

The Role of Orunodoi and Assam Bandhu in Spreading Woman education in Assam in 19th century

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Abstract :

Before the 19th century, the life of women in Assam was confined to the four walls of the house. In the conservative society, which followed the traditions introduced by the Vedas, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Upanishads and Puran, nobody paid importance to some issues like the spread of woman education and ensuring freedom to them. Most of the women of that time, apart from a few, considered getting marriage, giving birth to their child, satisfying the husband from all sides as their primary duties as per guidance of their parents. But a drastic change came to the society after the arrival of the British in the region following the Iandabu treaty signed in 1826. Due to the impact of the British rule, the issues, like the women's social existence, women education, freedom of women etc. were potent enough to draw attention of a section of conscious people of that contemporary society which was touched by the western thoughts. The young generation who went to Kolkata to pursue advanced education, left no stone unturned to create awareness on women education realizing its importance. They did it by writing number of articles in Orunodoi and Assam Bandhu, two noted news papers of that time.

This paper highlights the Spread of Women Education in 19th Century with special reference to Orunodoi and Assam Bandhu. The main points of discussion in this paper are the youths of that time who initiated special steps to spread the women education and the articles related to the issue which were published in what news papers. Some other points like the overall education system of that time, education policy, number of schools etc. are not covered in the paper keeping its length and time in view. Orunodoi and Assam Bandhu are taken as principal sources for the discussion and some other reference books as secondary sources while preparing the paper.

Introduction

In ancient age, the education was prevalent among a few people in Assam. Especially, the high caste Brahmins sent their children to the tols, some others to the xatras in order to pursue education. On the other hand, some people took the pathsalas as academic centers while some people of Muslim community sent their wards to the madrassas to study. As a result of it, the number of educated people in the society was very poor in number.

Assam witnessed dark days following the end of the Ahom's rule in the first half of 19th century. The three time invasions by the Myan had adversely affected the land and the psyche of the Assamese community and then the British arrived in the State as per the result of Iandabu treaty signed in 1826 between the British and the Myan. Evidences on the prevalence of education under the rule of the Ahoms in Uppers Assam and under the rule of Koch in Lower Assam were found till the days the British started ruling the State. It is noteworthy here that the Mowamoria revolt and consecutive invasions of the Myan destroyed the student hostels of the State, yet the teaching, following the ancient education system, was ongoing at some xatras and tols. **(Borpujari HK, Assam in the Days of the Company, 1980, P-26)**

It is notable here that the native education system achieved approval for its progress following the David Scott's initiative of granting land to the Adhyapaks after the British had taken up the charge of ruling the State. As a result of it, some schools, one each at Guwahati, Nilachal, Patidarrang, Hajo, Bijni under Lower Assam and two at Naduwar, were established. In these schools, ancient scriptures were taken as textbooks while the Sanskrit language was granted as medium for teaching. **(Borpujari HK, A Short History of Higher Education in Assam, 1926—1900 (Paper) Cotton College Golden Jubilee Commemoration, 1951, P-12.** Though the British thus initiated some steps to enhance the native education system, these schools did not last long. **(Ibid, P-9)**

0.1. Methodology

0.1.1. The objective of selecting the subject matter:

Before the 19th century, the life of women in Assam was confined to the four walls of the house. In the conservative society, which followed the traditions introduced by the Vedas, Ramayan, Mahabharat, Upanishads and Puran, nobody paid importance to some issues like the spread of woman education and ensuring freedom of women. Most of the women of that time, apart from a few, considered getting marriage, giving birth to their child, satisfying the husband from all sides as their primary duties as per guidance of their parents. **(Robinson W-- op-cit, P-277)** But a drastic change came to the society after the arrival of the British in the region following the Iandabu treaty signed in 1826. Due to the impact of the British rule, the issues, like the women's social existence, women education, freedom of women etc. were potent enough to draw attention of a section of conscious people of that contemporary

society which was touched by the western thoughts. The young generation who went to Kolkata to pursue advanced education, left no stone unturned to create awareness on women education realizing its importance. They did it by writing a number of articles in Orunodoi and Assam Bandhu, two noted news papers of that time.

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0.1.2. Source and Method:

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1.0 The key points

It is notable here that a chaotic and restless situation had engulfed the education sector of Assam in the middle part of 19th century. According to Gunabhiram Baruah, "Our students are not benefitted attending the schools established by the British, because the teaching in these school is conducted in foreign language. They don't go to schools established by the missionaries for the fear of being christianized and leave the tols without completing their course". In connection with the first kind of schools, it is said that the boys will study the textbooks in the school and leave the school when they qualify just to get recruitment in Kachari. **(Orunodai: July 1854, P-1176-7)**

A comprehensive education system is very essential for the alround development of a society or the nation. The progress of a society and the nation is possible only when the boys and girls can be get educated equally. Importance should be paid in educating the girls along with the boys without neglecting them. Though the women were honoured in the 19th century society which was reflected in Orunodoi, they had no freedom. They were praised for their efficiency in household works, but they could not express their personal opinion, nor could they take decision of their own. They were subdued by men. The prevalence of polygamy was its proof.

Moreover, Orunodoi has scripted some instances of selling daughter or wife for money.

The people of Assam in 19 century were very much influenced by many social prejudices like child marriage, superstition, dogmatism etc. The writers of the Orunodoi era tried to make these people realized that the girls had also right to pursue education like the boys. In the middle part of that century, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hemchandra Baruah, Gunabhiram Baruah-- these three prominent figures of the State played crucial role in spreading women education. They left no stone unturned in order to ensure freedom to women, to make an end to the affliction of child widows, to recover the dignity of the

women who were used like a commercial product and to throw light of education among women. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan managed educating his wife and daughter at home. Hemchandra Baruah did not engaged in second marriage after the expiry of his wife while Gunabhiram Baruah tied the knot with a widow after his wife breathed her last. These three prominent figures were luminous icon of their individual ideology that enlightened the contemporary society. They wrote various articles in order to make the people realized the importance of women education.

Orunodoi:

Orunodoi or Arunodoi is the first Assamese-language magazine published from Sibsagar, Assam, in 1846, edited by Nathan Brown. This magazine created a new era in the world of Assamese literature and gave birth to notable authors such as Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hemchandra Barua, Gunabhiram Barua etc. The magazine took the initiative of innovating the then Assamese dialect instead of borrowing words from other languages. The Assamese people got to know about the western world only through this magazine, which opened the gate to the modern literacy in Assam. It mainly included various news related to current affairs, science, astrology, history and also trivia although Christianity was its main aim.

The new writers freely wrote articles in Orunodoi criticizing the prejudices like superstition, dogmatism, exploitation, miserable conditions of the downtrodden people. They created awareness on the importance of women education among the people by writing articles to establish the social existence of women, to wipe out miseries of uneducated women, to ensure freedom to women. In this regard, the article-- 'Receiver', written by Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, published in the April issue of Orunodoi in 1946, can be cited. In this article, the writer says that the men and women have equal rights in the society. Further he attempts to motivate the people that the girls are not weaker than boys in any case including their right to education. He advocates that a society or the nation can accelerate towards comprehensive progress only when boys and girls will be provided the facilities of pursuing education equally.

Asomiya loksakati Saibilakr kanya Santank eko giyan ni Sikiar Larar mone giyan labar ji rupe Jona sowalir mano techyarupe jogya.... **(Orunodai: April issue, 1848)**

Progressive writer Gunabhiram Baruah realized the importance of women education and freedom by heart and soul. So, he got his daughter of tender age admitted at the Bethune College in Kolkata. He, moreover, wrote a number of articles in Orunodoi in order to create awareness among the people in favour of women education.

His article, titled as 'Asom Deshor Lok Sokolor Proti Nibedan Patra', published in the May issues of Orunodoi in 1953, is the crystal clear example of his honour in favour of women education.

Lora Suwali duyoke saman bidya sikowa aru pratipalon kora, Bapek makar Pradhan karam kintu ji deshath kebal larakei sampurnarupe Bidya Sikibaloi..... **(Orunodai: May issue, 1848)**

In that period, the concept of facilitating women education spread and expanded far and wide in Bengal. With the realization of the dignity for education in Kolkata, girls were sent to the schools like the boys. In Orunodoi, news were published on how women education got expanded in different parts of the nation and out of the nation. The editor of the Orunodoi described in its October issue in 1853 that a newspaper of Bengal, named 'Pratibrotupakhyan', became popular among the women.

Ei batra powat Ami bor Ananda Paisu... **(Orunodai: Orunodai, 1853, P-1082)**

Assam Bandhu.

Gunabhiram Baruah published the "Assam Bandhu" from January in 1885. This is the first literary magazine published monthly in the Assamese language. Of this magazine, only 16 issues, 12 issues in 1885 and 4 issues in 1886 from January to April, were published. The magazine was published in view of entertaining the people and to provide knowledge to them remaining away from administrative, political, critical, flattering and backbiting issues. Scientific invention, industrialization, trade and commerce are the key essentials for the all round development of a nation. But they were not available in Assam in that time. Assam Bandhu aims to inspire the native people to bring drastic change to such poor environment of the State and with this objective the magazine was published.

Articles with nationalistic fervour and related to the Assamese language, study of history, literary criticism, creative writing of different tastes and other common reflexive articles were published in the Assam Bandhu with priority. The new thought of consciousness for nurturing dignity for women touched the Assam Bandhu too. A number of writers wrote articles in that magazine highlighting the issues like the safeguarding of dignity for women, importance of women education treating them with liberal attitude.

One of such mentionable article is 'Ghoinir Kartabya o Stree Siksha' **(Ratneswar Mahanta: Ghoinir Kartabya O Stree Siksha, Assam Bandhu, 5th Issue, P-191--1994)** by Ratneswar Mahanta. In this article, the writer lays stress on imparting education to women without confining them in just giving birth to their children, bringing them up and weaving and farming. Supporting this at the end of the article, Gunabhiram Baruah says, "Purush aru stri duyoye mili manushya jati... **(Saikia, Nagen (edited): Assam Bandhu, First Publication, June 1984)**

Similarly, Padmawoti Devi Phukanani, in her article-- 'Narir Mukta Obostha' **(Padmawoti Devi Phukanani: Narir Mukta Obostha, Article, Assam Bandhu P-22-+-228)** and poem-- 'Gaonliya Bowarir Padya', **(Saikia, Nagen (edited): Assam Bandhu, P--476-481)** advocates the freedom of women and depicts the miserable life of women. She

opines that women should be encouraged to take part in all social activities and provided all facilities to them like what is done to men.

Hemchandra Goswami, who spearheaded the movement to re-establish the Assamese language, emphasized on the importance of equal right to women, women education with equal provisions which are facilitated to man. His ideology is reflected through his article named "Stree Siksha" (Nagen Saikia (edited): Assam Bandhu, P--476-481)

In addition to this writers, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's daughter Tarini Devi and other more writers like Bishnupriya Devi, Swarnalata Baruah Devi also left no stone unturned with regard to spreading women education. Tarini Devi shaped her son and daughter with advanced education. She also educated the illiterate women in the society and set up examples of her devotion and dedication in favour of expanding women education. Padmawoti Devi Phukanani whole heartedly advocated the freedom of women and did not want women to be interfered by others while taking decisions. She expressed this in her article 'Narir Mukta-wostha'.

Bishnupriya Devi led the women to ensure social development with the strength of women empowered with requisite qualifications and education. She sent her daughter to study in Kolkata and thus she dared to go against the conservative social norms and showed her love for education. Swarnalata Baruah, daughter of Gunabhiram Baruah, wrote an article, titled as "Arhi Tirota" in 1884 and became idol for all with this article in which she explained the qualities to be an ideal woman.

Conclusion

Thus various writers advocated the progress of women, expansion of women education, freedom and right to women through their articles. Role of men and women for the comprehensive progress of the society is inevitable. Out of them, none is weak, none is lower than the other. The development of nation is possible, only when right to equality and right to education will be ensured to men and women. The writers in our discussion have expressed this ideology through their articles.

Reference Books

1. Borpujari HK: Assam in the Days of the Company, 1980, P-26
2. Saikia Nagen (edited): Assam Bandhu, P--476-481
3. Sarmah, Satyendranath: Asomiya Xahityar Samikhytmak Itibritta, Soumar Prakash, Rihabari, Guwahati - 9th edition, 2009.

Research Book

Devi Jonali: Unabingsa Satikar Asomiya Bhasa, Eti Samikha, from 1836 to1901, 2014.