

Role of Informal and Skill-based Education in Upgrading Socio-Economic Status of Women in Assam during the Ahom Period

Priyanka Chetia*¹ & Dr. Rashid Khan²

¹Research Scholar, Centre for North-East Studies, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya

²Professor, Centre for North-East Studies, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100700393>

Received: 20 July 2026; Accepted: 26 July 2026; Published: 03 August 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines the paradigm of informal and skill-based educational models during Ahom Period in Assam (13th–19th century) across the Ahom, Kamata, Koch, Chutia, Kachari, and Jayantia polities. Adopting primary historical and descriptive methodologies, the research analyzes how multi-generational apprenticeships, experiential learning, and lived experiences bypassed structured institutional absence to serve as primary catalysts for women's socio-economic mobilization. The findings reveal that women converted localized technical expertise into significant structural leverage, maintaining functional monopolies within high-value cottage industries like sericulture, textile weaving, and multi-material handicrafts. Beyond these technical crafts, women executed indispensable tasks in agricultural production management, animal husbandry, and local fishing industries while directing decentralized commerce across regional haats (markets). This mastery over domestic economies and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) granted women relative financial independence, heightened social visibility, and critical household decision-making authority. Crucially, during geopolitical or environmental crises, this practical fluency seamlessly translated into tactical military resistance and matrilineal wealth preservation. Ultimately, this research shifts the regional historical discourse, proving that the holistic sustainability and socio-political resilience of medieval Assamese society were fundamentally contingent upon the informal empowerment of its women.

Keywords: Ahom Period, Informal Education, Skill-based Education, Women, Socio-economic Status.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Assam during the Ahom period functioned beyond the boundaries of formal institutions. Rather than structured schools or monastic universities, knowledge was transmitted informal way through lived experience, occupational engagement, ritual participation, and household instruction and preference was given in learning day to day life skills. Informal education refers to the non-institutional processes of learning embedded in daily life. It included moral instruction, ritual literacy, agrarian knowledge, household management and ecological awareness. Whereas, Skill-based education implies technical training in agriculture, weaving, crafts, fishing, trade, warfare etc. The Ahoms and their neighbouring polities like Kamata, Koch, Chutia, Kachari and Jayantia developed distinct yet interconnected systems of informal and skill-based education that ensured economic sustainability, ecological adaptation, and socio-political continuity.

During the Ahom period in Assam (13th - 19th century), education was largely informal and deeply rooted in practical life, social traditions and administrative needs rather than structured institutions. Unlike modern systems of schooling, knowledge was transmitted through family , community and occupational groups , where individuals learned skills by observation, participation and apprenticeship, this form of education emphasized agriculture, crafts, warfare, governance and moral values, ensuring that people were well-equipped to contribute

towards society. Institutions like the Namghars and Satras (Vaishnavite monasteries) also played a significant role in imparting religious, cultural and literary knowledge. Overall, the informal and skill based education of the Ahom period was closely connected to daily life, preserving traditions while developing practical expertise.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives of the present study are:

- a) To examine the types and nature of informal and skill-based education of women prevalent in the Ahom and its neighbouring Kingdoms during that period.
- b) To analyze the impact of informal and skill based education of women on the socio- economic and cultural development of the society during the Ahom period.
- c) To examine the ways in which informal and skill based education empowered women during the Ahom period.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design underpins this study, combining historical and descriptive methods. The historical method forms the core analytical approach. Data are sourced from primary and secondary materials. Primary materials include Buranjis, literary texts, epigraphs, copper-plate grants, inscriptions, and coins belonging to the period of study. Secondary materials encompass academic books, refereed journals, government records, theses, magazines, and newspapers. Analysis is carried out through source criticism, comparative study, and thematic categorization. Cross-checking information across multiple sources ensures the authenticity, reliability, and validity of the historical interpretation and reconstruction.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

INFORMAL AND SKILL-BASED EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN VARIOUS KINGDOMS DURING AHOM PERIOD

Ahom Kingdom

The Ahom dynasty, founded by Sukapha in 1228 CE, ruled Assam for nearly 598 years and successfully resisted foreign invasions, including the Mughals. The Ahoms gradually assimilated with Assamese society by adopting the Assamese language, Hindu traditions, and local customs while promoting religious tolerance and cultural integration. Informal education played a vital role in medieval Assam, with knowledge and skills being passed through families, communities, Namghars, and cultural activities. Women, especially from royal and noble families, received training in administration, politics, literature, and warfare. Notable women such as Joymati Konwari, Nangblock Gabharu, Mulagabharu, and Kamaleswari Devi displayed courage, patriotism, and political wisdom. Queens like Phuleswari and Chao Shin Kuwari actively influenced governance and state affairs, highlighting the significant role of women in the political, social, and cultural life of medieval Assam (Gogoi, 1991).

Household Activities: During the Ahom period, education was largely informal and practical and it was imparted mainly through observation and imitation. There were no formal schools or structured curricula; instead, learning took place in everyday life. Children learned by watching elders perform their duties and then imitating them. Skills related to agriculture, crafts, warfare and household work were acquired through continuous observation and hands-on practice. This method of learning was natural and effective, as it allowed learners to gain practical experience from an early age. The common women were not given any formal education. Girls on the other hand were taught morality and spirituality by their family's elders from a young age. They were taught the household works such as cleaning houses, washing utensils, bringing water from rivers and ponds, cooking food and caring for children and elders. These skills are acquired by the girls from their elders like mother, grandmother, aunt etc. and in this way passed from generation to generation.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry: Women played a vital role in agriculture and animal husbandry during the Ahom period. Since agriculture formed the backbone of the economy, especially paddy cultivation, women's

participation was indispensable. They were involved in almost all stages of cultivation except ploughing, carrying out tasks such as transplanting seedlings, harvesting, husking, and grinding paddy. While men often served the state through military duties and public works like road and embankment construction, women ensured the continuity of agricultural production and household management. In some cases, women independently handled plantation activities, such as sugarcane cultivation. They also fetched water, collected firewood, cared for workers, and provided them with food and water during farming operations. Besides fieldwork, women maintained household gardens, growing vegetables, flowers, medicinal plants, and, in hilly regions, crops like cotton, ginger, red pepper, and edible roots. Through their extensive involvement in productive and domestic activities, Assamese women shared the economic responsibilities of their families and became equal partners with men in sustaining the Ahom economy.

Handloom: The people of Assam were highly skilled in sericulture and textile production. They reared eri, muga, and pat silkworms and also extracted fibres from various plants and trees. Among the finest silk varieties were Champa and Mezankari, with Champa silk reserved exclusively for Ahom kings and nobles (Gogoi, 1991 & Gohain, 1992). Spinning and weaving were widespread occupations and were made compulsory for women under Ahom rule. Contemporary accounts note the remarkable skill of Assamese people in weaving embroidered cloth (Basu, 1970). Women were required to spin at least five conical balls of thread each evening and submit them to appointed officials.

Several royal looms operated under the supervision of royal women. During the reign of Dihingia Raja (Siu-Hung-Mung), the mother of Bhavanipuria Gopal Ata, a renowned weaver, was placed in charge of twelve royal looms (Lekharu, 1952). Under King Pratap Singha, Momai Tamuli Barbarua enforced compulsory thread production by women, particularly to meet military needs during Ahom-Mughal conflicts. Ahom queens also trained young girls in weaving and supervised royal weaving activities.

Ahom women were renowned weavers. A commander's wife traditionally wove a protective cloth called Kavach Kapur for her husband before battle. According to the Buranjis, Mulagabharu could not prepare this cloth for her husband Phrasengmung Bargohain, who was later killed in battle. She then joined the battlefield herself and died fighting bravely.

Handicraft: Embroidery and dyeing were important crafts associated with spinning and weaving in medieval Assam. Women were highly skilled in these activities and used gold and silver wire (guna) for embroidery. The production of guna was carried out by a specialized group called the Gunakatia (Gohain, 1992). Women not only wove their own clothes but also dyed them using indigenous methods (Hamilton, 1940). Natural materials such as lac, indigo, achu plant, manjit, majathi, and kendu were used for preparing dyes (Robinson, 2014).

Women also engaged in doll-making, using readily available materials like mud, bamboo, wood, and cane. Bamboo craftsmanship was particularly significant due to the abundance of bamboo in Assam. It was widely used in house construction, household utensils, fishing and weaving tools, as well as masks and props for Bhaonas (Goswami, 1986). Salt extraction was limited and expensive, so common people used khar, an alkaline substitute prepared by women. Women also actively participated in making gur (molasses) from sugarcane and extracting edible oil from mustard and linseed seeds at traditional processing centres.

Warfare: The Ahom Kingdom survived for nearly 600 years due to its organized military system, disciplined manpower, and strategic use of Assam's geography. Warfare was based on the Paik system, under which every able-bodied male between 16 and 50 years was registered for state service. Four paiks formed a got, and members served the state in rotation. In emergencies, additional paiks were recruited (Baruah, 2007). The system was strictly organized under officers such as Bara, Saikia, Hazarika, and Phukan. The Ahom army consisted of infantry, navy, artillery, cavalry, elephantry, and spies.

The Ahoms specialized in guerrilla warfare (daga yuddha), using ambushes, night raids, and surprise attacks. Their knowledge of forests, hills, rivers, and swamps enabled them to defeat stronger enemies, especially the Mughals. Soldiers were trained in weapons such as the hengdang (sword), spears, bows, arrows, firearms, and cannons. They also built defensive structures like mud forts, bamboo barricades, and earthen embankments.

A powerful riverine navy was strength of the Ahoms. Their large war boats (bacharis), equipped with cannons

and capable of carrying 70–80 men, played a crucial role in battles like Saraighat. Skilled boatmen and innovative river fortifications (Pani Garh) helped them dominate the Brahmaputra. The Ahoms also manufactured firearms and gunpowder under the supervision of Kharghariya Phukan.

Although warfare was male-dominated, women contributed significantly. They supplied food, weapons, medical aid, intelligence, and morale support. Some women directly participated in battles. Notable examples include Queen Sadhani, who chose death over surrender, and Mula Gabharu, who fought bravely against Turbak's forces and became a symbol of courage. Ordinary women also joined battles, including against Mughal invasions and during the Moamariya Rebellion. Their contributions, alongside those of male warriors, strengthened the Ahom Kingdom's resistance and military success.

Fishing: Some women took fishing as an occupation. These women formed a professional class called Pohari. Fishing instruments like jokai and kuki were used to catch fish. They went to the market or door to door to sell fish. Pohari had a good knowledge of the politics of the state. They were aware of the ongoing political matters of the state. The involvement of such poharis finds a place in the chronicles. One such incident was associated with King Gadadar Singh's concealment days. Three poharis helped prince Gadapani from falling into the hands of king Siu- Lik-Pha's men (Barbaruah, 2003). King Jayadhvaj Singha was questioned about his duty as a king when he was leaving for Namrup surrendering the capital in the hands of the invader Mirjumla. The pohari met King Jayadhvaj Singha on the Dalauguri roa and uttered, "Oh king, for the last fifteen years of your reign, you were in pleasure and luxury and did not take any steps to strengthen the embankments. Now, do you want to leave us in such a situation?" Fishing was not regarded as a prestigious profession by the society of Assam.

Trade: The economy of medieval Assam was self-sufficient. Assam had no undue prosperity or distressing starvation (akalo nai; bharalo nai). Generally batar system was adopted by the people (Rajguru, 1988). However, there were Mudoi or Sauds who carried on trade through river traffic. The cottage industries fulfilled the demand for local needs. There were hats or markets for internal trade. The Ahom kings set up many hats at different places. betel leaves and betel nuts were main commodities of the organised local trade (Guha, 2011). Shihab-ud-din Talish records a daily market at Garhgaon where women sold betel leaves and betel nuts (Bhuyan, 1956). Both men and women were sellers of goods in the markets.

Traditional Ecological knowledge: During the Ahom period, women played a vital role in preserving and transmitting ecological knowledge essential for daily life. They managed seed selection and preservation, cultivated flood- and drought-resistant rice varieties, maintained kitchen gardens, and possessed extensive knowledge of herbal medicine, midwifery, and reproductive health. Women also practiced sustainable fish preservation and harvesting, regulated fuel wood use, managed water and sanitation, and recycled organic waste into manure, minimizing environmental impact. Ahom ecological knowledge was closely linked to cultural beliefs, including respect for sacred groves, water bodies, and nature spirits. Passed through oral traditions, rituals, festivals, and daily practice, this knowledge was shared by both men and women, ensuring sustainable management of natural resources and environmental resilience.

Kamata Kingdom

The Kamata Kingdom emerged in 1257 CE when Sandhya shifted his capital from Kamarupanagar to Kamatapur after successfully resisting a Muslim invasion. This marked the transition from ancient to medieval Assamese history. The kingdom was ruled successively by Sandhya, Sindhu Rai, Rup Narayan, Singhadhvaj, and later the Kayastha rulers founded by Pratapdhvaj (Acharyya, 1992). Under Durlabhnarayan, Kamata became a centre of learning, patronizing poets such as Hema Saraswati and Ram Saraswati. After the Bhuyan ruler Arimatta and the Khen dynasty, the kingdom reached its final phase under Nilambar, who was defeated by Alauddin Hussain Shah in 1498 (Baruah, 2007). Women's education during this period was mainly informal, focusing on domestic skills, moral values, religious teachings, and cultural traditions learned within families and communities.

Household Activities: In the medieval Kamata Kingdom, both men and women played important roles in maintaining family and community life. Men supported households through physical labor, economic activities, and social responsibilities. They built and repaired houses using materials such as bamboo, wood, mud, and thatch, helping ensure shelter and stability. Women managed most domestic duties and contributed significantly

to the family economy. They prepared meals, preserved food, cleaned homes, fetched water, collected firewood, and maintained household hygiene. Women also cared for children, the elderly, and the sick. Additionally, they transmitted cultural traditions, social values, and basic education to the younger generation, ensuring the continuity of family and community life.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry: Agriculture and animal husbandry were the backbone of the Kamata kingdom's economy during the Ahom period. Men played a dominant role in farming and animal care. They cleared forests, prepared and ploughed fields using oxen, sowed seeds, transplanted paddy, managed irrigation, harvested crops, stored grains, and repaired farming tools. Men also cared for cattle, collected fodder, managed breeding, protected animals, and used them for farming and transportation. They passed agricultural knowledge from one generation to another. Women actively supported agricultural activities by sowing seeds, transplanting paddy, weeding fields, and harvesting crops, especially during busy seasons. They also looked after domestic animals such as cows, goats, and poultry, which provided milk, eggs, and meat for family consumption and trade. Together, men and women contributed significantly to the kingdom's agricultural prosperity.

Handloom: Handloom weaving was a vital part of the household and rural economy in the Kamata Kingdom. Women were the main weavers, and weaving was considered an essential skill taught from childhood (Basu, 1970). They spun cotton yarn, wove cloth on bamboo and wooden looms, and produced garments such as wrappers, shawls, and everyday clothing. Women also practiced embroidery, stitching, and dyeing, adding decorative designs and preparing clothes for family use. Natural dyes from plants, bark, roots, leaves, and minerals were used to create colorful textiles. Men played an important supporting role by cultivating and processing cotton and silk, making and repairing weaving tools, collecting dye materials, and assisting in dye preparation. Together, these activities supported the economy and preserved cultural traditions.

Handicraft: During this period, men in the Kamata kingdom were mainly engaged in crafts requiring strength, technical skill, or military use, while women mostly contributed to weaving and household crafts. Men dominated metalwork, producing both ritual and practical items such as xurai (offering trays), lamps, bells, temple utensils, household vessels, and weapons like swords, spears, and daggers.

Woodworking was also largely a male occupation, supporting infrastructure and transport. Men crafted durable bamboo and cane products including agricultural tools, fish traps, baskets, and mats, which were important for domestic use and trade. Although women sometimes assisted, large-scale pottery was mainly done by men, who made storage jars, cooking pots, and ritual vessels, with women helping in finishing processes.

Warfare: The Kamata army was not a permanent professional force like later Mughal armies but mainly consisted of peasant-soldiers. These soldiers defended villages and joined royal campaigns, relying on deep knowledge of rivers, forests, and marshlands, which shaped Kamata warfare. The army included infantry, cavalry, elephant corps, naval forces, fort garrisons, royal guards, and limited firearms. Infantry weapons included spears, swords, bows and arrows, daggers, and axes. Kamata rulers such as Sandhya, Niladhwaja of the Khen dynasty, and Chakradhwaja Khen were warrior-kings trained from youth, skilled in forest, river, and elephant warfare. Their strength laid in defensive strategy and terrain-based adaptation rather than large gunpowder armies. There is no evidence of organized permanent female military units in Kamata records.

Fishing: During the Kamata kingdom, fishing was an important shared economic activity involving both men and women. Men mainly engaged in deep-water and communal fishing using dugout canoes, plank boats, large nets, iron hooks, and spears. Women were active in fishing near settlements, focusing on shallow-water catching, trapping, and gathering fish. After fishing, women played a key role in processing tasks such as cleaning, drying, smoking, fermenting, and storing fish in baskets and earthen pots. Thus, while men handled riskier fishing operations; women contributed significantly to near-shore fishing and post-harvest processing, making the activity a joint livelihood system.

Trade: In the Kamata kingdom, trade was divided by gender and scale. Men mainly handled long-distance and bulk trade, transporting goods like rice, fish, salt, timber, bamboo, elephants, horses, and weapons through river and overland routes to regions such as Bhutan and North Bengal. Women played an active role in local markets, regularly selling vegetables, grains, fish, woven cloth, bamboo and cane items, and forest produce. They also

processed goods—drying fish, making baskets, and selling surplus grain. Overall, men managed transport and external trade, while women dominated local commerce and value-added activities, creating a balanced and interdependent economy.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Men in the Kamata kingdom were mainly responsible for field-level agricultural and ecological decision-making. They selected land based on soil texture, flood history and slope, managed crop rotation between ahu and sali rice, and used flood-resilient crops and raised-field systems. They assessed soil moisture and recovery after floods, and practiced sustainable forest use without harming sacred trees. Their knowledge included timber species, wildlife behaviour, hunting seasons, river dynamics, fish migration, flood prediction, and construction of embankments and fishing traps. They also interpreted natural signs such as wind, clouds, birds and insects for farming and survival.

Women were custodians of household and micro-ecological knowledge. They selected and stored seeds, preserved crop diversity, maintained homestead gardens, and used natural pest control and composting. They managed medicinal plants and herbal treatments, ensured water management and sanitation, and supported eco-rituals linked to agriculture and conservation, embedding ecological ethics in daily life.

Koch Kingdom

The Koch dynasty was founded by Biswa Singha, son of Haria Mandal, who united the Koch and Mech tribes and established the Koch Kingdom in 1527 with its capital at Kamatapur (Borpujari, 2003). A capable ruler, Biswa Singha expanded his territory, promoted Hinduism, rebuilt the Kamakhya Temple, and strengthened administration. His successors, especially Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai, greatly expanded the kingdom through successful campaigns against the Ahoms, Kacharis, Tripura, Jaintia, and other neighboring states (Nath, 1989). Chilarai emerged as a renowned military leader, while Naranarayan encouraged religion, public welfare, and diplomatic relations with both the Ahoms and the Mughals.

The Koch rulers also developed infrastructure by constructing roads, tanks, temples, and forts. Informal education flourished through namghars, bhaonas, folk literature, music, and religious institutions. Women played significant roles in weaving, agriculture, household management, and preserving cultural traditions. Although formal education for women was limited, they acquired practical, moral, and religious knowledge through family and community life. Some women, such as Padmapriya and Bhubaneswari during the Vaishnavite period, achieved education at home through their own initiatives (Debnath, 2023). After Naranarayan's death in 1587, the kingdom split into Koch Behar and Koch Hajo, leading to political decline. Internal conflicts, Mughal intervention, and continuous warfare eventually ended Koch independence.

Household Activities: In the medieval Koch kingdom, household life was sustained through the cooperative efforts of men and women. Men handled agriculture, construction, trade and public responsibilities and women managed food production, childcare and household organization. Women carried out most domestic food related work including husking rice using the dheki, grinding grains and spices, cooking daily meals, preserving food such as dried fish and vegetables. Women were mainly responsible for raising and caring for children, teaching customs, traditions and moral values, looking after elderly family members. Women managed the internal economy of the household to storing food grains, distributing daily rations, managing household resources, organizing festivals and family rituals. Women actively participated in daily household worship, observing religious fasts and vows, performing rituals related to fertility and harvest.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry: The Koch kingdom of 15th-century Assam and North Bengal was primarily an agrarian society, with agriculture and animal husbandry forming its economic foundation. Men performed the heavier agricultural tasks such as clearing forests, ploughing fields with oxen, preparing paddy fields, sowing seeds, transplanting rice seedlings, harvesting crops, constructing granaries, and managing irrigation systems through canals and embankments.

Women played an essential supporting role in agriculture. They assisted in sowing, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting. Their post-harvest responsibilities included husking rice, drying and storing grains, and preserving seeds for future cultivation. These activities ensured food security and agricultural continuity.

Women were also actively involved in horticulture around homesteads and village gardens. They cultivated fruits, vegetables, spices, condiments, and flowers for household use, trade, religious offerings, and medicinal purposes. Their knowledge of crops contributed significantly to family sustenance and local economic life.

In animal husbandry, men managed cattle, buffaloes, oxen, grazing, and livestock protection, while women cared for poultry, goats, pigs, and dairy production. They fed animals, cleaned sheds, treated illnesses with herbal remedies, and participated in barter trade involving milk, ghee, eggs, and poultry products.

Handloom: In the medieval Koch kingdom of Assam, handloom weaving was an important household and economic activity. The Koch people used locally available materials such as cotton, mulberry silk, and natural dyes made from plants, leaves, bark, and roots. Their handloom industry produced cotton garments for everyday use, silk cloth for royalty and nobility, and textiles for rituals and ceremonies. Men mainly constructed and repaired looms and weaving tools, while women carried out spinning, weaving, and dyeing.

Women played the most significant role in handloom production. They spun cotton and silk yarn, prepared fibres, dyed yarn with natural colours, and wove garments for family use, including daily wear, ceremonial dresses, and ritual cloths. Weaving was a vital skill taught to girls from childhood and was considered a symbol of virtue and dignity. Women of both the Koch and Chutia dynasties produced cloth for households, religious ceremonies, royal gifts, and marriage customs, including mekhela-chadors and gamosas.

Handicraft: During the medieval period, the Koch kingdom of Assam had a vibrant handicraft tradition closely linked to household life, agriculture, and local resources. Handicraft production was mainly family-based, with men and women contributing according to their skills and customary roles. Men generally undertook heavy and tool-based work such as bamboo and cane crafts, pottery, metalwork, woodcraft, boat making, fishing tools, and agricultural implements. They produced baskets, storage containers, tools, weapons, furniture, and household structures essential for daily life and farming. Women specialized in domestic and decorative crafts, including spinning cotton and silk, weaving cloth, making mats, trays, ornaments, and decorating bamboo and earthen items. Many activities, such as basket making, rope making, fishing net preparation and storage item production involved cooperation between men and women, strengthening family self-sufficiency and supporting economic and cultural life.

Fishing: In the Koch kingdom of Assam, fishing was a shared economic and cultural activity shaped by the region's river-rich environment. Men mainly engaged in large-scale fishing in rivers using nets, boats, and fish traps, while specialized communities such as Kaivartas and Mallahs often supplied fish to royal households. Women actively participated in fishing in ponds, wetlands, and village tanks using hand nets, bamboo traps, baskets, and scoops. They also played a key role in cleaning, drying, smoking, fermenting, and storing fish. Thus, men focused on river-based fishing, while women contributed significantly to local fishing and fish preservation.

Trade: The Koch kingdom, established by Biswa Singha and expanded under Naranarayan, occupied a strategic location linking the Brahmaputra Valley, the Duars, Bhutan hills, and Bengal trade routes. Its economy operated through household and village trade, regional markets, and long-distance commerce. Major trade goods included rice, pulses, mustard oil, timber, bamboo, lac, honey, textiles, fish, metal goods, and salt. Weekly haats were important centers of exchange. Men dominated riverine, caravan, and bulk trade, acting as merchants and intermediaries, while women played a vital role in local markets by selling household produce, fish, textiles, and homemade goods. Barter trade remained common, especially in rural areas.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge: The people of Koch kingdom had knowledge about soil types, crop cycles, forest fallows and watershed rhythms that guided where and when cultivation was feasible. The Koch men gave protection to the forests. Forest provided food, fuel, fodder, fiber (bamboo, cane, wild vegetables) and medicinal plants. Women were primarily responsible for saving seeds of preferred crop varieties across seasons. Women gathered edible greens, tubers, fruits and herbs with detailed knowledge of plant properties. Women harvested and processed bamboo and other plant fibers for baskets, mats and household goods. In everyday routine, women often managed water security, food storage and seasonal food preparation which required deep understanding of climatic patterns and ecological cycles.

Chutia Kingdom:

The Chutiyas, a Mongoloid people with a language akin to Bodo, ruled a kingdom extending from the Sisi River in the west to Brahmakunda in the east. Their capital was Sadiya (Swadhayapuri). Historical evidence suggests their kingdom stretched beyond the Suvansiri River. Archaeological remains in present-day Arunachal Pradesh and Malinithan are linked to them. Though their origins remain uncertain, some chronicles trace their history back to the 7th century CE. Their founder, Birpal (Gayapal), claimed descent from Bhismak, father of Rukmini. Birpal's successor, Gaurinarayan (Ratnadhvajpal), expanded and strengthened the kingdom through military conquests, diplomacy, fort construction, and cultural patronage. He established Ratnapur and later developed Sadiya as the permanent capital. The Chutiyas maintained relations with Kamata and Gauda, promoting cultural and educational exchanges. Relations with the Ahoms began in the 14th century. After periods of conflict and peace, the powerful Ahom king Suhungmung conquered the Chutiya kingdom in 1523 CE during the weak rule of Nitipal. Internal disorder, political instability, and the alienation of nobles contributed to their downfall. Despite defeat, Chutiya administrative, military, and architectural skills greatly enriched the Ahom kingdom (Baruah, 2007).

Women in the Chutiya kingdom received informal education through family and community traditions. They learned household management, weaving, rituals, folklore, morality, and spirituality. Elite women sometimes studied literature, music, and religion. Queen Sati Sadhani became a symbol of courage, patriotism, and honor. Chutiya women played vital roles in preserving culture through festivals, rituals, and oral traditions. Agricultural ceremonies like Na Bhui and religious observances such as Ai Hokam and Deo-Kuber Holita Loguwa involved active female participation. They also contributed significantly to Bihu celebrations and the transmission of community values.

Household Activities: In the Chutia kingdom, men and women had complementary and interdependent roles. Men made and repaired agricultural tools, weapons, and household items, while also focusing on agriculture, defence, and external affairs. Women managed household life, including cooking, cleaning, washing, fetching water and firewood, caring for children and the elderly, and processing and storing food grains. They also prepared fermented foods, dried fish and vegetables, brewed traditional rice beer, and engaged in textile production and ritual practices. Together, their contributions sustained the economic, social, and cultural foundations of Chutia society.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry: In the Chutia Kingdom (12th–16th century CE), agriculture and animal husbandry formed the economic foundation, with men and women sharing responsibilities through a complementary division of labour. Men cleared forests, prepared fields, ploughed wet-rice lands, managed irrigation, maintained granaries, decided crop patterns, and handled large livestock such as cattle and buffaloes. They also participated in harvesting, storage, breeding, and exchange of animals.

Women played a crucial role in sowing, transplanting rice seedlings, weeding, pest control, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, husking, and seed preservation. The ritual of Na Bhui marked rice planting, and women transplanting seedlings were known as Tuloni. Women also reared poultry, pigs, and goats, managed livestock care, processed milk and meat products, gathered fodder, and supervised household-level production, contributing significantly to food security and the agrarian economy.

Handloom: Handloom weaving was a vital household industry and economic activity of the Chutia society in medieval Assam. It reflected a self-sufficient agrarian economy and the significant role of women. Cotton, silk, and muga silk were used to produce textiles, with natural dyes prepared from plants, bark, roots, and minerals. Men cultivated cotton, collected silk cocoons, made and repaired looms, and assisted in dye preparation, while women spun yarn, prepared threads, and carried out weaving. Almost every household had a loom, and women produced daily wear, ritual cloths, and ceremonial textiles. Handloom products were important in trade, tribute, marriage rituals, religious ceremonies, and royal exchanges, shaping the cultural identity of the Chutia people.

Weaving was an essential skill for Chutia women and a symbol of cultural heritage. Women wove garments such as Mekhela, Riha, Chador, shawls, Gamusa, waist cloths, and head wraps. They also spun and wove silk, especially valuable muga silk used for royal garments, religious offerings, and gifts. Women created traditional

motifs inspired by nature and beliefs, passing this knowledge through generations. They further produced embroidered and ritual textiles, reinforcing their role as custodians of tradition and ritual practices.

Handicraft: The Chutia community was largely agrarian. Men made farming tools such as ploughs, hoes, spades and sickles. Blacksmiths shaped iron parts, villagers made wooden components. As a martial society, Chutia men crafted weapons for defence and hunting, including bows and arrows, spears, lances, swords and daggers. Basic forge tools like hammers, anvils and bellows were used. They were skilled in bamboo and cane work, producing jaapis, baskets, storage containers, fish traps, mats and house components. The decorated jaapi later became an Assamese cultural symbol.

Men made simple iron tools and assisted in ornament-making such as junbiri and gam kharu using anvils and tongs. Women excelled in weaving silk and textiles for daily and ritual use.

Warfare: Queen Sati Sadhani led the Chutia resistance against the Ahom invasion in 1524 after the weakened rule of king Nitipal. At Sadiya, she organized 120 women warriors who fought alongside Chutia soldiers. The forces retreated to Chandragiri hills and waged guerrilla warfare, including rolling boulders on the enemy. The Ahoms used deception through a Bihu drum signal and guidance from a captured soldier and traitorous commander, eventually locating and killing Nitipal. Sati Sadhani chose martyrdom by leaping from Chandragiri hills..

Fishing: Fishing was a key subsistence and economic activity in the Chutia kingdom, supported by abundant rivers, floodplains, beels, and seasonal floods. It was closely linked to agricultural cycles. Men mainly engaged in large-scale and communal river fishing using cast nets, drag nets, and bamboo traps in strong currents. Women played an equally important role in household and wetland fishing, collecting fish, prawns, and snails from shallow waters, ponds, and paddy fields using bamboo and basket traps. They also processed fish by cleaning, drying, and fermenting, ensuring daily nutrition and household food security.

Trade: The Chutia kingdom in Upper Assam (Subansiri, Dihing and Brahmaputra valleys) had a well-developed barter-based trade system closely tied to agriculture, crafts, forests and river routes. Men mainly handled long-distance and external trade using river networks, exchanging rice, surplus grains, iron tools, weapons, cotton cloth, salt and animal products. River ports and trading posts supported this system, and male artisans produced metal implements highly valued in exchange networks.

Women played a major role in local and household economy, especially in weekly haats and fairs. They produced and sold woven cotton and silk textiles, yarn, vegetables, fish, and fermented foods, along with bamboo, cane products, herbs and medicinal plants. They were also skilled in pottery, basketry and brewing rice beer. Women controlled much of textile production and exchange, bartering cloth for salt, iron and forest goods.

Sadiya linked Assam plains with Arunachal tribes like Mishmi and Adi, where women exchanged textiles, salt and metal goods for hill products like yak hair, ivory and medicinal plants; sustaining regional trade networks.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge: In the Chutia kingdom, Traditional Ecological Knowledge underpinned agriculture, fishing, hunting, trade and social life. Men engaged mainly with large-scale and mobile ecological systems in the riverine, wetland and forested landscape. They knew flood-resistant rice varieties, shifting and wet rice cultivation, and built embankments and drainage channels. They understood soil fertility, crop rotation, river currents, seasonal water levels and fish migration, designing bamboo traps, weirs and boats. Men also practiced regulated hunting, selective timber use, sacred grove protection, iron extraction, tool making and forest warfare adapted to local ecology.

Women maintained knowledge of seeds, crops, fish, wild foods and medicinal plants, supporting biodiversity, food security and health through preservation and storage. Both genders shared seasonal ecological knowledge and oral traditions, forming a sustainable system.

Kachari Kingdom

The Kacharis, early Mongoloid inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley, had a powerful kingdom from Dikhou to Kapili. They interacted with the Ahoms from Sukapha's time; initial avoidance gave way to conflicts, with

Suhungmung defeating them in 1526 and making them feudatories after capturing Dimapur. Later they shifted capital to Maibang. The Kochs briefly ruled South Cachar, but Kachari sovereignty revived under Meghanarayan. They also fought the Jaintias and resisted Ahom control, though eventually Mughal and later Ahom pressure led to subordination under Rudra Singha (Bhuyan, 2025).

Kachari culture showed strong architectural and administrative development, especially at Dimapur and Maibang, later influenced by Hinduism and Assamese traditions. Education was largely informal through oral tradition, folklore and religious practices. Women learned domestic skills, agriculture and cultural lore, while royal women sometimes influenced court politics and religion.

Household Activities: The Kacharis of medieval Assam followed a cooperative household system where both men and women contributed to family and economic life. Men mainly handled heavy outdoor work such as clearing forests, preparing land for cultivation, building houses and tools, hunting, fishing, and participating in village councils. Women managed domestic and key economic activities like cooking, brewing rice beer, caring for children and the elderly, preparing ritual items, and engaging in weaving and agriculture. The division of labour was flexible rather than rigid. This cooperation created relatively egalitarian households and strengthened both family life and the Kachari economy.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry: Agriculture was the main economic base of the Kachari kingdom. Both men and women actively participated in farming and animal rearing through a cooperative division of labour. The Kacharis practiced shifting cultivation as well as settled wet-rice cultivation. They were accustomed to irrigation system (Guha, 2004). Men cleared forests, ploughed fields, maintained irrigation channels, protected crops, and handled harvesting and transport. Women sowed seeds, transplanted seedlings, weeded, harvested crops, and carried out threshing and grain storage in bamboo granaries. They also managed homestead farming, including pest control and seed preservation.

Animal husbandry was an important supplementary activity. Men reared cattle, buffaloes, and pigs for ploughing, transport, and protection, while women cared for livestock and poultry, milked animals, and processed animal products. This family-based system ensured economic stability and gave women a respected role in Kachari society.

Handloom: The Kacharis of medieval Assam had a well-developed handloom weaving tradition central to their economy, culture, and identity. Women were the primary weavers, skilled in spinning cotton, dyeing yarn with natural materials, and using simple looms like backstrap and throw-shuttle looms. Men supported by cultivating cotton, collecting dyes, and making or repairing tools and looms. Textiles were used for daily wear, rituals, marriage, and festivals, often featuring geometric and nature-inspired motifs. Weaving also held social significance, especially in marriage customs and gift exchanges, reinforcing gender roles and community identity.

Handicraft: The Kacharis were among the early inhabitants of Assam, with a rich tradition of handicrafts closely linked to daily life, identity, and social roles. Men specialized in utilitarian crafts using bamboo, cane, wood, and metal, producing baskets, mats, fishing traps, agricultural tools, weapons, and boats. Women focused mainly on weaving using cotton and silk on traditional looms, creating garments like dakhona, jwmgra/riha, and aronai with nature-inspired designs. They also made ornaments from beads, metals, and seeds, and practiced pottery for household and ritual use. These non-commercial crafts were skillfully passed down orally, reflecting cultural heritage and social structure.

Fishing: The Kacharis relied heavily on fishing as part of their subsistence alongside agriculture and hunting. Fishing was largely communal, involving entire villages and often coordinated across stretches of rivers and streams. Women frequently played leading roles, especially in group fishing using tools like the “Zakhai,” while men commonly used devices like the circular “Palha.” Fishing was done in shallow waters using indigenous bamboo gear rather than nets. These activities were social, cooperative events that strengthened community bonds and reflected shared cultural and economic life.

Trade: The Kacharis had a largely agrarian economy, supported by active local and regional trade. Trade was mainly barter-based, with limited use of cowries, and was closely linked to agriculture, forest produce, and handicrafts. Men handled long-distance trade via river routes and hill passes, exchanging surplus crops like rice,

pulses, mustard, and livestock, and collecting forest goods such as bamboo, cane, lac, honey, wax, and medicinal herbs. Women played a vital role in local markets, producing and selling textiles, pottery, baskets, and household goods, as well as items like rice beer and preserved food. They also participated directly as traders. This gendered division of labour created a balanced economic system and highlighted the significant social and economic status of Kachari women.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge: The Kacharis of medieval Assam relied on Traditional Knowledge for survival, governance, economy and spirituality. Living across plains, hills, wetlands and riverine zones, they practiced jhum cultivation in hills and wet rice farming in plains, guided by soil fertility, flood history and drainage. They developed local tools, managed irrigation using river and rainfall patterns, and preserved diverse rice varieties suited to floods, droughts and short seasons. Women played key roles in seed selection, food processing, medicinal knowledge and use of forest products, while men specialized in timber, hunting, and crop protection. Communities read natural signs to predict floods and built elevated settlements and granaries. Healing combined herbal medicine and spiritual practices. Knowledge was orally transmitted through families and elders, creating a resilient and sustainable ecological system.

Jayantia Kingdom

The Jayantiyas (Syntengs), a tribe of the Jaintia Hills and adjoining plains, had a kingdom extending into the plains north of the Barak River. Their rulers in the 16th–17th centuries show Hindu influence, and their society had a semi-feudal character. They maintained close but often strained relations with the Ahom kingdom through alliances, trade markets, and conflicts over tribute and political authority. Eventually, Ahoms imposed suzerainty, leading to tribute, confinement of a king, and later rebellion during Moamaria uprisings (Baruah, 2007).

Jayantia society was matrilineal (Pnar), with inheritance through the youngest daughter (Ka Khadduh). Women held key roles in household and cultural transmission, while knowledge was passed orally due to lack of script. Marriage practices allowed maternal control over children, reinforcing female-centered social and educational structures.

Household Activities: Jaintia household life was based on cooperation between men and women with complementary roles. Men built and repaired houses, collected resources, hunted, fished, engaged in trade and village councils, performed rituals, defended the community, and undertook heavy agricultural tasks like clearing forests and shifting cultivation.

Women played a central role in domestic and economic life. They managed daily household affairs, food preparation, storage of grain and wealth, childcare, and preservation of food items. They collected water and firewood, maintained the home, and transmitted customs and knowledge through oral traditions, ensuring household stability.

Matrilineal inheritance defined Jaintia society, with the youngest daughter (Ka Khadduh) inheriting ancestral property and becoming custodian of family wealth. Elders trained daughters in household management and moral values. Women also preserved rituals and myths, preparing offerings and maintaining religious traditions such as Behdienkhlam.

Agriculture and Animal Husbandry: Agriculture formed the backbone of the Jayantia economy, combining shifting cultivation (jhum) with wet rice farming (Bordoloi, 1991). Over time, especially under medieval rulers, there was a gradual shift toward settled agriculture. The main crops included rice, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, sugarcane, cotton, areca nut and betel leaf. Farming used simple indigenous tools such as wooden ploughs, hoes, sickles and digging sticks, with men handling land clearing, ploughing, irrigation and animal care.

Women played a crucial and equal role, managing transplanting, weeding, harvesting, grain processing and kitchen gardens, along with post-harvest storage and domestic livestock care. Animal husbandry including cattle, buffalo, goats, pigs, and poultry also played a key role in sustaining farming and domestic life. Agricultural tasks such as ploughing and grazing were primarily undertaken by men, whereas women were responsible for household-level animal rearing and the processing of animal products. Together, agriculture and livestock formed a balanced, cooperative agrarian system with strong ecological knowledge, sustaining Jayantia society economically, socially and culturally.

Handloom: Handloom weaving among the Jayantias was an ancient household-based craft, practiced with simple bamboo and wood looms and entirely manual techniques. Women were the principal weavers, spinning yarn, weaving cloth, and preparing warp and weft, while men supported by cultivating cotton, rearing eri silk, collecting dye materials, constructing looms, and engaging in trade. The textiles, made mainly of cotton and eri silk, were used as garments and shawls with simple striped and geometric patterns reflecting identity, status and occasion. This tradition formed a key part of Jayantia cultural and economic life.

Women also practiced embroidery and dyeing, using natural plant-based dyes and silk threads to create geometric and floral motifs on garments like Ryndia Khyrwang, Ryndia Saru and Ryndia Stem, preserving cultural identity and artistic heritage.

Handicraft: Jayantia men were skilled in bamboo and cane work, making baskets, fishing traps like jakoi and polo, and containers for farming and fishing. They practiced woodcraft, building houses, granaries and village structures, and making ploughs, tools and ritual objects. Pottery making was also done for cooking, storage and ceremonies. They worked in metalcraft, producing weapons such as swords, spears, arrows and shields along with tools and ornaments. They also used stone and beads for tools, decorations and religious symbols, supporting domestic needs, agriculture, warfare and cultural practices.

Jayantia women excelled in weaving, spinning and embroidery, producing garments like jainsem and shawls. They also made bamboo items, mats, baskets, pottery, ornaments and ritual objects, and preserved food traditions like fermented delicacies. Their crafts supported household, cultural and economic life.

Fishing: In indigenous Jayantia societies, fishing roles were often gendered. Men primarily engaged in active and labor-intensive fishing in rivers, deep streams, and large beels, using nets, spears, hooks, bamboo traps, and canoes. They organized group expeditions, managed seasonal fishing, and made or repaired tools, emphasizing strength and coordination. Women mainly fished in shallow waters, paddy fields, and seasonal pools, collecting small fish, prawns, and crabs using baskets and simple traps. They also played a key role in processing fish—cleaning, drying, smoking, preserving, and sometimes trading surplus—supporting household food security and local exchange systems.

Trade: Jayantia trade was mainly local and regional, based on barter with occasional cowries and metal coins. Linked to agriculture, forests and handicrafts; weekly and seasonal markets connected hills with Assam and Bengal plains. Men transported goods via hills, rivers and forest routes as caravan traders and intermediaries, carrying limestone, iron, timber, bamboo, honey and herbs. They also acted as tax collectors and protected trade routes, strengthening the kingdom's economy.

Women controlled household resources and participated in barter, maintaining markets and social networks with financial independence. They traded agricultural, forest and mineral goods for salt, cloth, metalware and ornaments. Weekly fairs and seasonal fairs like Jonbeel Mela enabled exchange between hills and plains. In the matrilineal system, women traders along the Jayantia–Cachar–Sylhet route acted as intermediaries, enhancing household status and mobility.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Among the Jaintia people, Traditional Ecological Knowledge guided sustainable survival in hills, forests and rivers. Agriculture followed monsoon cycles, crop rotation and jhum cultivation. Men cleared fields while women handled seeds and storage. Forests provided food, timber and medicines, protected by sacred groves. Fishing and hunting were seasonal and regulated to preserve biodiversity.

Jaintia women possessed extensive herbal knowledge, identifying medicinal plants such as turmeric, ginger and gooseberry from forests and fields. These knowledge were transmitted orally through generations. They prepared remedies for menstrual issues, pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum recovery, combining herbs with cultural and spiritual practices for community healthcare.

Folk tales, oral histories and festivals preserved social values and environmental ethics. Women played a key role in storytelling and rituals, reinforcing the Niamtre belief system and community cohesion through events like Behdeinkhlam and offerings to ancestral spirits.

INFORMAL AND SKILL-BASED EDUCATION IN UPGRADING SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN

Informal and Skill-based education played a vital role in upgrading the socio-economic status of women in the society during the Ahom period. Though formal institutional education was limited, practical skills such as weaving, spinning, handicrafts, agriculture and household management enabled women to contribute significantly to the family economy and participate in local trade activities. As a result, women gained economic value, social recognition and relatively respected position in society. Thus, informal and skill-based learning not only strengthened the Ahom economy but also enhanced the status and self-reliance of women during that period.

Role of Household Activities

During the Ahom period in Assam (13th-19th century), women played a significant role in household management, which greatly contributed to their socio-economic status in society. Though the society was patriarchal, women enjoyed considerable respect and economic importance due to their active participation in domestic and productive activities.

Economic Contribution through Weaving: Weaving was an essential household activity. Almost even Ahom woman was skilled in weaving and textiles like mekhela-chador were produced at home. These textiles were not only used by the family but also contributed to trade and tribute system. This economic role enhanced women's importance within the family and society.

Participation in Agriculture: Women assisted men in agricultural activities such as sowing, harvesting and processing grains. Since agriculture was the backbone of the Ahom economy, their contribution strengthened the family's financial stability.

Management of Household Resources: Women managed food storage, livestock and daily household expenses efficiently. Their role ensured economic sustainability and proper utilization of resources, which directly influenced the prosperity of the household.

Role of Cottage Industries: Besides weaving, women were involved in activities like spinning, pottery and handicrafts. These cottage industries added to family income and improved their socio-economic position.

Social and Cultural Influence: Women preserved cultural traditions through rituals, festivals and food practices. Some women from royal families, such as queens and noblewomen, even influenced administrative and political decisions, which further elevated women's status.

Respect and Dignity in Society: Due to their productive role in the household economy, women in the Ahom period enjoyed relatively higher status compared to many other contemporary societies in India.

Thus, household management during the Ahom period was not limited to domestic chores but was closely linked with economic production and social stability. Through weaving, agriculture, resource management and cottage industries, women significantly contributed to the economy, which upgraded their socio-economic status in society.

Role of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry:

In Ahom period, agriculture was the backbone of the economy and animal husbandry was closely linked with rural life. Women played a vital role in both sectors, which significantly contributed to improving their socio-economic status.

Active participation in Agriculture: Women in Ahom period were deeply involved in agricultural activities such as sowing, transplanting paddy, weeding, harvesting and storing crops. Wet rice cultivation was the main occupation and women's labor was essential for successful production. Their active participation made them important contributors to the family economy.

Contribution to family income: Agricultural surplus was often sold or exchanged in local markets. Women's involvement in farming increased household income and ensured food security. This economic contribution strengthened their position within the family.

Role in Kitchen Gardening: Women maintained Kitchen gardens where they grew vegetables, fruits and medicinal plants. These gardens supplemented family nutrition and sometimes general additional income, enhancing women's economic importance.

Animal Husbandry Activities: Women took primary responsibility for rearing cattle, goats, poultry and pigs. They were involved in feeding animals, milking cows, processing milk products and caring for livestock. Animal products such as milk, eggs and meat were either consumed or sold, adding to family earnings.

Dairy and Poultry as Income Sources: Dairy farming and poultry rearing were reliable sources of regular income. Women's management of these activities provided financial support especially during agricultural off-seasons.

Social Recognition and Decision-Making: Since agriculture and livestock were central to the economy of Ahom period, women's active participation earned them respect in society. Their economic contribution gave them a stronger voice in household decision-making.

Support in Times of Crisis: During floods, conflicts or crop failures, livestock and agricultural skills helped families survive. Women's role in managing these resources increased their importance and security.

Agriculture and Animal husbandry played a crucial role in upgrading the socio-economic status of women in Ahom period. Through their active involvement in farming and livestock rearing, women became key contributors to the rural economy. Though they still faced social limitations, their economic role brought them respect, stability and greater influence within the household and society.

Role of Handloom:

The handloom industry occupied a significant place in the socio-economic life of Assam during the Ahom period (1228-1826). Weaving was traditionally associated with women and almost every household possessed a loom. The practice of handloom weaving played a vital role in enhancing the socio-economic condition of women. During the Ahom period, weaving was one of the most important skills that contributed to the economic empowerment of women, especially in Assam. Though formal education was limited for women, weaving was learned informally within the family and became a major source of livelihood and social recognition.

Household Industry Managed by women: Weaving was considered an essential skill for women. From an early age, girls were trained in spinning and weaving. This made women economically productive members of the family. Weaving was a domestic industry practiced in almost every household. Women were trained from an early age in spinning and weaving, making it an essential part of their upbringing. This skill ensured continuous production of cloth for family use and for exchange.

A source of Economic Independence: Women produced cloth such as mekhela-chador, riha, gamosa, silk fabrics like muga and eri and other traditional garments. Surplus production was sold in local markets, enabling women to earn income and contribute financially to their households. In times of war, famine or when men were absent, women's weaving skills helped sustain households. This economic contribution made them indispensable to family survival.

Contribution to State Economy: The Ahom kings encouraged weaving. Royal households required fine silk fabrics like paat, muga and eri silk. Women weavers supplied textiles for royal use and religious institutions, linking them with the larger economic structure of the kingdom.

Participation in Trade and Markets: Hand woven products were sold in local haats (markets). This gave women exposure to trade activities and increased their participation in the public sphere. Textiles were major trade commodities during the medieval period. Women indirectly participated in regional and international trade

through their weaving work. In some cases, women sold goods directly in local markets, increasing their economic independence.

Social recognition and Status: In Ahom society, weaving was not merely domestic work but a respected skill. A women's ability to weave fine cloth enhanced her social value and marriage prospects. Skilled weavers enjoyed prestige within the community.

Self-Reliance and Family Welfare: Handloom ensured self-sufficiency in clothing and reduced dependence on external markets. Women's productive role strengthened food security and household stability. The sale of these products in local markets gave women a steady source of income. In many regions, women contributed significantly to family earnings through textile production.

Cultural Preservation: Through weaving, women preserved Assamese cultural identity by maintaining traditional designs and motifs. This cultural contribution added to their importance in society.

Promotion of Cottage Industry: Weaving developed into a strong cottage industry during the Ahom period. Royal patronage encouraged the production of fine silk textiles. This created demand for women's labor and enhanced their economic importance in society.

Skill-Based Empowerment: Weaving required technical skill and craftsmanship. Skilled women weavers gained respect in society, especially in regions known for fine textiles. Their expertise increased their bargaining power and social standing.

During the Ahom period, the handloom industry significantly upgraded the socio-economic status of women. By making them economically active, socially respected and culturally important, weaving empowered women and gave them a vital role in both family and state economy. Weaving played a vital role in upgrading the economic status of women during the medieval period. It transformed them from being only household managers to income earners and contributors to trade and industry. Though complete economic equality was not achieved, weaving provided women with financial support, social respect and a degree of independence.

Role of Handicrafts:

Handicrafts and cottage Industries: Women were involved in pottery, bamboo work, embroidery and other cottage industries. These skills enhanced self-reliance and created opportunities for small-scale trade and exchange in local markets. In Ahom period, handicrafts formed an important part of the rural economy. Women were actively engaged in various handicrafts activities such as weaving, pottery, bamboo work, cane craft, embroidery and preparation of household items. These activities played a significant role in improving their socio-economic status.

Sources of Income: Handicraft provided women with an independent source of income. Products like handwoven textiles (mekhela-sador), silk fabrics (especially muga and eri silk), bamboo items and decorative goods were sold in local markets. This helped women contribute financially to their families.

Promotion of Weaving Tradition: Weaving was the most important handicraft in Ahom period and it was traditionally practiced by women. Almost every household had a loom. The production of silk and cotton textiles increased women's economic value and social respect.

Support to Cottage Industries: Handicrafts were part of the cottage industry system. Women's involvement in spinning, dyeing, embroidery and preparing finished goods strengthened the rural economy and made them economically productive members of society.

Participation in Trade: Textiles and other handicraft items of Assam were in demand both within and outside the region. Women indirectly contributed to trade through their craftsmanship. In some cases, they participated in local markets, enhancing their financial independence.

Skill Development and Social Recognition: Handicrafts required creativity and technical skills. Skilled women

artisans earned appreciation and respect in society. This transmission of crafts skills from mother to daughter also strengthened women's cultural role.

Economic Security during Crisis: Handicrafts served as an alternative source of income during agricultural off-seasons or natural calamities like floods. This ensured economic stability and increased women's importance in family survival.

Strengthening of Household Economy: The production of household necessities such as clothes, mats, baskets, utensils etc. by women served as a means of cutting down overall family expenses. This economic contribution enhanced their decision-making role within the household.

Handicrafts played a vital role in upgrading the socio-economic status of women in Ahom period. Through their skills in weaving, silk production, bamboo and cane crafts, women became economically active and socially respected members of society. Although they faced certain social limitations, handicraft activities significantly strengthened their economic independence and social position.

Role of Fishing:

Fishing played a significant role in improving the socio-economic condition of women in Ahom period. Due to the region's vast network of rivers like the Brahmaputra and Barak, wetlands (beels) and ponds, fishing became an important occupation and women actively participated in this sector.

Economic Contribution: Women were directly involved in catching fish in small rivers, ponds and floodplains. They also assisted men in net making, repairing fishing gear, drying fish and processing fish products. This enabled women to contribute to the family income, thereby strengthening their economic position within the household.

Fish Processing and Marketing: Women played a major role in cleaning, drying, fermenting and preserving fish. Dried fish and fermented fish products were important trade items. Many women sold fish in local markets (haats), which gave them financial independence and control over small-scale trade.

Participation in Local Trade: In Ahom period, weekly markets were common, women vendors sold fresh and dried fish, which enhanced their interaction in public spaces and increased their social visibility. This participation improved their confidence and decision-making power.

Support to Agrarian Economy: Fishing was often combined with agriculture. During floods or agricultural off-seasons, fishing provided an alternative source of livelihood. Women's involvement ensured food security and nutritional support for families.

Social Status and Empowerment: Economic contribution through fishing enhanced women's status within the family and community. In many tribal and rural societies of Assam, women's participation in fishing activities reflected a relatively better position compared to women in some other medieval Indian societies.

Role in Community and Cultural Life: Fishing activities were linked with festivals, community cooperation and traditional practices. Women's participation strengthened social bonds and collective economic life.

In Ahom period, fishing was not merely a subsistence activity but an important economic occupation that enabled women to contribute actively to household income, trade and food security. Their involvement in fishing and related activities improved their socio-economic status and gave them a more visible and participatory role in society.

Role of Trade:

The Ahom period (13th-19th century) in Assam witnessed significant economic activities, especially in agriculture, handicrafts and trade. Trade played an important role in improving the socio-economic condition of women in society.

Participation in Weaving and Textile Trade: Women were highly skilled in weaving, which was a household industry. Almost every Ahom woman was trained in weaving from a young age. They produced cotton and silk fabrics such as Muga, Eri and Pat. These textiles were traded within and outside Assam. Weaving gave women economic importance in the family. The production of valuable silk increased their contribution to household income.

Involvement in Local Markets (Haats): Women actively participated in local markets where they sold agricultural products, handloom items and household goods. This gave them financial independence. It enhanced their public role and social visibility.

Contribution to the Paik System Economy: Although the Paik system was primarily male-oriented, women supported the economy through domestic industries like spinning, weaving, pottery and food processing. Their indirect contribution strengthened the trade system of the Ahom state.

Trade Relations with neighboring regions: The Ahom kingdom maintained trade relations with Bengal, Bhutan and other neighboring regions. Women's products, especially silk and handicrafts were in demand. This increased the value of women's labor. It improved their economic status within the household and society.

Social Recognition and Status: Economic participation led to greater respect for women in society. Unlike many other contemporary societies, Ahom women enjoyed relatively better social freedom. Royal women also sometimes played roles in political and economic matters.

Trade during the Ahom period significantly contributed to enhancing the socio-economic status of women. Through weaving, market participation and involvement in cottage industries, women gained economic importance, social recognition and a degree of independence, which improved their overall position in society.

CONCLUSION

This research establishes that in medieval Assam, informal and skill-based educational models bypassed institutional absence to serve as primary mechanisms for women's socio-economic mobilization. By replacing structured curricula with multi-generational apprenticeship and experiential learning, the Ahom and neighboring polities successfully optimized their rural economies. Women converted localized expertise into significant structural leverage. They maintained technical monopolies within high-value textile industries like sericulture, executed crucial agricultural and animal husbandry management, and directed decentralized commerce across local haats.

Furthermore, this functional mastery over Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and cottage industries granted women relative financial independence, high social visibility, and household decision-making power. In times of geopolitical or environmental crisis, this practical fluency seamlessly translated into tactical military resistance and matrilineal wealth preservation. Ultimately, the study shifts the historical paradigm, proving that the holistic sustainability and socio-political resilience of medieval Assamese society were fundamentally contingent upon the practical, informal empowerment of its women.

Ethical Approval:

The research titled "Role of Informal and Skill-based Education in Upgrading Socio-economic Status of Women in Assam during the Ahom Period" did not involve experiments on human participants or animals. The study is based exclusively on historical records, archival materials, published literature, and secondary sources. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required in accordance with the institutional guidelines and applicable research ethics policies.

Declaration:

The author declares no financial, personal, professional or institutional conflict of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of this research.

REFERENCES

1. Acharyya, N. N. (1992). The History of Medieval Assam (From the Thirteenth to the Seventeenth Century). Reprint Edition, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, p. 144 & 145.
2. Barbaruah, H. (2003). Aahomor Din. 3rd edition, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati-781021, p.226.
3. Barpujari, H.K. (2003). The Comprehensive History of Assam: Volume II (Medieval Period: Political – From 13th Century to the Treaty of Yandabo 1826). 3rd edition (Reprint/Revised), Publication Board Assam, Guwahati,-781021.
4. Baruah, S.L. (2007). A Comprehensive History of Assam. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd.
5. Basu, N. K. (1970). Assam in the Ahom Age. 1st Edition, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 38, Bidhan Sarani, Calcutta-6.
6. Bhuyan, S. K. (1956). Mir Jumlar Assam Akraman. Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, p. 153.
7. Bhuyan, S. K. (Ed), (2025). Kachari Buranji. Purbanchal Prakash, Guwahati.
8. Bordoloi, B. N. (1991). Tribes of Assam (Part III). 1st Edition, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes (formerly Tribal Research Institute), Guwahati.
9. Debnath, S. (2023). A Comprehensive History of the Koch Kingdom. Aayu Publications, New Delhi, ISBN-13: 9789391685218.
10. Gogoi, L. (1991). The History of the system of Ahom Administration. 1st Edition, Punthi Pustak Publication, Kolkata.
11. Gohain, U. N. (1992). Assam under the Ahoms. R.K. publications, Guwahati, p. 188 & 196. ISBN-10: 81-85319-98-7, ISBN-13: 978-81-85319-98-8.
12. Goswami, S. K. (1986). A History of Revenue Administration in Assam, 1228-1826 A.D. Spectrum Publication, Delhi, p. 234.
13. Guha, A. (2004). The Mediaeval Economy of Assam. In T. Raychaudhuri & I. Habib (Eds.), The Cambridge Economic History of India Vol. - I: c.1200 - c.1750, Orient Longman, Reprint, New Delhi, p. 481.
14. Guha, A. (2011). Vaishnavavadar pora Mayamariya Bidrohloi. 2nd Edition, Student Stores, Guwahati, p. 36.
15. Hamilton, F. (1940). An Account of Assam. Ed. S. K. Bhuyan, 1st Edition, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, p. 61 & 62.
16. Lekar, U. C. (Ed.) (1952). Katha Guru Charitra. Dutta Baruah Publication, Guwahati, p. 261.
17. Nath, D. (1989). History of the Koch Kingdom 1515-1615. 1st edition, Mittal Publication, New Delhi.
18. Rajguru, S. (1988). Medieval Assamese Society. Asami, Nagaon, p. 349.
19. Robinson, W. (2014). A Descriptive Account of Assam. 2nd Edited Edition (by Dr. Ramesh Chandra Kalita), Bhabani Books, Guwahati, p. 234.