

**A STUDY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN  
IN BENGAL (1849-1905)**

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**Rashmi Ambasta**

Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies  
School of Social Sciences  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi-110067  
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ZAKIR HUSAIN CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Certificate**

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Certified that this dissertation entitled **A Study of the Growth and Development of Higher Education of Women in Bengal (1849-1905)** submitted by **Ms. Rashmi Ambasta** in fulfilment of eight credits out of the total requirements of twenty four credits for the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University is a bonafide work to the best of my knowledge. It is certified that the same has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

This dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

*Sushila Singh*  
**Prof.Sushila Singhal**  
Chairperson

*Suresh C. Ghosh*  
**Prof.S.C.Ghosh**  
Supervisor

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*Rashmi Ambasta*  
*Rashmi Ambasta*

## INTRODUCTION

Bengal underwent a process of modernization in the nineteenth century. The impact of the dynamic civilization of contemporary Europe brought about far reaching changes in the Bengali society. The British Orientalists and their followers in the ruling, circle wanted the people of this land to "change themselves according to their own value system". But the triumph of Macaulayism in the field of education put the process of modernization in a different order. The nineteenth century Bengal witnessed revitalization in almost every walk of life but the question is how far was it meaningful for the women and for the general masses for whom also it was intended Modernization or revitalization, the instrumental process in the development of a modern outlook cannot be meaningful and beneficial to a nation unless its women are also enlightened and imbued with the spirit of nationalism.

In the present dissertation "A Study of Growth and Development and Higher Education of Women in Bengal (1849-1905)", only the problem and issues of women's education, the circumstances amidst which it could develop, the obstacles which such developments were faced with and the social implications of such a growth are dealt with.

The focus of the dissertations is to present a general historical narrative of the already well known attempts at introducing education in India, and to locate within the framework the development of women's education and more specifically higher education of women, which took off a little later.

It has also been the aim of this study to analyse the typical social environment in which the education of women and girls developed, than a mere analysis of the endeavours of the Government and the non-Government organizations to develop it and so the themes of this dissertation have been moulded accordingly.

The period selected for the survey, (1849-1905) were the years when the nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal was gathering momentum then in the field of literature, arts and religious ideas and education. Missionary and private efforts had already led to the establishment of institutions of higher learning and gradually the Government came forward with its set of policies and regulations.

For our convenience we have started our period from 1849 which saw the establishment of the Bethune School for Girls and ended with 1905 which was marked by Curzon's attempt to control higher education by the Indian Universities Act.

The term higher education has been used to refer to the college and university education. It was only in 1901 at the Simla conference that the structure of higher education was formalised. Two years after the school final, a student received the First Arts (F.A.) degree, and again after two years the B.A. degree. The M.A. degree was received after another two years from the university. Apart from this, indigenous institutions and system of education envisaged by missionaries and social reformers for women has also been included.

This study focusses on the women belonging to the upper rich classes and to the up and coming educated middle classes of Bengal. The rural, or lower class women who had fewer restrictions on them, who could venture freely out of home, and who were not the beneficiaries of education have not been included in this dissertation.

Though a vast corpus of literature has been written about the Educational Policies of the British Government, the reforms introduced in the nineteenth century, and women's education in general, studies conducted in the area of specifically higher education of women in Bengal, have hardly been undertaken. The present, dissertation hopes to add to the available material in educational history by

providing a holistic, historical and social analyses of the development of nineteenth century women's education.

The study has been divided into four thematic chapters. In the first introductory chapter, the general state of education in Bengal, along with a brief discussion of the main landmarks in the introduction of English Education, and finally the establishment of universities and colleges, is provided. It is seen how English education became a qualification of jobs and how it seemed to create a new middle class which in fact was most receptive to change and new ideas.

The second chapter, traces the development of institutions for women's educations and how their establishment followed in the wake of introduction of education in general in Bengal, and also how English education indicated new liberal ideas which more so inspired private individuals to take a leading part in the field.

The third chapter in an attempt to understand the issue of women's education in a more comprehensive manner provides facts on the nature of education imparted to women the structure of courses and shows how they were different in some cases from men's education, as the role of men and women were envisaged differently by the society.



The fourth and the last chapter, attempts to analyse briefly the limitations of the development made in the social context, and on the other hand also, focusses on how the introduction of women education was also a step forward, however small, in their emancipation and elevation.

The materials for this dissertation have been found mostly from scattered references in Secondary Sources, and from Official Publications, in the National Library Calcutta, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, NIEPA and NCERT New Delhi and finally from the Library at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

It is hoped that with the help of materials available, the present study will be able to subtly show how in the case of women and girls education which was introduced as a tool for reinforcing British hegemony, ultimately sought to emancipate the masses and give them the necessary weapon to wield against their oppressors in a none too distant future.

## CHAPTER - I

### GROWTH OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BENGAL

The tradition of higher learning in India is many thousand years old. Nalanda and Taxila the first universities to be established were the two renowned centres of study, where scholars from all parts of Asia came to study Buddhism. In 1206 when Kutb-ud-din Aibak assumed the title of Sultan to rule his Indian conquest, sanskrit was replaced by Arabic and Persian, as the court language and a new tradition of learning began as a large number of Madrassas were set up. In the western sense of the term, higher education is said to have come to India, in the second decade of the nineteenth century when the East India company provided a sum of one lakh rupees each year, out the territorial revenues, for the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India.<sup>1</sup> The sum of money was also meant to promote and introduce knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the fact that the educational tradition in the Indian context has been strong-under the British rule

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1. H.Sharp ed. Selections from Educational Records, Part I, 1781-1839., p.101-107.
  2. S.C. Ghosh, Education Policy in India Since Warren Hastings, p.88.

education came to mean different things at different phases of time incorporating within it a complex set of motives, in the colonial context. Higher education in Bengal and in other parts of the country-therefore developed at one level as a result of direct British educational policies and at another level as a fall out of the system. These factors need to be explored, if the full context of higher education of women in Bengal at the time is to be studied, especially since women's education remained closely linked to the manner in which general educational policies were shaped in the colonial context.

During the first two generations of its rule in Bengal, the East India Company did not try to impose a Western or English system of education on its Indian subjects. It was their primary motive to further commercial interests and there was no wish to tamper with indigenous social and religious institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The Calcutta Madrassa was founded in 1781 to provide for the customary pattern of Islamic studies, by Warren Hastings. Elsewhere in the country too, similar institutions were established-For example in 1792 Jonathan Duncan, the Resident at Benaras established the Benaras Sanskrit College

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3. Moonis Raza, Higher Education in Colonial India, p.22.

and the Commissioner of Deccan-Mountstuart Elphinstone established the Poona College for Hindu learning. These men were influenced by practical considerations: the need for making officers well versed in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic to assist them in governing the country, as well as the desire to cultivate the good will of the traditional Hindu and Muslim elites.<sup>4</sup>

The Asiatic society was formed in 1784 with an aim of enquiring into the history, antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of Asia and in 1800 Fort William College at Calcutta was set up to train British civilians as administrators.

As is evident, the beginning of the nineteenth century did not mark the formulation of any education policy (elementary or higher). At this stage Hastings, Jones, Duncan-officials of the company with their interest in discovering India's past inaugurated a phase of British orientalism. India was objectified into a case of an archaic civilization with a golden past. This objectification of India as a civilization seemed necessary to justify change along western lines as suggested by the evangelicals, utilitarians who were making their presence felt around the

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4. Ibid, p.22.

turn of the nineteenth century, in Britain and later in India.

These Evangelicals, Utilitarians and Liberals were convinced that the Indian society had to be transformed the efficacy of oriental education in attaining this transformation was questioned.

There were men like Charles Grant, among the company's officials who were appalled at the degeneration of the Indian society. They were critical of social abuses like the caste system, Kulinism, sati, infanticide among other things. He blamed the East India company for its apathetic attitude and suggested the healing principle-namely the supercession of the existing religions by Christianity through the dissemination the the science and literature of Europe. Grant advocated the use of English language as a necessary tool for instruction which would open up the treasures of European knowledge for the erring Hindus.<sup>5</sup>

The need was felt for a common language which would draw the ruler and ruled into close contact, universally by the three groups, the Evangelicals, utilitarians, and Liberals. They represented the new social values set forward

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5. S.C.Ghosh, op.cit., p.9.

by the Industrial Revolution in Britain which in turn was represented by a new class of men with power who replaced the authoritative conservative landowning aristocracy, promoting social virtues like frugality, sobriety and industry.

Thus on the eve of introduction of English as a medium of instruction in India, different ideas were at play: while the missionary groups urged the East India company to introduce English as a means for propagating christianity, Free traders felt that anglicized Indians would be potential consumers of British goods, while utilitarians like James Mill were convinced that the aim of education was to promote useful learning not obscure and Worthless knowledge. And it was only English or Western education which could serve the purpose.

The pioneering work in spreading English education emanated from the missionaries as institutions for spreading English were set up for Indian Children. At this juncture in the nineteenth century in Bengal, aristocratic zamindars, and owners of agency house in Calcutta and district towns who came into contact daily with Englishmen in office or in areas of trade, gradually began to realize the need for western education for the purpose of earning a decent living. The middle class Bengalis especially the Hindus

began to appreciate the value of English as a medium of cultural intercourse.

Thus before the East India Company could formulate an official educational policy rich citizens in Calcutta as in Bombay came forward to set up English schools in collaboration with individual European officials and businessmen. In Calcutta, the Hindu College was founded in 1817, by Ram Mohan Roy along with. Sir Edward Hyde East, Sir Edward Ryan, David Hare and James Young. This first encounter with western learning created an intellectual ferment and the beginning of the Bengal Renaissance.

The first step in spreading English higher education in Bengal was taken therefore, by private enterprise. Similarly Baptist missionaries founded a college at Serampore in 1801. Two years later, a college was founded in Calcutta, in honour of Bishop Middleton, the first Anglican Bishop of India. Alexander Duff established the Scottish Missionary College in 1830 in Calcutta and in 1834, the Hooghly College was founded by a wealthy Muhammedan. Another missionary college was opened by the London Missionary Society in Bhowanipore - a suburb of Calcutta in 1838. Besides there were three institutions for the education of Europeans and Eurasian boys in Calcutta, the Docton College, La Martiniere Institution and the St. Paul's College which was later

shifted to Darjeeling.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, outside the purview of the private and missionary enterprise higher education in the western sense as we have already said in the beginning came to India in 1813, when the Charter Act of the East India company provided a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees each year out of the surplus territorial revenues, for the removal and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India.<sup>7</sup>

At first the machinery that worked to disburse the expenditure on education (the General Committee of Public Instruction) - was in favour of reviving Oriental learning and institutions only. The opposition to these activities as is natural owing to the wave of English Education that was felt at this time, came from within the Committee and from the young men in the cities, who were influenced by the new utilitarian and liberal ideals. Raja Rammohan Roy was among the first to realize that a balance between the Indian and Western learning could only be a timid compromise and this

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6. Moonis Raza, op.cit., p.23.

7. S.C.Ghosh, op.cit., p.88.



would further perpetuate a bondage to a lifeless tradition, Rammohan feared that traditional learning imparted through Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian would neutralize the effect of modern liberal education given in the seminaries of western learning - in this context Rammohan Roy also sent a letter to Governor General Lord Amherst, dated 6 October 1823 - to influence the official agency - the committee of Public instruction which was formed to formulate the education policy under the government.<sup>8</sup>

The intellectual ground from which Rammohan Roy attacked Sanskrit learning was his idea of progress and the idea of modernity, which were also at the base of European enlightenment and at the centre of Rammohan's work as pioneer of the New Learning.<sup>9</sup> Integrated with his ideas on education-were his defence of the rights of women, his right to property and education, opposition to multiple marriages by kulin Brahmins, child marriage, degradation of widows and of course opposition to sati.

Rammohan's ideals were also reflected in the thoughts of William Bentinck the Governor General in 1827 and

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8. R.K.Dasgupta, 'Rammohun Roy and the New Learning' in B.P.Barua ed., Raja Rammohan Roy and the New Learning, p.31.

9. The new learning of which Rammohun was the inaugurator, was the learning aquired through a foreign language, which was English in this case.

T.B.Macaulay the Law Member of Bentinck's council, who together finally decided the Orientalist Anglicist controversy raging in the General Committee of Public Instruction in favour of the latter.

One important reason why Bentinck was so keen on introducing English education was because he considered it not only to be a cure for the kind of social evils that he had to deal with at the very beginning of his administration in India but also as a key to the improvement of the country. Macaulay whose interest in consolidating the British Empire by the propagation of English language and English culture began quite early in life, held similar views to Bentinck on this subject.<sup>10</sup>

Finally in 1835, it was decided once and for all that the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed in imparting English Education. In 1835 itself a medical College at Calcutta was established to teach Medicine and Surgery through the English Language.

The tendency to support English education grew immediately after the decisive victory of Macaulay in the

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10. Refer S.C.Ghosh, Bentick Macaulay and the Introduction of English Education in India - in History of Education, vol.24, no.1, March. 1995.

field of Indian Education.<sup>11</sup>, but it became very prominent from the days of the famous so-called Wood's Despatch of 1854. In 1854 Charles Wood the President of the Board of Control prepared the comprehensive despatch on the scheme of future education in India. It established that the aim of the Governments educational policy was the teaching of Western education. English language was declared to be the most perfect medium of higher learning. Moreover it recommended a system of grants-in-aid to encourage and foster private enterprise in the field of education. The Despatch also proposed the setting up of Universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, on the model of the London University.

It might be mentioned that Charles Wood, himself, however was not too sure about the repercussions of establishing universities and imparting Higher English education to the natives. He confessed to Dalhousie, the Governor General, that 'these highly educated natives are likely to be a very discontented class unless they are employed and we cannot find employment for all.'<sup>12</sup> He was aware that the danger of educating natives lay in the fact

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11. On 2nd February 1835 - Macaulay member of Executive Council placed his famous minute forward which favoured the Anglicist Party. This minute was aimed at producing brown English Educated men to fill the lower cadres in the company's administration.

12. Moonis Raza, op.cit., p.24.

that they might become the company's future detractors and opponents.

However the first three universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, were founded in 1857, after a committee worked at preparing a detailed plan for the scheme. Like London University on which they were modelled, the Universities were examining and affiliating bodies and they undertook no teaching or research.

With European learning as the staple of curriculum, Indian universities everywhere as in Bengal became instruments for strengthening British Cultural intellectual and political domination. The administrative structure, language of instruction and personal contact between student and teachers all seemed to accomplish the same objective. As Charles Wood, conceived it, the Indian university had two main functions (1) to provide a test of eligibility for government employment and (2) transmit an alien culture.<sup>13</sup>

What was significant in the development of western education was that educational opportunity came to be confined to the upper classes, and higher education developed at the expense of primary and mass education.<sup>14</sup>

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13. Lord Hardinge's government had already made English the passport for obtaining jobs under the Government.

14. Gopal Mukhopadhyay in his book Mass Education in Bengal, makes these comments.

The useful learning that Bentinck and Macaulay, propagated in the first half of the nineteenth century was already based on a theory which felt that education was to be imparted to the higher classes on the assumption that knowledge was to descend from the higher to the lower classes.<sup>15</sup> This infiltration theory which provided the base of the British educational policy made knowledge the exclusive prerogative of the higher classes.

Any way in India, education had always been looked upon as the privilege of the higher classes and there was little disposition to impart it to the lower orders.

In the nineteenth century the larger reality behind the downward filtration theory, was pragmatism. With limited funds, and no defined education policy to implement at the outset, it was logical that the scope of education would be limited, -partly elitist and partly specialized, as per the western and utilitarian ideals that shaped them.

Significantly on the other hand official efforts which aimed at promoting vernacular primary education did not receive much support. For instance Lord Hardings government which had made English education the sole passport to higher

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15. This came to be referred to as Macaulay's infiltration theory.

services under the Government, in the first half of the nineteenth century, also tried experimenting with opening vernacular elementary schools in villages. However lack of a clear Government policy, and indifference to education at large among the village people, sealed the future of Hardinge's schools.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, Lieutenant governor of Bengal, George Campbell's Resolution dated September 30, 1872 by which he wanted to spread popular education at the cost of higher education in Bengal alarmed the educated and upper middle classes in Bengal. The Bengali middle class, like the British middle class had no idea of emancipating the masses but only of emancipating themselves to some extent from the control of a close oligarchy.<sup>17</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century the Bengali middle class cared only for imparting English or higher education to their own children. The new learning which Rammohan, had championed in course of time drove a wedge between the upper classes and the masses and alienated the two completely from each other.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op.cit., Chapter I.

17. Valentine Chirol, Indian Unrest, p.76.

18. Amitabh Mukherjee, Reform and Regeneration in Bengal, p.127.

Several economic, social and cultural changes had already taken place in Bengal in the early part of the nineteenth century, which reinforced the importance and popularity of English education among the upper middle classes.

Persian language which had been the court language, at that time was not very effective as the medium of communication, and Bengali which was the mother tongue of the people had never been the court language of the land.

English was looked upon by the new middle class as a wage earning proposition; these people who were not directly connected with cultivation, but who lived on income from the land or from the sale and purchase of agricultural products had to think of other means of livelihood since their earning from their traditional occupation began to decline.<sup>19</sup>

These people including small landowners, turned more and more to the legal and teaching professions and government services for augmenting their income. It was these people who constituted the new educated middle class which championed vehemently the cause of growth of English

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19. Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op.cit., p.9.

education as it gradually began to be considered synonymous with higher education.

British rule thus gradually, supplanted the precolonial indigenous system of education and imposed a new language and curricula. The purpose of education in the new English school and colleges was to grant degrees, which would enable students access to power in the colonial political and economic system. By the time, the university was established in 1857, there were already 281 high schools and 28 colleges, functioning even without a common standard of examinations and governing body to administer them.<sup>20</sup>

The Revolt of 1857, which transferred power from the East India Company to the British Crown, inaugurated an era which was to witness a gradual withdrawal of government from active participation in social, cultural issues of importance in the country. And even as missionary bodies, did manage a number of institutions and the Education Department continued to look to the running of Government institutions private Indian effort appeared in the field occupying a place of importance.

In 1882-the Government appointed a commission under the chairmanship of W.W. Hunter to review the progress of

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20. Moonis Raza, op.cit, p.44.



education in the country. Though the Commission's objective was mainly to enquire into the state of secondary and primary education, it recommended an all out effort to be made to encourage private enterprise in the field of education. It was recommended that the Government should withdraw as early as possible from the direct management of secondary and collegiate education and attention was drawn to the inadequate facilities for female education. The commission of 1882 thus largely left higher education to private initiative encouraging educated and moneyed individuals to support higher education with which the future of their community was closely linked.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of Government's withdrawal from active participation in the field of higher education raised apprehensions. For if the state withdrew, then the missionary societies which held an important position in educational matters in general, and played an active role in promoting higher education would come forward and monopolize the field. This would automatically lead to Christian religious teaching becoming a compulsory part of higher education. This naturally caused apprehension among the Indian people and Indian educators at large. Even if the withdrawal of government, from educational matters, except

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21. Valentine Chirol, op.cit., p.76.



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in terms of financial aid, was to be gradual, and even if it was aimed to pave the way to self government among the natives the underlying truth could not be ignored. That the missionary educators were taken for granted as the natural successors in the area of higher education if and when the government withdrew.<sup>22</sup> This issue however became significant in the coming decades. In the present context the importance of the Report mainly lay in the recognition of the improvement and extension of privately managed institutions, particularly when it concerned women's education.<sup>23</sup>

The twenty years following the report of the commission saw an unprecedented growth and expansion of secondary and collegiate education.<sup>24</sup> A number of denominational institutions sprang up in all parts of the country. Interest was kindled in Indian and Oriental studies apart from the pursuit of Western knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

The turn of the century witnessed a period of growing political unrest and controversies in educational policies

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22. Anima Bose, Higher Education in India in the 19th Century - An American Involvement 1883-1893, p.77.

23. Ibid.

24. B.Dayal, The Development of Modern Indian Education, p.39.

25. Ibid., p.39-40.

along with discontentment and unemployment among the newly educated classes in Bengal and elsewhere.

Higher education began to be dominated by liberal arts, which paid disproportionate attention to literature and philosophy and tended to limit career choices. In those days agriculture offered little incentive in terms of employment and so did manufacturing and commerce. There rose discontentment and unemployment among the educated classes which also paved the way for the growth of militant nationalism in the near future.

The Official view was that educational expansion had not proceeded on the right lines, that quality had deteriorated under private management that there was a lot of indiscipline in schools and colleges and the educational institutions had become factories for the production of political revolutionaries. Nationalist opinion which had begun to assert itself admitted to the lowering of standards but emphasized that the Government was not doing its duty to eradicate illiteracy.

In his characteristic zeal for improvement of all branches of administration, Lord Curzon, the Governor General at the beginning of the twentieth century sought to reconstruct education in India. He deprecated the far too slavish imitation of English models and Macaulay's colossal

blunder in erecting an invested pyramid which inculcated prejudice against, Indian vernaculars. His motives were mainly political and only partly educational. Curzon sought to increase official control over education in the of quality and efficiency but actually sought to restrict education and discipline the educated minds, away from the cause of the nascent Indian nationalism towards loyalty to the Government. The Indian Universities Act was passed in 1904, under Lord Curzon's regime which finally seemed to control the unchecked growth of higher education, marking therefore the victory of the constraints that the colonisers felt, in furthering the welfare of the natives.

Among other recommendations in the Act, the Government for one was vested with powers to enquire into the regulations passed by the Senate of a university. It lay down strict conditions of affiliation to the university for private colleges. Moreover the Governor in Council was empowered to define the territorial limits of a university and decide the issue of affiliation of colleges to the university.

The story of Higher Education in Bengal, therefore came to represent the factors and circumstances that led to growth of English education, with which it had become synonymous.

Even the curricula of elementary classes, in primary schools, were gradually developed in such a fashion that these classes could later serve as preparatory classes to high school and college education.<sup>26</sup>

Higher education, developed in the absence of mass education in Bengal mainly owing to the utilitarian ideals which moulded British educational policy, and also because of the antipathy of the middle class Bengalis towards pure vernacular education.

For instance Vidyasagar, a Champion of women's education and vernacular education in Bengal, when faced with financial constraints observed that mass education could not be stressed at the expense of higher education. He also reviewed the problems that mass education had caused in other countries during the first half of the nineteenth century and was convinced it would fail in India as well.

Higher education as it developed came to represent narrow class interests, as a result of which larger issues, social ideals and aspirations were obviously compromised.

The university degree became the recognized goal of ambition not because it testified to a genuine intellectual

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26. Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op.cit., p.44.

stamp but because it furnished the passport to a trite happiness to be enjoyed among respectable people with an assured competence. Higher education has been regarded as good business in other lands also, but nowhere has the good business been so dependent on the limited demand of the state for capable servants.<sup>27</sup>

Most obviously the ideals of Education were compromised as a pragmatic education policy developed under the British. However by the middle of the nineteenth century, the intellectual consequences of the new learning began to influence life and letters of Indian life. It was discovered that the creative and uninhibited response to the west had a given a new dimension and a new depth to their world view. The most important feature of this new outlook (as represented by the new middle class Bengali intelligentsia) was a new respect for the individual reason, which encouraged the heretical temper and a will to organize society through a revision of values. It pitted modernity against tradition and opposed reason to superstition.<sup>28</sup>

It is in this space, that the initiative for encouraging women's education was taken, and it has to be

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27. J.Ghosh, Higher Education in Bengal, p.148.

28. R.K.Dasgupta, op.cit., p.31.

understood in the above context. The education of women, especially higher education as in the case of men, received impetus, from missionary enterprise and official patronage. However, the greatest interests were taken by men motivated by higher social ideals, which went beyond the practical realm of producing employees for the company's administration to the issue of social welfare.

## CHAPTER - II

### ESTABLISHMENT OF INSTITUTIONS FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Women's education in India attracted official attention long after definite measures had been undertaken for the education of boys; It was left solely to the care of a few individuals and private societies.<sup>1</sup> Women's education was not referred to even in a single despatch on educational matters by the Court of Directors and the local government in the first half of the 19th century. Due to the lack of official patronage local efforts on the part of individuals as well as the zeal of the foreign missionaries in this field were almost wholly lost at the outset.

In this connection in July 1832 Rev. James Hough, in his evidence before the select Committee of Parliament, speaking of the progress of Girls Schools in Tinnevelly remarked - 'one very imported feature in these schools remains to be noticed that it was for many years considered impossible to prevail on the Hindus to allow their women to be educated'. Rev. J. Tucker of Madras in reply to the question, "what attempts have been made by Indians themselves in that directions",? said, "None whatever; They

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1. Benoy Ghose, I.C. Vidyasagar, p.58.



are as a body rather opposed to the education of women" In reply to a similar question William Jacobs of Bombay said, "None on the western side of India. I do not think as yet a single woman has come under the Government system of education in Western India'.<sup>2</sup>

There did exist a strong prejudice against education of Indian women amongst both Hindus and Muslims and that prejudice stemmed from age old tradition. It is true that there was evidence in the ancient literatures of India that women took part in religious and philosophical discussions with men shared in the affairs of the state, participated in heroic acts and were even taught to read and write. Vivekananda himself had written - 'In the period of degradation when the priests made the other castes incompetent to study the vedas, they deprived the women also of all their rights. You will find in the vedic and upanishadic age Maitreyi Gargi and other ladies of revered memory have taken the place of Rishis. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmans who were all erudite in Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged Yajnavalkya in a discussion about the Brahman.<sup>3</sup> Despite this tradition Vivekananda also paradoxically emphasized that the true ideal to be emulated

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2. Ibid, p.58.

3. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, p.214-5.

by every Indian women was 'Sita' who was a true picture of chastity and sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the Indian ideal of a women life remained as one of pristine purity social seclusion and quiet domestic duties of an affectionate mother and a devoted wife above other things. Till the middle of the nineteenth century therefore the company's government was reluctant to impose any policy which might interfere with ancient social customs and traditions. The indifferent attitude of the authorities was one of the reasons why the efforts of the early pioneers failed in this direction.<sup>5</sup> Unlike education of men, women's education therefore posed distinct problems which had to be handled differently by different enterprising forces.

THE MISSIONARY PHASE: The initiative in female education as in education in general in India was taken by missionary bodies. The British and Foreign School Society of London, in cooperation with Harrington and William Ward of the Baptist missionary society at Serampore in 1821 deputed Miss Cooke (better known as Mrs. Wilson) to open schools for girls under the auspices of the Calcutta School Society set up in 1818 following the foundation of the Hindu School in

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4. As the wife of Ram in the epic Ramayan, Sita typifies the pure sacrificing, devoted Indian wife.

5. Benoy Ghose, op.cit, p.59.

1817. By 1826 Miss Cooke had 30 schools and 600 pupils under her charge which were concentrated in 1828 into a Central School in Calcutta under a committee called the Ladies Society for Native Female Education<sup>6</sup> Lady Amherst the Society's patroness on May 18, 1826 laid the foundation stone of the Central School for girls. Other schools were also established by the London and the Church missionary societies but nothing had yet been done by the Government to encourage the pioneers. At the outset the picture of female education was not very encouraging in the British India except in the Punjab.

The missionary enterprise managed to evoke a very limited response from the Indians firstly because, the religious consideration and missionary zeal which had led the societies to open schools, was disliked by upper caste Hindus. Secondly - the financial incentives provided to parents for sending their daughters to missionary schools, attracted many students only from the lower classes, whose poverty and degradation had rendered them invulnerable as far as literacy was concerned<sup>7</sup>

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6. Arthur Howell, Education in British India quoted in J.A. Richey ed. Selections from Educational Records Part II 1840-59, p.106.

7. S.C. Ghosh 'Education of Women's and Girls 1813-1947' in Education Policy in India since Warren Hastings; p.71.

In 1833 William Adam reported that he had seen in the district of Burdwan 175 girls in four female schools, 138 of whom were Hindus all belonging to lower castes - Bagdis, Muchis, Bauris, Domes, Haries, Tantis, Chandals.<sup>8</sup> The upper caste Hindu preferred their daughters and womenfolk to lead a life a strict purity, seclusion and quiet domestic duty. It was believed that a girl taught to read and write would soon after marriage become a widow. In the face of similar prejudice among Mohammedans against female education, it is understandable why the East India company preferred to adopt a 'hands off' policy in this field as mentioned earlier.

Despite all these difficulties, the missionaries made some headway in the field of women's education Mrs. Wilson, left the country in 1845, but after her, Mrs. Thomson and Mrs White took charge of the Central Female School. After wards a Normal section was attached to the central school. The Ladies society continued upto 1857 many enlightened scholars and leaders of the Hindu Society such as Gourmohan Vidyalankar, Raja Radhakanta Dev, Raja Baidyanath Roy and others helped them in this respect.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Willam Adam, Reports on the State of Education in Bengal 1835 and 1838 ed., by Anathnath Basu p.305.

9. G. Mukhopadhyay, Mass Education in Bengal, p.36.

### **Role of Leaders of Renascent Bengal**

Apart from the missionaries the leaders of Renascent Bengal were very enthusiastic about espousing the cause of women's education in the land. The Derozians of the Hindu college advocated the cause of women's education in the very first issue of their weekly English magazine, 'The Parthenon' published in 1828.<sup>10</sup> Men like Motilal Seal and Ram Gopal Ghose donated generously for the propagation of women's education. The Bengal British India Society<sup>11</sup> also urged for women's education but no tangible programme was formulated for carrying out the scheme. In this respect during this time Joy Krishna Mukherjee and Raj Krishna Mukherjee, the Philanthropic Zemindars of Uttarpara, submitted a concrete proposal before the council of Education for the establishment of a girls school at Uttarpara and asked for a fifty per cent grant for its foundation and maintenance. But the Council of Education on the plea of shortage of funds; totally rejected the proposal.<sup>12</sup>

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10. Due to social prejudices prevailing, the Hindu College authorities disallowed the magazine's further publication.

11. Founded on April 20 1843.

12. J.C. Bagal, Bangla Stri Siksha, p.30-32 quoted in G. Mukherjee's, Mass Education in Bengal.

## Role of Philanthropists

The need for non sectarian and secular education for girls was widely felt by the people of Calcutta for a long time and this was removed at last by the foundation of the Calcutta Female School later known as the Hindu Balika Vidyalay on May 7 1849, ~~by~~ John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune Legal member of the Governor General Council and ex-officio President of the council of Education. Education in this school was free and was imparted through the vernacular medium.

After more than thirty years since the process to educate men had started, Bethune, realized that the time had come to extend the benefits of education to women. In his opening speech delivered on the occasion of the founding of the school, he pointed out that the character of a nation depended intimately on the character of its women.<sup>13</sup>

Few Englishmen had come to India with a more sincere desire to do good than J.E.D. Bethune. Having taken part in the great movement in England for the education of the people, he naturally directed his attention to educational

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13, Bethune's opening speech - quoted in full in the Appendix to Bethune School & College Centenary vol., 1849-1949 ed. by Kalidas Nag p. 107-12.

matters immediately on arrival here; before long he was appointed President of the Council of Education.

Bethune received immense help and unflinching support from Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Ram Gopal Ghose, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Sambhu Nath Pandit and Pandit Madanmohan Tarkalankar to overcome various hurdles on the way and was encouraged to devote much time energy, and money to the running of the institution. The establishment of this school was a milestone in the progress of women's education<sup>14</sup> And with this - Bengal became a significant centre - for the education of women.

At the instance of Bethune, Raja Radhakanta Dev established a girls school at his own house within a fortnight of the starting of Bethune's school. On the same model, girls school were started at Uttarpara, Nibudhia, Sukhsagar, and other places without the assistance of Government subsidies.

It may be noted that at this juncture an attempt to establish girls schools in rural Bengal also became visible. Nabin Krishna Mitra and Kalikrishna Mitra, two brothers, with the help of Peary Charan Sirkar (1823-1875), started a

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14. Nemaï Sadhan Bose, The Indian Awakening and Bengal, pp.188-189.

girls school at Barasat. However, the reactionary and conservative elements there did not sit idle; they vehemently carried on their propaganda against sending girls to these schools.

It is interesting to note in this context that when the zemindars of Uttarpara had been trying to persuade the Government for establishing a girls school at their place the zemindar of Barasat with the help of anti social elements threatened the Mitra brothers with dire consequences. With unabated courage the Mitra brothers stuck to their efforts and remodeled the school after the pattern of Bethune's school.

Peary Charan started an Industrial school at Barasat at the same time for the young girls of the labouring class under the supervision of the former school committee.

When the reactionary people openly threatened the organisers of the girls schools at Barasat with dire consequences, the silence on the part of the Government on this issue encouraged the former to spread the wrong notion among the common people that the Government was also not in favour of women's education.

At last at the fervent request of Bethune, the government of India asked the Government of Bengal to break their silence on this issue and declare that the Government



was not against women's education and was even ready to extend all possible help for the cause except financial support.<sup>15</sup>

Bethune, acting as the President of the Council of Education requested the Government of India especially to issue a circular expressing public sympathy with all private endeavours connected with girls schools.<sup>16</sup>

This was readily complied with by the Government since Bethune had indeed done a great work in the first successful introduction of Native Female Education in India on a sound and solid foundation and had earned a right not only to the gratitude of the Government but also to its frank and cordial support.<sup>17</sup>

The official support of the Governor General Lord Dalhousie along with his wife Lady Dalhousie was of great help to Bethune and his friends But Bethune did not rest content with official patronage. He, in cooperation with English educated Bengali intellectuals<sup>18</sup> and radical Bengali

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15. Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op.cit, p.43.

16. Benoy Ghose op.cit, p.61.

17. S.C. Ghose, op.cit, p.74.

18. Ramgopal Ghose, one such famous intellectual was known as the King of Bengali Intellectuals or the Rajah of Educated Bengalis - or 'Edu Raj'.

Pandits like Vidyasagar and Madan Mohan took positive measures for the propagation of women's education in his own capacity.

As President of the Council of Education he had to visit different centres of education in the districts of Bengal and deliver instructions and addresses to the students. In almost every address he emphasized the urgent need for women's education and called upon educated young men to fight for the progress of the noble cause with all their might.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Role of Official Patronage**

Bethune passed away on August 12 1851. From October 1851, however Dalhousie had borne all the expenses necessary for keeping Bethune's institution going and on his retirement in March 1856 the Bethune school became a recognized Government institution supported by the state. The state placed Bethune's institution under the supervision of one Mr. Cecil Beadon. Thus by supporting Bethune's female school in Calcutta Dalhousie closed the era of official non-interference and marked the beginning of that of an open encouragement.<sup>20</sup>

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19. Benoy Ghose, op.cit, p.65.

20. Richey ed. op.cit, pp.364-393.

And finally - the Education Despatch of 1854 reached India in which the court of Directors recognized for the first time the need and importance of women's education in India. Paragraph 83 of the Despatch said - "The importance of female education in India cannot be overrated and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives of India to give good education to their daughters".<sup>21</sup> The Despatch further admitted that by supporting women's education more might be done for the educational and moral tone of the people at large than by the education of men alone. The girls schools were included among the schools to which the new grants-in-aid scheme could be extended.<sup>22</sup>

After that the growth of female schools in India was only a matter of time. In Bengal, schools came up in Dacca, at Howrah and at a few of the vernacular schools in the eastern educational division of Bengal, girls were reported to be in attendance. It may be noted that these schools were attended by girls from higher families. At one school in the eastern educational division of Bengal, the Inspector, Mr. Woodrow, saw 19 Brahmin girls, all of good parentage studying there.<sup>23</sup>

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21. Ibid., p.388.

22. Benoy Ghose op.cit, p.66.

23. S.C. Ghosh, op.cit, p.76.

### **Role of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's contribution to the development of women's education too was particularly, significant. In fact, Vidyasagar vehemently championed the cause of women's education at a time when the Government owing to financial difficulties occurring as a result of the Revolt, of 1857 began to limit and withdraw financial support in the field.

Early in 1857, the Lieutenant governor of Bengal Sir F. Halliday (1854-59) requested Vidyasagar to prepare a comprehensive scheme for the expansion of women's education in Bengal in the light of the Education Despatch of 1854.<sup>24</sup>

Vidyasagar found that his own proposals were also identical in some respects with those of the Despatch of 1854. He observed that a wide and elaborate system of vernacular education was essential for the rapid progress of education in this country.

Besides, holding the post of Principal, Sanskrit College, Calcutta (1851-58), Vidyasagar also held the post of Inspector of schools in South Bengal (1855-58). As the Inspector of schools, he established a number of model schools and girls schools in Nadia, Burdwan, Hooghly, and

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24. J.C. Bengal, Banglar Stri Siksha p.46 quoted in Gopal Mukhopadhyay's op.cit, p.45.

Midnapore. He got assurance from Halliday and W.G. Young, the Director of Public Instruction, that his action would be approved. With this understanding between November 1857 and May 1858 he established, twenty girls schools in Hooghly, eleven in Burdwan, three in Midnapore and one in Nadia. These thirty five girls schools cost a monthly expenditure of Rs.845 only and there were 1300 girls on their rolls.

In 1857, the Mutiny led to a transfer of power from the company to the crown. The financial stress as mentioned earlier and the need to approach the social problems in India cautiously slowed down the Government's support for female education in India.<sup>25</sup>

In keeping with the new state of affairs, the Government did not approve of Vidyasagars scheme and consequently did not sanction any grant for the maintenance of these schools. It was held that unless the girls schools were really and materially supported by voluntary aid, they had better not be established at all.

After the Government order it now appeared to Vidyasagar that all his efforts in this direction had been in vain and that the schools set up by him would have to be closed without delay. After a prolonged correspondence

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25. S.C. Ghosh, op.cit, pp.76-77.

however, the Government of India by a letter dated December 22, 1958, sanctioned Rs.3439/- for the expenses incurred so far for the maintenance of these girls schools and at the same time intimated that the Government would not bear any liability for these schools in future.<sup>26</sup>

Hence Vidyasagar had to maintain these institutions from his own pocket and he later raised voluntary contributions from well disposed gentlemen including Raja Pratap Chadra Sinha of Paikpara, C. Beadon and H. Raban.<sup>27</sup>

Having become disgusted with the Government's policy, Vidyasagar, resigned from his posts under the directorate of Education Government of Bengal. Another cause of the failure of Vidyasagar's scheme of vernacular education was the antipathy of the newly educated middle class Bengalees towards pure vernacular education which Vidyasagar strongly felt should be encouraged. However, despite the indifferent attitudes of the Government towards Women's education Vidyasagar pursued the cause vigorously. He took the initiative in opening a Fund for rendering financial assistance to girls schools and collected money for it from persons of means in Calcutta. <sup>28</sup>

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26. Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op. cit, p.46.

27. Brajendra Nath Bandopadhyay, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, p.68.

28. Benoy Ghose, op.cit, p.68.

Vidyasagar continued to serve the Bethune School as secretary even after he had resigned from the post of principal of the Sanskrit College in November 1858: he held the post till the Bethune school committee was dissolved in January 1869.

The progress of the school under his secretaryship may be glanced from his report of December 1862 which said "As regards the number of admissions the Committee beg to observe that there has been a steady increase from 1859. The Committee are happy to believe that home education for females is being resorted to by many families amongst the wealthier classes and this result they believe is in a considerable degree owing to the beneficial influences of the Bethune school".<sup>29</sup>

It became evident from this report that women's education was making but little headway against strong social prejudice. It is true that by 1866-67 the number of girls schools under the Department of Education increased to about 300 and the number of students to about 6000 but owing to early withdrawals by guardians very few girls were able to prosecute their studies upto a general standard. It is

~~It was the upper classes not the middle or lower~~

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29. Ibid., p.69

clear that the custom of early marriage stood in the way of good education.<sup>30</sup> It was the upper classes not the middle or lower classes who responded more sensitively to the custom and discouraged longer years of formal school education. For their daughters they preferred Anthahpur Strisiksha or home education to public school education. "The bhadra lok (the respectable), not the dhani lok (the rich) sent their children to the Bethune school".<sup>31</sup>

As far as the Government was concerned the post mutiny phenomenon of dwindling interest in supporting girls schools, reached a high point in 1867, when an official circular was issued which practically admitted that Government had no desire to take the initiative in the case of Girls schools as it had done in the case of boys but was ready to encourage existing schools by the system of grants-in-aid.<sup>32</sup>

By 1870, however it was the Bengal Presidency nevertheless, which received the greatest share of the public money the amount being £ 316, 509 out of which a sum £ 1,173 was given to Government Girls Schools and £ 4,462 to

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30. Ibid., p.70.

31. Ibid., Woodrow's Report of 1863-64 quoted on, p.70.

32. Monier Williams, Modern India and the Indians, pp.325-26.



the aided girls schools chiefly in the North West and the Punjab region of the province.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from the contributions made by Vidyasagar, and the lukewarm support provided by the Government for female education in India since 1857, education for girls thrived mainly on the enthusiasm displayed by the various societies that came into being in the wake of the nineteenth century renaissance which brought with it a liberal attitude taken by the educated classes towards their wives, sisters and daughters.

#### **Role of Educational and Cultural Bodies**

In the second half of the nineteenth century a major role was also played by the educational and cultural bodies which sprang up, which promoted learning through the synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures, and which were committed to the spread of education among women. Foremost among them was the Bethune Society started in 1851 after Bethune's death and then the Brahma Sabha started by Keshab Chandra Sen in April 1863. The first Sabha in the Bengal Presidency however was the Bhagalpur Mahila Samiti organised a few months before the Brahma Sabha. Through debates publications of journals and articles in the newspapers

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33. Ibid.,

these Sabhas and Samitis played an important role in spreading education among women and girls.<sup>34</sup>

The Uttarpara Hitkari Sabha founded in 1863 was an organisation for public welfare in the Uttarpara region of the Hooghly district. It was established by a young social worker of Uttarapara Harihar or Chattopadhyay under the patronage of the illustrious Mukherjee family of Uttarpara, Rajkrishna Mukherjee and Jaykrishna Mukherjee, well known for their enthusiasm for all philanthropic and public activities. It stood for the expansion of women's education imparting purposeful education to the peasantry and spreading of hygienic and social education among the poor illiterate masses.<sup>35</sup>

The Annual report of the Sabha for 1863-64 clearly states that "to diffuse the blessings of education among the female population of Ooterparah to train them into habits will calculated to produce beneficial affects on our society were the motives of the Hitkari Sabha.<sup>36</sup> The Sabha not only established a girls school in Uttaraparah but also gave

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34. S.C. Ghosh op.cit, p. 78; K.K. Dutta, A Social History of Modern India, p. 167. Both discuss the role of educational and cultural bodies.

35. G. Mukherjee, op.cit, p.47.

36. Annual Report of the Ooterparah Hitkari Sabha for 1863-64, p.4 quoted in B. Mukherjee ibid, p.47.

primary assistance to the girls schools at Chandannagore, Baluti and Majilpur : within a decade it became the Chief authority on the subject of female education in the Burdwan Division.

At the end of 1866, Miss Mary Carpenter came to Calcutta to help in the cause of womens education. With the support of Vidyasagar, Miss Carpenter proposed to start a Female Normal School in Calcutta to train female teachers. Miss Cooke had realized that the non availability of female teachers was a major hindrance in making education more acceptable and accessible for women. However by 1872, the school had to be abolished since no respectable High Caste Hindu women would seek professions outside their homes and besides the low caste needy women who did attend these schools, would fail to attract women from respectable families.

#### **Role of Brahma Reformers**

Even among the Brahma Reformers who played a progressing role in the nineteenth century , Bengali society Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) and Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay (1844-1898) made significant contributions by supporting women's education. K.C. Sen appreciated the efforts made by Bethune and Miss Carpenter. Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay in his time was bold enough to think about a residential girls

schools which he founded at Beniapur Lane Calcutta on September 18, 1873. In a society which did not permit even girls of ten or eleven years of age to appear in public staying of girls in a hostel far away from homes was really unimaginable. As a result, this venture of D. Gangopadhyay created a furore both among considerable and liberal elements in the society.<sup>37</sup> The school could not survive beyond March 1876, owing to the lack of a sufficient number of girls scholars willing to study here. In 1879, Dwarkanath also established the Bikrampur Sammelani Sabha in Calcutta to further the interests of Bengali women. Under the auspices of this Sabha he established some girls schools in Bikrampur.<sup>38</sup>

The central place occupied by the Bethune school lost its leadership in women's education in Bengal to the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya founded in the eastern part of Calcutta in November 1873, and later re-named and recognized as Banga Mahila Vidyalaya from 1876. This Institution was sponsored by Miss Akroyd with the active support of some young progressive educated Bengalis like Monomohan Ghose, Dwarkanath Ganguli, Durgamohan Das, Ananda Mohan Bose and others. The Government admitted in its Report on Public

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37. B.N. Bandopadhyay, Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay, p.12 quoted in Gopal Mukhopadhyay's op.cit, p. 56.

38. Ibid, p.56.

Instruction for 1876-77 that the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya was in every sense the most advanced school in Bengal.<sup>39</sup>

It was found that the Government patronized Bethune school was lagging far behind the Vidyalaya in matters of teaching administration and organisation. A suggestion was therefore put forward by Mr. Justice Phear, President of the Managing Committee of the Bethune school that the two institutions should be amalgamated and brought directly under the supervision of the Government. This was eventually done on August 1, 1878 and it was from this reorganized Bethune school that Kadambini Bose was sent up for the first time to sit for the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University in 1878. Kadambini came out successful and was placed in the second division. It was a great event in the annals of womens education in India. It was in this year April 1878 that the senate of the university of Calcutta for the first time resolved that female candidates be admitted to University Examinations subject to certain rules.<sup>40</sup>

#### **Phase of Higher Education**

With the passing of the Entrance Examination by Miss Kadambini Bose a new career opened out for the Bethune school and a new phase of women's education began. In

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39. Benoy Ghose op.cit, p.73.

40. Ibid, p.74.

consequence of the success of Miss Kadambini Bose and in accordance with her desire to continue her studies to the First Arts examination the Lieutenant Governor consented to the proposal to raise the status of the school by appointing a Lecturer qualified to teach the First Arts course there.

It was only in the beginning of the eighties of the last century that the dream of women's education which Vidya Sagar and a few of his contemporaries had dreamt of for decades, came true. The report on Public Instruction for 1883-84 took note of this progress of higher education of women in Bengal. It said "Of the young ladies who have taken the lead among the more highly educated women of Bengal, Kadambini Bose (now Mrs. Ganguli) who took the B.A degree in January 1883 and is studying medicine in the Calcutta medical college, Chandramukhi Bose who has taken the M.A. degree with honours in English has recently been appointed a teacher in the college classes of the Bethune school".<sup>41</sup>

For Vidyasagar who was in his last stages of life - it was perhaps a consolation to him that at least one of the noble causes for which he had fought so hard-the education of women had made hopeful progress in his lifetime. He presented a copy of Cassell's Illustrated Shakespeare to Mrs. Chandramukhi Bose, after she had passed the highest

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41. Ibid, p.74.

examination of Calcutta University and got her M.A. degree.<sup>42</sup>

The government of British India at this time also took a renewed interest in women's education. The Education Commission of 1882 observed that women's education should be treated as a legitimate charge alike, on local, on Municipal and on Provincial Funds and receive special encouragement. William Hunter who headed the Commission found the picture of female education in British India, quite dismal since 98% of the girls of the school going age were still outside the schools and out of their total population of 99.7 million less than 99.5 million were unable to read and write. So the Commission strongly recommended easier terms of grant in aid for the girls schools than those prescribed for the boys schools, a simpler syllabus in girls primary school, starting women's normal schools and organise a separate inspectorate for girls education.<sup>43</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century female education was making a slow but steady progress. Girls who got the opportunity for higher educations distinguished themselves in it and the number of those who passed the higher

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42. Ibid, p.75.

43. J.C. Aggarwal, Land Marks in the History of Modern Indian Education, p.24.

examination in Arts in the provinces was also increasing. For example - in Bengal in the five years 1893-97, 193 passed Entrance, 29 F-As, 7 B.As and 2 M.As. As in 1893-97 so in 1898-1902, all the B.As were from the Bethune College, Calcutta.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of some efforts on the part of the Government the progress of women's education was not satisfactory in the period under review. The problem of securing women teachers was the most serious. Thus in the Simla Conference of 1901, the Government of Bengal reviewed the whole situation and increased the amount of grant to the Christian missionary societies on the condition that they would take up in earnest the task of training women teachers.<sup>45</sup>

Among other steps taken, was the appointment of some orthodox Hindu Mussalman women teachers for the (private instruction of girls and married women) of an elementary nature and the establishment of a few model schools for girls.<sup>46</sup>

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44. Quinquennial Review of Progress of Education, 1883-1897, quoted in G.Mukhopadhyay op.cit, p.45.

45. Annual Education Report of 1302-03 etc Government of Bengal Progs. Education December 1903, Nos 43 and 44, p. 346, quoted in G.Mukhopadhyay op.cit, p.45.

46. Ibid, pp.45-46.



According to the Government, the causes of the slow progress of womens education in Bengal were (1) the conservatism of the great majority of the people (2) the indifferent attitudes of the parents towards the education of their daughters as it was not a paying proposition in these days (3) the universal practice of early marriage of girls (4) the dearth of educated women teachers (5) the absence of a proper system for educating the zenana ladies (6) the want of adequate state aid and aid from other public funds and (7) the recurrence of natural calamities like widespread epidemic famine etc.

Owing to financial stringency and distress in the closing years of the nineteenth century a good many primary schools for boys ceased to exist; and with the closing down of primary boys schools the opportunities of girls education also became scarce. It may be noticed that the revival of Hindu religious orthodoxy in the closing years of the nineteenth century led to the withdrawal of all but extremely young girls from public schools at least in some parts of Bengal.

The Education Resolution of the Government of India 1901-1902 which reviewed the progress of female education in India as slow, did not say anything about the higher education of women which had made a promising start in

institutions like Bethune College. This was not unexpected since the Education Resolution was announced just on the eve of the passing of the Indian universities Act of March 1904 which was designed to check the spread of higher education in India<sup>47</sup>

From the various data available on the subject of the beginnings and growth of women's education in India and particularly in Bengal, a kind of patchwork of different groups, ideas, people, and policies emerge. In an age which was still grappling to lay a comprehensive base for education of the people and men at large, the education of women was bound to take a back seat.

At one end were the missionaries, who wanted to include women and men in their scheme of education hoping thereby to win converts, and at the other end were philanthropists, individuals like Bethune, Vidyasagar who were led by high ideals of championing the cause of women's education for itself. Then there were the reformers, the newly western educated class who wanted to see their wives, daughters as members of the society uplifted and made literate. And somewhere in between these strong cross currents was the Government of Bengal and India, the colonial British power,

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47. S.Ghosh, op.cit, p.81.

which in an effort to strike a balance between economic necessity, financial constraints, obtaining support from the natives and to keep the legitimacy of their rule strengthened, passed declarations, and implemented policies according to its convenience.

Amidst these factors at play it is interesting to note that women's education did make a beginning, and within a few decades, despite limited opportunities higher education became accessible to women. In fact the latter half of the nineteenth century is significant mainly because higher, or college education for women made a good start, even if at one level, education at the primary level, both for boys and girls in rural and urban areas, declined.

However, in addition to the foundation of the institutions and the circumstances which made it possible, a closer look at the nature of education imparted and the structure of institutions, provides a deeper insight into the background in which higher education for the Bengali women developed. The story of the growth of women's education in Bengal would remain incomplete, if the kind of training imparted in the institutions was not analysed. This analysis is carried forward in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER - III

#### NATURE AND CONTENT OF THE EDUCATION IMPARTED

In India the concept of universal education of providing a minimum standard of education to every boy and girl is as old as the beginning of her civilization. In the educational system evolved by the Vedic Aryans some three thousand years ago education was prescribed for all children. By the eighth year, the upanayana ceremony was performed for both boys and girls<sup>1</sup> which inaugurated the phase of education by introducing them into the home of the Guru. Here they spent a long period of apprenticeship living a life of simplicity and hard work and pursuing their studies. The curriculum included not only the study of religious texts but also all branches of culture and knowledge as they were known then. The period of study usually lasted till the age of sixteen and not infrequently till the age of twentyfour when the student got married and became a grihastha.

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1. The Brhadaranyaka Upanishad tells of a learned lady Gargi Vacaknavi who attended the discussions of the sage Yajnavalkya and for a time so nonplussed him with her reaching questions that he could only jestingly reply, Gargi, you must not ask too much, or your head will drop off! References occur here and there in later texts to girls occasionally attending the lectures of gurus and mastering at last part of the Vedas. A.L. Basham, 'The Wonder That was India', p. 179.

Unfortunately this system of education disappeared almost completely due to social changes that took place in later years. Women lost their social status especially after the entry of the non aryan element in Aryan household. They were first denied the right to study the sacred texts; later on the upanayana ceremony came to be prescribed for boys only and ultimately the right to education was denied to women. The evil of child marriage which also crept in made the education of girls virtually impossible.<sup>2</sup>

As the caste system acquired rigidity educational opportunities even among men came to be restricted to the upper castes. Among them too, only the Brahmins had access to higher learning while the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas ordinarily received only an elementary and general education and professional training. Towards the end of the ancient period the Hindu system of Education developed into two main types of schools. The Tol was the Hindu school for higher learning.

It imparted instruction through Sanskrit and provided a curriculum which covered all sectors of traditional classical training. The teachers were Brahmins and most of the pupils too were Brahmins.

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2. In general, the true functions of women was marriage, ibid., p. 180.

In addition to these institutions of higher learning there also grew up a large net work of elementary schools which provided instructions in the 3 Rs to the children mostly to boys of the upper castes and the richer landlords and agriculturists. Their teachers were persons of humble training and generally maintained themselves with small gifts of cash and kind which were given by the parents of those children who attended their schools.

As far as the female population was concerned when the British obtained possession of the Indian territories a section of the women was educated to the modest requirements of a household life. Many women of the upper class had their minds stored with the legends of the Puranas and epic poems which supplied impressive lessons in morality and also substituted for the study of history.

Among the lower orders the keeping of the daily accounts fell in some households to the mothers or chief female in the family. The arithmetic of the homestead was often conducted by primitive methods of addition and subtraction being performed by means of flowers or the notches of the sticks etc.

Among the more actively religious sects and races girls received education as a necessary part of their spiritual training.

The official surveys of indigenous education conducted in different parts of India at the beginning of the nineteenth century throw some light on the condition of the education of women. In Madras and Bombay, girls attended indigenous primary schools. However, the upper class families, preferred to provide education for women at home.

In Bengal, Adams reported in 1835 that parents did not favour the idea of giving education to their daughters. A superstitious feeling existed that a girl taught to read and write would become a widow. The general picture of the education of girls on the whole was unsatisfactory because they received no formal instruction whatsoever except for the little domestic instruction that was provided to the daughters of the upper class families.

These indigenous schools were essentially religious in character and the knowledge imparted was considered a means of spiritual growth. This set up was adversely affected when English became the court language and the medium of instruction in high schools. At first undue interference in the prevalent system of education was opposed. The British believed in leaving education in the hands of the people, and supplying what was deficient and improving what was defective.<sup>3</sup>

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3. For Details see Y.B. Mathur, Women's Education in India 1813-1966, Chapter II.

But the westerners condemned the old system of education as ridiculous. They gained an upper hand and there began the novel experiment of educating people through a foreign language.<sup>4</sup>

As the new system of education came into vogue the old Arabic and Sanskrit schools generally closed down and the country at large lapsed into illiteracy as the masses were left out in general.

The passing of examinations replaced in importance the acquiring of knowledge and the formation of characters. Since the Company followed a policy of strict non interference in the life of the people, education became divorced from religion. These changes in the scheme of education were far reaching in their results as the motive behind learning became utilitarian. Knowledge ceased to be an end in itself. This new attitude proved a serious obstacle in the education of girls and led to a distaste for higher education since, unlike boys, girls were not competing to obtain employment under the Raj - for which the English education was most suited.

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4. That this policy retarded the development of vernacular literature cannot be denied.



## FORMAL EDUCATION

A brief survey needs to be made of the nature of education imparted to women in the nineteenth century, to understand the true nature of the development of women's education, and higher education in Bengal.

In the missionary schools started by Mrs M.A. Cooke, education was free, and the students were taught reading writing, moral lessons, and sewing. It was the Christian missionaries who pleaded for making vernaculars the medium of instruction, introduced the progressive element of western learning among the common people, and devised improved methods of instruction suited to local needs and conditions.

It was the missionary societies also who decided to establish separate schools for girls in Bengal, and before 1849 they were the sole contributors to providing elementary education. No steps were taken however in the area of higher education for females. The religious nature of the education imparted made missionary schools unpopular, as the place was taken by more secular and non sectarian instructions.

The establishment of the Hindu School in 1817 had already set the stage for secular education among men, Finally the Bethune School established in May 7, 1847, inaugurated a phase of secular education for girls, three

decades after the men had already been exposed to it.

Education in the Bethune school was free and imparted through the vernacular medium<sup>5</sup> Apart from knowledge of Bengali, some training in industrial work was imparted English was an optional subject.

The opening of the Bethune School provided an impetus to the progressive elements of the society to take initiative in this field. Peary Charan Sirkar (1823-1875) started an industrial school at Barasat for the young girls of the labouring class. In this school besides, reading, writing and arithmetic in Bengali, teaching in vocational \*subjects was also imparted.

Naturally, this was a bold step which invited a lot of opposition from the reactionary and conservative elements in the society. The government's open support to the cause of women's education however quietened the reactionary elements.

Vidyasagar who prepared a comprehensive scheme for the expansion of women's education in Bengal in the light of Wood's Despatch, realized that a wide and elaborate system of vernacular education apart from English education was

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5. G. Mukhopadhyay, Mass Education in Bengal, p. 42.

essential for the rapid progress of education in the country.

Secondly mere knowledge in reading writing and arithmetic was not, in his view sufficient. To make education complete and effective Vidyasagar proposed introduction of subjects like Geography, History, Biography, Arithmetic, Geometry Physics, Physiology etc. at the elementary stage<sup>6</sup>

It is not known clearly whether all these proposals could be implemented. Vidyasagar however faced difficulties in opening schools in villages and in obtaining female teachers. At this time women's education had not made much headway in the city itself.

The Governments reluctance to modify the grants-in-aid rules in favour of girls schools, made matters difficult for Vidyasagar who was already bearing a 'part of the running cost including the teacher's salary' in the schools.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless he took the initiative in starting a fund for rendering financial assistance to girls schools and he collected money for it from persons of means in Calcutta.

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6. Ibid, p. 45.

7. Benoy Ghose, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagal, p.67.

To make the Bethune School, more accessible, and attractive to the families in Calcutta, a circular was issued in Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar which read: "None but the daughters of the respectable Hindus are taken in, and Reading, Writing Arithmetic, Natural Science, Geography and Needle work are taught. The subjects are taught through the medium of Bengali and lessons in English are given only with the consent of parents and guardians. No fee will be charged from the girls and books will be supplied free. Those who live at a distance from the school and cannot afford the cost of conveyance will be allowed free use of the carriages and palankeens of the school.<sup>8</sup>

Ishwar Chandra vidyasagar the learned pandit, selected a suitable saying from the manusamhita and got it painted on the doors of the carriages and palkee of the schools. Its meaning was that daughters too like sons can claim equal attention in training and education. This passage from one of the oldest shastras surely served to convince the Hindu householder of the need of giving education to his daughters more than tonnes of arguments based on reason could have.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Ibid p. 68.

9. Ibid, p. 68.

The Bethune School Committee noted that there was a steady increase from 1859 in the admissions. In 1862, the number of girls on the rolls were 93. It was clearly becoming popular among the upper, wealthy classes in the city. The committee in its report also noted that "The committee are happy to believe that home education for females is being resorted to by many families amongst the wealthier classes; and this result they believe is in a considerable degree owing to the beneficial influences of the Bethune school".<sup>10</sup>

Though by the year 1866-67 the number of girls schools under the Department of Education increased to about 300 and the number of students to about 6000, owing to early withdrawal by guardians very few girls were able to prosecute their studies upto a general standard, Elementary reading, writing and arithmetic with some needlework were, perhaps all that the girls were allowed to be taught by their parents in school.

The upper classes, who remained in close conformity to traditional custom preferred antahpur strisiksha or home education to formal school education (which will be discussed in a separate section in this chapter).

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10. Ibid, p. 69.

Mrs Mary Carpenters scheme of forming a Normal School for the training of female teachers also met with failure. As Vidyasagar had prophesized Hindu girls 'especially grown up upper class women were not allowed to accept any profession outside their homes".<sup>11</sup> Besides no respectable Hindu gentleman would be interested in sending his daughter or sister to teachers who came from lower classes.

The education standard in Bethune school, too remained low. In 1873 senior students of Bethune school could not write even a few lines correctly in Bengali. It may be mentioned here that on the contrary as early as 1863, students of the home educational scheme of Keshab Chandra Sen and his contemporaries could write correct Bengali, and the quality of their expression too was good.<sup>12</sup>

However as Vidyasagar pointed out that the significance of the Bethune school in imparting formal general education lay in the fact that it was desirable that there should be a well organized, female school in the heart of the metropolis to serve as a model to similar institutions in the interior. "The moral influence of the present institution in native

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11. Gopal Mukhopadhyay's, op.cit, p. 50.

12. Usha Chakravarty, Condition of Bengali Women around the second half of the 19th Century, Chapter III.

society has been undoubtedly great".<sup>13</sup>

The Tattwabodhini Sabha of the Brahma reformers, which founded the Tattwabodhini Pathsala for educating young men in the principle of patriotic self respect and national consciousness, did not set up any similar institution for women and girls. The Tattwabodhini Patrika however upheld the cause of women's educations and was to some extent successful in creating an atmosphere in the society in favour of this cause.<sup>14</sup>

Among the Brahma Reformers Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884) proved to be a strong protagonist of women's education in Bengal.

Since education of grown up girls was still lacking, Keshab Chandra Sen, started a school for grown up women, in Nov. 1871, under the patronage of the Bharat Sanskar Sabha on similar lines. Mrs Pigott a former headmistress of the Bethune school helped him in this task.

The number of adult women was 24, out of which 2 were in class I, 4 in Class II, 11 in Class III and the rest in class IV The curriculum included English, Bengali,

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13. Benoy Ghose, op.cit, p. 72.

14. Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op.cit, p. 55.

Geography, Mathematics Science composition and translation.<sup>15</sup>

Subjects like logic and metaphysics were not included as they were not meant for women. Though this school was meant for grown up women, it did not impart higher education to them.

In around 1866 Manmohan Ghosh a noted Brahmo leader, admitted his wife to the Loreto convent a missionary school for higher education.<sup>16</sup> In 1873, Monmohan Ghose along with Dwarkanath Ganguli, Durgamohan Das and others started an institution for higher studies, called Hindu Mahila vidyalaya under the aegis of Mrs Akroyd. By 1876 it was reorganized as Banga Mahila Vidyalaya.

This new revived institution began instructions for the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University The Government admitted in its Report on Public Instruction for 1876-77 that the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya was in every sense the most advanced school in Bengal with boarding accommodation.<sup>17</sup>

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15. Usha Chakravarty op.cit.

16. Not much information is available on this - The issue owes its significance to the fact that attitudes towards higher education for women were becoming broad and flexible.

17. Usha Chakravarty, op.cit., pp.144-145.



The teachers in the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya were English ladies assisted by male teachers in subjects like Bengali. It was the first attempt to establish a High English boarding school for Bengali Hindu Women.

It was found that the Government patronized Bethune school was lagging far behind the vidyalaya in matters of teaching, administration and organization. A suggestion was therefore put forward by Mr. J. Phear president of the Managing Committee of the Bethune school, that the two institutions should be amalgamated and brought directly under the supervision of the government.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore in 1878, the Bethune school with its elementary education and the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya with its higher standard were amalgamated into one the Bethune School for girls, which sent Mrs. Kadambini Ganguly to sit for the first time for the Entrance examination of the Calcutta University in 1878.

The Government, encouraged by the sources of the institution came forward with rewards and scholarships. A F.A. class was started in Bethune school in 1879 and its own successful student was admitted to it.<sup>19</sup>

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18. Benoy Ghose op.cit, p. 74.

19. Usha Chakravarty, op. cit, p. 145.

The number of girl students in F.A and B.A classes increased year by year and the two pioneer Bengali girls Kadambini and Chandramukhi passed the degree examination of Calcutta University in 1883. Higher education of women in the nineteenth century reached its high point with this event, laying the foundation for further development of formal high education.

Between 1879 and 1888 - 12 students passed the entrance exam, 6 - F.A. and 6. B.A - all from the Bethune school.<sup>20</sup> Upto 1888 all the students were considered by the university as private candidates not as regular students. In the same year the attached department of Bethune School started a separate affiliated college under the first woman M.A. Chandramukhi Basu. From 1903 Bethune school started M.A classes too.<sup>21</sup>

In April 1883, Keshab Chandra Sen Started a rival institution for higher education the Victoria college, on distinctively specific lines suited (in his opinion) to the nature of women. The dual object was to make Hindu women

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20. The girls who passed B.A. from Bethune school between 1883-1887, were Kadambini Basu in 1883, Kamini Roy in 1886, Priyatama Datta in 1886 and Kumudini Khastagiri in 1887. Source, Usha Chakravarty's, op.cit.

21. Ibid., p. 145.

good wives and mothers and provide for their suitable educations.

The college taught women simple principles of science, health, hygiene, grammar composition, history, geography - domestic science as well as ideals of Hindu womanhood Religious instruction, painting, needlework formed part of the course.

In 1897 - two girl students, Amiya Ray and Charulatu Ray became the first women to be admitted to the Presidency College.<sup>22</sup> A reaction to the secular education imparted to Bengali women, became manifest in the later part of the nineteenth century at a time when Hindu revivalist forces had gathered momentum.

The Mahakali Pathshala started by Mataji Maharani Tapaswini in 1893, at Calcutta, Mymemsingh and other places was one such institution.

In this Pathshala, meant exclusively for Hindu girls, the students came in closed carriages, studied Sanskrit Bengali with arithmetic, cooking and house wifery. More stress was laid on memory work and religious training A special prize was awarded to the best performer of puja or

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22. Presidency College Centenary Volume p.19.

worship By 1906-7, 500 students were studying in these type of schools.<sup>23</sup>

The question of women's education received attention in the Simla conference of 1901. The commission while proposing, the expansion of primary education of girls, did not make any specific provisions for the higher education of women. It proposed the promotion of zenana education<sup>24</sup> by orthodox Hindu and Mussalman teachers.<sup>25</sup>

The Simla conference, however formulated an uniform examination course for each province. This was significant since upto 1901 there was no uniform system of examination for women. The course formalised provided for a primary or vernacular and secondary or Anglo Vernacular education. The first ended in a departmental exam and the second in a public exam (school final). After two years one obtained the F.A degree and again after two years the B.A degree and finally the M.A degree after another two years.<sup>26</sup>

Between 1902-1907 there were only 3 affiliated collages for women in Bengal; The Bethune college, Loreto House and

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23. Usha Chakravarty, op cit, p.146-147.

24. Private instruction of girls and married women.

25. Usha Chakravarty, op.cit, p.147.

26. Refer Appendix for rules regarding holding of examination and granting of degrees.

the La Martiniere School (with a college department).<sup>27</sup> In the first two colleges Indian girls were allowed to read but the last did not admit them for a very long time the total number of Indian students in these affiliated colleges numbered 23 only.

#### INFORMAL EDUCATION

Apart from formal general education provided by Government aided institutions or privately started schools and colleges, there was an alternate kind of education - the zenana-education which a majority of the Bengali women received.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bengali women did not receive formal literary education in any organised way, but individually many of them were carefully instructed at home in all types of household work and

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27. La Martiniere, Calcutta was affiliated to the University of Calcutta in 1857, later reaffiliated in 1928. The Bethune Girls School (now Bethune College) was affiliated in 1888, while Loreto House attained affiliation later, in 1907, which actually falls outside the period under the review in this study. Source, 100 years of the University of Calcutta, supplement.

28. Zenana was the Persian word which meant both women and women's apartments. Here it is referred to the system of group teaching to be organized at home for women which combined the principle of feminism seclusion with a growing need for education.

traditional religious teaching. Their artistic tastes found expression in activities in alpana painting, sewing and many other useful crafts.

The term Bengali women used here is meant to denote upper class 'pardanashin' or secluded women not the lower class women who could work outdoors and move beyond the confines of their homes.

The training which paradanashin ladies received at home consisted of traditional Eastern education aimed to make women ideal mistresses at home.<sup>29</sup> The popularity of home or zenana education accrued from the fact that the scope of formal education was very limited as many girls left school on account of early marriage and no systematic effort was made to educate them when they were thus shut up in their households.

The Scotch missionaries in 1854 were the first to take up the plan of educating Bengali women at home in an organised fashion Mrs. Toogood an Eurasian lady began to instruct, Swarnakumari Debi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore in the secluded apartments in their house.

By 1861, the Indian Female Norms School and Instruction society had begun working in Bengal for the promotion of

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29. Usha Chakravarty, op.cit, Chapter III.

women's education both in regular schools and at home it had elderly women and 150 girls receiving instructions under it students under such instruction came mostly from Bengali enlightened families<sup>30</sup>

The missionary sponsored zenana and select school scheme proved a failure, ultimately as European governors employed by wealthy Bengali families, were more anxious to teach christianity than reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>31</sup>

K.C. Sen in 1862-63 started the Brahmobandhu Sabha, (Theistic Friends) which organised Antahpur Strisiksha, as he found the prevalent scheme of home education insufficient. This movement was the first of its kind undertaken by the Bengalis for Bengalis. The course content included literary training, and religious instruction.

Similarly in 1863, U.C. Datta another Brahma Reformer started the Bamabodhini Sabha (for home) with an organ for women the Bama Bodhini Patrika, which let Bengali women publish their own writings. By 1865-67, 19 such organisations existed in Bengal, which imparted education to Bengali women.<sup>32</sup>

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30. Ibid, Chapter III.

31. Benoy Ghose, op.cit, p. 60.

32. Usha Chakravarty, op.cit, p.145

The Uttarpara Hitkari Sabha in 1864, made similar attempts to educate girls who left schools at an early age due to their marriage. They were encouraged to continue studies at home even with some scholarships.

Besides there were few adult women's home education schemes organised by women themselves<sup>33</sup>. Finally this scheme of home education also received official recognition as the Education Commission of 1882 suggested allocation of Government Grants to improve the state of affairs. The Education Conference of 1901 accepted at last this recommendation but lay stress on a secular form of instruction, deputing inspectors to see to their functioning.

Malvika Karlekar is of the view that the social implication of the Zenana education must not be overlooked. The nature and curriculum were moulded to teach the virtues to be cultivated by girls such as obedience, patience, chastity, together with some basic learning, were intended to reinforce stereotypical roles in women, i.e. the job of motherhood, the merits of an educated wife and companion. It suited the needs of the new brand of western educated men.

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33. For example the Banga Mahila Samaj Started on 1 Aug 1879, The Sakhi Samiti (1886) organised by Suvarna Kumari Devi, the Bharat Stree Mahamandal of Sarala Devi (1910).



who expected something more from their prospective brides.

Even in the formal institutions differences between the sexes was reinforced, thereby determining the nature of education to be imparted.

Though there were no differences in the textbooks used for boys and for girls in the Government and Government aided school girls were encouraged to take up needlework instead of Euclid, Mensuration and Science, and instead of native accounts, they could read a little poetry.

Moreover the drills and games of boys were made different from girls. Further when girls studied in only girls schools the contents of the stories taught were also different from those taught to boys.<sup>34</sup>

The Education Commission of 1882 declared that it ought not to be taken for granted that instruction which is suitable for a boy must necessary be good for an Indian girl.<sup>35</sup>

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34. Malvika Karlekar's, article 'Women's Nature and the access to Education' in K. Chanana ed., Socialisation Education and Women, Explorations in Gender Identity, discusses these disparities.

35. Report of Progress of Education in India 1897-1902 vol II, p. 305-306, quoted in Goapl Mukhopadhyay, op.cit, p.45.

Thus higher education when it became accessible to women, created unpleasant, reactions from the conservatives elements of the society, and therefore very few women actually found the prospects of obtaining higher education attractive for the sake of attaining knowledge achievement and self actualization. A Kadambini Ganguly, or Chandramukhi Basu, did not form the order of the day instead they were exceptions to the rule. <sup>36</sup>

In fact Sarala Das, Kadambini Basu, who received immense support and invaluable help from Dwarkanath Ganguly, and managed to attain eligibility for taking the C.U entrance exam, did so, at a time when no British University had opened its doors to women.<sup>37</sup>

The same Kadambini Basu, who was hailed by Annie Besant as being a symbol that Indian freedom would uplift India's womanhood was called a fitting example of a modern Brahmo Women and was accused of being a whore<sup>38</sup> in 1891 by the Bangabasi a journal of Hindu Orthodoxy.

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36. For instance, out of the around 40 colleges in Bengal affiliated to the Calcutta University only 3 institutions as mentioned before were imparting higher education for girls especially. Source, 100 years of the University of Calcutta, Supplement.

37. M. Karlekar, op.cit, p.276.

38. The Editor of the Journal, Mohish Chandra Pal - was sued and fined Rs.150 and granted 6 months imprisonment.

Since 1880s acrimonious debates in public and in newspapers occurred, discussing the right kind of Education for girls - culminating often in the establishment of alternate institutions (like K.C. Sen's Victoria College).

The Review of 1886 noted that while lessons of emancipation are being learnt and stability has not been reached the period of transition will be marked by loosing of social ties and upheavals of customary values.<sup>39</sup> By and large the post vedic ideal of womanhood was also not totally discarded, as opportunities for education of women remained limited and the content of education defined and constrained. At the same time, the limited opportunities provided to women, did inaugurate an era of change and unsettling of values.

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39. M. Karlekar op.cit, p. 278.

**CHAPTER - IV**  
**THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The university degree, in British India, became the recognized goal of ambition not because it testified to a genuine intellectual stamp - but because it furnished the passport to respectability and competence among men, as the degree served to fulfill the state's demand for capable servants. The mischief to be deplored was the hard practical turn that circumstances gave to the mind of the educated men and also the injury done to initiative and self reliance by the peculiar practical object -which they learnt to value above everything else.<sup>1</sup>

As for the women, in an age - which did not expect respectable women to come out of the houses and work, education, or even an university degree however came to mean different things than it did to men.

Education was permitted to enter into the lives of nineteenth century women only when its subject matter and method of teaching was not regarded as threatening to the existing power relations within the family<sup>2</sup> and as long as it did not conflict with the roles women played in the

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1. J.Ghosh, Higher Education in Bengal, p.148.
  2. M.Karlekar, Woman's Nature and access to Education in K.Chanana ed. Socialisation Education and Women, p.107.

society Basic literacy skills and other accouterments were seen as essential for the daughters and wives of the recipients of western education. Educational statistics show that every year more girls were in school as well as in various institutions of higher learning, yet a societal ideology based on male superiority in decision making and control, affects the self perceptions of women as well as conditions familial views on the feminine role, limits the nature and scope of change possible through education in the condition of women.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is a school of thought which believes that the nineteenth century social reform was uniquely a result of education, especially English education.<sup>4</sup> K.K. Pillay has remarked that what the 'English education did was that it opened a new vista of mental thought process of the middle class men. Saturated with a new spirit of rationalism men by began to critically probe into the irrationally accepted age old beliefs and social customs. It was 'unsettling people's minds raising controversies and thus forwarding the cause of social progress. As an alien agent of social change in Bengal, English education injected a

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3. M.Karlekar, Ibid. p.107-108.

4. Charles Heimsath, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform, p.47.

secular element in the process of social change in nineteenth century Bengal.<sup>5</sup>

Bruce Cameron has rightly remarked that the purpose of a social movement cannot be evaluated nor the motives of its members understood unless we clearly perceive the background of the society against which they play their part.<sup>6</sup>

Nineteenth century Bengal was in a process of a gradual break up of the old political and economic order since the eighteenth century. In the age of decaying Mughal set up social values were the first casualty. The vertical divisions of the society were disturbed when the Mughal authority was eclipsed. Previous to that the Maratha invasions had dealt a severe blow to the society in Bengal which was reflected in the contemporary literary works. The large scale transplantations of population and the resulting demographic imbalance was not without significance.

After Plassey, the old nobility which was under strain, ultimately went out of occupation after the take over of administration by the English.

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5. Tarasankar Banerjee, 'Social Reform Movements in Bengal in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Social Change', in S.P. Sen ed. Social and Reform movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. p.21.

6. Ibid. p.21.

The famine of 1770 had already struck a rude blow to the social structure of Bengal. Taking ~~the~~ ~~the~~ from the English Private traders a new trading class came up with a knack for business. Cornwallis introduced the Permanent settlement, to divert capital from trade to land, thereby creating a new landed aristocracy. These zamindars with their unearned income and plenty of time at their disposal later came to the forefront of the Bengali society.

With the introduction of English administration and justice a new vista was opened in the rural sphere. However in the process of economic transition the rural society was severely strained. New industrial and trade centers grew up with a shift in the population. A structural imbalance was in the offing as a result of what may be called a new urban pull.<sup>7</sup>

Simultaneously, a gradual permeation of new ideas in the closing years of the eighteenth century, arising out of the slow introduction of a new pattern of education, introduced a new element in the society that bore fruit in the first half of the nineteenth century. The background is therefore a curtain raiser of the nineteenth century social movements.

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7. Ibid. pp.22-23.

One great service the English education had done was to bring Indian nearer to the Western thought process.<sup>8</sup> The first expression of liberal westernism was the passion for social reform, the attack on traditional practices and institutions. Sati, ban on widow marriage polygamy child marriage depressed status of women, caste restrictions etc. The main goal was the relative liberation of women and a relaxation of rigid social rules. Rammohan Roy, later the Derozians, and others like Ramgopal Ghosh, Dwarkanath Tagore, were inspired by the same western liberal social ideals.

Reforms were bound to come and this was visualised by different writers in the Tattwabodhini Patrika. In one of its issues it was written that "The customs and values<sup>in</sup> the society cannot remain the same for eternity. With the change in condition of society and men...a change in the social practices and in the value system becomes necessary."<sup>9</sup> Apart from individual efforts, organised attempts by the Brahmo Samaj, the Social Reforms Conference and the Ramkrishna Mission had been made to bring about social change through concerted action. The Introduction of education and later higher education among women, can be seen as a part of that

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8. The three strands of the philosophical thought process were liberalism, utilitarianism and positivism.

9. Op.cit. p.27.



concerted action that aimed to remove inequalities and establish social justice. But in the process, basic contradictions appeared, as the uninhibited response to the west had pitted modernity against tradition and opposed reason to superstition.<sup>10</sup>

For one, <sup>they</sup> disliked caste rules but would not renounce them publicly for fear of cutting himself adrift from the main current of his times; even later Brahmo liberation stopped half way. The rebel Young Bengals could not solve the contradiction between family attachment and social change. They showed the hesitation of a class which was not certain of itself, which had subjectively broken the bonds of tradition, but objectively was still struggling to become modern.<sup>11</sup>

The attempted social changes no doubt brought about a social consciousness but that was mostly confined to urban areas and suburban villages. the filtration of ideas from the educated layers to the lower one never took place, as the rural society and lower orders remained immune to the waves of reform.

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10. Salahuddin Ahmad, Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, p.437.

11. A. D. Pant, Rammohan Roy and Indian Liberalism, p.122.

Even the great Vidyasagar himself sometimes expressed this class bias in his view on the spread of education. An advertisement issued by the Governing Body of the Bethune school under the signature of its Honorary Secretary, Vidyasagar, clearly stated that the institution was meant for the instruction of girls belonging only to respectables and high cast~~e~~ Hindu families of Calcutta and Greater, Calcutta.<sup>12</sup> Therefore education and later higher education of women remained confined to the upper classes of women.

In fact women like Sarala Das and Kadambini Basu, both were will connected with the bhadralok of Bengal.<sup>13</sup> And it was Dwarkanath Ganguly (a trading Brahmo citizen in those days) who helped Sarala Das and Kadambini Basu to appear at the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University at a time when no leading British University had opened its doors to women.<sup>14</sup>

Dwarkanath Ganguly who was dissatisfied with existing Bengal textbooks prescribed for women, wrote alternate

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12. The advertisement was published in the Sambad Pravakar dated Calcutta January 13, 1857 and quoted in Gopal Mukhopadhyay, op.cit., p.46.

13. Sarala Das was Durga Mohan Das's daughter and Kadambini, was a cousin of Manmohan Bose.

14. M.Karlekar, op.cit., p.107.

tracts for his students, who among others included daughters of many Brahmos of the newly formed Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.

These efforts made by a limited section of the Bhadralks<sup>15</sup> was however limited in scope, because nineteenth century Bengal had not been able to deal effectively, with the conflicting ideal of education and ideal of womanhood. There were acrimonious debates since 1880's in public and through newspapers and journals, on the right kind of education of girls. These resulted in the establishing of institution, such as the Mahakali Pathshala of K.C.Sen, which aimed to reinforce, traditional womanly values of chastity, obedience, subservience among women. The zenana education that was imparted within homes also aimed at teaching girls similar values.

The introduction of Education among men had created the new elite breed, who expected something more from their prospective brides. There were advantages to be reaped by imparting knowledge which would inculcate merits of an educated wife and companion among women.

Even Kadambini Basu, who passed the University Entrance Exam with great credit obtaining high marks in Bengali, and

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15. J.H.Broomfield, Elite Conflict in a Plural Society, on p.13, onwards discusses the term Bhadralk as a distinct category.

tolerable marks in history and exact sciences, took special pains in proving her credibility as homemaker after her marriage with Dwarkanath Ganguly. despite all of which the Bangabasi a journal of Hindu Orthodoxy accused her of being a whore<sup>16</sup> as she was a modern Brahmo women.

Naturally, Bengal was ~~to~~ yet ready to accept the full implications of granting education to women, and see them developing into rational confident assertive individuals outside the purview it established traditional roles of mother wife, daughter sister etc.

Malvika Karlekar observes that society by creating the stereotype of the well educated and yet unquestioning and docile girls, purportedly ~~minimising~~ the liberating potential of education, ~~minimised~~. Rather than foster equality the educational system, with its separate curricular, brought about new differences between girls and boys.

Despite the debates among the Bengali intelligentsia on the role of education for woman, an increasing number-were going in for higher education. For instance in 1902 of the 177 female college students in India, 55 were from Bengal.

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16. Ibid., p.109.

During the quinquennium 1897-1902, 37 woman students all from Bethune College graduated from Calcutta University as against 7 in the Madras Presidency and one each from united provinces and Bombay.<sup>17</sup>

Significantly, despite so many constraints, women were coming forward to avail of educational opportunities, forming their views and also giving expression to them. the seeds of change had thus been sown.

By the middle of the nineteenth century women in Bengal began writing essays, poetry, fiction and about their own times in a growing number of journals and magazines. Most of the pieces were written in Bengali and some were published as independent books. Written as poems stories and essays these compositions emphasized the role of education in promoting new ways of viewing the world. New occupational roles for men and changing expectations of women in the home necessitated the development of a new ethics and behaviour patterns.

Between 1949 and 1905 near about 400 were estimated to have been written by Bengali women.<sup>18</sup> They reflect, various observations on changing life styles, expectations and

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17. Progress of Education in India, vol.I, p.229.

18. M.Karlekar, Voices from Within, p.11.

aspirations. A few also give expression to a certain sense of loss resentment if not anger. In part this resentment arose primarily out of a questioning of some of the assumed implications based on the differences between the two sexes. Yet all authors, functioning under a process of deeply ingrained socialization complied with what was expected of them as women.

For example the autobiographical account of Saradasundari Debi mother of K.C.Sen depicts how she too saw herself as daughter, bride wife and eventually mother.<sup>19</sup> Kailashbasini Debi's autobiography, Janaika Grihabadhur Diary or certain Housewife's diary, asserts that a women's destiny is determined by the accidental fate of her husband's personality.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from these works, there were other autobiographies which showed the same women, going through a phase of transition from an unselfconscious traditional way of life to a consciously chosen path of individualism and assertion of the self.<sup>21</sup> A questioning unsettling spirit

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19. Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'The Unperceived. Self - A study of five 19th Century Autobiographies. In K.Chanana ed. op.cit, refers to these works.

20. Ibid, p.110.

21. Prasannamayee Debi's Poorva Katha 1856-1939 and Binodhini Dasi's Amar Katha, are such autobiographical works.

could be discerned in (Amar Jiban). Where Binodini wrote that women were indeed unfortunate and could be counted as being animals: "But my mind would not accept this and was always restless with the urge to learn".<sup>22</sup>

Debates on various social practices, treatises on education for women criticism of the Antahpur, were all a part of the formal moral discourse of the times, for had been its usual exponents but in time some women also felt the need to speak and write of all that was happening to their lives.

In terms of class, and caste, English education managed to create only status groups among the rising middle class and the concept of social change remained primarily an intellectual, upper class phenomenon. As far as women were concerned only a small section of them could actually reap the benefits of education.<sup>23</sup> It was not as if education was creating a new social order. Nor were traditional

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22. Quoted in M.Karlekar's, Voices From within, p.14-15.

23. It is accepted that the Bhadrakalok comprised mainly of Brahmin Baidya and Kayasth castes, according to the census of 1881, not more than 10 percent of the Bengali population came from these. At the same time students from these castes constituted over 70 percent of the college going population. Anil Seal's - The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, provides much useful information on this. Then if women comprised half of the total population, only a tiny number wrote.

institutions and social roles which were concerned with women, demolished. What Higher education however did was to provide space for women in a patriarchal and colonial society. Moreover in keeping with the times, what has to be appreciated is that, while women could not use education as mere passport to jobs, they were actually questioning social mores and gender relations, becoming active participants in a changing environment, thereby fulfilling a holistic purpose of education.



## CONCLUSION

Several, points of significance have emerged out the discussion. It is evident from the analysis that Bengal was indeed at the forefront of imparting education to both men and women. The Presidency of Bengal, pioneered the task of reorganization of education and it was made possible by the liberal attitude of the court of Directors in England. In a Resolution dated July 17, 1823, the Governor General in Council appointed a General committee of Instruction for the Bengal Presidency, which in those days was the seat of power in British India. The Committee was empowered to spend the amount of yearly grant as sanctioned by the charter Act of 1813 for the promotion of education in this country in any manner that it might think fit and proper. This was an important factor that led to the concentration of educational activities in Bengal.

The Second point that emerges is the limited extent to which education spread among women. Higher education as has been emphasized was primarily a middle and upper middle class phenomenon in Bengal. Thus the women from these classes constituted a miniscule percentage of the women population. More than fifty percent of the population in those days consisted of the weaker sex. The major problem with regard to women's education was the conservative

attitude of the orthodox Hindus and Mussalmans. Moreover the problem of non availability of properly trained women teachers, the short school going period of four to five years, the universal practice of early marriage of girls, non existence of separate schools for girls in the districts and above all the indifferent attitude of the parents to their daughter's education, and insufficient fund allocated by the government for the same purpose made the whole problem extremely complex.

The third point that emerges from the discussion is that even the upper and middle class men who promoted women's education were not absolutely sure of a distinct line of policy and often there was a conflict within their personal and public lives. The spirit of the Renaissance is the spirit of the transvaluation of values necessitated by the needs of the time. In the wake of the foreign rule came some alien ideas which produced extreme reactions in India, a strong desire to remember and revive the past and an equally strong and uncritical desire to ape and adopt ideas of European origin. The introduction of education for women may be seen in this context, as representing traditional old values for women and at the same time, challenging them to break out of traditional roles into individuals. Therefore, the reactions to the far reaching changes in the nineteenth

century was not by any means simple. A complex culture with a long and rich tradition could not have reacted in any other way. The bhadralok had certainly grasped the importance of raising the status of their women through education but were also aware that this could not be isolated from fundamental changes in other areas of life. This much was not disputed. What was hotly disputed however were the concrete terms by which this change was to be introduced.

Lastly, a fallout of the nineteenth century introduction of higher education for both men and women in Bengal, was an emphasis on the individual both as a learner and a disseminator of knowledge. For men, it provided the economic incentive, the passport to a job and in that there was no conflict. As far as the women were concerned the purpose of education became a complex issue. Even as education inspired the growth of the mind and soul, on the other hand it did not want to see women outgrowing their social and familial roles.

Vivekananda writes in his Philosophy of Education, that the ideas of Education should be the formation of character, strengthening of the mind, expansion of the intellect and to make a persons self reliant. Thus when judged by these standards, the higher education of women, in the colonial

context of nineteenth century Bengal, fell short of these ideas. However when realistically analysed in the existing context of time and situation, it cannot be ignored that by the turn of the century the issue of women's education had already made a bold beginning.

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## APPENDIX

### Rules Regarding Holding of Examinations and Granting of Degrees in the University of Calcutta - Nineteenth Century

A candidate appearing in the Entrance Examination should complete his sixteenth year and pay an examination fee of five rupees. The subjects for examination were (1) Languages which included English and one of the following: Greek, Latin, Arabic Persian, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Urdu and Burmese; (2) History and Geography which included outlines of General History, outline of India History, a general knowledge of Geography and a knowledge of the Geography of India, (3) Mathematics and Natural Philosophy which included Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry and elementary knowledge of Mechanics, (4) Natural History which included general knowledge of the habits and characteristics of vertebrated animals and general economy of vegetation and simple or elementary organs of plants. A candidate was to apply wither to the Registrar at least fourteen days, or to the Secretary to the local committee of Public Instruction where he would be examined, at least two months before the examination, and produce testimony that he was sixteen years of age and of good moral character and also give notice in writing of the language in which he desired to be examined. A candidate could answer in either of the language he had

taken up. On the morning of the fourth Monday, after the examination, the Syndicate was to publish a list of successful candidates in two divisions. Each successful candidate was to receive a certificate signed by the Registrar.

The degree of the Bachelor of Arts was not to be conferred "within four academical years of the time of his passing the Entrance Examination", but a candidate might be admitted to the examination for the degree three years after he had passed the Entrance Examination. A candidate for the B.A. Examination must produce a testimonial from the Head of the institution that he had prosecuted a regular course of study in one of the institutions affiliated to the University. Application for permission to appear at the examination and the testimonials were to reach the Registrar at least fourteen days before the commencement of the examination. He was also to indicate the languages in which he desired to be examined. He was required to pay an examination fee of twenty-five rupees and a certificate testifying to his moral character. The subjects for an examine were

(1) Languages: English and any of the languages prescribed for Entrance Examination. (2) History which included History of England and of British India and Ancient History with

special reference to the History of Greece to the death of Alexander; History of Rome to the death of Augustus and the History of the Jews. (3) Mathematics and Natural Philosophy which included Arithmetic and Algebra, Geometry, Plane Trigonometry, Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Hydraulics and Pneumatics, Optics and Astronomy. (4) Physical Sciences which included Chemistry, Animal Physiology and Physical Geography. (5) Mental and Moral Sciences which included Logic, Moral Philosophy and Mental Philosophy.

A candidate who appeared at the B.A. Examination within five years from the date of passing his Entrance Examination and was placed at the first Division, might be examined for Honours in any one or more of these five subjects: languages, History, Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, Natural History and the Physical Sciences, and Mental and Moral Sciences. Candidates were to intimate to the Registrar their desire to be examined and the subject or subjects before the last day of March.

A person who immediately after passing the B.A. Examination obtained Honours was entitled to the degree of Master of Arts without further examination or fees. Any other graduate of any Indian university or any university of the United Kingdom might be admitted to the examination of payment of a fee of fifty rupees. There was no special

examination but the candidate was required to pass in Honours examination in at least one of the subjects.

Following the spirit of the instructions of the Directors of the East India Company, the Senate adopted the principle that no question should be asked in the examination "so as to require an expression of religious belief on the part of the candidate", and "no answer or translation given by any candidate" would be "objected to on the ground of its expressing any peculiarity of religious belief".

Source: 100 Years of the University of Calcutta (1857-1956), Calcutta, 1957.