

WE ALSO WANT TO SERVE THE NATION: GHAR JEUTI AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Self-expression for the women in the print is one of the major developments in the colonial the colonial interactions in India. The Assamese women also tried to utilise it to express their concerns about several issues relating to them as well as for the nation. Many of their concerns were not remedied at the time and some of them these are still contentious.

KEYWORDS: Women's Movement, Feminism, Nationalism

INTRODUCTION

Self-expression of the women has always remained a critical issue. Unlike the men, it is always difficult for the women to express their feelings and desires openly due to several factors like patriarchy and gendered role models or ideals. Although, the women tried to express their self in the different periods of history it was only during the modern times that women actually got some wider platforms to do so. First, the growth of the printing press offered some avenues to the educated women to express themselves. In fact, the very term of educated women is not beyond question as whether the access to the ability to read, write and a little bit of arithmetic's makes a person literate in the real sense. Secondly, did the modern education system adopted by the colonial state actually understand the real needs of the Indian women? Thirdly, the issue of women's mobility was problematic in colonial Assam in the existing patriarchal set up. Fourth, how far the women's organizations and the women's magazines' were able to challenge and negotiate with the existing patriarchal set up of the society?

The idea of women's organization is itself a new idea, not only in India but even in the western countries, which started by the second half of the 19th century. In the west, it was the Socialists who were pioneers in establish women's organizations. In fact, there were other efforts made by the non-Socialists to organise the women, but it was the former who tried to provide organizational framework for the women's movements. The colonial state found it convenient to establish some organizations through which it could know the mindsets of the educated sections of the men. For that purpose they helped in the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In colonial Assam, it was reflected in the establishment of the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha (1884) and the Assam Association (1903). Gradually, the need was felt to establish women's organizations and the first major organization, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal was established.¹ In the colonial context of Assam, it was in Dibrugarh where the beginning was made through the involvement of the English ladies with the native ladies by forming a Mahila Samiti.

The growth of the Victorian ideology in the second half of the 19th century, which tried to make the women more responsible towards their domestic duties, also influenced India. It advocated specific education for the women whereby

they can help their husbands, who were the breadwinners for the family. The management of the household was to be done by the women and for they must know the art properly. Several books and articles in the newspapers were published which advised the women how they can do so. In colonial India also the Indian reformers started to emphasise it through newspapers and books.² The growth of the Hindu Revivalist Movement which emphasised that instead of imitating western ideas the source of inspiration should be sought in the idealised Vedic past. Here again the burden of maintaining the tradition was placed on the shoulders of the women. This was continued by the leaders of the Nationalist Movement. Therefore, the writings of the women's magazines' emphasised on this neo-patriarchy. At the same time, these journals also had an inherent problem, in which they virtually dictated the women to do as they deemed fit.

The present paper's area is mainly confined to the Brahmaputra valley as the issues of the Assamese nationalism to which the entire discourse is located. It will try to locate the issues of gender and patriarchy in the context of colonial Assam. How far the Assamese nationalists were able to properly situate the women's question in the changing environment? Did the Nationalist ideas brought a new form of patriarchy or modified it?

Women and the Print

The relationships between women and the print medium is a contentious issue in India. Even in the west it was not so easy equation either. The skill of reading and writing was considered as a disadvantage for the women. It was considered that the literate skills of women resulted in early widowhood. Moreover, a large section of the society believed that literacy among the women had the danger of extra-marital relations. Rassundari Dasi, a Bengali women's autobiography, 'Amar Jivan' (My Life) published in 1868 was the first major effort on the part of the Indian women to publish her experiences through the print medium.³

The publication of the 'Bamabodhini Patrika' by Umechandra Dutta in 1863 was one of the major breakthroughs for the women's movement in the country. It continued until 1907, in spite of several problems like the lack of numbers of adequate subscribers and the efforts to maintain it at an affordable price. It was an initiative from the Brahmos who were arguing for women's education and the increase of the age of marriage for girls. This was the first news magazine for the women in the country and it inspired many others to take the initiative in their own areas. This did not result any radical change in the attitudes of the women as a large part of the published works belonged to men, who had to write for the women. The majority of the women were illiterates and only among the very limited educated sections who encouraged women's education had avenues for the women of their own class had the option to express themselves. These expressions therefore, had the limitations of caste and class as the majority of them had no experiences of the common women, who were predominantly illiterate. The issue of literacy of women also became an important benchmark to differentiate between the modern and the traditional, although it also had to negotiate with the agendas of the western modernity, to its own⁴

The Hindu Revivalist Movement had a profound impact on the whole issue of the reform of the Indian women. Through its solutions of going back to the idealised Vedic period it tried to provide multiple solutions to the contest between the ideas between the east and the west. The notion of western modernity was re-examined through the lenses of comparison and contrast, where the former failed on many accounts. Nearly all the Hindu reformers or the nationalists tried to accept these ideas in their own ways. This also applied to the other communities who had their agendas of revivalism.⁵ It placed on the shoulders of the women the duty of maintaining the traditions, who were relatively less subjugated by the colonial dominations. The ideas of Hindu Revivalism were predominantly patriarchal. Therefore, it was no wonder that the

Indian women also accepted it as a fact and to be performed for the sake of the nation, which was under foreign domination. They had to contribute through their own ways.

In colonial Assam the native women were not silent spectators, although the number of female literacy was quite negligible in the province. From the days of the 'Arunodoi' the first Assamese newsmagazine, published by the American Baptist Missionaries (1846-1883) they tried to express themselves in nearly every print avenue available to them. And the Assamese educated men also made special provisions for them. For example the 'Jonaki' and the 'Bijuli' had separate sections devoted to the women. Padmavati Devi Phukanani published her book a novel a new genre of the time 'Sudharmar Upakhyan' in 1884. Its topic was basically moral advice for the women. Similarly, Gunabhiram Barua's second wife Bishnupriya Devi in 1883 published 'Nitikatha' (Moral Talks) a book of morals for the children. But, the Assamese women had to wait for time as the very issue of regional or the provincial issues had to negotiate with the issues of the pan-Indian contexts. It was only in 1920's that the Indian National Congress could make its presence felt in the province. The entry of the Congress marked a great breakthrough into the politics of the province. For the first time there was a renegotiation between the provincial and the pan- Indian issues.

Ghar Jeuti, the very term which meant enlightenment of the Home clearly showed the agendas of the Journal. It was founded and edited by Mrs. Kanaklata Chaliha and Mrs. Kamalalaya Kakati from Sibsagar. Both of them were related to the enterprising Chaliha family who were not only wealthy due to ownership of tea gardens but, also famous regarding their public activities. It promoted the cause of the women's education, spread awareness about the increasing presence in the public organizations so that free and fair exchanges of ideas could develop. As a result, they had not to look for outside sponsors for funds as in the case of the majority of the Assamese journals. In fact, Ghar Jeuti had no revenues from advertisements unlike the widely circulated the 'Jonaki', the 'Banhi' and the 'Awahan'. Although, the financial fortune of the family did not last for long yet, within the limited period of the journal it was a tremendous achievement in a situation of colonial Assam where the overwhelming female illiteracy was another serious challenge. Moreover, the financial power does not always guarantee a better future for the women, as in the case of Kamalalaya Kakoti. She left her husband when he tried to have a second marriage with her son to her paternal family, who supported her decision. The question of rebellion against the existing patriarchy was therefore, inherent in the founders of the journal. She devoted her life in the cause of the women's organization of the District and even participated in the Freedom Movement.⁶

As in the case of the Bamabohini Patrika, the Ghar Jeuti was not a profitable venture and it had to be closed down in 1933, coinciding with the family fortune. In fact, not only Ghar Jeuti, all the newsmagazines of the province had to constantly face the challenge as a large section of the reading public did not want to pay the subscriptions.

The idea of nationalism was inherent in the Chaliha family and the Ghar jeuti stood as the bastion for it. But at the same time, it was also concerned with the issues of the contemporary western women's as well as the Indian women's movements. It therefore acted as a bridge between the two. In fact, the Ghar Jeuti always did not abide by the nationalist ideologies of the family. For example, Kamalalaya Kakoti, in her Presidential Address at the Konwarpur Mahila Samiti, (in Sibsagar) published in the magazine in Vol.III, No. III, 1929, as Aparna Mahanta argues the voice of a feminist can easily be discerned.⁷

Ghar Jeuti and the Men Writers

The role of the men in the publication of the magazine as well as its continuation is important to examine. Like in the other parts of the country the publication of it was mainly due to the efforts of the men. In fact, even in the west the women's movement had to rely on the men like J. S. Mills to propagate their causes. Apart from the issue of financial security, the support of the men was also necessary as the majority of the women were illiterates. So, the men had to fill the vacuum by writing for the cause of the women's rights. The contemporary Assamese men therefore, attributed the success of the magazine to the men writers like Taraprashad Chaliha and Durgaprashad Majinder Baruah.⁸ Moreover, since its agenda was limited only for the women very few major writers contributed for it, the best examples are Lakshminath Bezbarua and Padmanath Gohain Barua, who were like their contemporaries were very sympathetic to the cause of the women but were unwilling to commit the cause for the women publicly. They did not contribute anything for it. Rather they had some negative feelings for some of the agendas of the educated women which they felt did not suit the time. Bezbarua, for example, was critical at the agendas of the contemporary western Feminist ideas, like the voting rights for the women.⁹ although, the Indian women repeatedly stressed that they did not uphold the western feminist line of thinking it failed to change the mindsets of the educated men. Sarojini Naidu categorically stated in 1918 at the special session of the Indian National Congress demanding women's franchise that,

“Never, never, for we realize that men and women have their separate goals, separate destinies and that just as man can never fulfil the responsibility or the destiny of a woman, a woman cannot fulfil the responsibility of man. We ask for the vote, not that we might interfere with you in your official functions, your civic duties, your public place and power, but rather that we might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of the children that we hold upon our laps, and instil into them the ideals of national life.” (Emphasis added)¹⁰

The Ghar Jeuti also upheld it. In order to provide updates about the latest developments it tried to publish the speeches and activities of the leading national figures to encourage the Assamese women.

In fact, poets like Atulchandra Hazarika contributed some poems whose central feature was the idealisation of the historical and the mythical Hindu past. The Assamese writers were not the exception as in the other parts of the country it became the norm. They were influenced by the trends of the Hindu Revivalist ideas, where the women who had been free from the colonial domination had to be prepared themselves as the ideal daughters of the nation. The Ghar jeuti was also not free from this notion. It was the women who had to bear the burdens of traditions for the sake of the nation. The Assamese nationalists also tried to prepare role models for the women through invoking the ideas of Joymoti apart from the mythical Hindu women, both mythical and historical. Noted historian, Surya Kumar Bhuyan wrote a series of articles on this aspect in the contemporary newsmagazines which was later put through in the book form as 'Chaneki' (Ideal).¹¹

One of the most important issues in colonial India was the need for women's education. Indian social reformers also gave priority to this as without it the basic issues of reform would have no impacts on the society. The colonial state had no separate agendas for the Indian women's education prior to the Woods Despatch of 1854, which for the first time brought the issue of the women education. But, the colonial state was not sincere about it, as it did not want to spend for it. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's effort in this direction proves the point.¹² the colonial state wanted the natives should think and make efforts about it. As a result, the issue of the women's education remained a neglected part of the government's agenda during the colonial period. Therefore, the Hindu Revivalists like the Arya Samaj tried to introduce their own

agendas in this regard in the educational institutes founded by it.¹³ But it had its own ideological limitations as it tried to confine the issues of women to an ideal past.

Women are the first teacher of the child and if she remains uneducated she cannot become an ideal mother. Moreover, the need of women's education was also felt when the educated middle class under the influence of the Victorian ideologies that wives should become companions for them. Therefore they made efforts to become teachers for them. As Judith Walsh has shown a new genre of literature emerged which tried to advise the women how to be modern housewife and still maintain the traditions.¹⁴ The examples of Mahadev Govinda Ranade prove the point as well as examples of the leaders of the Bengal Renaissance. In fact, there were differences of opinions among the people whether the curriculums for the boys and the girls should be uniform or different. This issue was not limited to India but a universal issue. Even in England, the dominant Victorian ideologies expected that women's prime duty is Homemaking and they should not strive for independent earning like the men. They should be like companions of men but should not try to be equal, whose main duty is to be the breadwinner. Therefore, they should be obeyed and respected. Since, the women's duty was basically secondary in nature the purpose of their education should not be the same. The Victorian patriarchal ideologies gave a new fillip to the to the educated Indian middle class men who got a new bastion to maintain their own patriarchy by choosing what were the best for them, by choosing the agendas and the priorities for the native women so, they could identify themselves as modern in the colonial context. But, at the same time, they were careful in maintaining the distinction between the East and the West. The comparative analogy between the east and the west remained a dominant theme in the whole debate.

Ghar Jeuti was in complete agreement with this dominant trend. It also began to argue that the curriculum should be separate between the sexes. In fact, it was one of the common agendas of the Indian women's organizations in the first half of the 20th century.

The Assamese Women and Feminism

The term feminism is contentious even in the west in the present time where it first emerged. Does Feminism mean complete gender equality or difference between the men and the women? The Assamese nationalists like their counterparts in the other parts of the country were very much against the idea of western Feminism or equal Rights for the women with men. They tried to view that both the genders have different needs to fulfil in the society for its proper functioning. Although, the 'Ghar Jeuti' tried to show some sympathies for the contemporary western Feminist Movement its tone remained predominantly to support the existing gendered relationships. In other words, it was not ready to challenge the existing patriarchal set up. But at the same time, it could not ignore the trends of the Feminist Movement in the contemporary west. Therefore, in the first issue of the magazine in 1927 Mrs. Kanaklata Chaliha through her brief article, Nari Jagaran (Women's Awakening/Movement) she appealed the Assamese women to consider the latest developments regarding women not only in India but, in the global perspective, so that the Assamese women can situate their position in the existing society. This awareness about the difference of the women's agendas not only between the east and the west but also within the country was repeatedly highlighted in the magazine. It remained a rather problematic aspect for the magazine who tried to situate two different trends, women's Equality and the question of the national independence. As in the other parts of the country, the Ghar Jeuti and the other women's magazines' and organizations gave priority to the later. This was also a problematic issue for the Indian Women's organizations that developed in the 20th century.¹⁵

Chandraprabha Saikiani, whose ideas and activities sometimes shows hers sympathies to the west, still she argued against it. In her Presidential Report, Jorhat session of the Assam Mahila Samiti published in 'Ghar Jeuti', in Vol. II, No. Xi, 1929, she argued that men were not the prime barrier against the development of the women. Then who were? This was answered by the Resolutions passed in the session which demanded (i) girls should also be given the opportunity to study in the Cotton College (established in 1901) (ii) demanded that in each Local Boards and in the Municipalities the number of girls Primary Schools should be increased. (iii) It supported the Sarda Act as prescribed by Dr. Gaur (?) which stated the minimum age of consent for girls should be 16 years as against the boy at 25. (iv) It requested the Government to nominate a woman from the forthcoming Local Board and Council Elections.

But, at the same time, *Ghar Jeuti* was not totally unaware about the issues of the contemporary western Feminist Movements. In a predominantly patriarchal set up, where the literacy rates of the population were very low it was not easy for the limited numbers of educated women to openly express their opinions in the print media. In the print media, dominated by the men the issue of western feminism was derided. Even L.N. Bezbarua who was rather sympathetic towards the women had grave doubts about the issue of equality. He argued that that the by introducing the right for vote for the women it would create problems for the ideal home as the Assamese nationalists envisioned. This issue was also highlighted by Haliram Deka (who happened to be a lawyer in the Calcutta High Court) and others. The issue of women's suffrage is interesting in the Indian context. It was not seriously demanded by the Indian women but, was provided by the colonial state that became more concerned to the issues of the Indian women by 1920's, due to the pressures of the League of Nations and other factors. Therefore, it did create some apprehensions among a section of the Indians that through the introduction of the female franchise the issue of the women's question would take a western dimension. The *Ghar Jeuti* did not demand it. The colonial state introduced the practice of the women's reservations in the provincial councils and by that time the magazine was no longer to respond.

In order to accommodate the issue, the *Ghar Jeuti* did create some spaces for their expressions. In her address at the Jorhat Mahila Samiti, Mrs. Ratnakumari Rajkhwani, published in the magazine Vol.II, No.VI, 1928 as Mahila-Samitir Abashyakata (The Necessity of the Women's Organizations) she lamented that Jorhat has yet no women's organizations and she blamed the Assamese men for their inactivity's. She was clear that men should play an active role in the exercise of women's power and for that they should make efforts for women's education (controlled by patriarchal agendas?). She also questioned some dominant social views on the women like impossibility of trusting the women, by arguing that without the support of the women no society can progress. Ratnakumari supported the existing gendered social division but, with concerns for the wishes and aspirations of the women who also wanted to perform their own duties for the nation. She appealed to the women that they should make efforts to become companions of men by becoming educated and re-energetize the nation.

In her article, Nabajugar Bharatar Mahila Samiti aru Nari Jagaranar Rup (New Women's Organizations and Women's Awareness) published in the magazine in Vol.II, No. Xi, 1929, Mrs. Swarnalata Baruah, argued that the women's organizations should play active roles in making awareness among the women. She lamented that her contemporary society ignored the issues of the widows and the destitute. She argued that women's organizations should not be ridiculed by the society but be actively supported by the every section of the society, as it was done in contemporary Bengal.

The *Ghar Jeuti* was however not very vocal about the atrocities committed against the women which was reflected in some of the contemporary literary and news items. Does it signify that the educated Assamese women felt it as unimportant and the women have to bear it? The answer is not simple, as in a predominantly patriarchal society the women always have to be careful about the limit of their expressions. It was not confined to Assam but can be witnessed in other parts of the country as well. One of the dominant themes which is still active is the belief that the task of maintaining female modesty belonged only to the women and if there were any incident where it is violated the women are also responsible for it. This theme was highlighted from the days of Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued that the women should make efforts to protect their virtues.¹⁶

The need for women's self protection was initiated by a man, Durgaprashad Majinder Barua, in his article, *Mahilasakalar Atmarakshar Upai* (Ways of Self-Protection for the Women) published in the magazine in Vol.I, No. IV. 1927. He argued that apart from the formal and moral education efforts should be made to impart physical education to the girls.

Purdah

The issue of Purdah was one of the prime agendas of reform for the women's organizations of the country in the 20th century. Purdah did not simply mean the veil, but the restrictions of women's mobility, free expressions as well as restrictions as individual. That is why all the women's organizations that emerged in the 20th century continuously campaigned against it. In colonial Assam the purdah restrictions were limited to a section of the upper caste families. Poet Nalinibala Devi, in her autobiography 'Eri Aha Dinbor' narrated its existing in the upper caste families.¹⁷ In colonial Assam it was not a serious issue as it was believed that the 'Orani' that the Assamese women wears cannot be related to the other parts of the country. It is a marker of respect to tradition which the nationalists believed is necessary to maintain. But, did the Assamese women enjoyed more mobility?

The question was not simple as Mrs. Dipeshwari Gohain through her article, *Gaonlia Tirotar Jivan* (Lives of the Countrywomen) published in the *Ghar Jeuti* in Vol.II. No. II-III, 1928 argued that the village women are less affected by Purdah as they had limited mobility which not only keeps them healthier but free from affecting their gendered social roles. The village women were only maintaining the weaving traditions unlike the urban ones. The author argued that the Purdah system were primarily confined among the urban women who unlike the village women were less exposed to free air and hard work (therefore lazy). But, at the same time one must also critically examine whether the majority of the Assamese people had any experiences of the urban life as there were very few towns and even among these limited towns many women did not cease the weaving practices.

Narmadakumari Devi in her address in the Na-Duar Mahila Samity, published in the *Ghar Jeuti* in Vol.IV, No. VII, 1932 argued that it was due to the lack of education that the Purdah system continued. Usha Devi in her Presidential Address in the Choukhat –Meleng Mahila Sanmilan, published in the *Ghar Jeuti*, in Vol. IV. No. VIII, 1931, argued that the Purdah system have severely affected the Assamese women which resulted in a position of slavery or blindness. Women's true veil is purity (satittva) internal and external whereas the veil represents the later. She also argued that in the rural areas the women were healthier as there was no strict Purdah.

Among the limited sources about the Assamese Muslim women Md. Saleh Kazim through his article '*Purdah Rahashya*' (Mysteries of Purdah) published in the *Ghar Jeuti*, in Vol. IV-V, 1932 argued that the Assamese Muslims

should have a clear understanding on the differences between seclusion and Purdah. He argued that there should be more rational and proper interpretations on women's mobility as if the women have any important tasks outside their homes there should not be any restrictions. According to the author the Muslim practice of Hijab makes their women less smart than the other women who do not follow it. This view was similarly echoed by Mrs Nur Jehan in her lecture published in the Ghar Jeuti, Satir Smriti Puja, in Vol.IV, No.VI. 1932. She appealed for the abolition of the Purdah system and that the Muslim girls should also practice martial arts like the Hindus for the cause of the nation.

It was Chandraprabha Saikiani, who tried to break the practice of public veil that existed in the province to differentiate the sexes in the Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti (Assam Women's Congress) session held in Nagaon in 1927. But, this she soon realised was not the proper course of action. She had to admit in her Report on Assam Mahila Sanmilani, published in the Ghar Jeuti in Vol.I No.V-VI, 1929 that her action affected the interests of the organization as it provided several wrong interpretations among the people. By that time, many Assamese writers including Lakshminath Bezbarua were showing concerns against the agendas of the western feminist movement. They believed that women were trying to be equal with the men in every respect, and this they feared would break the gendered structure of the society. To put in other words, the Assamese men felt themselves threatened by the agendas and the activities of the western Feminist Movement.

Women and Nationalism

The publication of the Ghar Jeuti coincided with the the growing national Movement which tried to appeal to the Indian women as the daughters of the Nation to respond to the needs of the motherland which was in distress under the colonial rule. It was M. K. Gandhi who understood the need of involving the women in it for the mass movement. Prior to him it was the Swadeshi Movement which tried to involve the women. Women not only constituted nearly half of the population but also represented the national symbol. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the icons of Mother India was creatively utilised by the Indian nationalists which was replicated in the provinces through similar images like the Asomi Aai, Banga Maa etc, which tried to invoke the children of the nation to respond to the distress condition of the Mother Nation. The paintings of Raja Ravi Varma, which became available to to the masses through cheap printings and later through the Swadeshi advertisements, like the caleder art, tremendously helped in the circulation as well as popularizations of the mythical characters.¹⁸ But at the same time there also contrasts and contradictions with the regional identities among the provinces as in case of Assam and Bengal both were based on linguistic identities and the issues like Goalpara clearly shows the point.¹⁹ Alongwith it, several mythical and historical as well as semi-historical figures like Joymoti, the Rani of Jhansi, several Rajput and Maratha female heroines were idealised to show to the Indians that the Indian women had in the past symbolised the valour of the nation. Interestingly, during this period there was significant proliferation of the Durga and Kali Pujas in colonial Bengal, which also affected Assam.

In colonial Assam the issue of Joymoti who sacrificed her life for the sake of her husband in the 17th century is interesting. Still, around 1880's her name was not known to the majority of the Assamese before Ratneshwar Mahanta wrote about her. By the beginning of the 20th century there was a renewed effort on the part of the Assamese nationalists who tried to idealise her sacrifice to show that their contemporary women should also cultivate it to do something for the nation. In fact, the idea of sacrifice became a popular theme throughout the country to highlight it as a special quality for the Indian women. The growing popularity of the Hindu Revivalist Movement also contributed to its proliferation among

the masses. Likewise Revivalist ideas also developed among the other communities like the Muslims and the Sikhs who also tried to seek answers in the past traditions. Everywhere there was a contrast between the past and the present and the former was placed as the ideal for the later.

Interestingly, by focussing exclusively on Joymoti the Assamese nationalists ignored Mula Gabharu, another queen from the Ahom period who actually went to war and became a martyr. Was it due to the fear that the Assamese nationalists that independent decisions or actions by the women without taking permissions from men should not be encouraged. The Nationalist Movement also focussed on it, where the women were selectively used like in picketing, boycott and in the Khadi campaigns. The gendered separation of the two sexes was always maintained.²⁰

In colonial Assam, it was in 1917 that efforts were made to celebrate the achievements of Joymoti by organising a festival in her name in Sibsagar. This festival was organised in the different parts of the Brahmaputra valley till the mid thirties of the 20th century. As part of it meetings were held where both men and women participated and discussed on her ideals and repeatedly appealed to the Assamese women to follow her ideals. The Ghar Jeuti made full coverage to it. The Joymoti Utsav apart from idealising the role model also offered opportunities to several women to speak publicly for the first time and without it the names of these women would have never been known. Their lectures showed how the Assamese women felt about their role in the National Movement. So, prior to the entry of the Indian National Congress and M. K. Gandhi in to the province the seed for the women's movement were already sewn through these efforts. The Congress and Gandhi further strengthened it.

One of the main issues highlighted by the Ghar Jeuti was the issue of spinning. It was in response to the Gandhian strategy against the British imports. The impacts of the imported items among the women had already become a cause of concern due to the Nationalists campaigns of Swadeshi. In fact, unlike many other provinces of the country the tradition of weaving continued and those women who could not do it was not viewed as negative quality of a bride. Padmanath Gohani Baruah who was loyal to the colonial state therefore argued in his edited newspaper '*Usha*' that 1904 that the idea of swadeshi was not alien to Assam unlike many other parts of the country where weaving (mainly cotton) was caste based occupation; it was universal in the province.

The 'Ghar Jeuti' published several articles in this regard encouraging the Assamese women to take seriously the art of weaving. It also tried to condemn the practice of 'lavishness' through which the Assamese women were increasingly becoming prone to the use of the foreign imported items like dress and perfumes. There were also comparisons between the towns and the villages and the later was idealized as it was still maintaining the traditions.

One of the crucial issues before the Indian women in the trajectory of modernity and tradition was morality. Although the Indian women fared negatively in comparison to the western women, the nationalists urged that in the issue of morality the Indian women continued to be superior. The Ghar Jeuti supported this view and appealed the Assamese women to be morally strong like the mythical Hindu women like Sita and Parvati and particularly, Joymoti.

As a women's magazine the Ghar Jeuti also had to think about the gendered social responsibilities of the Assamese women. It never demanded from the Assamese women that they should ignore their prime duty of homemaking. As cooking was regarded as a prime responsibility for the women it expected that the Assamese women should be updated with new recipes, so that they could please their newly educated men. As part of this it published several cooking recipes to attract the attentions of the women. This trend is still visible in the women's magazines' of the present times.

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of the limited print life the Ghar Jeuti made several breakthroughs in the issue of the Women's question in colonial Assam. It acted as a vehicle through which it tried to convey the latest developments regarding the women, not only the national but also to the wider international agendas. Its role as the mouthpiece of the Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, as well as to create a new section of women writers are invaluable. Although, it could not survive for long its message were not lost as to a large extent the *Awahan* tried to fill the gaps by publishing several articles on women and their activities. Unlike in the many other parts of the country the emergence of an independent newsmagazine for the women was late the Ghar Jeuti tried to fill up the gap by accommodating the different groups of women as well as the men about the importance of the women in the national life.

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2. For details see Judith E. Walsh, *How to be the Goddess of Your Home? An Anthology of Bengali Domestic Manuals*, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2005. Walsh showed how the new Victorian ideologies were appropriated by the Indian nationalists for positioning the Indian women. In fact it was not limited to Bengal; it influenced a large part of India, particularly among the educated middle class.
3. See, Tanika Sarkar, *A Book of Her Own. A Life of Her Own: Autobiography of a Nineteenth-Century Women*, in Kumkum Sangri & Sudesh Vaid Edited, *From Myth to Markets, Essays on Gender*, Monohar Publishers, New Delhi, (1999) 2001 Reprint, pp.85-124.
4. For the *Bamabodhini Patirika* see, Bharati Ray Edited and Compiled, *Nari O Paribar Bamabodhini Patrika*, (in Bengali) Kolkata, 2002. Also see, Pradip Basu, *Samayaki*, Vol. II, Kolkata, 2009. Also see, Sutapa Bhattacharya, Ed, 'Bangali Meyer Bhabanamulak Gadya- Unish Satak, An anthology of women writings in 19th Century (in Bengali)', Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1999, p.15.
5. For details see, Keneth N Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, Cambridge University Press, 1999 (Indian Edition).
6. For details see Aparna Mahanta Edited, *Ghar Jeuti*, Publication Board Assam, 2008.
7. Mahanta, *ibid*, p.
8. see, *Milan* (the mouthpiece of the Assam Satra Sanmilan) Vol.VI, No. I, 1931.
9. For Bezbarua, see, in his 3 part article, 'Stree Swadhinata" (Women's Liberation) and he was also its editor, in the newsmagazine 'Banhi' in Vols, VIII, XVIII, and Vol.XX (1922, 1929, and 1931). Similar views were also expressed by many other educated men like Rajanikanta Bordoloi and Nakulchandra Bhuyan who were afraid that the traditional institutions and practices were at risk through the influences of the new ideas from the west.
10. Quoted in Geraldine Forbes, *ibid*, p. 94.

11. See, Suryakumar Bhuyan, Chaneki, 1928, prior to him Kashinath Barman also wrote a book Nariratna published in 1925, on this theme.
12. See, Indramitra, Karunasagar Vidyasagar, Ananda Publishers, Kolkata, 2002.
13. For the Hindu Revivalists agendas on the women see, Madhu Kishwar, Daughters of Aryavarta, in Women in Colonial India, essays on Survival, Work and the State, Edited by J. Krishnamurty, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.78-113.
14. For details see Judith E. Walsh, How to be the Goddess of Your Home? An Anthology of Bengali Domestic Manuals, Yoda Press, New Delhi, 2005. Walsh showed how the new Victorian ideologies were appropriated by the Indian nationalists for positioning the Indian women. In fact it was not limited to Bengal; it influenced a large part of India, particularly among the educated middle class.
15. For details see, Forbes, *ibid*, pp. 92-120.
16. For Mary Wollstonecraft see, A Vindication of the Rights of Women, Edited by Miriam Broody, Penguin Books, pp.292-302.
17. See, Nalinibala Devi, Eri Aha Dinbor, Guwhati, (1976), 1994 Reprint, as well as her poems like Sandhiyar Sur. For her poems and other works see, Nalinibala Devi Rachanavali, Guwahati, 1988. Similar anxieties is also to be found in the writings of Nirmalprabha Bardoloi, another poet of later generation, who had to face questions of widowhood as well as illegitimacy. For details, see, Nirmalprabha Bardoloi's autobiography, Jivan- Jivan Bar Anupam, Guwahati, 2004.
18. For details on Raja Ravi Varma and the Nationalist School of Art, see Christopher pinny, Indian Magical Realism: Notes on Popular Visual Culture, in the Subaltern Studies, Vol.X, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, pp.203-33. Also see, Partha Mitter, Art and Nationalism in Modern India 1850-1922, Occidental orietations, Cambridge University Press, 1994.
19. Goalpara, a district of Bengal was added to Assam in 1836 to cover up the deficits of land revenue in the newly annexed province. But problems began to develop when the Zamindar of it began to show interests to remerge the District with Bengal by 1915. Whereas, the Assamese nationalists welcomed similar demands from the Barak valley in case of Goalpara it was strongly resisted as in the geographical and cultural map of the province the District became an inseparable part of the province. This shows the complexities of the Indian nationalism, between the regional and the pan-Indian contexts.
20. For details, see, Suruchi Thapar –Borkert, Women in the Indian National Movement, Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 76-81.

