Chapter - III

PRESS AND EDUCATION
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The invention of the printing press had recognizably infused a new spirit in learning. Information now became accessible to the masses and ideas, hitherto the exclusive right of the nobility and the clergy, began a downward filtration thereby playing a significant role in expanding the intellectual horizon of the Indian people. The process was slow but gradual. The survival of the newspaper press itself was largely dependant on the spread of education and the rate of literacy in the society. With the spread of education, the desire to read increased among the educated sections. The spread of education and the popularity of newspapers were, thus, complementary to each other. The most powerful effect and the enduring result of the press in India during the nineteenth century was the intellectual development of the people on an entirely new line, and the consequent changes in their political, social, religious and economic outlook. It may be said, without any doubt, that during this period, India passed from medieval to modern period.
The first vernacular periodical of India, Digdarshana was primarily educational in character. The first issue of the paper contained, for example, a leading article on Christopher Columbus and his discoveries and other articles on various aspects of history, adventure, agriculture, industrial advances, botany and zoology. It was, initially, published for use in Baptist schools, and by the Calcutta School Book Society. The paper provided 'entertaining as well as instructive' information. The editors of the paper hoped that the paper would instil in 'older Bengalis' a love of reading and increase their knowledge. The paper was subscribed both by the students and the older people. The School Book Society alone subscribed one thousand copies monthly. Even the low income groups could get access to the paper because of its low price.¹

Lord Hastings commended Samachar Darpan as an endeavour 'to excite and to gratify a spirit of inquiry in the native mind by means of a newspaper'. In addition, he boosted the circulation of the paper by allowing it to be transmitted throughout India at one-fourth of the normal postal charges. Although the Court of Directors had doubts whether a newspaper was the most suitable medium for disseminating useful knowledge among the people, it reluctantly approved the concession. Till then, the East India Company had practically done nothing with regard to the spread of education amongst the people of India.² Samachar Darpan became so popular amongst the Bengalis that its circulation far exceeded the expectation of the publishers. Dwarkanath Tagore's named headed the first list of the subscribers. The publishers of the paper believed that "it was to the growth of a strong and viable press that most people of any country would look for instruction", and so the Darpan was used to direct "the attention and energy of

2. ibid., p. 103
the ... people to a neglected literary field". They were convinced that "no other event followed our arrival in the East than the introduction of a Press among the Natives, we should have conferred a boom on India for which generations yet unborn must bless the British name". ³

When the first printing press, the Sibsagar Mission Press, was established in Assam by the American Baptist Missionaries, it inaugurated a revolutionary change in the intellectual atmosphere of Assam. As Nidhi Levi Farwell wrote in Orunodoi -

"... The American gentlemen brought the printing press to Assam and printed books devoted to religion and general intelligence for the people of Assam. This has been very good for the people, as earlier, the dearth of sufficient books and scriptures deprived most of the people from adequate reading; now books are printed in most of these places, and many people are reading these books. Earlier, apart from a few gentlemen, the common people could not read much, but now most of these people are reading and acquiring knowledge as well as intelligence. Moreover, books are available and can be collected from the printing press, as an when required."⁴

We have noted earlier that the first newspaper and magazine of Assam, Orunodoi was devoted to religion, science and general intelligence. No doubt, the Missionaries used Orunodoi as a means for their higher aim of proselytization, but the religious aspect of the paper was neither 'aggressive' nor was it used as a sole organ of 'sectarian propaganda'.⁵ The columns of Orunodoi covered news from across the world. The great events of India and abroad were brought to the doorstep of the

³. ibid, p. 104
⁴. 'Discovery of Printing', Orunodoi, March, 1846
Assamese. The paper published articles on science, history, geography etc. in a very simple and comprehensive form. Like the Digdarshana and the Samachar Darpan. Orunodoi, devoted itself not only to the spread of religious education but also to the progress of science and general intelligence.

The publishers of Orunodoi declared it as a "store of knowledge". In 1861, the editor of Orunodoi wrote remarked: "The editor feels confident none will doubt that the Orunodoi has been useful to the natives of this secluded province in the diffusion of general information and more liberal ideas." Orunodoi was a news magazine of a high standard covering all aspects of a modern newspaper. But apart from it being merely a newspaper, the Orunodoi served several important functions in the socio-cultural life of Assam in the later half of the nineteenth century. At a time when the modern system of education in Assam was yet to be set on a strong footing, Orunodoi did the pioneering job in the field of mass education in Assam.

In its wide variety of articles, Orunodoi made available to its readers the diverse geographical description of many lands. Mention may be made of the following — 'Discovery of America' (March 1846) 'Eruption of Mt. Hecla' (Jan 1846), 'Bhutan' (July 1846), 'Description of Great Britain' (Sept, 1846), 'First Passage Round the Cape of Good Hope' (Sept-Oct 1846), 'Account of Ceylon' (Jan, 1847, July 1853), 'Cuba' (June 1848), 'The Egyptian Sphinx' (Aug 1848), 'The Great Wall of China' (Aug 1848). 'Eastern Countries of Africa' (Aug 1850), 'Geography of Southern Africa' (Oct 1850). 'Australia' (Jan 1851), 'North American Lakes' (Mar 1851), 'Account of Cataracts' (Mar 1851), 'Russia in Asia' (April 1851), 'Turkey in Asia' (May 1851), 'Syria and Palestine' (June 1851), 'Geography of Arabia' (Jul 1851), 'Description of Persia' (Sept 1851).

'Account of Mississippi' (Oct 1851), 'Description of Tatar' (Dec 1851), 'North America' (Feb 1852), 'Geography of Mexico' (Mar 1852), 'Geography of Central America' (April 1852), 'Discoverers of America' (April 1852), 'Western Africa' (May 1852), 'Description of Burma' (Jul 1852), 'An Account of Mount Etna' (Feb 1854), 'Description of South America' (May 1857, Jan, March, 1858), 'Description of Africa' (May, Jun, July, 1858), 'Description of China' (Jan 1855), 'Japan' (May 1858). A scientific presentation of these topics were brought out in detail along with maps and illustrations.

Apart from geography, the paper included topics on flora and fauna — 'The Natural History of lion' (May 1846, May, June 1858), 'The Natural History of Tiger' (Jan 1846), 'The whale' (Nov 1846), 'The Buffalo' (Jan 1848), 'Tobacco plant' (Aug 1847), 'Ox' (Feb 1848), 'Cow' (Mar 1848, April 1858), 'Nutmeg Tree' (Mar 1848), 'The Bee' (Sept 1848), 'Horse' (June 1849), 'The Alpaca or Peruvian Sheep' (July 1849), 'Giraffe' (Aug 1848), 'The Ostrich' (Sept 1849), 'Tortoise' (Nov 1850), 'The Clove tree' (Dec 1847), 'Zebra' (Aug 1853), 'Hawk owl' (Sept 1851), 'The Cassowary' (May 1850), 'The Iguana' (Mar 1950), 'Dodo' (April 1850), 'Pigeon' (Jun, April 1858), 'Vulture' (Jul 1858) 'Crab' (Oct 1856), 'The Mole Cricket' (May 1860).

Orunodoi created among the people of Assam awareness about science through descriptions of scientific theories. Information on scientific inventions, development of trains, balloons, printing machines etc. generated interest in science among the readers. Various scientific articles such as, 'About Seeing a New Planet' (Jan 1846), 'The Solar System', 'Rotundity of the Earth', 'Galileo' (Feb 1846), 'Solar Eclipse and Lunar Eclipse' (Feb 1848, Feb 1849), 'Attraction and Heat' (Oct 1852), 'A Machine to weigh Air' (April 1850), 'About a Machine through which very Distant places can be seen' (Nov 1853), 'Description of an Epidemic' (Nov 1853), 'About Mirror' (Aug 1853), 'Description of
veins through which Blood Circulates' (May 1846), 'Earth's Gravitation' (Dec 1847),
'The Story of Rain' (Dec 1853), 'Microscope' (Sept 1853), 'Chloroform' (March 1848),
'Iron' (Oct 1846), 'Heat Measuring Machine' (Sept 1854), 'Human Bone' (Feb 1854),
'Description of Eyes' (May 1854), 'Description of Baloon or Floating Object' (Oct 1847),
Description of Sun (July 1860), Description of Moon (Aug 1860), Astrology (October 1860), Description of Saturn (May 1860), James Watt (April 1856), Steam Engine (Feb 1855) were published in the Orunodoi.

Orunodoi made an attempt to include science as a subject of general knowledge and to create an interest among the educated people of Assam for the study of science. Interestingly, in the article, Discovery of America, the writer 'Aa', while describing the discovery of America by Columbus, preceded the description by note on the Compass - How the Compass could be made on the basis of the magnet remaining always in the north-south position; how sea voyages became easier as it helped in determining the directions; and how because of this, it became possible for Columbus to rightly steer his journey in the sea. Such articles provided significantly useful information.

The first scientific article in Orunodoi was The Solar System. The article had two pictures of which the first one showed the orbit of the planets with the sun in the centre; and the other one indicated the sizes of the planets showing which one is big and which one small. The article described the planets as -

"Those stars near us that rotate round the sun are called planets. In order to know which star is a planet it has to be looked at a relation to the sun. If it is a planet it moves, if it does not move, it is not a planet but it is another star."

The article gave a description of the planets' distance from the sun, their revolution.

7. 'Discovery of America', op. cit.
8. 'The Solar System', Orunodoi, February, 1846
9. ibid
measurement, number of satellites and meteors. The article was followed by a brief addendum-

"After the above article was written, a report has come to us from London with the information that an astronomer from Germany, Hank, had seen a new star from his telescope on 8 December. After a careful watch for several days, he discovered that it was not static like a star but moving like a planet."¹⁰

Orunodoi published the first Ethnological Studies in Assamese by bringing out short accounts of the tribes of Assam - the 'Aka, the Abor, the Khamtis, the Mishmis etc. Description of different nationalities and tribes from different parts of the world was another important feature of Orunodoi. Illustrations of men and women of the concerned ethnic groups were also published together with the articles. Some of such articles were 'Description of Garoland' (May 1847), 'Description of the Naga' (June 1848), 'Description of the Khamtis' (July 1848), 'Description of the Mishims' (July 1848), etc.

Another special feature of Orunodoi was the articles on history. Orunodoi published the 'Puroni Asom Buranji' (Ancient Assamese History) in several parts beginning with the August 1850 issue. Kamrupar Buranji was published in Orunodoi part by part starting from January 1853. The Lineage of Chutiya Kings was published in the December 1850 issue. An article on the History of Assam was published in August 1860. Not only articles on Assam History but also on Indian History and History of foreign lands were published - 'History of Hindustan' (March 1850 - July 1850), Description of Syria and Palestine (June 1851), Early Kings of Hindustan (June 1851), The History of Pathan Dynasty (January 1854 - August 1854), The Mughal Emperor Akbar (August 1854), The Emperor Titus (September 1854), History of England (Jan

¹⁰ Orunodoi, February, 1846

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1860), *History of Bengal* (Feb 1857 - Sept 1858) etc. The publishers of *Orunodoi* attached special attention to history and chronology. *Orunodoi* published an interesting series on history entitled *Brief History from the Creation to the Confusion of Tongues* (August 1846), *Brief History of the Jews* (November 1846), *Brief History of Greece* (December 1846). The *Buranjis* of Assam, regarded as the secret State documents under the Ahom rulers, were brought to light for the first time in the pages of *Orunodoi.*

The *Orunodoi* made a very significant beginning in Numismatic studies by publishing the facsimiles of quite a large number of coins of Ahom and Koch monarchs and Mughal emperors found in Assam. Many important articles were also published. Mention may be made of - *Coins Dug up Near the Old Palace at Rongpur* (Mar, 1851), *Old Coins Dug up at Rongpur* (May, 1851), *Mahomed, second king of Gour* (Jul, 1850), *Coins of the Mogul Emperors* (Jan 1852), *Poetical Description of Rangpur* (Jan 1853), *Coins belonging to Captain Dalton dug from the tank in Gauhati* (Nov, 1854), *Coins of Lakhmi and Gourinath* (Aug, 1854), *Coin of Mahamed Sami el Gouri* (Jan, 1854), *Shemus Uddin Iltomush* (Feb, 1854), *Coins of the Assamese Rajas* (Apr, 1854), *The Pathan Dynasty - Balin Sultan* (May, 1854), *Coins of Ombika*, *Horbeswori and Pratap Singh* (Jun, 1854), *Coins of Sib Singh, and Queen Phuleswory* (May, 1854), *Gold and Silver Coins of Rajeswar Singha* (Jul, 1854), *Coins of the Ahom Rajas* (Sept, 1854), *One anna coin of Brojonath Singh* (May, 1857), *Half anna coin of Chondrekant Singh* (May, 1857), *A Coin Dug up Near Gowahati* (Sept. 1856).

These articles generated a great deal of interest among the Assamese, who had for so long been confined to an isolated environment. Information on all aspects of life not only widened their horizons but also inculcated in them a spirit of enquiry. *Orunodoi* tried to publish, within its limited scope almost every branch of human learning. Infact, 

11. Ancient Assamese History, History of Kamrup and Ancient Chronicle of the Chutiyas were serially published in *Orunodoi.*
Orunodoi served the purpose of a useful school book. In an advertisement printed in Orunodoi, the bound volume of Orunodoi containing twelve issues had been described as "an excellent Assamese Reading Book for schools." The Orunodoi was used as a text-book in the Missionary schools. Besides providing useful information to school children, Orunodoi broke the monopoly of acquiring knowledge from the select few. For the first time, information were brought to the doorstep of the common man. The price of the journal was also affordable to its readers, the annual subscription being only one rupee. Moreover, the journal was also made available free of cost for the people who were too poor to afford it at one rupee.

The educational value of Orunodoi can be correctly assessed only when we take into consideration the state of formal education in Assam during that period. Till that time, there was not a single college in Assam. The number of schools could be counted on fingers. As such, the literacy rate was very low. However, it is noteworthy that even people from the remote corners of Assam communicated with the editors of Orunodoi. Nathan Brown, editor Orunodoi, complained about their faulty language and that much of his time was wasted in correcting their correspondence. The number of books on science and general knowledge were also negligible. On the other hand, the medium of instruction in Government schools in Assam at that time was not Assamese but Bengali. In such a situation, Orunodoi, indeed helped in giving useful information and widening the knowledge base of the Assamese people.

12. Orunodoi, March 1854 and June 1854, Sept 1857
13. H. K. Barpujari., The American Missionaries and North-East India, 1836 - 1900 A D., Delhi, 1986, p. 113
14. Orunodoi, January 1846, last page declaration.
16. The first Government college in Assam, Cotton College was established in 1901
17. 'Village Reports', Orunodoi, August, 1854
18. Bengali was the official language in Assam from 1836 to 1873, the year when Assamese were re-established. We shall discuss this later in this chapter.
19. 'Advantages of reading the Orunodoi', Orunodoi, October, 1855
No. of Articles published in Orunodoi during the years 1846-1854

G. I.  =  General Intelligence  
Rel.  =  Religion (Articles on Christianity)  
Sc.  =  Science  
Hist. =  History  
Geog. =  Geography

The newspapers and Journals that followed Orunodoi in Assam during the later half of the nineteenth century, played no less a significant role in shaping the basic foundation and promotion of education amongst the Assamese people. These papers succeeded in creating an intellectual atmosphere in Assam. The basic objectives of most of these papers was the spread of knowledge and a sense of social responsibility amongst the people. Though mainly devoted to religious matters, The Assam Bilasini, published by the Satradhikar, Auniati Satra, Sri Dattadev Goswami, contained useful knowledge and information on science too, which added to the general intelligence of its readers.20 The objective of Assam Bandhu, edited by Gunaviram Barua, was the pursuit of knowledge. In its first editorial, Assam Bandhu declared - "Our aim is quite

20. G. P. Sarma, 150 years of Journalism in Assam, Guwahati, 2007, p. 82
simple: It is entertainment for the common people and pursuit of knowledge. In this paper we shall discuss matters relating to literature, science and arts."21 The motto of the paper was 'Knowledge is power'.


Mau, of Bolinarayan Bora, presented good examples in scientific writing. An article on 'Natural Geography' (March, 1887) gave description of the shape of the earth, its dimension, density, day and night, changes of seasons, the use of latitude and longitude in determining places on earth's surface. Another article, 'How to Maintain our Health' (March, 1887) highlighted how contaminated water could cause diseases like Cholera. Mau also raised important issues related to higher education and women's education.

Although the main thrust of *Jonaki* was Assamese literature, it also published few scientific articles related to zoology, geology and physics - *Physiology* (Vol. 1, VII, VIII, IX issues, 1811 *Saka*, *Saon*, *Bhada*, *Aahin*), *Water* (Vol. 2, VIII issue, 1812 *Saka*, *Bhada*), *Earthquake* (Vol. 2, XII issue, 1812 *Saka*, *Puhi*; Vol. 5, II issue, 1816 *Saka*; Vol. 7, IV issue, 1819 *Saka*), *Magnet and Iron* (Vol. 3, VI issue, 1813 *Saka*, *Aahar*), *Weight of Air* (Vol. 3, XI - XII issue, 1815 *Saka*, *Aaghon - Puhi*), *Darwinism* (Vol. 5, III issue, 1816 *Saka*), *Telephone* (Vol. VI, II issue, 1817 *Saka*, *Fagun*), *Usefulness of Plants* (Vol. 6, XI issue, 1818 *Saka*, *Kati*), *Body and Mind* (Vol. 6, XI issue, 1818 *Saka*, *Kati*), *Flora and Fauna* (Vol. 6, XII issue, 1818 *Saka*, *Aaghon - Puhi*), *Astrology* (Vol. 7, III issue, 1818 *Saka*, *Sot*). An interesting discussion on Electricity was presented in the form of a conversation between a teacher and students under the title "Teacher and Student".\(^{22}\)

*Bijuli* published various scientific articles on the topics of *Baigyanik Prasanga* (Scientific context), *Madhyakarshan* (Gravity), *Jun* (Moon), *Saurajagatar Katha* (Story of the Solar System) etc.\(^{23}\)

Thus, Press in Assam in the later half of the nineteenth century was intimately associated with the development of the intellectual life of the Assamese people. There was a rising concern amongst the intelligentsia of the necessity of spreading education to the masses and they used the press as a platform to carry this message. Unfortunately, the people, in general, were apathetic towards education. An article in *Orunodoi*, September 1846, highlighted this indifferent attitude of the common people towards education. The editor wrote that the urge for education was only to be found among the urban people and amongst some of the well-to-do families in rural areas. But the village

\(^{22}\) *Jonaki* Vol. 5, V issue, 1817 *Saka*.
\(^{23}\) *Bijuli*, Vol. 2 and 3.
people were more inclined towards agriculture than education. The people, he felt, failed to assess the value of learning. They were, either on account of general poverty or due to ignorance, unwilling to spare their children from agricultural labour. They used to point out that they could not spare their children from ploughing, hoeing, and transplantation work during the sowing season. Three months later they said that it was harvest time and the children could not be spared. After a few months, they brought up some other excuses and the whole year passed like this denying their children from learning.24

The editor stressed that education was more valuable than gold and silver, and that once acquired it becomes a lifetime treasure which never depletes. He pointed out that the best time to acquire it is early childhood and advised the Assamese people to inspire their children to aspire for higher ideals and not to engage them in gaining cheap profits by indulging in agricultural labour.25 Furthor, the writer cited the example of the development of England from its earlier uncivilized condition to a position of an advanced nation and a world power, which was possible only due to the progress of education amongst the English people.26

Advice for early childhood education made repeated appearance in Orunodoi. A letter addressed to the people of Assam "from an Assamese friend from Calcutta" was published in Orunodoi, May 1853. The sender of the letter, perhaps, Gunaviram Barua, wrote that the duty of the parents towards their children does not end with merely providing them with food, shelter and clothing, but it must necessarily include their proper education. Education should be, he reiterated, the primary requirement for the welfare of the children and of the country. He regretted the fact that the Assamese were not as

24. 'Lyceums and Schools', Orunodoi, September 1848.
25. ibid
26. ibid
enthusiastic as the Bengalis in Calcutta and Bengal about the modern system of education, which was a blessing of the British rule. He deplored that, his countrymen were satisfied with the petty jobs in Government offices and in the courts.27

The indifferent attitude of a general Assamese towards higher education became a matter of criticism in a number of essays, letters, and verses published in the newspapers in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Assam. The educated intelligentsia as well as the missionaries expressed their deep concern in this regard. There was a growing consciousness among this section of the society regarding the slow progress of education in Assam and the fact that the Assamese lagged behind the Bengalees in this matter. The impact of the modern education and Bengal renaissance convinced the intelligentsia that if the people in the West could achieve such miraculous progress through education, then the Assamese too could achieve similar miracles by emulating the examples set by them.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan’s article *Englandar Bibaran* in *Orunodoi*, brought this out very explicitly. In the article Anandaram gave an account of the geography, agriculture, industry and commerce of England, to highlight the rapid progress made by that nation by dint of education.28 He wrote -

"Hear me my friends, if you want to become civilized, wise and happy, then rise from your stupor. The boys should not listen to anyone but just devote their time and energy to their studies, because wealth cannot bring wisdom. Parents, leave aside everything else and let your children acquire knowledge, not wealth, because the sin they will be committing by remaining ignorant will befall you too.

27. 'Letter from an Assamese in Calcutta to his Countrymen', Orunodoi, May, 1853.
28. 'Englandar Bibaran', Orunodoi, 1847.

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And donot think that you can escape the wrath of God. Rich and wealthy ones, shed your past pledges and reform yourselves; do not let your wealth rot under the soil; spend it in spreading knowledge. Take this path and our land will surely become civilized and cultured.

"Secondly, O my Assamese friends, in this age nothing is more useful than knowledge. But if you want to become civilized and contended, strive to be experts in agriculture and industry like the English. You are very ignorant, you have no idea about those things and have no inclination to learn them. How happy you would have been if you could build steam engines, steam mills or steamers. Even now it is not beyond your capacity; the only thing required is for the rich amongst you to spend some money and get some agricultural machines built with the help of the English and have some local brethen learn how to operate them as well as to know the functions of different machines developed by the English. If people see the marvellous work done by these machines, they will not ignore them but will learn their use even better. This, you will see, will turn the jungles of Assam into flower gardens, the huts will give way to buildings, small boats will be replaced by steam boats and the whole state will become prosperous.

"My Assamese friends, hear the third reason for your being inferior to the English. You do not have a business mentality, with everyone preferring to keep the money buried underground, not realizing that money begets money. One of the main reasons for the prosperity of the English people is their trade and commerce; so if you want to prosper, engage yourselves in business activities. But if agriculture does not prosper, trade and commerce too will not make progress; so try to
engage yourselves in both occupations.

"But O my countrymen, the fourth and main reason for the pathetic condition of our land is that you do not think about the welfare of the State but are concerned only with your own interests. What good results can be expected from the solutions I have given above if you do not love your own country? Listen my wealthy friends, be aware of the fact that God has given you the money not for hoarding or for yourselves but for use for the welfare of others. This sermon will awaken the realization in many good people who can get rid of the State's misery. But do not get disheartened when you find yourself alone in the job; carry on the work according to your capacity and others will follow suit.

"O Almighty One, give the people of Assam the wisdom to become patriotic and religious and the knowledge to realise their shortcomings and miserable condition. With your miraculous powers, make them civilized and worthy of knowing and praying to you. O Omnipotent One, bring about that stage soon when jungles will make way for flower gardens, rafts will be replaced by steamboats, concreta houses will phase out huts, the villages will have thousands of schools, educational meetings, hopitals and shelter homes for the poor, when people will shed envy and show brotherly love to one another, not tell lies for a little opium and will not harm each other for the sake of money, when prostitution, opium and alcohol will be things of the past in this land."29

Similar articles advocating the spread of education in Assam were published in Orunodoi - A Plea for Education (September, 1853), A Friendly Work to the Assamese by an Assamese from Upper Assam (August, 1853), Chinese and Assamese Schools (June, 1853), An "Appeal to be Civilized" from a school student of Sibsagar (August.

29. ibid; Translation taken from G. P. Sharma ed. op.cit, pp. 49-50.
Lakshminath Bezbaruah in an article in *Assam Bandhu* highlighted the importance of early education in a child. He stressed that just as physical exercise is required for physical education, similarly for mental development, education is essential. He observed that student-life is the best part of life when one should fully utilise the time in the pursuit of knowledge, and that parents should also be conscious about this.\(^{30}\)

A number of such articles also appeared in *Jonaki*. Sivaram Bardoloi, in an article in *Jonaki* expressed his dissatisfaction over the reluctance noticed amongst the Assamese parents towards the education of their children. He observed that parents in countries like England and America were more conscious about their children's education than the Indian parents. Although this consciousness was apparent in some parts of India, he lamented the fact that it was not so in Assam. The writer requested the Assamese parents to shed all inhibitions and come forward to educate their children in their early childhood, which he stressed, was the best period for both physical and mental development.\(^{31}\)

Bijoy Ram Barua in an article in *Jonaki* quoted Chanakya's words that parents who do not perform the duty of educating their children are their greatest enemy.\(^{32}\)

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya in an article in *Jonaki*, *Jatiya Unnati*, held that a nation cannot progress, in the true sense, without the development of science and technology, which is not possible without the progress in education. He opined that development amongst the European countries was possible only because of their progress in education.\(^{33}\)

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Kanaklal Baruah in another article in *Jonaki*, agreed with Herbert Spenser's views that it is of utmost importance to impart useful education. He further discussed the different traits of physical education, mental education and moral education. On moral education, *Jonaki* published three thought-provoking articles, respectively by Ratneswar Mahanta, Ghanashyam Barua, and Dalim Ch. Das.

In the later half of the nineteenth century Lyceums had gained popularity. *Orunodoi* published news on the number of lyceums that had come up in Europe and America, where people assembled and exchanged ideas. In the Hindu College at Calcutta, three new lyceums were organised. Gunaviram Barua wrote on the *Bidyutsahini Sabha* of Calcutta where discussions were held on topics of education and publications of books. Students also participated in the deliberations. The *Orunodoi* urged the Assamese people to follow these traditions. The existence of voluntary organisations like the *Gyanar Sabha* of Sibsagar (1845) and Assam *Deshitaisini Sabha* (1856), are mentioned but these appear to have had limited membership, and advertisement of the Sibsagar Lyceum was published in *Orunodoi* in January, 1856.

One of the most important features of the newspapers and magazines published in Assam during the later half of the nineteenth century was that, when it was customary for newspapers to allot most of its pages for political news and views, the press in Assam devoted space for articles on social reform, welfare of the people, religion, health and hygiene, and spread of education. These journals advocated the cause of education as a measure towards the removal of social evils and the progress of the province as a whole.

34. 'Siksha', *Jonaki* Vol. 5, II issue, 1816 Saka.
36. 'Lyceums and schools', *Orunodoi*, Sept, 1846.
37. 'Bidyutsahini Sabha', *Orunodoi*, December, 1855
38. 'Sibsagar Lyceum', *Orunodoi*, January, 1856; *Orunodoi*, September, 1856
39. 'Asam Deshitaisini Sabha Bigyapan', *Orunodoi*, January, 1856
In India, education has always been held in high esteem and the learned have always commanded respect in society. As F. W. Thomas observed,

"There is no other country where the love of learning had so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful an influence. From the simple poets of the vedic age to the Bengali philosopher of the present day there has been an uninterrupted succession of teachers and scholars."\(^{40}\)

When the English came to India, they found a widespread system of elementary and higher education of which the former was mainly practical and the latter mainly literary, Philosophical, and religious.\(^{41}\)

During the early days of its administration in India, at least till 1813, the English East India Company 'did not recognise the promotion of education amongst the natives of India as a part of its duty or concern'.\(^{42}\) In educational and social matters, the East India Company followed till 1813, a policy of *laissez faire*, probably under consideration that such matters might jeopardise their political and commercial activities in India. However, the introduction of Western Education became inevitable in the wake of phenomenal expansion of the British rule in India for reasons both administrative and commercial.\(^{43}\)

Moreover, forces of three kinds were already in operation, in favour of the education of Indians, in both modern and classical systems. First of all, the early efforts of some of the British officers like Warren Hastings, the Governor General of Bengal, John Sullivan, the Company's Resident at Tanjore and Jonathan Duncan, the Company's Resident at Banaras during the later half of the eighteen century; secondly, the activities

\(^{40}\) F. W. Thomas, *The Historical Prospect of British Education in India*, London, 1891, p. 1
\(^{41}\) ibid., p. 148
\(^{42}\) Syed Mahmood, *History of English Education in India 1781 - 1893*, Aligarh, 1895, p. 2

(58)
of Christian Missionaries and thirdly, the growth of a new consciousness amongst some of the enlightened Indians, starting with Raja Rammohan Roy, regarding the usefulness of a new education system in India.\textsuperscript{44}

The Charter Act of 1813 earmarked a sum of Rs. 1 lakh for the promotion of education among the natives of India. The money thus sanctioned remained unspent and it was in 1823, that the General Committee of Public Instruction in Calcutta was set up for the purpose.\textsuperscript{45} But there arose a controversy among the members of the Committee on the issue of the type of education to be imparted to the Indians and the medium of instruction necessitated for the purpose. Two schools of thought emerged - Orientalists and the Anglicists. The former favoured Oriental learning and the latter English education and Western learning. Lord Macaulay, the Chairman of the Committee of Public Instruction favoured English education.\textsuperscript{46}

Assam's educational institutions on the eve of the British rule consisted of Pathsalas for Hindus, Tols for Brahmans and Upper class Hindus, Madrassas for Muslims, and Satras for the Vaishnavites.\textsuperscript{47} David Scott, Agent to the Governor-General, favoured oriental learning through the promotion of indigenous institutions. He felt that undue emphasis on English at this stage may lead to dissatisfaction and resentment in the popular minds which might be disadvantageous for the rulers. Accordingly, in October, 1826, he obtained sanction from the Government of India to set up eleven schools mostly in lower Assam. This action of David Scott was in concurrence with the Charter Act 1813. He set up schools at Gauhati, Nilachal, Na-duars, Patti Darrang, Hajo, Bajali, Seela, Bishnath, Nowgang, Desh-Darrang; each having one school except Na-duars;

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{44} K. K. Datta, \textit{A Social History of Modern India}, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 40-41.
\bibitem{45} R. C. Majumdar ed., \textit{op.cit.} p. 43.
\bibitem{46} \textit{ibid.} p. 47.
\end{thebibliography}
which had two. The only language taught in these schools was Sanskrit and the matter related to *Shastras*. Of course, in some schools the curriculum consisted of the perusal of the *Bhagavata* and *Ramayana*, with the study of Arithmetic, Medicine and Astrology.

Scott had employed some of the former officials of the Ahom Kings in the revenue and judicial departments of the new Government. But they found the new system quite unfamiliar for which they had to make room gradually for men from outside, specially from Bengal. With the consolidation of the British rule in Assam, a knowledge of the three R’s became essential in the new administrative set up. While the Ahom system of administration did not involve much paperwork, the new administrative set up under the British required the maintenance of written documents, files, and accounts. The new rulers felt the need to educate the local people and absorb them in the Government Services. Being alarmed at the sight of foreigners in almost all the Government offices, Jenkins had written to the Government of India in 1834 -

"These few (Assamese) in their present uneducated state do not suffice to carry on duties of our courts .......... the old families of Assam are losing influence in their own native province being elbowed (out from) those situations which lead to power and decent maintenance. This state of things appear to me pregnant with evil (consequences) and I know no other method by which it would be remedied then by the Government taking active measure to provide instruction for the Assamese youths."  

In the same despatch, Jenkins recommended the establishment of English medium schools at each of the Sadr stations - Gauhati, Darrang, Nowgaon and

49 *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
50 *Political Consultations*, Bengal, 1834, July 10, No. 211
Biswanath. Without waiting for the decision of the Government of India, Jenkins raised a fund of Rs. 1,740/- from the inhabitants of Gauhati for the establishment of a school. Fortunately, the General Committee of Public Instruction recommended in June 1835, the establishment of an English school at Gauhati with Mr. Singer as its first headmaster.51 A firm believer in Downward Filtration Theory, Jenkins believed that education should spread from higher to lower stratum in society. But so high was the demand for english education that soon branch schools of the Gauhati School were opened in the neighbourhood of Gauhati in areas like Pandu, Kamakhya, Beltola, Amingaon and North Gauhati. These schools sprang up entirely at public cost and their enrolment at the close of 1841, exceeded 600.52

At the unofficial level, the Christian Missionaries established schools for both girls and boys. Rev. N. Brown and O. T. Cutter had started two primary schools at Sadiya, one for the boys and the other for the boys. By 1844-45, the American Baptist Missionaries had set up at least fourteen schools in the district of Sibsagar53 in 1835, total twenty one schools were started in the district of Kamrup. The British Government annexed Upper Assam in 1838 and the first Government School in Upper Assam was started at Sibsagar towards the end of 1841 with D’Souza as Headmaster.54 With the introduction of the new land revenue system in 1834, in the lower Assam division when the right of Patta was first distributed, a knowledge of the three R’s became all the more necessary. To cater to this growing demand James Mathie, the collector of Gauhati, submitted to the Government a scheme for village education. He proposed for the establishment of an Anglo-Vernacular school at a central location in Kamrup for higher

51. H. K. Political Consultations, Bengal, 1835; June 22, Nos. 52-55.
52. H. K. Barpujari op. cit, pp. 7-8.
53. H. K. Barpujari, American ... op.cit., P. 103.
54. Report on Public Instruction, Bengal, 1841; p.222.

(61)
education, and for improvement of the indigenous schools for mass education. Eminent educationists like Adams, Elphinstone and Munro supported the proposal, but the Company Government's policy was good education for the few rather than the many. The scheme of Mathie was turned down by the General Committee of Public Instruction.  

Orunodoi gave an impressive description of the state of education in Assam during the mid nineteenth century. In a letter from an Assamese from Calcutta published in Orunodoi, the sender of the letter stated that during the mid-nineteenth century Assam, there were three types of schools - the Assamese medium schools set up by the missionaries, the Sanskrit tols, and the Bengalee medium schools started by the Administration. He expressed disillusionment over the fact that the people did not send their children to the missionaries schools lest they be Christianised; the pupils had developed a distaste for Sanskrit and did not go beyond a smattering of the language in the tols, while in the few Government schools the boys learnt Bengali just enough for them to work on the lowest scales in offices.

The whole education system in British India was found to be unsatisfactory. In Assam also, the progress of education was pathetic. Most of the mofussil schools kept no registers of daily attendance. Many did not have a list of pupils. There was neither any fixed curriculum nor any text-book. The book of instruction was hardly used. Much time was devoted to writing letters, petitions, keeping accounts etc. In the circumstances, William Robinson, Inspector of Schools, reported that 'even the most advanced students were just able to read only a few pages of their text books without any comprehension whatsoever of their meaning .... their handwriting was illegible, orthography much orse and of arithmetic they literally knew nothing. The doors of higher offices were closed

55. Revenue Consultations, Bengal, 1838; August 14, Nos 65-66.
56. 'Seventh letter from Calcutta', Orunodoi, July, 1854.
57. Report on Public Instruction, Bengal, 1845; vide Appendix 4; Robinson to Jenkins.
to the local people as before. As soon as a boy could write a petition, it was time for him to seek a job. The height of one's ambition was to become a copyists, clerk, or an accountant for which the village school or the junior standards at the English school provided the requisite qualification. Mills reported that the people of Assam could not take their proper share in the higher posts under the Government which was due partly to their insufficient English education.\footnote{A. J. M. Mills, \textit{Report on the province of Assam}, Calcutta, 1854, p. 26. In June, 1853, the Lt. Governor of Bengal had sent Mr. A. J. M. Mills, a judge of the \textit{Sadar-Diwani-Adalat} to Assam, to survey the administrative and political difficulties of this province and report on them.}

\textit{Mau} pointed out that a very important reason for the slow progress of education in Assam was that many people tend to leave education half-way in search of jobs. It was very easy to secure a job with minimum knowledge of English. Jobs like those of clerks in Government offices, heads of ministerial establishments, labour supervisors, revenue fiscal officers, police officers, head clerks in tea-gardens and so on were early available. \textit{Mau} noted that the number of jobs exceeded the number of qualified men. The people were content to secure the lower category jobs in the Government offices which required only minimum qualification. The aspiration for higher education and higher posts was rare among the Assamese people.\footnote{ibid.} In order to prevent the common Assamese craze for ordinary jobs and incomplete education, \textit{Mau} suggested that "the best way would be to appoint a Bengali person instead of an Assamese whenever there was a vacancy for the post of a clerk or a supervisor."\footnote{ibid.}

For the development of Education in India, the British Parliament constituted an enquiry committee. The responsibility was given to Sir Charles Wood to formulate a policy for the development of education in India. The Woods Despatch "imposed on the Government of India the duty to create a properly articulated system of education from the primary school to university."\footnote{R. C Majumder ed., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 50.} The Educational Despatch of 1854, described as
the "Magna Carta of English Education in India", formed a landmark in the history of education in modern India.

Orunodoi gave a detailed account of the education Despatch of 1854.62 Two important features of the Despatch were highlighted — adoption of the vernacular at the secondary level, and the rejection of the 'downward filtration theory.' The Despatch kept both English and Vernacular as the medium of instruction in the schools of India, English as the medium for those who had acquired a sufficient knowledge of it, and vernacular for the common people ignorant of English.63 In Assam, however, Jenkins approved the continuance of Bengali.64 The medium of instruction in the village schools, therefore, continued to be Bengali. The English medium schools imparted instruction in English, Sanskrit and Persian. In such circumstances, little scope was left for the study of Assamese. The foreign medium became a great obstacle faced by the pupils in Assam. Mills in his historic report of 1854 had strongly recommended the substitution of Bengali by Assamese in Assam. He remarked '.... an English youth is not taught Latin until he is well grounded in English and in the same manner the Assamese should not be taught a foreign language until he knows his own'.65

Sir Charles E. Trevelyan, T. B. Macaulay and lord William Bentinck took a momentous decision in 1835 when they inaugurated the system of English education in India. The general impression is that the British rulers introduced English education in India with the sole object of making Indian's fit for clerks; but it must also be remembered that different sections of the society desired it for different reasons. There was a two-fold object which motivated the people in general for English education — one, to

64. M. S. Barkataki., British Administration in North-East India (1826-1874) - A Study of their Social Policy, Delhi, 1985, P. 57.
remove the darkness of ignorance and two, as a means to enable to take part in the administration of the country.66 The Bengali Journal *Sudhakar* wrote on 7 Sept., 1833:

"The Government pays no heed to the newspaper articles on the spread of education. It no doubt spends a lakh of rupees on education through Education Society, but we are at a loss to understand the benefits accruing from it. The amount spent on Sanskrit College or School is of no benefit to the people in general for only Brahman students are admitted there. Besides, institutions for teaching Sanskrit were never wanting in this country, and Sanskrit education would not have suffered much even if Government had not extended its patronage to it. It is further to be remembered that Sanskrit learning only enables a man to prescribe *Sastric* rules, and serves no other useful purpose. Therefore the Government should sow the seeds, all over the country, of that type of learning which can remove the darkness of ignorance and makes a man fit for administration and other public activities. It is necessary to establish an English school for this purpose in every village. This would involve a huge cost and to meet this we suggest that the Government orders each villager to pay a subscription according to his ability ranging from one to four annas. The balance may be met out of the funds placed at the disposal of the Education Society."67

Through its articles, *Orunodoi* expressed concern over the fact that the Assamese language had been deprived of its rightful place. It was vocal in its views against Bengali being introduced as the official language in Assam. An anonymous writer in *Orunodoi* severely criticised the Assamese people for their indifference towards their own mother-tongue and urged them to work for the growth and development of the Assamese.

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He emphasised the importance of early education through the medium of the mother-tongue because learning was always fast, easy and comprehensive through one's own language than in any other language. As Assamese books were rare, Madhram Sarma Borpujari, suggested that the Assamese people could read Orunodoi which was a proud store-house of knowledge for the Assamese in Assamese language.69

Towards the later half of the nineteenth century, it was found that the urge for English education amongst the people had gradually became more intense.70 Moreover, job opportunities attracted people belonging to the upper and the middle classes of the society towards English Education, in the absence of which all high offices in the province became a monopoly of the Europeans and the non-Assamese. Balinarayan Bora observed that -

"The knowledge of English had made the Bengalis more advanced than the Assamese. There seemed to be no alternative to constant dependence of the Assamese people on the Bengalis ... the Assamese were to be taught by Bengalis, their legal grievances heard by Bengali Magistrate, and pleaded by Bengali Lawyers and offices too had to be run by Bengali clerks."71

Gunaviram Barua in Assam Bandhu expressed the same feeling while writing, "... the clerk and other officials of the court were Bengalis ... school teachers were Bengalis, the medium of instruction in school was Bengali ... the model of our education has become Bengali in all respects."72 Why are the Bengalis getting jobs in Assam instead of the Assamese? Questioned the Mau.73

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68. Orunodoi, March, 1857.
69. 'Asomiya Manuhe Orunodoi Parhar Phal', Orunodoi, Oct, 1855.
71. 'Engraji Siksha', Mau, Dec, 1886.
73. 'Uchcha Siksha', Mau, Mar, 1887.
Gunaviram Barua again pointed out the blessings of English education in *Orunodoi*. He advised the Assamese people to study the most advanced texts and most intense subjects in English and even the most difficult branches of English learning. He pointed out that in no other language in the world had so many books been written as in English. The cultivation of English would, therefore, not only increase knowledge but also far-sightedness. According to him, English was the store-house of knowledge and had high cultural value. Through English Education one could acquire information about the most advanced civilizations of the world, he said. Further, he expressed support for the establishment of English medium schools in different parts of Assam where methodically correct form of English instruction would be imparted.74 At the same time, Gunaviram also believed that a person should attain sufficient proficiency in his own mother tongue before learning a foreign language.75

The publishers of *Orunodoi* never rigidly prescribed the English language as the only vehicle towards progress. In the first letter addressed to junior readers of *Orunodoi*, Miles Bronson referred to English as the treasure-house of the best and the most useful knowledge in the world, but in the same article he also pointed out that the knowledge thus gathered from English books should be translated into Assamese for general reading by the public.76 The publishers of *Orunodoi* had great faith in the "downward filtration theory" in education formulated by Lord Macaulay. Thus a group of Assamese intellectuals' translations or adaptations of various English words, appeared in Assamese in *Orunodoi - Englandar Bibaran* by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan (Apr, 1847), *Direction for Reading* by Purnananda Sarma (Nov, 1853), *Questions for Scholars* (Dec.

74. 'Engraji Bidya Janar Phal', Orunodoi, November 1855.
75. 'An Assamese from Calcutta, Advantage to the Assamese of Learning their Native Language', Orunodoi, August, 1853.
76. 'First letter to the Little Readers of Orunodoi', Orunodoi, Sept. 1846.
1853), *For the Orunodoi* by Muzaffar Hussain (Feb, 1854), and *An English Gem* (Feb, 1854).

For the English educated Assamese *The Times of Assam* of Radhanath Changkakoty was of great value. This section took pride in exhibiting their knowledge in English through the paper. Persons like Lakshminath Phukan, Munin Barkakoty, from an early age, contributed articles in English to the paper and wrote letters to the editor. It gave them immense pleasure and encouragement when these were published. For students of English, the paper was a good source of knowledge of the English language. *The Times* introduced Assamese students of the period to good written English.\(^{77}\)

Balinarayan Bora firmly believed that the advancement of the Assamese society, to a great extent, depended on the spread of education.\(^{78}\) In a poem in *Assam Bandhu*, written under the pseudonym, the poet Gau-Na-Da (full name unidentified) emphasised that English education had infused a feeling of inferiority complex in the minds of the Assamese youth. He observed that the section of people with English education adopted English dresses, English food, English temperament, English style of walking and English customs and thereby tried to identify themselves with the rulers.\(^{79}\) Ratneswar Mahanta stated that those who were educated in English considered what was their own as bad and the evils of others as good.\(^{80}\) Writing in the same vein, Sadananda (Lambodar Bora) wrote that for the English educated, all foreign things were good and indigenous things bad. As most of them felt that they could not speak English dressed in traditional attire, many had taken to western dresses. Thus he was convinced that English education had resulted in the loss of cultural heritage for many.\(^{81}\)

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78. ‘Engraji Siksha’, *Mau* December 1886.
Panindranath Gogoi in an article *Asamar-Unnati Ne Obonati* in *Jonaki* observed that, the 'half-rotten' system of education introduced by the British in Assam had made the Assamese youths strange creatures because according to them their parents, their friends and relatives and their fore-fathers were all uncivilised. For them culture and civilization was synonymous with English education. Thus, he pointed out, was a negative attitude.82

Kamalakanta Bhattacharya in his thought-provoking article *Asamar Unnati*, that was serially published in *Jonaki* in several issues, expressed his concerns that English education was transforming the Assamese youths into the 'disciples' of Charbak Muni (followers of the principles of Charbak on materialism).83 At the same time he also expressed his gratitude towards the British Government for the introduction of a modern system of education in Assam which was, he felt, indispensable for the progress of the region.84

While the prospect of job opportunities attracted most of the pupils to English education, they found it difficult on their part to learn English as a subject as well as to use it as the medium of instruction. Gradually, there was a fall in the enrolment of the English classes in the Gauhati School. The study of English began even before the pupils had a fair knowledge of their mother tongue, Assamese, which was not even the recognized vernacular in Assam. Under the new system, therefore, one could neither speak Bengali properly, nor write Assamese correctly. Sri Purnananda Deka Barua, editor, Sibsagar Lyceum, pleaded through a letter in the *Orunodoi* for the recognition of the rightful place of the Assamese language in Assam. He stressed that the official language of any country should always be the mother-tongue of that land. For instructions...

in one's own language is always easy to understand. He questioned, how children could excel in Bengali without mastering their own mother-tongue. Moreover, there were obstacles in learning through Bengali. The lack of interest was combined with difficulties in pronunciation, expression and understanding. He pointed out the similarity in the difficulty that the English had to face when they had to study in Latin and Greek.  

The discontent amongst the educated section of the Assamese towards the imposition of Bengali as the medium of instruction in Assam was clearly manifested in the memorandum of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan to Mills. He described the state of education in Assam as "retrograde" and the reason for this, he pointed out was the imposition of an alien language, Bengali, in the schools of Assam. The only object that motivated the pupils to learn Bengali was that it was the language of the court. Elaborating on this Anandaram wrote,

"Much time is in the first instance wasted in acquiring a knowledge of Bengalee, and the reason assigned for the substitution of Bengalee for Vernacular Assamese is that 'Bengalee is the language adopted in the courts', as if the object were to make the Assamese a nation of judicial officers; and strange to say, notwithstanding the proper object of the schools, very few ex-students of the vernacular institutions in the interior have ever qualified themselves to fulfil offices of trust or responsibility in the courts of the province. The knowledge which they acquire seldom makes them fit for discharging any higher duties than those of a Gaon Kakoti or village accountant ..."  

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan suggested three propositions for the improvement of the state of education in Assam, viz., the substitution of the vernacular language in
lione of Bengali, publication of a complete series of different branches of indigenous and European knowledge, literature, history, science and arts, and completion of the course of vernacular education in Bengali. Mills, agreed with Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. He wrote to the Council of Education: "I think we made a great mistake in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengalee." The imposition of Bengali as the medium of instruction in schools had resulted in a set-back in the development of education in the state. The press in Assam during the later half of nineteenth century became in seperably associated with the cause of the restoration of the Assamese language to its rightful status in Assam. We have observed that many scholars argued for the re-introduction of Assamese through Orunodoi which became an important platform for discussions on the subject. The controversy raged not on English vs. Assamese but more on Bengali vs. Assamese. The Assam News, edited by Hem Chandra Barua, raised the standard of Assamese language, gave it a correct and proper form. Later, both Jonaki and Bijuli inaugurated a new era in the history of Assamese language and literature. All these, we shall discuss at length, later, in an independent chapter.

Educational progress in Assam, particularly higher education, was slow. In 1858, the Gauhati School was affiliated to the entrance standard of the Calcutta University. Three years later, in 1861, two candidates successfully passed the entrance examination from this school. In 1864, celebrities like Anandaram Barua, Zalnur Ali Ahmed, Sivaram Borah and Madhab Chandra Bordoloi passed the examination. A few scholarships of Rs. 10/- each were awarded to those who proceeded to Calcutta for collegiate education. The provision was not adequate. Hence many scholarships remained unavailed of. Since 1862, representations were being made by the leading public for the establishment

87. ibid., p. xli.
of a high schools or college at Gauhati. In October 1864, Murray, the Inspector of Schools of the North-East Division, wrote to the Director of Public Instruction for making provisions for collegiate education in Assam. In July 1865, the Gauhati School was raised to a higher or collegiate school with an establishment of Rs. 12,000 per annum. In May 1866 the collegiate section was opened in the Gauhati School, which was the first step in the direction of collegiate education in Assam. In 1870, a Law class was also attached to the collegiate section. Manik Ch. Barua and Ghanashyam Baruah passed the F. A. (First Arts) examination from the Gauhati school with good results and went to the Presidency College, Calcutta for higher studies.

Gradually, however, the results of the collegiate section deteriorated. During 1872-74, no student came out successful in the Entrance examination. Difficulties arising out of a foreign medium contributed to the failure of a large number of candidates at the entrance examination. English was introduced from the lowest classes and was also used as the medium of instruction. Moreover, Assamese the mother tongue was not even recognised as a subject, while Bengali was taught in the schools. Further, the cost per pupil was becoming very high. Government expenditure per capita on a pupil in the Presidency College at Calcutta was calculated at Rs. 210/- While of the Gauhati School it was Rs. 1086/-. Under such circumstances, in 1876, the collegiate section was abolished and the Gauhati School was restored to its former status.

Mau accused the Government for its inability to initiate steps for the development of higher education in Assam. Pointing out that, the duties of the Government regarding the development of education had to be fulfilled by the Government itself, it recorded,

90. ibid., p. 23.
91. General Report on Public Instruction, Assam, 1874 - 5, p. 46.
Last year the expenses of the Education Department of Assam amounted to a total of Rs. 4,52,000/-. Out of this, the amount allotted for the High School was only Rs. 65,000/-. The entire amount, however, was not fully granted by the Government. The larger share of this amount came from the collection of fees. The Government's contribution amounted to only 19,000. In a backward state like Assam, the Government should take the responsibility of the larger share. Even if the Government contributed an equal share, higher education in Assam could hope for a firm footing. When the Government fails to allot more than Rs. 19,000/- for the functioning of a high school, with what justification, does it spend an amount of Rs. 18,000/- on the salary of a single person, the Inspector of schools.92

Mau criticised the Government policy of employing a high salaried Inspector to look after the high school that failed to produce satisfactory results. The function of the Inspector could easily be managed by a Secretary with the assistance of the Deputy Commissioner of the districts. The State Education Department could save about Rs 12,000/- to Rs. 18,000/- per year by following this system.93

Mau repeatedly reiterated its view that the Government's attitude towards higher education had aggravated the hindrance to progress. Much time had been wasted in idleness, and a bit of dynamism had become necessary.

"We need to know whether the Government wants to introduce higher education in Assam or not. If not, then the high schools should be eliminated; none of us would have any objection to this. If we can manage to meet the expenses for higher education, we shall go ahead, if not, we shall live without it. If the Government is interested in higher education, then it should burn the ruined buildings established

92. 'Uchcha-Siksha', Mau, January, 1887.
93. ibid.
in the eleven districts for higher education or hand them over for minor education, and establish a series of high schools with new teachers. The Government should be prepared to spend Rs. 50,000/- in stead of Rs. 19,000/-. Otherwise with half dead institutions, I see no occasion for the Inspector to sing carols on the higher education of Assam with a drum hung round his neck.94

Assam Dipak featured an article on the educational scenario of Majuli and attacked the Government for its lack of interest in the development of education in the island.95

Mau pointed out that the primary reason for the slow progress of higher education in Assam was the sparse population compared to the density of population in Bengal. As the population was sparse in Assam, the children of the remote areas missed the opportunities of going to the high schools located at distant places.96 Mau gave suggestions for the improvement of higher education in Assam. The first suggestion was to bring some well-educated Bengali persons to Assam; second, to establish a college; third, to facilitate the successful college students of Assam for higher studies in Calcutta and England by granting scholarships etc; and last but not the least, to improve the condition of high schools in Assam. It pointed out that there was no point in retaining 'some rusted and stunted clowns' in the high schools in the name of higher education.97

Balinarayan Bora felt that the dearth of competent teachers for high schools was another great hindrance in the path of the progress of education in the state. He stressed that there could be no possibility of progress in higher education in a province where the teachers themselves were devoid of higher education. First of all he pointed out that

94. 'Uchcha-Siksha', Mau, January, 1887.
95. Assam Dipak, 1876, inaugural issue.
96. 'Engraji-Siksha', Mau, December 1886.
97. 'Uchcha-Siksha', Mau, March, 1887.
the number of capable teachers in Assam were scanty. 'Perhaps the Government was unaware of the fact that the future of a school depended on the quality of its teachers', he wrote, *Mau* raised the question as to why in most of the schools in Assam the teachers were not sufficiently qualified, whereas, in Bengal almost all the school teachers were highly competent. In Assam, he wrote, most of the teachers had no higher degrees. He stressed upon the Government to try to bring qualified teachers with Graduate and Post Graduate degrees from outside, if required by offering high salaries. He was of the opinion that every school must have, at least, one post graduate teacher and two graduate teachers. Further, he felt that F. A. should be fixed as the minimum qualifying degree for becoming a teacher in schools. He concluded, "Until and unless, any endeavour is made to appoint competent teachers in high schools, no fruitful progress can be expected in the higher education of the province."98

A very important article on *Asamiyar Siksha* (Education of the Assamese) by Ananda Chandra Gupta appeared in *Jonaki*. The writer, began with an evaluation of the value of education, specially, for the poor and the ignorant. While expressing his gratitude towards the British Government for the introduction of the modern system of education in Assam, he none the less stressed that the time had come for an evaluation of the progress of education in the province. In this regard he brought before the readers of *Jonaki*, some interesting facts based on the Census Report of 1891. He wrote:

"From the Census Report of 1891, we come to know that the population of Assam is 5,476,833. We get the following facts regarding the spread of education in Assam after making a division of the total population of the state into literate, semi-literate and illiterate.

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From the above estimate, we can understand that the progress of education in Assam is very slow and pathetic. In the Brahmaputra Valley the total population is 2,449,782, out of which 15,430 male and 687 female are literate, 63,096 male and 1,811 female are semi-literate and 1,195,703 male and 1,173,055 female are illiterate. This shows that out of a population of 2,449,782, a total of 2,368,758 are illiterate.... There are nine high schools in the six districts of Brahmaputra Valley. The Gauhati and Sibsagar high schools are about 60 years old. In Bengal also one or two such old schools can be found. Apart from the high schools there are minor schools in many parts of Assam. But their number is very less. The Government should increase the number of high schools and minor schools taking into consideration the population of Assam. We desire one high school in every subdivision of Assam.99

In 1874, Assam was made a separate province and was put under a Chief Commissioner. A separate Directorate of Public Instruction was created for the province. Prior to it, in 1873, Assamese was recognised as the language of the schools and courts in Assam. The new era began, rather, in inauspiciously. Colonel Keating, the first Chief Commissioner of Assam, favoured the abolition of the collegiate section of the Gauhati school.100 The abolition of the collegiate classes was, however, disliked by many enlightened persons of Assam, and there was a concerted move in the province

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<th>Illiterate</th>
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(Rate of literacy in Assam per 1000 persons.)

100. H. K. Barpujari, op. cit, p.18.
for the re-establishment of the collegiate classes in the Gauhati High School. In 1882, Sir Charles Elliot, the Chief Commissioner of Assam approved a scheme of awarding Rs. 20/- per month to each student of Assam studying in Calcutta colleges. Elliot assured to consider the question of re-opening the college classes at Gauhati.\textsuperscript{101} In 1887, the next Chief Commissioner, William Ward, limited the number of scholarship to 14. Further, scholarships for the degree courses were made convertible for students offering medical or engineering courses.\textsuperscript{102}

\textit{Mau} did not consider the scheme as practical. Balinarayan wrote -

"Again it was seen that last year 18 students who passed the Entrance Examination were awarded scholarship by the Government to pursue higher studies in Calcutta. A scholarship of Rs. 20/- awarded for F. A. examination amounts to an expenditure of Rs. 9,000/- annually on the part of the Government. But if a provision for a F. A. college is made in the province itself like before, than it would have cost only Rs. 5,000/- to Rs. 6,000/- annually. Unnecessarily why should Rs. 3,000/- more be spent on scholarships. Moreover, instead of raising a popular demand for granting scholarships to every student pursuing higher studies, scholarships ought to be awarded only to students who excel in examinations. Hence, a college should be established in Assam for the Assamese students, and the system of awarding scholarships should be withdrawn or else scholarships should only be awarded to the meritorious students. This would not only raise the standard of higher education in the state but also minimise government expenditure."\textsuperscript{103}

Ananda Chandra Gupta wrote in \textit{Jonaki}:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{101} Assam Gazette 1882; March 11, pp. 122-123.
\textsuperscript{102} Assam Secretariat, Home A. 1899; July Nos. 123-124; See note by the Chief Commissioner, para 2.
\textsuperscript{103} 'Uchcha-Siksha', Mau, January, 1887.
\end{quote}
"For the poor Assamese students, the Government has announced fourteen scholarships. If more than fourteen students qualified the entrance examination, the rest, apart from the first fourteen, did not get the scholarship. For those poor students, the door to higher education was closed here. Those fourteen, who proceeded to Bengal for higher studies, if they passed the F. A. Examination within two years, they were given the scholarship for another two years for doing B. A. After that they did not get any other scholarship from the Assam Government. But, it was not possible that all those fourteen students would, at the sametime, qualify the examination at their first attempt.... Only 29 Assamese students had the opportunity to study at the Calcutta University. Of these 29 students, 13 got B. A. Degrees, and 16 got B. L. Till date, there is not an Assamese with an M. A. degree. From this we can understand how poor the Assamese people are. Out of 24 lakh Assamese people (Brahmaputra Valley), only 29 are graduates .... This is the state of higher education in Assam. The British Government is running our administration and they are collecting land revenue and many other taxes from us.... Thus it is their duty to provide us proper educational facilities. Out of 24 lakh Assamese, more than 23 lakhs have not seen the light of education. This year, the Government has increased the taxes. If a part of this increased amount is spent on education, this will bring immense benefit to the Assamese .... The main duty of the Government is to educate the common people. The Government should pay special attention towards the progress of general education in the province. We know that, the present Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. Ward, has special interest in the spread of education. We hope that during his tenure, Assam will witness great progress in the sphere of general education. The condition of the Assamese people is very miserable .... There is no industry in Assam — from where then will there capital
formation? The Assamese lack the thirst for knowledge — How will they be educated? ... Today, from all sides, they are inferior. Who knows, if they get education, within half a century, they might become worthy of being counted amongst the great communities of the world .... Assam is a land of resources. The only obstacles towards the progress of the land is lack of education.\textsuperscript{104}

The agitation for a college which was temporarily dropped because of the scheme of scholarships by Mr. Elliot was renewed following the reduction of scholarships by William Ward. However, there was a split in the agitating camp. One section in the Government favoured the setting up of a second grade college at Gauhati; another section headed by William Booth, the Director of Public Instruction, opposed the location of the college at Gauhati, considering it neither healthy nor centrical, while yet another section expressed the opinion that the Assamese youths should go to Calcutta to acquire a broader outlook.\textsuperscript{105}

Undoubtedly, the Assamese students studying at Calcutta got a greater exposure. They had seen the emergence of Renaissance in Bengal which inspired them to usher a new era of intellectual activity in Assam. In 1899 - 1900 the total number of students from Assam who were studying Arts in Bengal had reached three hundred.\textsuperscript{105} In fact, both Jonaki and Bijuli, were published from Calcutta with the help of a number of spirited Assamese students studying in Calcutta colleges and newly educated conscious youngmen staying there.\textsuperscript{107} Even Assam Bandhu was printed at Calcutta with the assistance of the Assamese students of Calcutta.\textsuperscript{108}

Manik Chandra Barua, a person of high spirit, who was also a product of the

\begin{flushright}
107. See Chapter II.
108. Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Mor Jivan Sowaran, Asam Sahitya Sabha, 1961, p 83.
\end{flushright}
collegiate section of the Gauhati School, submitted a memorial in March 1899, to the Chief Commissioner, pointing out that 'Assam is the only province which has not got a college .... it does not have a higher educational institution worth the name. A college at Gauhati with an European Principal will be better appreciated by students than similar private institutions in Calcutta to which they generally resort.' He also admitted that Gauhati was the most suitable place for the proposed college. 109 Being an editor (English section) of an important paper, Asam, Barua took every opportunity to publish articles and comments in the paper in favour of the foundation of a college in Assam. Asam soon became an important part of the movement for the establishment of a college in the province. However, 'Asam' also published the views of individuals and groups, who opposed the establishment of a college in the region. An interesting letter, written to the editor, was published which cited various reasons as to why a college should not be established in Assam. 110 The paper was able to involve all the leading citizens of the period in the controversy associated with the establishment of a college in the province. If the Government considered it premature to start a college at Gauhati, Barua concluded that it could promote higher education in Assam by extending the system of scholarships and constructing a hostel for the Assamese students in Calcutta.

The Eastern Herald published a letter from some of the Assamese students written in support of the movement for a college in Assam. 111 Mau stressed that the establishment of a College in Assam was inevitable for the progress of higher education in the province in particular and the overall development of the Country, in general. 112

After a careful observation, Henry J. S. Cotton, then Chief Commissioner of

110. Asam, 22 July, 1895.
111. The Eastern Herald, May, 1899.
112. 'Uchcha-Siksha', Mau, March, 1887.
Assam, felt that the time was not yet ripe for a college at Gauhati and expressed his favour for a hostel in Calcutta for the Assamese students. He was, however, also ready to consider the case for a college at Gauhati if the people, in general, were in its favour. Accordingly, circulars were issued inviting public opinion. To the great surprise of the Commissioner, the majority expressed their opinion in favour of a college instead of the hostel. Cotton accepted people’s verdict and Assam’s first college - Cotton College - gratefully named after him, was established in 1901.113

The foundation of the Cotton College in 1901 was a great landmark in the history of Assam. To sum up, the printing press in Assam in the later half of the nineteenth century was inextricably linked with the progress of education in the province. The enlightened section of Assamese society used the medium of the press to express their concern over the sorry state of education in Assam. They criticised the character and scope of the system of education, and made rich and varied suggestions for the spread of education in the province. In fact, the history of the intellectual growth of the Assamese people may be gleaned from the newspapers of the nineteenth century. These newspapers introduced to the Assamese the benefits of the modern system of education. This came at a very opportune time when the traditional education system was at its lowest ebb. Scientific education was needed to remove superstitions and other social evils rampant in the society. The papers published articles on a variety of topics and urged the people to take an interest in the new scientific and industrial developments. All these had a tremendous vivifying effect. In course of time it freed the Assamese mind from the fetters of old ideas and paved the way for Renaissance in Assamese society.

113. On Nov. 3, 1899, the Chief Commissioner declared the decision for the establishment of a second grade Government College at Gauhati. Assam Secretariat, Home A, Nov. 1899, No. 113; also the Times of Assam, 20 April, 1901.
Female Education:

In pre-British Indian society, barring a few examples, the mass of Indian women were not given education. Tradition of India assigned to women only domestic duties. There were schools in the villages and towns for the boys but girls, in general were not provided the opportunities of education.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a regular system of female education was practically unknown in most parts of India. Women belonging to the aristocratic families got a smattering of elementary education but, as a general rule, women's education, was definitely discouraged. It was regarded as being against the injunction of Hindu scriptures and there was also a widespread belief that education of girls leads to their widowhood. 114

Very little could be achieved in respect of female education in India even after the coming of the British. The East India Company's Government remained indifferent towards female education during the early period of its empire building. In fact, till 1818, it had followed a strict policy of non-interference in relation to Indian social and educational matters on the apprehension that any interference in these matters might jeopardise their future in India. However, female education received a considerable impetus from the renaissance spirit which permeated Indian life during the nineteenth century.

The pioneering work for women's education was done by religious reform bodies such as the Brahma Samaj, the Parthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Ramkrishna Mission, the Danish, American, German, and British Missionary Societies etc. Indian women had great 'defenders' for their rights in the persons of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Radha Kanta Deb, Baidya Nath Ray, Dakshinaranjan

114 R. C. Majumder., ed. op.cit., p. 284.
Mukherjee, Modan Mohan Tarkalankar, Drinkwater Bethune, and others and some enterprising Christian Missionaries.

Until the mid nineteenth century, the Government's attitude towards the female education in India was one of apathy. The authorities at the Fort William were not prepared to undertake any responsibility for the education of the Women partly on account of the social and religious prejudices of the age. A breakthrough, however, came with Wood's Despatch of 1854 which declared that by the encouragement of female education, a great impulse might be important to the educational and moral progress of the people than by the education of man alone.\textsuperscript{115}

In Assam the Missionaries had done extremely valuable pioneering work in the field of the education of women — a dangerous area in which the officials of the period refused to tread. The wives of the American Missionaries, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Cutter, Mrs. Barker, and Mrs. Bronson, and some women mission workers took the lead in this matter. They opened day schools for girls, established orphan homes, and provided domestic instruction or \textit{Zenana} education in the families of the middle and higher classes.\textsuperscript{116}

There were various social and religious prejudices attached to female education during the period of our study which was reflected even in the newspapers of that period. Notwithstanding the introduction of the modern system of education in Assam - Higher, Secondary and Primary - the education of women in the state was sadly neglected. It was not until 1860-61 that the first primary Girls School was opened by Utsabananda Gosain, the Deputy Inspector of Schools, Upper Assam. In 1862, in Lower Assam there was only one school for girls at Dharapur near Gauhati.\textsuperscript{117} The first requirement for the

\textsuperscript{115} ibid, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{116} H. K. Barpujari., \textit{op.cit.,} pp. 107-121.
\textsuperscript{117} A. Chakravarty., \textit{op.cit.,} p. 28.
improvement of female education was to remove the prejudices attached to it, from the minds of the people. However, prejudices die hard.

There was a lack of genuine demand for girl's education as a means of livelihood. According to Mau, there was nothing wrong in providing women with education but this did not mean that it was desirable for them to sit for graduate and post-graduate examinations or get into professions of doctors and lawyers.118 "The work of men and women differs, the former being oarsmen, latter boats. Both drift together, men doing the hard labour requiring strength, i.e., rowing, and women performing the works of endurance, i.e., bearing the burden.... Men would plough and women would plant the seedlings, men would bear loads on their shoulders, women would guard them, men would fish and women would sell them."119

Domestic management was regarded as the sole objective of women's life. Skill in weaving, cooking, husking paddy etc. were considered greater accomplishments in a girl than her knowledge in the three R's. Mau suggested vocations of sewing and painting for women.120 The conservative attitude of the parents of the upper and middle classes was, in general, an apathy to the education of their daughters. Mau stood by the view that the home should be the main educational centre for girls. They should be taught reading and writing at home and it considered sufficient for a girl to be equipped with the skill of speaking, writing and understanding in the mother-tongue. With this a little knowledge of geography, history, and mathematics for domestic calculations, was required.121

There was a general fear of a social revolution attached to female education. It

118. 'Tirotar Ban Ki', Mau, December 1886.
119. ibid
120. ibid.
121. ibid.
was believed that if the women began to be educated, harassing times for men would come. Fear was expressed in Mau that if women were to become learned, all their virtues would vanish with education, and the society would be devastated.\(^{122}\) Mau laid more importance on the economic freedom of men than on the social freedom of women.

More space was devoted to discussions on this subject in Assam Bandhu. The editor, Gunaviram Barua, held liberal and broad views on the matter. His wife, Bishnupriya, and daughter Swarnalata, were both educated. He tried to spread the message of the importance of education of women in society by publishing articles of his daughter and Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's daughter, Padmavati Devi Phukanani in Assam Bandhu. In spite of his efforts, Assam Bandhu could not do much for the progress of women's education in Assam. Assam Bandhu published articles like *Swadhinata ne Swechchachar* (independence or wilfulness?) and *Ghainir Karttabya O Stri Siksha* (Duties of Wives and Women's Education) which presented the conservativeness of the male dominated Assamese society.

Ratneswar Mahanta held that daughters-in-law without school education were much more qualified for worldly life than the daughters-in-law, who had school education.\(^{123}\) These assumptions obviously had negative effects on the path of progress and expansion of women's education. Further, Mahanta opined: "There are many differences between male education and female education. Men go for education primarily for earning more and for maintaining the family. The aim of female education is to improve their family life."\(^{124}\)

Perhaps, the time was not ripe to think of equal rights of education for men and

\(^{122}\) *ibid.*


\(^{124}\) 'Ghainir Karttabya O Stri Siksha', Assam Bandhu, Vol. 1, 1885, VI issue, 1807 Saka, Aashar
women. This was not only the attitude of Ratneswar Mahanta but also the over-all attitude of the contemporary male society towards formal female education. Leading intellectuals of the period like Lambodar Bora too commented on the matter of women’s education in a very sarcastic tone. In his satire Sadanandar Natun Abhidhan (New Dictionary of Sadananda) he described the meaning of women education as,

"to learn to write letters; to pass time in reading drama or novels; to forget about the daily works of weaving, cooking; to weaken the active and cause the religious to become irreligious, to make the mind imbalanced, wicked and rough; to try to catch a groom; to forget the duties of women; to develop manliness; to roughen the softness of flowers; to make the lake a desert."\(^{125}\)

While Lambodar Bora described educated women as those who "ride on the back of an elephant placing their feet on the back of men.", Ratneswar Mahanta talked about husbands who did not allow their wives to perform household duties, under the influence of Western customs.\(^{126}\) A similar opinion was expressed by Panindranath Gogoi in Jonaki. He expressed that under the influence of English culture, our women folk had forgotten their traditional values. From hard working housewives they had become idle and expected to be served by the male.\(^{127}\) However, the editor of Jonaki countered the author’s views regarding the negative picture that he had drawn of educated women.\(^{128}\)

No form of protest came against such comments. The illiterate village women were considered by Ratneswar Mahanta as ideal, their hearts simple because they had not been introduced to the ‘vile arguments of education which could destroy peace

128. ibid.
of life.' 129 All negative qualities were attached to educated women. Definitely this had a negative impact on the society.

Purnokanta Sarma in an article in Assam Bandhu wrote that the ideal school going age for a girl was between 5 years and 10 years. By the time a girl was 11 years old, it was time for her to get married and get engrossed in household activities with little time left for the pursuance of education. He commented that under such circumstances, her education remains incomplete and the little knowledge that she acquired during this short period proves dangerous in practical life. The writer questioned, the objective of education. If it is to earn livelihood, then earning was not necessary for women. If the objective was to attain knowledge, this could be done at home, without going to school. 130 Widespread poverty of the majority of the Indian population was one of the fundamental obstacles to the rapid growth of women's education. Thus Pumakanta wrote, "The Assamese people are poor. Due to their poverty, they fail to send their sons to school. Many of the boys have to leave education half-way in search of livelihood. In such circumstances, how is it possible to provide higher education to girls?" 131

In relation to women's education, Orunodoi played a leading role in the second half of the nineteenth century. A news item published in Orunodoi in October 1853 stated that in Bengal, both men and women were showing great interest in the education of women. Kalichandra Rai of Rungpore promised to give free copies of his book Patibratopakhyan, to all Bengalee women, who wrote to him in their own handwriting. The news item reported that after the announcement was being made, letters written by many women began to pour in from different parts of Bengal. The editor of Orunodoi

129. 'Gaolia Boari' (Poem) Vol. 1, Assam Bandhu, 1885, VII issue, 1807 Saka, Shraban
131. ibid.
expressed his happiness over this and encouraged the Assamese women to show similar enthusiasm and eagerness for learning.132

The champions for the cause of women in Assam who had raised a strong voice for women's education in *Orunodoi*, were none other than Gunaviram Barua and Hem Chandra Barua. Gunaviram Barua in a letter written from Calcutta to the people of Assam through *Orunodoi* expressed his objection at the arrangements of different sets of educational norms for the boys and girls. He reiterated that boys and girls should be treated equally in matters of education. He pointed out that the Hindu *Shastras* never discouraged the education of women. However, these were often mis-interpreted and superstitions and prejudices prevalent in the society deprived the Hindu women from the benefits of education. He expressed hope that just as women's education was gaining ground in other parts of India, so also in Assam the society would one day become enlightened enough to recognise the necessity of women's education for the betterment of the society.133

Hem Chandra Barua wrote in *Orunodoi* that the Assamese nation134 cannot prosper until and unless the women were emancipated through education.135

Hem Chandra Barua, in a very interesting letter in *Orunodoi*, expressed his joy, that he felt after going through the articles of Padmavati Devi and Bishnupriya Devi in *Orunodoi*. He called them the sweet fruits of the tree of womens' education. He requested them to extend their knowledge to all the women folk of Assam through the pages of *Orunodoi*. "Alas! when will all the Assamese women be educated and enlightened like them?"136 Another news-item on the female schools at Agra appeared in *Orunodoi*. It

132. 'Journal of Events', *Orunodoi*, October., 1853.
133. 'Letter from an Assamese in Calcutta to his countrymen', *Orunodoi*, May, 1853.
134. Nation here is referred to Assam in the context of Assamese sub-nationalism in the backdrop of greater Indian nationalism.
135. 'Stri-Siksha', *Orunodoi*, May, 1861.
was reported that and Gopal Singh of the Agra district had established as many as 50 girls' schools and their enrolment was around 1200 ... The editor of Orunodoi expressed that the Assamese gentlemen should also come up and establish girls' schools in different places of Assam.137 Orunodoi also published translations of relevant articles on women's emancipation from journals like the Hindu Patriot of Bengal. The article named Stri-Siksha discussed the reasons behind the increase in adultery among the educated Bengalees who do not find companionship in their ignorant and orthodox wives. The author condemned those social customs which encouraged the ill-treatment of Indian women by men. He concluded with the note that only when women are educated and emancipated do they become fit companions of men.138

In spite of vigorous support for female education from one section, the spirit of hostility against it continued within the orthodox section of the community, though gradually people began to take a more reasonable view. In a letter in Orunodoi, a person under the psynonym 'Observer' wrote that, those who once criticised Hem Chandra Barua's views on women's education, had come forward to establish schools for the girls in Jorhat. He was hopeful that the attitude of the Assamese society would one day change towards women's education. He extended his gratitude towards Utsabananda Gosain, the Dy. Inspector of Schools, Upper Assam, for his efforts in opening the first Primary Girls' School in 1860-61 in Sibsagar.139 To this the editor of Orunodoi added that women's education would bring welfare to the state. The advanced nations of the world had always given importance to the cause of female education, he wrote.140

Thus, public opinion for the spread of female education in Assam during the

137. 'Agra Zilar Sowlir School', Orunodoi, November 1866.
138. 'Stri-Siksha', Orunodoi, April, 1861.
139. 'Stri-Siksha', Orunodoi, October 1860.
140 ibid.
latter-half of the nineteenth century was not enthusiastic. Even the advocates of the progress of general education in the province abhorred the idea of a girl becoming highly educated. There was an absence of any propaganda or organised public opinion as in Bengal, regarding the spread of education amongst the women in Assam. The newspapers which espoused the cause of education in the state often had negative views on the matter of women's education. Only Orunodoi expressed some hope in this regard. Yet, it cannot be denied that the Press, in general, played a significant role in, at least, highlighting the issue and in providing a platform for debate.