

Status of Women in Assam During the Colonial Period

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ABSTRACT:

The coming of the British in the mainstream politics of Assam had influence the status of women and the society as a whole. In the medieval period, though the society was patriarchal in character but due to the prevalence of tribal outlook, women enjoyed certain amount of freedom in the society. Despite the fact of having better status in the society as compared to other parts of India, their position was still subordinate and therefore they were severely discriminated in various fields. However, after the colonial intervention and the advent of western education, the scenario of Assamese society witnessed lot of changes. The educational experiment of the late 19th century produced a new class of women as well as men intelligentsia who helped in the development of the status of women in the society. Women, along with male intelligentsia protested against the prevailing evil condition in the society such as female infanticide, child marriage etc. The British penetration in Assam and the introduction of western culture created a new condition and thus towards the end of 19th century many women began to participate in public domain and nationalist campaign which provided them a political status in the society.

KEY WORDS: Women History, Colonization, Assamese History, Gender Discrimination, British.

Introduction

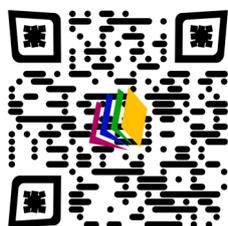
A status is a social or professional position in the society which is either ascribed or achieved. Ascribed status is acquired by birth, whereas achieved status is that which is earned on the basis of merit. The status of women is often determined in terms of her role and social position in the society. In a vast and complex country like India, the status of women is not uniform and has undergone several changes within the course of time due to its social and economic needs. Assam as one of the states of North-eastern India has certain regional peculiarities then compared to other parts of India. On the population front, it is inhabited by different groups of people having different culture, food habit and languages. Though the region is basically patriarchal in character, but the women possessed certain amount of liberty from the very ancient time due to the assimilation of various tribal socio-economic and religious norms and values. Throughout the ages women played a very important role in the Assamese society but their contributions were mostly ignored and they were always regarded as the inferior sex. However, the intrusion of British rule in the society of Assam brought major changes in the status of women. There were



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