

# Development in Women Education

(STUDY OF ASSAM)



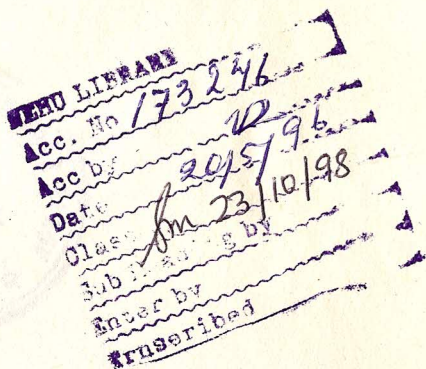
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## Foreword

Without education, the individual will make no progress any more than a patient who thinks to cure himself by some favourite remedy without giving up his luxurious mode of living. Without education one can have no power of Self-Government. Education touches the evil at its source. It alters the whole outlook on life. It is mental medicine for all mental diseases. It keeps the soul in the environment in which it would develop itself fully. It initiates the citizen in the spiritual life of the State. It is the means by which freedoms are enjoyed. It enables a person to discharge his duties in the station of his life to which he is called by his capacities and with a sense of responsibility. It develops intelligence which is better than thousands of eyes. It enables a person to climb the ladder from particularism to philosophy, from subjectivism to objectivism. An effectively educated person has a special mental apparatus which enables him to make a distinction between what is real and what is unreal, what is relevant and what is irrelevant what is good and what is bad and what is transient and what is permanent. Though all this true to both the sexes, women's education is more important than that of men, because she is the first emotional teacher of the child. She guides and controls the child in the direction it should go. If a woman is educated generation after generation is educated.

What was the state of education of women in Assam? Mrs. Bina Lahkar, Head of the Department of Education, Sankardev College, Shillong has answered this question. As

the supervisor of her research work I had occasion to read and guide her work. She collected the material from the original sources available in the Assam Records. Her work covers a full century from 1874 to 1974. She dealt with the subject masterly and covered all aspects of the subject. All the chapters are self-contained and the thesis is result of laborious work. It is free from slogans and shibboleths. The examiners recommended the degree by a unanimous vote.

I believe that this is the only work which covers the whole field in great detail, authentic in character. She tells the state of women's education in the last century and traces the gradual development of women's education. She acknowledges that the Christian Missions did great service to the cause of women's education. They were the first to break the barriers to women's education. They also realised that without trained teachers women's education would make no progress. Therefore they were the first to establish training schools in Assam.

Mrs. Lahkar trace the progress of Women's education from 1874 and found that the progress was no satisfactory. Even in 1967, the proportion of women's students to men students in Higher Education was 1 to 4. The Kothari Commission recommended that this portion should be increased to one to three to meet the requirements for educated women in different fields. For this purpose a programme of scholarships and provision of suitable but economical local accommodation should be developed.

The Commission also recommended the establishment of separate colleges for women at the undergraduate level if there was a local demand. At the post graduate level there is no need to establish separate colleges or universities for women.

The Commission further recommended the women students should have access to all branches of learning. Courses in Home Science nursing, education and social work should be developed as these have attraction for a large

number of girls. Finally, the Commission also recommended that facilities for advanced training in business administration and management should also be provided.

All these recommendations have been noted by Mrs. Lahkar in the concluding chapter. The conclusions arrived by the author are reasonably sound.

V. Venkata Rao

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## Preface

This work is the revised version of my thesis on 'Development in Women Education' from 1874 to 1970. This is based mainly on original sources.

The work has been divided into nine chapters. In the first chapter, I have dealt with the condition of female education in Assam before 1874. In the early part of the period there was very little of Women's education.

The second chapter is devoted to the organisation and enrolment. The system of organisation for women's education was the same like that of men. Regarding enrolment, it was found that the condition was very significant in the early part, but in the later part there was a significant improvement.

In the third chapter, I have dealt with the curricula. The same curricula were followed both for boys and girls. Later on, separate curricula for Girls' Schools were introduced, and in the mixed schools also subjects like sewing, knitting etc. were included in the course of study for girls. But later on, the primary curriculum for girls was made similar with boys in the early part, with some exception in the higher classes, where useful subjects like needle-work, hygiene, domestic science were included in the curricula.

In the fourth chapter, I have dealt with mainly examination and scholarship. In the beginning, there was no separate examination for girls. Afterwards, separate examination was conducted for girls from girls school.

Girls were given scholarships from the general quota competing with boys. Girls from Girls' Schools competing in the special examination for them, also used to get special scholarships.

I have dealt with the training of teachers in the fifth chapter. In earlier years there was no teachers' training institution. In course of time, a number of such training institutes were set up, particularly in Nowgong, Silchar and Shillong. Moreover, girls were sent to Calcutta for training.

Wastage of education has been dealt with in the sixth chapter. It is found that the problem of wastage is common for both boys and girls. Moreover, it was a problem not for Assam alone. It was a problem for the whole of India also. But in comparison with boys, the wastage in girls' education was much more higher.

In the seventh chapter, I have dealt with finance. It is found that very little was spent for the education of girls.

The eighth chapter dealt with the administration and inspection of education. The administrative machinery for both boys and girls were same for a very long time. Only in 1909, the first Inspectress was appointed. Later, more Assistant Inspectresses were appointed to help the Inspectress. But they were mainly in charge for scholars in the headquarter stations only. The male inspecting staff were responsible for the administration of the schools in the rural areas.

In the final chapter, I have dealt with the conclusions arrived at the previous chapters.

In the preparation of this work, I have incurred a number of obligations. I am grateful to Mr. P.C. Sarma, Keeper of Records, Assam Secretariate (Civil), who gave me permission to consult records in the Secretariat Records Office in connection with my work. I am also thankful to the staff of the Record Office for their co-operation and help in the collection of

materials. I am also indebted to Dr. T.C. Deka, Dr. Niru Hazarika of the Gauhati University, Prof. A. Barman, Dr. N.N. Bora and Dr. (Mrs.) D. Saikia of Sankardev College. Dr. D.D. Mali for helping me in various ways in the preparation of this work.

Dr. V. Venkata Rao, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University not only supervised my work but readily agreed to write a foreword for the book. It is needless to mention how much I owe to him.

It is, however, Sri Ramesh Kumar of M/s Omsons Publications, New Delhi, who by undertaking publication of the work has made an important addition in the literature on Development in Women Education. I gratefully acknowledge his contribution.

Sankardev College,  
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(BINA LAHKAR)

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## Introduction

Educational institutions, for girls in the present sense of the term, were practically non-existent not only in ancient Assam but also in India. No doubt there were women scholars in ancient India like Maitreyee, Gargi and Lilavati. But there were no separate educational institutions for them. Girls were taught along with boys. There were no such institutions as *Gurukulas* or universities imparting instruction for women.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of the 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th century, William Adam made an enquiry into the state of education in India and noted the existence of some educational institutions. These included family centres of learning. In these schools there were some girls too.<sup>2</sup>

The condition of women's education in Assam was no better than in other parts of India before the advent of the British. In Assam, there were no certain kinds of educational institutions. They were known as *tols*. The *tols* imparted instruction in Sanskrit and the *Sastras*. Besides the *Tols*, *Satras* (which were founded by Sri Sankardev) also imparted some instructions. But in the *Tols* and *Satras* it was only the boys who were instructed. Girls were not admitted. In Sylhet there was another type of indigenous institution, known as the *maktab*. *Maktabs* too were meant only for boys. In Lakhimpur

among the *Khampti* (a hill tribe) there was some sort of an educational system. This tribe is supposed to be of Burmese origin. Their children were taught to read and write the *Khampti* language by their spiritual instructors who were known as *Bapas*. The *Bapas* were itinerant teachers who moved from village to village; they usually remained in a village for about three or four months.<sup>3</sup> So there were no formal institutions for the education of girls in Assam. But we occasionally come across the names of Assamese lady writers of repute. For instance, Padmavati Devi Phukanani wrote a novel 'Sudharmar Upakhyān', which was published in 1884.<sup>4</sup> Besides Phukanani, there were other lady writers such as Bishnu Priya Devi and Swarna Lata Devi. This indicates that some kind of education was given to girls. Though there were no schools for girls perhaps instruction was given at home by parents or guardians or by paid instructors.<sup>5</sup>

Assam came under British occupation after the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826.<sup>6</sup> The British introduced Bengali as the language of the court and as the medium of instruction, and thus the Assamese language was neglected; consequently education in general and girls' education in particular did not make progress. The Assamese language did not get its rightful place until 1871.<sup>7</sup> In that year, due to pioneering work of the Christian Missionaries and a few Assamese gentlemen, such as Anandaram Dhekial Phukan Assamese was made the language of the court as well as the medium of instruction in schools.

In 1813, the first Missionary came to the Khasi hills. In 1829, a branch of Serampur Mission was set up at Gauhati. In 1836 Rev. Brown and T. Cutter of the American Baptist Mission came to Assam. They brought along a printing press, intending to spread Christianity in the hill areas. But due to certain political disturbances they had to leave the hill areas and started their work in the plain areas of Assam.<sup>8</sup> They realised that the Gospel would not spread without the mother tongue being the medium of instruction. Therefore though their purpose was the spread of Christianity they had to look after the education of the people as well. In June, 1839, Brown's wife founded a school at Sadiya for boys and Cutter's wife

too began a school for girls.<sup>9</sup> This was the first attempt at formally educating girls in Assam. After that, gradually more attempts were made to establish schools for girls in Assam.

In 1874, Assam was separated from Bengal and was made a Chief Commissioner's province with the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, K. & J. Hills, Cachar, Naga Hills and Goalpara as its constituent parts. Later on, from 12 September, 1874, the district of Sylhet was also included in the province of Assam.

The educational policy followed in Bengal was followed in Assam as well. From time to time the Government appointed Commissions and some of their recommendations for the spread of education were accepted.

In 1813, the East India Company, for the first time, took the responsibility for the education of the people. But it restricted its activities to the men and refused to take any responsibility for the education of women.<sup>10</sup>

The educational policy laid down by the Despatch of 1854 laid stress on the spread of female education. However, due to the disturbances of 1857 it was not implemented.<sup>11</sup>

Mary Carpenter, a great English Social reformer, visited India during the years 1865-1870. She found that the main obstacle to the progress of female education was the absence of female teachers. So, she suggested the establishment of female normal schools. Later, it was decided to devote special attention to women's education. And after that girls' schools were started in different parts of Assam. But almost all of them were very ill equipped. In 1870, it was found that there were 8 girls' schools in Assam, 5 in Kamrup and one each in Darrang, Nowgong and Lakhimpur districts.<sup>12</sup>

The Indian Education Commission of 1882 discussed the problems of women's education and suggested certain measures for improving it. The Commission found that there was no demand for girls' education. Due to the practice of child marriage, a large number of the girls were withdrawn from school at an early age. This adversely affected the supply of female teachers. The employment of male teachers prevented many parents from sending their daughters to school. Above all, the system of education, as regards text books, control and

instruction, was framed to suit the requirements of boys and not of girls.

The Commission therefore recommended that the grant-in-aid rules for girls' schools must be made more liberal.<sup>13</sup> Further, there should be a concession of fees, awards of prizes and the institution of scholarships to encourage the girls to remain in the schools for a longer period. It moreover recommended an increase in the number of female inspecting agencies,<sup>14</sup> and finally prescribed a simple curriculum for the girls' primary schools.<sup>15</sup>

Some of these recommendations were implemented throughout India. Girls' Schools were given more liberal grants than Boys' Schools. In Bengal and the Punjab separate standards were prescribed for girls.<sup>16</sup> Since Assam followed Bengal, separate courses were prescribed for girls in Assam. In other provinces, such subjects which were suitable for girls were included in the course. In Girls' Schools, payment of fees was not as regular or compulsory as in the Boys' Schools. As a result it was found that in Boys' Primary Schools fees amounted to more than 33 per cent of the total expenditure, whereas in the case of Girls' Primary Schools it was only 6 per cent more.<sup>17</sup>

The Commission discouraged mixed schools for girls and boys. But this recommendation was not accepted by many provinces such as Bengal, Madras, Central Provinces, Bihar and Assam. It was found that in Assam and Coorg most of the girl students attended the mixed schools rather than the Girls' Schools.<sup>18</sup>

Girls belonging to the upper classes, the *bhadralok*, were not allowed to go to school. Even when they did go to school they were not allowed to stay there after they attained puberty. For such girls, in some places, instruction was arranged in *Zenana* classes. So the Indian Education Commission recommended *Zenana* teaching, and that rules for the aid of the *Zenana* classes should be drawn up in consultation with those who conducted them. Aid should be given in such a way that it would assist the *Zenana* schools substantially in extending their activities.<sup>19</sup>

As already mentioned, there was a large number of girls

in the Boy's Schools. These girls followed the curricula prescribed for boys. But later on, some modifications were introduced. In the new Bengal Regulation for vernacular schools, needle work for girls took the place of agriculture for boys. But in the Girls' Schools, most of the teachers were males. So they could not teach the girls needle work. Furthermore, most of the girls did not reach the higher primary standard where the differentiation in course of studies began. So, in practice, the differentiation of curricula remained ineffective.

On 11 March, 1904 Curzon published his educational policy in the form of a Government Resolution. It recommended increased Government expenditure on women's education. For this purpose, the Government would have to establish more training schools for women teachers and model schools for girls. It also laid stress on increasing the number of inspectors for the efficient supervision of these schools.<sup>20</sup>

In the beginning of the present century there was a strong movement demanding the reform of the educational system as a whole. Public opinion in India was in favour of a rapid expansion of primary education and the introduction of compulsion. In 1911-12, the percentage of literacy in India was 6 and only 23.8 per cent of the boys of school going age were at school. The percentage of girls, of the school going age, at school was as low as 2.7.<sup>21</sup> The great advocate of this movement was Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who was a member of the Imperial Legislative Council. In 1910-13, Gokhale made heroic attempts to induce the Government to accept the principle of compulsory primary education. But his proposal for compulsory primary education was rejected on the ground that education was a subject within the sphere of provincial Government.

The Government Resolution on educational policy dated 21 February, 1913, laid down certain principles for the expansion and improvement of education for women. It observed that female education was in a very deplorable state owing to the social customs of the people. Efforts were made to give liberal treatment in respect of fees and scholarship, and bring education to women who were under *purdah*. But still progress was insignificant. So the Resolution of 1913 laid down four

important principles regarding girls' education: (1) The education of girls should have a practical bias with reference to the position which they will fill in social life. (2) It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys, nor should it be dominated by the examination motive. (3) Special attention should be paid to hygiene and the surrounding of school life. (4) The services of women should be more freely utilised for instruction and inspection. And (5) Continuity in inspection and control should be especially aimed at.<sup>23</sup>

On 12 October, 1915 a memorial on women's education was presented to His Majesty's Secretary of State for India by a deputation which included English and Indian ladies. Certain points of the document caused anxiety to the British Government. These were: that an insignificant number of girls were being instructed; that the great disparity in education between the male and the female population affected the well-being of the Indian Community.<sup>23</sup> Chamberlain agreed with the deputation and asked the Government of India to implement the scheme. But as the report of Indian constitutional reforms and the Calcutta University Commission were under the consideration of the Government, no action was taken.

In 1919, the Government of India enunciated its policy of education in a resolution. It pointed out that the education of girls needed more financial assistance than that of boys. Therefore education must be free for girls. Scholarships and studentships must be given more liberally to girls; grants-in-aid to Girls' Schools must be more generous, and finally greater cost of secondary education should be recognised.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of this there was a steady and comparatively rapid expansion in the education of women at all levels. A University for women was established by Maharishi Anna Sahab Karve in 1916 on the model of the Japanese Women's University.

The number of girls who were attending school, gradually increased. Parents were gradually desiring the education of their daughters, not from any utilitarian motive, like the education of their sons, but for increasing the value of the girls in the marriage market. But many parents still questioned the

value of the subjects taught in the Primary Schools for girls. Due to practical difficulties it was not possible to introduce a domestic curriculum in Primary Schools. The character of secondary education was controversial, with the humanistic and vocational schools disagreeing over the introduction of certain subjects for women. The Humanistic school wished to bring up girls on the same line with the boys and prepare them for university Education. The vocational school, on the other hand wanted to prepare the girls primarily for home life.<sup>25</sup>

In 1917, the Calcutta University Commission was appointed to enquire into the conditions and prospects of the University of Calcutta, and to consider the question of a constructive policy in relation to the problem it presented. This Commission mainly discussed the condition of education at the University, but it did make certain recommendations relating to women's education.

Regarding women's education, the Commission recommended that *Purdah* Schools should be established to encourage girls belonging to conservative families to receive education. A special Board of Women's Education should be established in the Calcutta University to safeguard the interests of women with regard to education.<sup>26</sup> This Board was empowered to propose special courses of study suitable for women. It should organise teaching in Women's Colleges, especially for the training of teachers and preparation for Medical Courses.

Many concessions were made for the spread of female education; grants were given on a more and more generous basis. A number of scholarships were reserved for girls. Moreover, girls were permitted to compete with boys for open scholarships. Girls' scholarship schools were brought under the supervision of the Inspectress of Schools. In 1909-10, two assistant Inspectresses were appointed in the provincial educational service.<sup>27</sup>

Provision was made for the training of Junior and Senior vernacular teachers at Silchar and Nowgong. The teachers deputed by the Government were given stipends. But for High School teachers there was no provision for B.T. or L.T. and so women teachers for High Schools were deputed to Calcutta for B.T. and L.T.

In 1921, education at the state level was transferred to the control of the Ministers. The State Government began to take a more active interest in the promotion of education of women. There was a general awakening among women generated by the non-co-operation movement started by the Mahatma. Many women took part in the struggle for independence. The impact of their participation in the freedom movement, on women's education, was tremendous. Furthermore the Sarda Act prohibited child marriage. Then again non-official bodies like the Mahila Samaj agitated within and without the Legislature for the provision of greater facilities for the education of women.<sup>28</sup>

Between 1917 and 1927 compulsory Primary Education Acts were passed in most of the Provinces including Assam. It is true however that all these Acts did not introduce compulsory education. These Acts transferred large powers of administrations and control over primary education to local authorities. But the extent of the powers transferred to local authority varied from province to province. They also authorised the local authorities to levy taxes for the promotion of education. The local authorities were made responsible for the introduction and enforcement of compulsory primary education in their areas.<sup>29</sup> In Assam, the Primary Education Act was passed in 1926. This was the first attempt to make primary education compulsory. But due to financial reasons this Act was not enforced. After independence another attempt was made to make primary education compulsory.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of women's education was recognised by the Central Government as well as by the provincial Governments. The Hartog Committee surveyed the whole field of education in India in 1929 and recommended measures for its improvement. The most important aspect of this Report was regarding primary education. Though steps were taken for the expansion and improvement of primary education, it was still in a poor condition. As far as women's education was concerned, the Committee recommended a policy of consolidation rather than expansion and this policy dominated the official view during the period from 1927 to 1937.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Report, there was much wastage and stagnation in schools. Too much attention was being given to higher education and as a result primary education was entirely neglected. In British India, out of every 100 boys studying in Class I in 1922-23, only 19 reached Classes III & IV, after three years.<sup>32</sup> The wastage was much greater in the case of girls. Only 14 girls out of 100 studying in Class I could reach Class IV. In other words, in terms of wastage it was 80 per cent on the average.<sup>33</sup>

The Committee observed that the importance of girls' education needed no new emphasis. It affected the efficiency of the educational system. The education of a girl meant the education of a mother and the education of her children.<sup>34</sup> So the education of girls was of immense importance. In 1930 the Primary Education Committee recommended that separate funds should be set apart for girls' education.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the education of girls was unsatisfactory due to many reasons. There was no proper provision for the education of girls in the rural areas. In India about 80 per cent of the people lived in villages. So the state of women's education was not satisfactory.<sup>36</sup> Therefore the Committee recommended that the number of primary and secondary schools should be increased. Moreover, an adequate number of women teachers should be employed and inspectresses to supervise girls schools should be recruited.<sup>37</sup>

Accordingly, the number of women teachers and the number of trained teachers increased. But the increase was not in proportion to the increase in the number of schools and scholars.

The progress of women's education was however not satisfactory because adequate financial provision was not made.

Then again some of the recommendations of the Hartog Committee, such as the increase in the salary of the teachers, the appointment of more inspecting officers, and an improvement in the curriculum were not implemented.

The Hartog Committee decided that the time had come to make a comprehensive attempt at the education of women. It recommended that a whole-time woman officer of high standing and experience should be appointed to prepare a plan and

programme of girls' education. Women should be represented in all Local Bodies, and the strength of the inspecting agency for girls should be increased. Moreover, an alternative course should be provided at the High School stage and at a later stage in special institutions for diploma. The University should recognise the courses in Domestic Science, Hygiene, Music etc. and to overcome the shortage of women teachers, special attention should be paid to the training of girls from rural areas for appointment as Primary School teachers.<sup>38</sup>

The Women's Committee of the Central Advisory Board of Education suggested the establishment of Girl's Schools in places which had a large number of girls. It recommended co-education at the Primary stage.<sup>39</sup>

In 1937-38, the Women's Education Committee decided that there was no necessity for differentiating the curriculum for boys and girls at the primary level. The curriculum in secondary schools too should be the same for both boys and girls with some special subjects for girls which were useful to them. Subjects such as Music, Needle work, Painting, Weaving and Domestic Science were taught in certain schools.

Another important development of this period was the introduction of basic education. The experiment in Basic education began in 1938. But the outbreak of the II World War and the resignation of the Congress Ministries led to its suspension.<sup>40</sup>

In 1937, provincial autonomy was introduced in 11 provinces. The resignation of the Congress Ministries and the Quit India Movement of 1942 affected the progress of education in Assam. The period 1937-42 was the dark period in the history of education in Assam. During this period, the progress of education was slower than it had been earlier.

The education of girls increased considerably only after independence. There was a phenomenal increase in number of girls in schools. This increase was mainly due to the implementation of the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission, the Secondary Education Commission and the Kothari Commission.

The Indian Education Commission of 1949 stressed the need for women's education. Regarding the curriculum, the

Commission suggested that the curriculum for girls must be consistent with their way of life. They should not try to imitate men. The Commission also recommended increased opportunities for women.<sup>41</sup>

The Secondary Education Commission of 1953 also stressed the importance of girls' education. The Kothari Commission too stated that the education of girls is necessary for many reasons. These are:—the full development of human resources; to mould the character of children during the most impressionable period of life and for the improvement of the home. Education of women would also help in reducing the fertility rate. For all these reasons the education of girls was stressed. There was a great improvement in women's education after independence and the gap between the education of boys and girls is gradually being reduced. The Commission found that the number of girls enrolled per 100 boys was 12 in 1901. It rose to 39 in 1950 and to 55 in 1965.<sup>42</sup> Therefore there is still a big gap between the numbers of boys and girls, being educated. To remove this the Commission recommended that special schemes are to be prepared for the expansion and improvement of girls' education. There should be a special machinery both at the Centre and State to look after the education of girls.<sup>43</sup>

The Central Government too took an interest in the education of women. This was evident from the institution of a number of Committees such as the National Committee on the Education of Women under the Chairmanship of Durgabai Deshmukh; the Committee on Differentiation of Curricula under Hans Mehta, and another one under M. Bhaktabalsalam.<sup>44</sup>

As a result of this, there was a great improvement in women's education. In 1861, only 0.59 per cent of the female population in Assam was literate. In 1961 the percentage was 19.63. The increase was much more rapid from 1951 to 1961, as compared with the period from 1931 to 1941 when it was 4.38 and from 1941 to 1951 when it was 9.48 per cent.<sup>45</sup>

The number of girls increased not only in the schools and colleges for general education but also in the professional and vocational institutions. There was a large number of girls in the Medical Colleges and in other industrial schools. But till

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1960-61 there were no girls studying Engineering, Agriculture, Forestry, Law or Commerce.<sup>46</sup> Moreover there was an increase in the number of girls in different teachers' training institutes. This too helped to further the progress of education of girls in Assam. This trend seems to indicate that within a short time the existing differences between the education of boys and girls may be completely bridged. Both the sexes may come to occupy a position of equality with respect to education. The opposition to girls' education has almost disappeared except in the lower classes. The lower classes are not opposed to the education of girls, rather they are indifferent to it.

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46. Education in Assam, 1947-1960-61. A Statistical handbook.

The book deals with the state of education of women in Assam from 1874 to 1974. This is the only work which covers the whole field of women's education in Assam in great details and authentic in character. The book is based on original sources.

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Dr. (Mrs.) Bina Lahkar, had her Master degree in education from the Gauhati University in 1958. She served as a lecturer in Education in Abhayapuri College for a brief period prior to her joining in Sankardev College, Shillong as Head of the Department of Education. She had been awarded the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy by the Gauhati University in 1976.

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