patha Bhangi, and such, her strong epilogue and verse was alien to the women writer who's proceeded.

"একাকে প্রেমিকে সংগের বাজাত তাই বিচার রক্তেৰিল, কিন্ত কোনো করদিন কোনো প্রেমিকে অনুরাগত কেতিয়ারা তাই প্রাপ্তব্য বুঝাতে কোথা রাখিল তা তাই সেই অল্প সমস্ত রূপাচ দেখিয়া চুনি ছিল তা?"

Pg. 136 Nilkanthi Braja

She was roaming around in the dreams of few gangs. But did she ever unclothe herself? Did she ever unbuttoned her blouse to show of her beautiful breast? Her bold self revelation in her autobiography—

उह्र काव्यासं कुतियाग्ग एने छहेंने?

दिबा दिबथि चाही कुमा हैंैं एजनब बाबे आक अनुसूक भैं हैंैं आन एजनब बाबे) Pg. 16, Dastabeg

Oh, did it happened to anybody, you sign the marriage for someone and divert your heart together.

As a whole, Mamoni Roysom sensitive portrayal depicts reality as she faces it, her imagination never corrupts, comforts but simply states with a charity born of an understanding of the situation and the people who have found themselves in it. These are the contribution of Indira Goswami to Assamese and Indian literature.
## DISTRICTWISE LITERACY RATE AND DENSITY OF POPULATION

**Literacy in P.C. 1991 Census**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
<th>Density per Sq. Km</th>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dhubri</td>
<td>47.32</td>
<td>28.75</td>
<td>38.31</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kokrajhar</td>
<td>49.57</td>
<td>30.29</td>
<td>40.57</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>55.47</td>
<td>37.58</td>
<td>46.81</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bongaigaon</td>
<td>58.67</td>
<td>38.72</td>
<td>49.06</td>
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**ASSAM**

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**Source:**

*Statistical hand book of Assam year, 1999-2000*
Our observation on the slow growth of educational the vast difference between urban and rural women in this matter interview with a large number of women indicate the following reasons.

While in almost all the districts, majority population reside in rural areas their role as educated citizens can not be ignored. Ironically the picture of rural woman has a sharp contrast with that of urban counterpart. The reason are –

> In village areas the main aim of the parents was to marry off daughters as early as possible. The expenses incurred on girls' education are seldom justified in the patriarchal family structure. Women were mainly engaged in agricultural and weaving activities so education to the housewives was not given importance. Instances were also there, where the females had to give up studies for want of necessary fund. Superstition regarding 'Pure character and virginity of girls' debarred them from joining the co-educated schools.

> Even in few villages child marriage and marriage to rich man had been practice till Harsh realities like poverty and unemployment had been the main reasons.

> Lack of family planning measures, a number of children and importance of male child pushed back girls from education. Parents were not inclined to send their daughters to schools where education was imparted by the male teachers. The guardians, by and large, were apathetic to the education of girls.

> Female teachers were not inclined to go to the village schools for lack of suitable accommodation. A wrong notion that educated girls go out of control and can not be good housewives in future, prohibit girls from getting educated. For want of suitable hostel accommodation many a girl had to give up studies. Acquiring of moral values to become only good housewives seem take the motto of most of the Assamese village girls.

> Lack of enough schools established by the government leads to employment of girls in household works. Lack of proper communication
creates hindrances to women's education in village areas against a secured environment in urban areas. Miles and miles of walks made the girls tired of education process, besides the natural calamities like flood and poverty.

- Lack of proper electrification, coupled with superstition banned women from education. Lack of proper nutrition, sanitation and hygiene and lack of proper roads also made rural life harder where only the brilliant girls pursue higher studies despite hardships.

- Age difference between educated girls and male, depicts a picture of male dominance. The stigma attached to unmarried women is terrible. To get rid of that suffering girls themselves dream about being only housewives and not somebody with a equal identity with male.

- Girls are considered as fragile which generally lead them to undergo vocational and professional courses like shorthand typing, tailoring, embroidery, knitting, nursing, midwifery and gram sevikas."

Against this backdrop various programmes of adult education, both governmental and not governmental, helped the housewives to be more self dependent and socially aware. In several rural areas women after getting adult education and vocational training started co-operative societies for the improvement of economic status and general development. The awakening in the last couple of years has been remarkable in the sense that husbands in the village set up started recognising the contribution of women to the family income. Programmes like, poultry, farming, gardening, weaving and fisheries made the housewives more equal to their male counterparts. A comprehensive programme of literacy adopted by "Gyan Bigyan Samiti, one of the leading Samities has been as follows :-

From our interview with the officials of GVSA we have some information on SUSA, and its contribution to the education and employment to housewives.

The Assam Science Society formed the Gyan Vigyan Samiti in Assam on 18th July 1990 in accordance with the earlier decision of Peoples' Science
Movement. It was formed at a general meeting held at Handique Girls' College where the educationist late Dandeswar Gogoi, was selected the President and Dr Debadatta Barkataki, the secretary. It had 17 members in its Executive Committee. The Samiti had the following aims:

* To link up the Government and non-Governmental organisation working for literacy and work together in unison.
* To provide an informal platform for a quicker exchange of ideas amongst the activists.
* To spread the message of literacy to the nook and corner of the country.
* To bring about awareness amongst the people and give a glimpse regarding literacy and science through its programmes and organisation.
* To encourage people at all levels to work for literacy.
* To perform Kala Jatra i.e. cultural programmes in 500 districts from 2nd October, 1990. Each group would give cultural performance in 100-120 places within 30-40 days.
* Prior publicity work to be conducted in each of the places where the Kala Jatra is to be performed. Publicity to be in the form of postering, cycle rally or lectures.
* To prepare publicity material like posters.
* To build up the organisation at all levels.

The GVSA in its agenda incorporated and included the following objectives—

> Literacy to library and cultural movements
> Literacy to women's emancipation
> Literacy to health
> Literacy to sustainable self-reliant development

**Few case studies on housewives who have started a new life**

A few case studies on the housewives who started a new life after being initiated by the GVSA revealed positive changes amongst the housewife in Kamrup. Some of them are as follows:
Her name is Ms Shayera Begum. At present she is an instructor in an Ankur Omalaghar at Lahoal. It was about five years ago when she was in school. One day she was beaten up by one of her teachers. That incident disturbed her mentally. On the way back from her school she threw away her books and notebooks into a river, and dropped out from the school. When GVSA searched for volunteer instructors at her place, she willingly came out and till 1992 she was avidly working as a Volunteer Instructor. Her learning centre was situated in a very backward place. The villagers were not interested in learning. Some of the villagers insulted her when she requested them to learn. Again some of them used to tell her that if they got wine to drink then they would learn. These are some sample difficulties she had to face. But by her own capability and ingenuity she overcame these difficulties and made people interested to become literate. She has proved herself a successful Volunteer Instructor.

Some more success stories are as follows –

Ms Mausumi Sarma was a Volunteer Instructor of GVSA. Her husband was working in a factory. She came out of her house and joined GVSA as a Volunteer Instructor. Ms Sarma was the first amongst the Volunteer Instructors who completed the teaching of all the three primers. Now she is an Volunteer Instructor in an Ankur Omalaghar.

Ms Gita Das (30) of Pragjyotishpur Block was a Volunteer instructor. She and her husband were committed workers. Their learning centre was at their house. People came to their courtyard batch by batch and learnt the primers. She completed all the 3 primers successfully. Even now women of her locality come to her place to gain some more knowledge. Through GVSA, Ms Das proved her potential qualities.

Two neo-literate women Ms Bhabani Gogoi of Hajo and Ms Rangila Medhi of Sipajhar of Kamrup proved themselves as poets. After being literate they started writing poems. The Neo-literate Barta (Newspaper) published their poems which gained praises from noted poets of Assam. Both of them told that they were grateful to the GVSA, since for this organisation they could express their feelings through poems.

Ms Banu Bordoloi of Shualkuchi Block was a handicapped girl. She used to curse God for her sufferings. When GVSA searched for Volunteer Instructors she readily accepted the offer. Ms Bordoloi too proved herself to be a committed volunteer.
Another woman of Sesa Block lost her job due to some misdeed committed by her husband. She became a neo-literate. She protested against the illegal suspension. She wrote an application to the authority explaining about the incident and thus regained her job. She told that if she could not read and write she would never have regained the job.

**Learning ability in the field of education**

It is a common belief that women’s learning ability is lower than that of men, especially in the field of Arithmetic. But Gyan Vigyan Samiti Assam repudiates this belief. Following table revealed this fact. According to Gyan Vigyan Samiti Assam it is not the learning ability, but the lesser opportunity for which women cannot expose their ability in learning. GVSA is eager to know whether their campaign has had any impact after the participation of the women folk. The women activists and learners outnumbered their male counterparts. More than 75% of literacy activists and learners are women. GVSA’s Evaluation report proved this fact.

GVSA is proud of its female activists. The present General Secretary of GVSA and the Editor of the GVSA news bulletin are women. Besides this in Raha Block the Block Secretary is also a woman.

A girl is daily subjected to the argument that girls are less talented or less capable than boys and are suitable for unessential activities only. It is not surprising then that a girl is firmly convinced of the unchangeable and bitter fate of a woman and sooner or later because of her lack of training in childhood, actually believes in her own incapability.

During the last several years this samiti has immensely contributed to the literary campaign programme among women.

The literacy rates in the country have certainly improved over the decades. However, there is a clear differential between the literacy rates between males and females. Female literacy rates are falling behind male literacy rates.

Education is a double edged instrument. It can on one hand, eliminate the effects of socio-economic inequalities whereas on the other hand introduce a new kind of inequality between those who have it and those who do not. Apart from the sharp increase in the number of illiterate women and the disparities educational development
between rural and urban areas, there are severe imbalances in educational development between advanced and backward classes and between regions. Imbalances in women's education and literacy rates are the consequences of these regional disparities which reflect to a great extent, variations in regional attitudes to women. A detailed analysis of state-wise progress in women's education of different levels revealed that while all of them have made rapid progress, the rate of progress have been uneven between different states. The lack of uniform development of education among women in different regions as well as in different classes has serious implications in the upliftment of the position of women in all sectors of the society. Thus it is not only to increase the spread of women's education but it is further necessary to spread education among all the groups of society so that it does not remain the privilege of a few.

PROGRESS OF LITERACY RATES IN INDIA :

(1901 to 2001)

![Chart showing progress of literacy rates in India from 1901 to 2001.](chart)

Source*

* Report on status education and problems of Indian women, p. 43, Govt. of India.
Census Year, 2001

Chart-ll

We have also observed the literacy rates of Assam and in the North East

Literacy Status of Assam and the North-Eastern Region

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Source*

Women Magazines in the new Millenium and its contribution to the moral education of Assamese housewives

Study on educated housewives in Assam will remain incomplete a few "high class women magazine", are not reviewed. Women magazines like, Femina, Sawy, Sananda, New Women and Society which came down from Metropolitan cities like Mumbai and Kolkata. By virtue of various literary campaign programme, and growing number of educated women, specially housewives cater the journals to the intellectual need of the woman. These magazines have made women socially aware. A close study on various housewives in Kamrup district and Assam reveals that. Both the housewives in village areas and urban areas prefer to kill their time reading light magazine. They acquire more knowledge while special extra pages on women in various newspapers seldom quench their thirst for knowledge.

* Gyan Vigyan Samity
The beginning of new millennium, in the beginning of two much readed women magazine are priyo Sakhi, Nandini published from Guwahati, Kamrup*.

Our study of few Assamese women who have excelled in the field of science and technology as published in the mentioned magazines give us a clear picture on the various achievement of assamese women abroad** Besides that various articles related to health education, economy spending of housewives, has generated a career conscious class of educated women in Assam.

We have talked to the editors of the respective magazines and few intellectual regarding the latest contribution of these magazines to the housewives in Kamrup and Assam***.

* The Researcher herself contributed to the magazine by her cover story on "New Millennium Women in Assam."
Since the 1st publication "Priya Sakhi" has catered. The need of educated housewives in its various segments specially meant for women. For the first time this magazine with extraordinary printing gimmicks catch the attention of women reader.

** Renita Saikia, a scholar and employee in (NASA), Indira Das (Director of Technical Education, Assam), Jene Dhekialphukon (Chief of computer and incharge Assam Engineering College, Dr. Archana Sharma, Scientist, Suranjita Khound, Flying officer, Indian Air Force, Bandana Goswami, Chief Executive Engineer, Assam Electricity Board, Captain Papori Choudhury, Pilot, Abhishruti Dutta, Engineer and Pilot.

*** According to the circulation manager "Priya Sakhi". More than 40 thousand copies sold out in almost all areas, while this magazine catching the attention of male reader and writer too. From 2000 to 2002. This magazine has circulated copies from 10,000 to 40,000 to prove its popularity. In the same time with Priya Sakhi, "Nandini", a magazine, published from the largest selling new paper publication house "Pratidin Sadin Group" has brought about a new era to "educated housewives. According to Editor "Mainee Mahania" last two years shows an increasing number of reader of this magazine and it has definitely contributed to the changing persona of modern housewives in particular. Prior to this magazines other few women magazines in last 5 years are– Shreemoiiee, Pubali, Swarupa, excluding few less circulated magazines. The magazine Shreemoiiee paved the path of new modern Assamese women highlighting a new fashion consciousness among housewives. On the other hand "Pubali" by its weekly meeting Sahitya Sora, other magazine like "Gariyasi" under the editorship of Academy Award Winner Chandra Prasad Saikia* aiming at high class intellectual, time and being encouraged research based writing on women. Another popular Magazine "Prantik" under the editorship of Dr. Bhavendra Nath Saikia, has formally invited research based study on women and housewives. "Pragya" a souvenir published by "Asom Lekhika Sanstha, yearly is able to comprehend a clear picture on women writer, in Assam and various districts.
Computer Education in Assam and women

In the past few years specially in the last 5 years India has witnessed a "computer fever". Everywhere we see the signs of computer courses. This has been due to the following reasons:

* Computer is no longer a device used by computer engineers to make programmes. They find that computer can help them write and learn languages, create art and music, search for information, communicate with people residing in other parts of the country and abroad.

* Computer is considered to be a powerful instrument which is changing the way of work and life of people.

* The JIVA learning system, includes a complete classroom selection with programme emphasis on the academic syllabus and coordination of computer syllabus with the academic syllabus.

* In the last four years JIVA developed principles like, focusses on practical skills rather than knowledge.

* Activities that teach students how to use computers as a resource or a tool to accomplish tasks.

* A teacher training module to help teachers handle new technologies and effectively teach computers in their school.

It was in 1978 that personal computers were developed which offered complex calculation facilities to business and common people the internet has been a worldwide network to get varied information around the globe.

"Computer education in Assam is not a very alien concept, In 1989" National Informatics Centre" was the first step to computer education in Assam. By the effort of "Assam electronics development cooperation of Assam government", hardware, software, education on the use of computer are given. Computer centre in Assam mostly in Guwahati in 1998 were lesser than present year*


Source : (Swarupa, 1998, January Computer Education in Assam by Nishajyoti Hazarika)
2002. There are growing number of cyber cafe in the nook and corner of Guwahati and other urban area is a common right.

In our survey on computer education centres in Kamrup we found that –

- More and more "higher educated housewives" visit computer education centres.
- "To cope with the high strata of modernisation, housewives from upper urban classes have started realizing the benefit of rapidly taking up of computer education. A few women officer have started their own computer centres.
- More and more girls are spending their times in internet surfing to communicate with different countries.
- Computer education has helped women in urban areas to become more knowledgeable in the area of information and higher studies.

Due to the lack of computer education in lower classes of women, and housewives in village areas information is still at a still borne stage. Yet, a new elite section scattered in several colleges - educational institutions, helps in enhancing self confidence among women and girls. Ushering of computer education and necessities, definitely lead the Assamese women and housewives to a new era of modernity. No without doubt in the coming years computer-education may become a must status symbol to the elitist Assamese housewives.

A detailed study on the history of literature, education, women and housewives in Assam an or the study on the new concept of peace education, history of women's participation in literary field, has opened up some new areas of fact finding regarding educated housewives in Assam as follows:

It is a fact that almost all the changes relating to housewives has the direct outcome of education. The growing number of crime against women, unemployments, irregular pay package in governmental offices, have led the educated housewives to search either for full time or part time jobs. With more and more women becoming educated, morally, technically and literally, more awareness regarding self-identity and status may rise forsaking the old values of
division of labour. Today's Assamese Housewives are constantly transforming their personality to suit the mood of modernism. However, a glorious history and literature also have contributed to the new concept of women and humanity to prove that "education leads to progress only."

Preservation and transmission of culture is an important function of education. Education has brought a silent revolution to Kamrup. Our literary survey finds that prior to Independence only a few housewives with extraordinary support from their scholar and broadminded husbands got a chance to widen their horizon. The mode of changes amongst the housewives and other members of the families are evident from a look into the history of literary graph. Changes in that period were spiritual, lasting and deep as compared to the changes taken place in the last couple of years in our state, which is by nature superficial and lack in depth. Educated housewives are no longer concerned to their own rights alone. They have been aware of the fact that total changes need to take place in our society.

Kamrup was the centre of all the progressive agenda and programmes initiated by educated housewives for other women with low status. Sivasagar, one of the significant districts in Assam along with other districts have been following the suits.

Thus education has brought out women from the confines of their households to the wider horizon, in determining their own fate and space in the society. Ancient Assam and Kamrup as compared to the other states of India, reflected remarkable development, in the field of education. Impact of media and governmental plans have made the housewives in both rural and urban Kamrup more aware of their identity. Uneducated girls are now a days considered to be a waste and less efficient. Western concepts, materialistic needs, corruption, price hike, status consciousness altogether are inspiring women to realise the benefits of education. No doubt the demand for the educated-working housewives in the households are on the rise, but at the same time few domestic problems like violence, divorce have been also on the rise.