

Tracing the Growth of Women's Education in Howrah District: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract: The study explores the evolution of women's education in Howrah from the colonial period to the contemporary era, highlighting the socio-cultural, missionary, and policy-driven forces that shaped its development. The primary aim of this research is to trace the historical progression of female education in Howrah District, examine the influence of missionary activities during the nineteenth century, and analyze the impact of British colonial educational policies on the establishment and structure of girls' schools. Methodologically, the study adopts a historical research approach, utilizing both primary and secondary sources such as archival documents, missionary records, government reports, census data, and scholarly publications to reconstruct the chronological development of women's education. The findings reveal that early progress in women's education in Howrah was primarily driven by reformist and missionary efforts—such as those of the Serampore Mission and Church Missionary Society—supported later by colonial policies like Wood's Despatch (1854) and the Hunter Commission (1882). The post-independence era, marked by initiatives like the National Policy on Education (1986) and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015), significantly enhanced enrolment and retention rates among girls. However, socio-economic inequalities and infrastructural gaps continue to impede uniform educational advancement. In conclusion, the study underscores that the trajectory of women's education in Howrah District reflects both historical resilience and persistent challenges, emphasizing the need for context-specific policy interventions to promote equitable and sustainable educational empowerment for women.

Keywords: Women's education, Howrah District, historical perspective, missionary activities, British colonial policies, gender equity, educational reform, Colonial India