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# The First Assamese Women's Journal, 'Ghar-Jeuti': Voice of Women and Voice on Woman Behalf.

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**Abstract:** Women's journals and the publication of women's magazines arose along with women's organizations. Magazines and Journals of women help women in strengthening their position in society. Moreover, in the initial time of its progress, it helped them to raise their voice against child marriage, and female infanticide, and also women used these as a forum to express their support in favour of widow remarriage, education for women, and women voting right. They also used these as a medium to invite women to participate in the freedom struggle movement. By these, literate women tried to spread their voices to the rest. Like the rest Women's journal of India, the first Assamese women's journal *Ghar-Jeuti* exclusively engaged with the social reforms also express what women expect from their male leaders. At this instant, they sufficiently delivered their grievances in front of the males of the society. Several women writers vehemently showed their firm existence in opposition to some of the discrimination against women in the pages of *Ghar-Jeuti*. This again helped in changing questions on the activeness of women in the public sphere.

**Keywords:** *Ghar-Jeuti*, Women's magazines, Women's voice, conjugality, Women's education

## 1 Introduction:

The history of women's journals and magazines is quite interesting. It leads to the start of a new era of understanding of women also in their voices. The first women's magazine was Ladies' Magazine (1827-1836). This magazine was edited by Sarah Josepha Hale. Woman's Journal was the first women's journal edited by an American lady Lucy Stone. These two were the earliest and the sole platform for women to draw attention to their grievances. Like that several magazines and journals had come to light in the various regions of India. *Sreebodh* was the first women's magazine published in India and *Balabodi* was the first women's magazine in the Hindi language edited by the male reformer named Bharatendu Harichandra and *Mullah-e-Nissan* was a pioneering journal in Urdu for women. The earliest Bengali magazines are- *Bamabodhini*, and *Bharathi* edited by Swaranakumari Devi created a space for women writers from Bengal. In south Periyar's Self Respect Movement journal *Kudi Arasu*, *Puratchi*, *Patgutharivu*, and *Samadharmam* gave space to women to write their articles related to women's issues. *Sarada and Mahila* were two prominent women's magazines from Kerela. There were three prominent women's magazines at the initial time of its emergence. 1. *Grihalakshmi*-edited by Gopala Devi reforming women and domesticity. 2. *Streedarpan*- edited by Ramaswami Nehru propagated education and political awakening and fought against gender discrimination. 3. *Cannada*- encouraged full participation of women in the public sphere. *Arya Mahila*- edited by Sanatan Dharma Mahamandal looked at the status of women based on Vedic knowledge. *Maduri* and *Saraswati* were journals that published articles about the lifestyle of women in other countries. *Andhra Lakshmi*, *Hindu Yuvathi*, *Bharatha Mahila*, *Grihalakshmi*, and *Viswagnami Y Asoda*, were some journals that urged women's participation in the freedom struggle movement. In the case of *Ghar-Jeuti*, this journal was published monthly between October 1927 and 1931 from Sibsagar in upper Assam. Aparna Mahanta in her book 'Journey of Assamese Women' clarifies, "though *Ghar-Jeuti* supported the work and activities of the Assam Mahila Samiti and drew strength and sustenance from it, it maintained its independence and distinct identity as a 'woman's magazine' with its well-defined aims and objectives, regular articles published on 'Joymoti Utshav' (*Joymoti Festival*) a festival that celebrated the sacrifice of Ahom's legendary queen Joymoti. The two editors Kamalalaya Kakoty and Kanaklata Chaliha mainly focused on women's rights and women's education. Their main motive was to produce more and more female writers, so they made appeals to women's writings in their editorials. There had at least one article in the journal to discuss the issues of the contemporary world." As an example, Kanaklata Chaliha translates 'Science Worker Madam Curie'. She also writes articles on 'Child Welfare' which contained detailed data on the recent measures taken in Britain to improve child health. She also writes about the Marriage customs of Japan.

## 2 Objectives:

1. To study the importance of the first Assamese women's journal, *Ghar-Jeuti*
2. To exemplify the voice of women

## 3 Methodology

The methodology followed in the study is descriptive, historical and analytical. Both primary and secondary sources are taken into account in the preparation of the article. The primary sources are relevant newspapers, periodicals, journals, and autobiographies. Secondary sources include published books, journals, periodicals, unpublished thesis, and dissertations of the different universities that have been used. Relevant websites and browsers were also consulted in the preparation of this topic.

## 4 Discussion:

The 'Ghar- Jeuti' was much different from the other magazines and journals that run till the day of Ghar-Jeuti. As these journals had a very limited representation of women's life and only a few women's writers had gotten the chance to write in these journals and magazines. As, *Orunudo*, the first Assamese periodical which started from Sivsagar in 1846, 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, and many others. It is the earliest forum that discusses women's issues as well as became an initial juncture of the Public Sphere of Assam. *Assam Bandhu*, a monthly paper devoted to Assamese literature, language, and culture, edited and published by Gunabhiram Barua in 1885-1886, became the first platform for operating debates on women's education. This periodical is the first that implied the idea of domesticity and conjugality. *Mou* another Assamese periodical edited by Balinarayan Bora became the extreme carrier of running debates on women's education. It also led to the framing temperament of Assamese culture and society. *Jonaki* and *Banhi* the two journals were edited by Lakhminath Bezbarua. These two journals were the prime bearer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's women-related debates. These two fervently dispersed views of the Assamese society towards their women. The journals and periodicals like *Chetana*, *Awahan*, *Ramdheni*, *Usha*, *Alochani*, and *Assam Bilasinee* were the prime that absorbed social issues and the people's opinions. The male writers were not considered the women's voice as important but rather presented their problems. It is also seen only a few numbers of women's writings had been present in the previous journals and magazines. The real representation of women had come only after the issuance of *Ghar-Jeuti*. The *Ghar-Jeuti* was published in 1927. At that time women's education gained little advance, and circulations of the Bengali newspapers and the freedom struggle movement led women informed about the improvement of the

women's position in the best parts of India. This enhanced confidence in raising their voice against some prejudices in society. As an example, in the article, *Nairir Jagaranar Rup*, Swarnalata Saikia, pledged for progressive women. As some women from the provinces like Boroda, Punjab, Bombay, and Madras tried on wrestling, swimming, and nursing again joined the councils; therefore, she has preferred the same for the Assamese women since they were indifferent in terms of courage and strength.

#### 4.1 Women's Writing before Ghar-Jeuti

The women's writings were in few in the journals that run before Ghar-Jeuti. In the thesis of Ajit Konwar, he remarks that the women from Assam had shared their opinions on Orunudo's page on the subject of women's education. But their thoughts never rose beyond the ideal devoted wife. In her article (published in *Orunudo*) entitled '*Stri Sakalar Kartabya Karma*' (Duties of Women) Padmawati Devi has emphasized that God has created both men and women. Men are by nature brave and stronger than women but it doesn't reflect the weakness of women. She also emphasized that women must know well about using their husband's money. Such qualities can be acquired barely from education. Another woman Bishnupriya Devi gave the justification by showing her concern for education as education help woman to remind their duty. She further emphasized that it is not bad for women to come out of their houses and travel around the world. She again said that Women should see the world to acquire more knowledge to strengthen their minds. Both for Padmawati and Bishnupriya Devi education was an essential instrument for women to run home perfectly. Other journals too present only a few writings of women. These are also written in a dull form as they only emphasised the women's obligation as a nurturer, mother and home maker. That means their thought had not risen beyond the sphere of their home.

#### 4.2 'Ghar-Jeuti': Voice of Women and voice on woman behalf

Women's sole writings on their problems only started with *Ghar-Jeuti*. Not only women some males also wrote articles about checking some good changes in the life of women. These led to setting some new values on conjugal rights and also locate some new ideas on women's education.

In the article, *Stree Sikshar Bishaye Ekakhar*(Some notes on Women), Labanyaprabha Barbora, emphasized higher education for both boys and girls especially, emphasized holding a University degree. She also encouraged Assamese women to use their ability of weaving as a tool of earning.

In her article, *Kiyo Khaddar Pindhim?*(Why we need to wear Khadi clothes?), Hiranayapha Borua gave a detailed account of rupees invested in buying machine-made clothes coming from Manchester. To reduce the machine's cost she emphasized using the weaving ability of Assamese women.

The women of this era realized that every girl needs to be financially independent and that they have no more remained someone's wife or daughter or sister. A woman's identity will be defined only by her ability to be independent. This type of mentality we found in the writings of Punyaprabha das. In her article, *Bharatar Ovab Aru Abhijug*(The Problems and Indictment of India), Punyaprabha Das discusses the women of Japan, who equally earned with her husband and had performed professional jobs like editor, literary, artist, businessman, clerk, teacher, doctor, typist, telephone operator, driver, and housemaid. She expresses her utter dissatisfaction at the point that the women of India live in absolute darkness and poverty. So, they had a long battle to win to get a proper position in society. She further argued that women only gained proper honour by their economic proficiency.

Some progressive male leaders supported women in this regard. As an example, Taraprasad Chaliha, Durga Prasad Majindar Barua, and Taraunram Phukan advocated for the economic sufficiency of women.

Taraprashad Chaliha in his article, 'Problems related to Women's Education' emphasizes equal education for both boys and girls. According to him higher education for women is important to realize the growing demand for female teachers. By giving the example of Bengal he said that only five hundred women in a year can pursue higher education but only fifty girls out of five hundred just take admitted to the colleges. So, it limited the production of female teachers. He further said that the condition in Assam was more pathetic than in Bengal. The practise of early marriage among the higher caste and the restriction of society for women's work as a teacher were mainly responsible for not having female teachers in Assam. As a solution to the problem, he prayed to society to create an atmosphere for women to perform both their duty at home also as a teacher. He also favoured providing education to the widows.

In his article *Stree Shiksha*(women's education), Tarunram Phukan said that he could not accept the concept of limiting women's work at home only. There had a difference in the work both for males and females in different places. So, when in Assam there had a restriction for women to do some work that may not be restricted to other countries. He further said that the nature of duty needs to be changed when the right time comes. So, what is emphasized by Manu may not mean for the existing period. So, he advocated for equal education for both boys and girls. He denied society's fear of losing good qualities by educating girls. He advocated for providing higher education to girls. He finished his argument by saying that for the well-being of the nation education is equally obligatory for them. He was the first who dared to question the basic structure of society and was ready to accept the change that comes over time.

Durga Prasad Majindar Barua had advocated for the physical training of women to protect themselves from the molesters. He also advised making physical training a compulsory subject in the women's school.

It suggested changing the question on conjugality as a now equal position is sought for the betterment of the society. In this instant, both the progressive men and women were ready to accept the full idea of modernity.



They were somehow exceptional from the earlier liberal thinkers who emphasised standing in tradition and modernity at the same time. So, their ideas were not completely clear as sometimes they seemed confused about their stand. The progressive women of the 20<sup>th</sup> century very clearly showed their concern for equality as they wanted to stand by themselves and for themselves.

The quest for women's education also changed as now women of this era emphasized that female education not to fulfil the demand of a good mother or a good housewife but to change her personality. As an example, to inspire the women of Assam Swarnalata Saikiani, mother of Puspalata Das refers to the activities of women all over the world. In her article, *Nabajugar Bharatar Mahila Samiti Aru Nari Jagaronor Rup*, (Women's organizations in the new India and the nature of women's awakening) which was read at the Kamrup Mahila Samiti speak about the initial stage of the women's organization in Assam and emphasized that organizations of Assam have a long journey to reach.

The contribution of *Ghar- Jeuti* to the Assamese literature and society is that the few writers who emerged in the pages of *Ghar- Jeuti* became great writers in the future. Most of the writings were about the duty of the housewife. But some radical women such as Puspalata Das and Swarnalata Saikiani wrote articles on the women's movement that took place outside Assam. Another radical women writer Ratnakumari Rajkhowani's articles were originally speeches written for different meetings. Punyaprava Das B. A wrote articles on a socially relevant topic. Both male and female writers wrote many articles in support of female education and also offered different justification on its behalf in the pages of *Ghar- Jeuti*.

In her article, *Narir Jagaron* (Rise of Women) Kanaklata Chaliha wrote about women from different places in the country and also from outside India. She said sadly about the backward condition of Assamese women in case of education. She also writes about a meeting organized by the Theosophical Society, where several women attendee delivered their speeches on the progress of women. So, she feels the need for the same also in Assam.

In her article, *Mahila- Samitir Abashyakata* (Need for women organization) Ratnakumari Rajkhwani, shared her sadness about not having a women's organization in Jorhat. According to her, in a country where women are not progressive leded progress of men short living. Assamese women still have a long way to go. She requested women to raise their inner power in strengthening their position in society. By giving the example of women from the *Miching*(a tribal community of Assam, where women enjoyed a good position) community she said that like the strong position of women in the *Miching* community the status of the women needs to be improved for the betterment of their situations.

Apart from these radical writers some women still preferred women's education only to fulfil the demand of a good mother in the article, *Stree Sikshar Prayujaniyota*(Importance of women's education) Dharmeswari Das, admitted that though women are weaker than a man in terms of physical strength hence she praises the women's

duties as a mother as this is offered only to women. According to her as a mother of future potency education for women is inherently 'essential'.

In the second year, the tune of the writings somewhat changed from the first year. Gradually, the tunes become bold and demands were increased. The whole thing only suggested the increasing strength of Assamese women and their link with the rest of the world and the profundity of their thoughts. Now, their sphere of thinking is not limited to their home, to their place but crosses the boundary of the country and they do not think of themselves as separated from the women of the rest of the world. According to Aparna Mahanta, "*Ghar-jeuti* was the heart of the women's organizations". She made the statement in her book, *A Journey of Assamese Women*. Because all works of the organizations were immediately reported in the pages of this journal. Though the women organizations do several works for upgrading the position of women but *Ghar- Jeuti* generated the power of holding that strength. It also provided an open place for women to share their thoughts and suggestion for the well-being of society. Several women writers tried their future in the pages of *Ghar-Jeuti*. The journal also changed the trend of writing. Before it, the journals mainly held the literary tune but by adopting writings about the contemporary world the editors had attracted attention. Especially women's matters attracted people to re-emphasis some customs of the society. It also suggested the concerns of women for their surroundings and also helps in rejecting society's vision toward their women. *Ghar- Jeuti* tries to satisfy women from every denomination. Articles like how to raise children and how to maintain homely duties are also published here.

## 5 Conclusion:

*Ghar- Jeuti* did excellent work by giving a proper place for women where they had shared their experiences. From household activities to social work, domestic performance to the reports of the meetings of the women's organization, news of their locality to the news outside the country, *Ghar- Jeuti* had not left any single aspect untouched. The articles published on *Ghar-Jeuti* are showing the awareness and consciousness of the women of their surroundings. It also helped in building a bond of sisterhood with the women outside and inside the country.

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