
Growth and Development of Female Education in the Princely State of Cooch Behar : 1881-1949

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Abstract: Prior the British contact the education was confined in the royal family and family of the nobles. After the 'Anglo-Cooch Behar Treaty' Cooch Behar became a native or princely state. The main aim of the present study is to highlight the growth and development of the female education in the Cooch Behar State. A drastic change came in the education system with the advent of the British interfere in the administration. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and Maharani Suniti Devi played a vital role for the female education. Many Girls Schools were founded in the state. The number of the local girl's students was very few. In this paper I would like to focus how did female education growth and development in the Princely State of Cooch Behar from 1881 to 1949 A.D.

Keywords: Administration, British Rule, Development, Female Education, Girls School etc.

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Introduction

Cooch Behar has its own history. This land witnessed many historical events. 'Kamata Koch Kingdom' was emerged in a part of ancient 'Kamrup' or 'Pragjyotishpur'. Kamata Koch Kingdom became a native state or princely state after the 'Anglo-Cooch Behar Treaty 1773'. Prior the British contact the education system was based on Tol, Chatuspathi, Madrasa and Maktab. With the interfere of the British in the administration, Western education came in the state. Growth and development of the Western education brought many changes in the state. An effort has been made in the study to show that how the female or women education was

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spreaded in the State or how the female education got pace under the royal patronage. The starting point of the study is the year 1881. Suniti College, a female institution, was established in this year and the concluding year of the discussion has been selected 1949. Cooch Behar signed the 'Merger Agreement' in his year. From 1773 to 1949, Cooch Behar was a Princely State.

It is the fact that the wave of female education comes in the Princely State of Cooch Behar so late than the other parts of British India. In the earlier stage the female education was prevalent in the royal house. Maharani Brindeswari Devi, wife of Maharaja Shibendra Narayan wrote the history of Cooch Behar 'Beharodanta' in 1859 and it mentioned the picture of female education in the royal house.¹ She laid down the foundation of the female education in the state and female education got its topmost pace under the efforts of the Maharani Suniti Devi.

It can be said that the female education was started in the state after the advent of Colonel Haughton as Commissioner. Maharaja Narendranarayan firmed 'Deshhitaishini Sabha' for social reforms and the development of education.² It was re-formed and renamed as 'Kochbihar Hitaishini Sabha'. The president was Colonel J. C. Haughton and Secretary was Shashibhushan Haldar.³ In 1865 at a conference of the 'Kochbihar Hitaishini Sabha', Assistant Secretary of the 'Kochbihar Hitaishini Sabha' and the Head Master of Jenkins School, Sri Bhujanga Mukhopadhyaya addressed that "It is very necessary to establish a female school at the capital of the state. If the female gets education, they will light the mouth of the country",⁴

In the academic session 1868-1869, the numbers of the boy's school were 25 and the numbers of the girl's school were only 6 and the girls students were 130. In the academic session 1875-1876 the numbers of the girl's school were 23 and 352 were the girls students.⁵ In the academic session 1879-1880 the numbers of the girls school were 50 and the numbers of the students were 651.⁶ A table regarding the development of female education has been given below.

Table-1		
Academic Session	Girls school	Total student
1868-1869	6	130

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1875-1876	23	352
1879-1880	50	65

A new wave of female education comes in the Princely State of Cooch Behar after the marriage of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and Suniti Devi, the daughter of Sri Keshab Chandra Sen, a famous Brahma leader. Suniti Devi was high educated. She took the active initiative for the extend of female education in the Cooch Behar State when she came Cooch Behar from Calcutta as Maharani. ⁷ In the context of the purpose of the marriage of Suniti Devi, Keshab Chandra Sen told Maxmuller that ‘‘The marriage was a political marriage, a whole kingdom was to be reformed’’. ⁸ Before the advent of Suniti Devi at Cooch Behar, Ratideb Baksi and other established a girl school which was known as ‘Rati Babur School’.⁹ In 1881 ‘Rati Babur School’ was renamed as ‘Suniti College’ as the result of the active initiative of the Maharani Suniti Devi. In this regard a quote can be shown here.

‘The building together with the small pacca house constructed for the girls school, now called the Suniti College. In same year closes the list of public building of the old type. The latter which was built in accordance with the wishes of Her Highness the Maharani is 23’-6X 27’-9’. The foundation stone of the building was laid by His Highness the Maharaja in July 1889 and was formally opened by Her Highness in March 1890.’ ¹⁰

Later on 22 August 1916 it was re-named as ‘Suniti Academy’ and no doubt that it opened a new vista in the development of female education. ‘Suniti Academy’ got the affiliation of the University of Calcutta in 1928 and since the time the only female teachers were recruited instead of male teachers.

Maharani Suniti Devi followed the management model of ‘Keshab Chandra Sen’s ‘Victoria Institution’ of Calcutta. She took the charge for the development of the school. A governing body was formed to govern the school with the following members.

Table No-2

Sl No	Name of Member	Remarks(Qualification)
01	Her Highness Maharani Suniti Devi	
02	Sri Bhupati Chakraborty	M.A., B.L.
03	Sri Brajendra Nath Shil	M.A.

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04	Sri Priyanath Ghosh	M.A.
05	Sri Nirmal Chandra Sen	Son of Keshab Ch Sen
06	Sri Amritlal Sen	Son of Nabin Ch Sen, brother of Keshab Ch Sen

Suniti Devi always encouraged the students of the Suniti College. A quote has been taken from the 'Administrative Report' of 1890-91.

'Her Highness the Maharani was pleased to invite the girls of the Suniti College to the palace in May last and after delivering to them an interesting address on their duties as girls wives and mothers, gave them prizes of useful books, nice cloths, plates boxes and other fancy things. The Maharaja also was kind enough to be present on the occasion and to award a Silver Medal to the first girl and appropriate prizes to others'.¹¹

In this connection it is a very important thing that 'Cooch Behar Brahma Samaj' was established in 1874 under the leadership of Kalikadas Dutta and Jadab Chandra Chakraborty. The secretary of it was Kalikadas Dutta and first Upacharya was Kailash Chandra Roy.¹² There is no doubt to say that Brahma Samaj was developed in the state as Maharani patronized it. She brought the famous Brahma teachers to teach at Suniti College. Gouri Prasad Majumdar was a great name in this regard. He was Principal of this college for a long time. Other teachers were Nagendra Nath Chattopadhyay, Suresh Chandra Bandhyopadhyay, Bimal Chandra Chakraborty, Mahesh Chakraborty, Kedar Nath Mukhopadhyay and his wife Ashrumati Devi. All of them were the leaders of the Brahma Movement.¹³

Another important name of girl's school was 'Dinhata Rahkumar Balika Vidyalaya'. Rajendranarayan, son of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and Suniti Devi was born on 11 April, 1882. For this happiness Maharaja Nripendra Narayan established a girls school and it was named as 'Rajkumar Balika Vidyalaya'. In the earlier stage the class was held in the morning session at the buildings of the Dinhata English School. On 22 May, 1882 Maharaja Nripendranarayan visited 'Rajkumar Balika Vidyalaya' with government official Jadab Chandra Chakraborty and Maharaja Nripendra Narayan wrote on visitor's diary that 'Visited the English School with Jadab Babu, examined most of the boys, found them fairly prompt in answering questions, the attendance seems very good. I take this opportunity to remark that these is a girls school here, the state should allow it to have a Pandit of its own, I

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hardly think it is fair us to expect him to teach the girls school as well as without an increase of his pay. I propose that as this is called the Rajkumar School in honor of the son and heir an allowance might be given to the Pandit''.¹⁴ On the basis of the proposal of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, the secretary of school applied for fund to Education Department of the state. The Superintendent, Education Department, came to visit the 'Rajkumar School' on 14 Jul, 1882 and he also remarked on the visitor's register that "Visited the newly established Rajkumar girls School, no of the rolls 12, present 8, I was pleased to see that unlike other girls school these girls do not read by vote but know their alphabets and can totally spell easy words..."¹⁵

The notable meritorious students of the 'Rajkumar Balika Vidyalaya' were Haimanti Devi, Sushila Devi, Bijaya Dopiya and Purnaprabha Mukhopadhyaya etc. Purnaprabha Mukhopadhyaya, daughter of PostMaster of Dinhata, obtained First Class and top rank in the state in 1889 and Maharaja granted scholarship to Purnaprabha Mukhopadhyaya to obtain higher education at Bethune School of Calcutta. Acharya Brojendra Nath Seal, the Principal of Victoria College visited this girls school in 1908 and remarked that total number of the girls students were 32 and out of this only 8 girls were Coochbnehari i.e. Rajbanshi Community.¹⁶ Acharya Brojendra Nath Seal appreciated the quality of education in the 'Rajkumar Balika Vidyalaya' and the importance of his appreciation is very deep.¹⁷ In the 19 the century many girls schools were established in various places of the State. These girls schools were Dinhata Rajkumar M.E. Balika Vidyalayay, Mekhliganj M.E. Balika Vidyalalya, M<athabhanga Chhabirennasa M.E. Balika Vidyalaya, Tufanganj Ila Devi Madhya Bangla Balika Vidyalaya, Haldibari M.E., Bamanhat, Gossanimari, Khagrabari, Chilakhana, Baladanga and Khapaidanga Nimna Prathamik Balika Vidyalaya.¹⁸

A summary regarding the numbers of the government primary schools, non-government primary schools, number of the pupils, daily average attendance and expenditure etc. has been mentioned in the following table no-3 and table no-4¹⁹.

Table No-3

Summary of Government Girls Primary Schools				Expenditure		
Year	Number of schools	Number of pupils	Average daily attendance	State grant	Local source	Total

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1901-02	6	101	66	--	--	--
1902-03	4	69	41	112	12	124
1904-05	6	122	83	127	45	172
1909-10	6	113	74	153	--	153
1910-11	6	110	80	150	18	168
1912-13	7	104	70	175	24	199
1913-14	7	101	75	192	36	228
1914-15	6	108	79	156	84	240
1917-18	5	82	60	132	36	168
1918-19	4	60	48	115	30	145
1919-20	5	79	56	142	54	196
1920-21	4	58	42	104	--	--
1930-31	4	52	30	132	60	192
1931-32	4	57	39	155	--	155
1932-33	7	123	99	340	487	827

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1934-35	7	134	81	377	307	684
1935-36	7	139	87	382	334	716
1936-37	8	244	172	512	732	1214

Table No-4

Summary of private Girls Primary Schools				Expenditure		
Year	Number of schools	Number of pupils	Average daily attendance	State grant	Local source	Total
1901-02	4	38	26	--	--	--
1902-03	4	37	29	--	--	--
1904-05	3	46	32	--	--	--
1909-10	9	94	52	--	91	91
1910-11	9	119	96	--	105	105
1912-13	10	100	73	--	101	101
1913-14	11	105	82	--	126	126
1914-15	12	114	85	--	120	120
1917-18	4	46	20	--	86	86

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1918-19	3	36	21	--	72	72
1919-20	--	--	--	--	--	--
1930-31	3	48	28	--	48	48
1931-32	2	41	36	--	60	60
1932-33	1	20	13	--	24	24
1934-35	3	58	39	--	117	117
1935-36	8	157	120	--	227	227
1936-37	6	143	93	--	300	300

The following table (table no-5) shows the number of the upper and secondary girl's school in the Cooch Behar State.

Table No-5²⁰

Upper Primary and Secondary girls schools	
Year	Number of schools
1901-1902	8
1902-1903	9
1913-1914	22
1918-1919	11
1919-1920	9
1920-1921	8
1932-33	12
1939-40	6

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1940-41	3
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A brief picture has been highlighted below about the examination, appeared students and their result. The girls studying in various schools appeared for Lower and Upper Primary Scholarship Examination and Middle Vernacular Examination.

Year 1880-81 : 10 passed the Primary Scholarship Examination.²¹

Year 1881-82: 19 students were sent up and 17 passed the Primary Scholarship Examination. 6 in Division I, 7 in II Division and 4 in Division III. 2 appeared for the upper Primary and the Middle Vernacular Examinations. Both passed, one in Division I and one in Division II.²²

Year 1884-85: 6 appeared for the Primary Scholarship Examination and 5 passed in Division I and one in Division III. Rajkumari Debi of Rati Babu's School and Chandramoni Debi of Dinhata obtained scholarship valued at Rs. 2 each.²³

Year 1888-89 : 2 candidates, Hemangini Debi and Sharat Sasi Debi from Rati Babu's School appeared for the upper primary scholarship examination. Both passed in Division I. 2 candidates were sent from Dinhata Girls School. One of them passed in Division I securing the 8th place among the successful scholars of Dinhata Circle.²⁴

Year 1889-90 : 2 girls from Dinhata Girls and Singjani Girls Schools appeared for the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination. Kumudini Debi of Singjani Girls School secured the 5th place among the 66 successful candidates of the Dinhata Circle.²⁵

Year 1892-93 : 2 girls from Sunity College were sent up, one for Middle Vernacular and one for Upper Primary Scholarship Examination. Both passed, one securing the 4th place in the general list of the Vernacular Scholarship Examination. From the Mekhliganj Circle, a girl passed the Primary Scholarship Examination in Division I. Purnoprobha Mukhopadhyay from Dinhata Girls School standing the First in the First Division.²⁶

Year 1910-1911 : 2 candidates appeared for the Middle English, 2 for the Middle Vernacular and 18 for the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination. Out of these 22, 19 students passed, 14 in Division I and 5 in Division II.²⁷

Year 1913-14 : 4 girls were sent up to the Upper Primary and 15 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examinations (excluding Sunity College). 18 candidates passed, 12 in the Division I and 6 in the Division II. Nalini Prava Choudhury of the Mekhliganj Girls School headed the list of all of the Upper Primary Scholars in the State and Najuk Bibi of the

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Kristapur Upper Primary School was awarded a special prize for securing a high position among the successful candidates of that examination.²⁸

Year 1919-20 : 4 girls were sent up to the Upper Primary and 13 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examinations (excluding Sunity College). All candidates passed, 13 in the Division I and 4 in the Division II.²⁹

Year 1920-21 : The total number of girls was 21. One of them to the Middle Vernacular, 3 to the Upper Primary and 17 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination were sent up. All of them passed, 19 being placed in the First Division and 2 in the Second Division.³⁰

Year 1932-33 : : The total number of girls was 98. 8 of them to the Middle English, 10 Middle Vernacular, 24 to the Upper Primary and 56 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination were sent up. 92 of them passed, 71 being placed in the First Division and 17 in the Second Division and 4 in the Third Division.³¹ The total number of schools for the exclusive education of girls including the Sub-Divisional Girls schools as 12. These were³²-

1. Rajkumar Girls Schools, M.E. Dinjata.
2. Mekhliganj Girls, M.E.
3. Chhabiannessa Girls, M.E., Mathabhanga.
4. Ila Devi Girls, M.V., Tufanganj.
5. Haldibari Girls, M.E.
6. Bamanhat Girls, L.P.
7. Gossanimari Girls, L.P.
8. Khagrabari Girls, L.P.
9. Chilakhana Girls, L.P.
10. Baladanga Girls, L.P.
11. Golenaohati Girls, L.P.
12. Khapaidanga Girls, L.P.

Year 1933-34 : The total number of girls was 90. 8 of them to the Middle English, 3 Middle Vernacular, 15 to the Upper Primary and 64 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination were sent up. 84 students of them passed, 61 being placed in the First Division and 17 in the Second Division and 6 in the Third Division.³³

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Year 1934-35 : The total number of girls was 90. 10 of them to the Middle English, 3 Middle Vernacular, 24 to the Upper Primary and 53 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination were sent up. 84 students of them passed.³⁴

Year 1935-36 : The total number of girls was 133. 13 of them to the Middle English, 3 Middle Vernacular, 40 to the Upper Primary and 77 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination were sent up. 119 students of them passed.³⁵

Year 1936-37 : The total number of girls was 116. 16 of them to the Middle English, 3 Middle Vernacular, 28 to the Upper Primary and 69 to the Lower Primary Scholarship Examination were sent up. 86 students of them passed.³⁶

A summary regarding the number of the students, examination results and expenditure etc. has also been mentioned here. I have highlighted here some year-wise records.

Year 1931-1932 :

Total number of the pupil in the year 1931-1932 was 282 and of these 31 were natives of Cooch Behar. Of the total number of Cooch Behari pupils, 23 were Hindus and 6 were Mohamedans and 2 were Christians. The total number of the girl's schools during this year was 10. The following table (Table No-6)³⁷ shows the distribution of students on 31st March, 1932 according to the different classes and religions.

Table No-6

Class	Hindus	Mohamedans	Christians	Total
X	4	--	--	4
IX	8	--	--	8
VIII	11	--	--	11
VII	19	--	--	19
VI	9	1	--	10
V	25	--	1	26
IV	32	--	2	34
III	40	--	--	40
II	49	2	--	51
IA	45	5	--	50
IB	29	--	--	29

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Total	271	8	3	282
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The following statement in table no-4 ³⁸ shows the distribution of free-studentships in the years 1931 and 1932.

Table No-7

Numbers of free pupils	On 31 st March 1931	On 31 st March 1932
Scholars	3	2
Rajguns	7	7
Cooch Beharis other than scholars and Rajguns	3	4
Girls other than Cooch Behar	6	9
Total	19	22

Examination: there was only one student in the Matriculation class who sent up for the Matriculation Examination of 1932 and passed in the 1st Division. Of the 240 girls who appeared in the Annual Examination of 1931, 81 passed in all subjects, and 188 were promoted. The percentage of passes was 33.75 and that of promotions 78.30.³⁹ There was no case of breach of the rules of discipline in the Academy during the year. During the year under report the School had 11 teachers in all, including one M.A., B.T., two B.As, four I.As and one Matriculate. A summary of tuition fees during the year is given below table No-5 ⁴⁰.

Table No-8

Class	Rs. p.m. (Running year)	Rs. p.m. (Previous Year)
X to IV	Rs 1	0 8 0
III and II	0 8 0	0 4 0
IA and IB	0 4 0	0 2 0

Year 1932-1933 ⁴¹ :

Srijukta Nikhilbala Sen Gupta, M.A., B.T., continued to hold charge as Head Mistress throughout the year. Total number of the students was 306 during the year. The following

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table no-9 shows the distribution of the students on 31st March, 1932 according to the different classes and religions.

Table No-9

Class	Hindus	Mohamedans	Christians	Total
X	5	--	--	5
IX	11	--	--	11
VIII	14	--	--	14
VII	9	1	--	10
VI	22	1	1	24
V	26	--	2	28
IV	36	--	--	36
III(A+B)	52	2	--	54
II(A+B)	58	5	1	64
IA	33	1	--	34
IB	23	2	--	25
Total	290	12	4	306

Out of the total roll number, 36 were the natives of Cooch Behar, including 6 Rajguns. Of the total numbers 290 were Hindus, 12 were Muslims and 4 were the Christians. The following statement in table no-10 shows the distribution of free-studentships in the years 1933.

Table No-10

Numbers of free pupils	On 31 st March 1933
Scholars	3
Rajguns	6
Cooch Beharis other than scholars and Rajguns	11
Girls other than Cooch Behar	12
Total	32

One student sat the Matriculation Examination, 1932 and passed in the First Division with distinction. There was no case of breach of discipline in the Suniti Academy during the year

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under report. Teaching staff consisted of 13 teachers. There were 2 male teachers and 11 female teachers. An abstract of the income and expenditure of the school for the years 1932-33 and 1931-32 is given below table no-11

Table No-11

Item	1932-33			1931-32		
	Rs	A	M	Rs.	A	M
Income	3255	5	3	1808	15	3
Expenditure	10632	9	2	12171	3	8
State share of the expenditure	7377	3	11	10367	4	
				5		
Average annual cost per girl	38	12		46	15	
		10		10		
Sate share of the average annual cost per girl	26	14		40	0	
		9		5		

Year 1933-1934 ⁴²: Total number of the pupil in the year 1933-34 was 308 and of these 290 was Hindus, 14 were Mohamedans and 4 were Christians. The following table (Table No-12) shows the distribution of students on 31st March, 1934 according to the different classes and religions.

Table No-12

Class	Cooch Behari Girls	Total number of Girls
X	1	9
IX	0	9
VIII	2	8
VII	2	17
VI	3	24
V	4	27
IV	6	50
III	12	63

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II	6	48
IA	10	37
IB	6	16
Total	52	308

The following statement in table no-13 shows the distribution of free-studentships in the years 1933-34.

Table No-13

Numbers of free pupils	On 31 st March 1934
Scholars	3
Rajguns	7
Cooch Beharis other than scholars and Rajguns	3
Girls other than Cooch Behar	6
Total	19

Year 1934-1935 ⁴³:

Total number of the pupil in the year 1934-35 was 315 and of these 295 was Hindus, 16 were Mohamedans and 4 were Christians. The following table (Table No-14) shows the distribution of students on 31st March, 1935 according to the different classes and religions.

Table No-14

Class	Cooch Behari Girls	Total number of Girls
X	--	5
IX	1	4
VIII	2	11
VII	4	19
VI	2	31
V	5	52
IV	8	50
III	4	51

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II	11	57
IA	11	35
Total	52	315

The following statement in table no-15 shows the distribution of free-studentships in the years 1934-35.

Table No-15

Numbers of free pupils	On 31 st March 1934
Scholars	2
Rajguns	6
Cooch Beharis other than scholars and Rajguns	14
Girls other than Cooch Behar	10
Total	32

Needless to say that one of the significant events in the history of the spread of education was the foundation of the Suniti College (later on Academy) in the capital town of the Cooch Behar State.⁴⁴ It was a land mark in the history of women's education. Maharani Suniti Devi was its chief patron. It played a vital role towards the cause of women's education.⁴⁵ As regards of female education Maharani Suniti Devi remarked: "We have tried hard for education of our country women. But we find it uphill work for many years".⁴⁶ The royal family was a great patron of the female education in the state.

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