

FEMALE EDUCATION IN THE BENGALI SOCIETY: 1849-1905

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*in partial fulfilment of the requirements*

*for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2012

## **DECLARATION**

I, Debdatta Chatterjee, do hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “**Female Education in the Bengali Society: 1849-1905**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my bonafied work. I further declare that the dissertation has not been submitted by me or by anyone else for any other degree or diploma of this or any other University.

Debdatta Chatterjee

## **CERTIFICATE**

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

**Prof. Binod Khadria**

**(Chairperson)**

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## ***Acknowledgement***

*This study would not have been possible without the co-operation and generous help rendered by a lot of people in various ways.*

*First, and foremost, I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Deepak Kumar, without whose patience and unending support, this work could not have been completed. His continuous encouragement and guidance was a great motivation to me throughout the entire research period. His faith in me propelled me to work harder. He also helped with his constructive suggestions and criticism which gave new dimension to the work and made it more meaningful. I consider myself privileged to have got this opportunity to assimilate the essentials of research under his caring supervision and shall always be indebted to him.*

*I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Neelam Kumar who not only encouraged me since the days of my preparing the synopsis, but also helped me a lot for making the improvisations in my dissertation especially in technical matters. I am thankful to both the teaching and the non-teaching faculty of the Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational Studies of the JNU for their help and support.*

*I am also grateful to Dr. Subhayu Chattopadhyay and Dr. Bipasha Raha of the Visva-Bharati University, Dr. Tanveer Nasreen Chowdhury of the Burdwan University, Dr. Simonti Sen and Dr. Urmita Ray of the Bethune College of the Calcutta University, Dr. Uttara Chakraborty (retired from the Bethune College), Dr. Aishika Chakraborty of the Brahmananda Keshub Chandra College, and Dr. Debjani Das of the Vidyasagar University for their valuable and innovative suggestions and also helping me out by providing me various books and reading materials which was a great impetus for my work. I am thankful to them all as they spared valuable time for me from their busy schedule. I am also thankful to my seniors in JNU, Kaushalya di and Shuvo da for their help and support.*

*I am thankful to the staff of the various libraries and the Government Institutions which I had to consult during the course of this work. My special thanks are to those of the National Archives of India, the Central Secretariat Library, the Nehru Memorial Library and the J.N.U. Central Library, all of Delhi, the West Bengal State Archives, the Bethune College Archives and Library, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and the National Library, all of Kolkata, and the Rabindra Bhavan Library and the Visva-Bharati Central Library of Santiniketan etc. This dissertation also owes a lot to all my friends studying in the JNU, the Calcutta University and the Visva-Bharati University of Santiniketan to whom I extend my sincere thanks. Their continuous encouragement and support helped me a lot.*

*Last but not the least, I express my sincere thanks to all of my family members and specially my parents, Dr. Biswadeb Chatterjee and Shamayita, both being the college teachers in West Bengal, and my brother Rick. It is the constant inspiration, encouragement, love and support from them which inspired me to complete my work successfully.*

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**Chapter 1**  
**Introduction**

This study proposes to deal with the introduction of female education, development and its impact on the nineteenth century Bengali society. It will try to identify both colonial and indigenous approaches, initiatives and negotiations towards the development of female education, was education for women a homogenous process, if not, why? This work would also try to address the women question from the perspectives of both the Hindu and the Muslim society.

The history of the female education has been a field of interest for a long time among the scholars. Apart from the general history of the stereotype developments of girls' schools and colleges, the reasons behind the government's interest in the field, the changing and different mentality and attitudes of the western educated nineteenth century intelligentsia towards the female education and lastly the women as they thought of themselves were some of the debated and contentious topics regarding the development of female education. There are different opinions and views on these issues as we know several competent works has been done. Regarding women education and their lives of the nineteenth century, the works of Geraldine Forbes, Meredith Borthwick, Angles Dagmar, Malavika Karlekar, Gitashreebandana Sengupta, Sambudhdha Chakraborty et al. are noteworthy.

The work of Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2 Women in Modern India*, is a pioneering work in the history of women in India. In this study, female education in India has become a part of the history of women but it could not address the address some intricate questions like complexities and contradictions within the society, bridges and gaps between the intelligentsia and of course within women themselves. Y.B.Mathur's work, *Women's Education in India 1813-1966*, however, deals with the political history and has totally emphasised on Government's role in the development of female education. *The Development of Women's Education in India, A collection of Documents 1850-1920*, edited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Joseph Bara, Chinna Rao Yagati and B. M. Sankhdher, however, is an authoritative work on the subject of female education. This work unfolds the pages of the old official records to us. This work is really of worth mentioning as, sometimes, it becomes difficult to have access to the old records. This work, however, on the development of female education, based on the compilation on official documents, helps us largely for the analysis and further critiques of happenings and doings of the contemporary time.

The other works, such as, *Voices from within Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, *Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905* and *Beyond Purdah, 1890-1939* by Malavika Karlekar, Meredith Borthwick and Angles Dagmar respectively, point to the female question from the gender ideology. Karlekar's work largely depends on the analysis of the personal narratives through which she has tried to portray the contemporary socio-economic conditions and also the position of the women. Borthwick's work, however, largely emphasis on the role of the Brahmo women in the changing societal conditions. Dagmar has viewed the women question from the political aspect with special emphasis on Hindu revivalism. In these works however, female education has become a part of the main study of the gender question.

Whereas Sonia Nishat Amin's *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*, deals with the Muslim Women's life in colonial Bengal, the works of Gitashreebandana Sengupta, "*Spandita Antorlok Atmochorite Nari Pragatir Dhara*" and Sambudhdha Chakraborty, "*Andore Antore Unish Satoke Bangali Bhadramahila*" however points out the life of Bengali women from different perspectives and changing notion of women towards life where education played a major role.

The above works, however, have done on some particular points of view of the respective scholars. So one may find it difficult to get a thorough view on the particular subject including different perspectives, such as, government attitudes and initiatives, the 'mentality' of the 'native' people and their demands and the changing notions of the women themselves. This study on the development of 'Female Education: 1849-1905' in Bengal, however, would like to deal with these issues and to portray an overall scenario of the female education. There are also several vernacular sources remained untouched. This work of mine, also would try to unfold those pages of vernacular sources, which may help to find new information of the subject.

Nineteenth century is considered as a period of new changes in every realm of the Indian society. It was during this time when the country witnessed the emergence of several intellectual waves, be it religious, social, political, economic or cultural. Among those intellectual waves, the cultural wave, especially its educational aspect, was of great importance. There was a radical change in attitudes, of both the colonial rulers and the colonized Indians, towards education in general and the female education in particular. The social reformers of the nineteenth century India were very much conscious about the issues related to the female education.

Actually these changes in the nineteenth century did not come all of a sudden. It was the time when the British Empire in India almost consolidated its political power and was facing problems to run the administration mainly due to shortage of the skilled and the English knowing people as the language appeared to be the most important barrier. Since it was not possible for the British to fill up every post in the administration by people of their homeland, they had the urgent need of making the native indigenous people English educated. In the earlier years of the colonial rule, the East India Company had no intention to interfere into the personal lives of the indigenous people either through religion or through education. Here it is important to mention that at the initiation of the nineteenth century, political, economic and social lives of the Indians became chaotic and shattered as they suffered long periods of foreign invasions and internal wars, beginning of the British rule and, most importantly, the 'Great Famine' of 1770 and, as a result, Indian system of learning lost all its pride and was lying almost at the bottom-line of the society.

The system of universal-learning, which had very much existed in the Indian subcontinent from the time of the Vedas, equally applicable both to the boys and the girls, unfortunately lost ground, almost completely, due to social changes that took place in the later years. The major victim were the women who lost their social status being denied the right to study the sacred texts as the 'Upanayana' ceremony began to be prescribed for the boys only. Ultimately, they were denied the right to education and as the evil system of child-marriage also crept in, it made education of the girls virtually impossible. Right to education even among men became restricted due to rigidity of the caste system. Higher education became confined only to the 'Brahmins' and the other two upper castes, the 'Kshatriyas' and the 'Vaishyas', could only receive elementary education. During the Muslim period, besides the existence of the traditional Hindu system of learning, another system of learning was imported into the country and that was the education in 'Maqtab'( like the Hindu elementary school, generally attached to mosques and functioned with the primary objective of teaching the boys and the girls to read and write, particularly to read the 'Holy Koran') and 'Madrassah' (corresponded to the Hindu 'Tol', an institution of higher learning which prepared a highly selective group of students for the prestigious professions of priests, judges and doctors, etc.). Though there was no rigid system of child-marriage among the Muslim women and they had some property rights, unlike the Hindus, the custom of 'Purdah' prevented the spread of education amongst them. So, barring some particular cases (examples of



very few Sanskrit learned women in Varanasi, some educated Muslim elite class women belonging mainly to the ruling strata of the society and the 'Vaishnavis', the followers of 'Chaitanya Mahaprabu'), education among women, in general, almost disappeared from the society.

Besides this worst condition of the women education, condition of the men's education was also not up to the mark because of the chaotic situation that occurred and existed towards the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century as is mentioned earlier. It was the British authorities in India to be credited for revival of the Indian learning. A series of encouraging works took place as Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrassah in response to a request of a Muslim deputation in 1781, the Asiatic society was founded by Sir William Jones, the renowned orientalist, in 1784, the Sanskrit College was founded in Benares by Sir Jonathon Duncan, the British resident with the assent of Lord Cornwallis in 1792 etc. Ultimately, it was because of the continuous pressure and influence of the religious enthusiasts in England (mainly due to the interest of spreading Christianity) and also the need for the indigenous clerk group to run the administration properly, a clause was inserted in the East India Company's Act of 1813, enabling the Governor General to devote not less than a lakh of rupees annually to spread education. It was the first governmental approach to the promotion of education. Education, however, was continuing with vernacular languages and oriental studies. The scope for mass education in general and female education in particular was still in vain even after the enactment of 1813.

After this, since 1823 onwards with the formation of the General Committee of the Public Instruction, there arose a long drawn debate popularly known as the 'Anglicist-Orientalist Controversy', between the patrons of the traditional policy of teaching through the medium of classical languages and those who wished to teach through the medium of English. Along with these, the period saw the "semi-rationalist movement led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the great Indian reformer and David Hare, a Calcutta watch-maker, who, in 1816-17, founded a college that led to the springing up, all over Bengal, of the English schools to be conducted by its pupils. The college itself was absorbed in 1855 into the Presidency College, Calcutta."<sup>1</sup> The Christian missionary movement also continuously exercised deep influence on education in India since its

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<sup>1</sup> Mathur, Y.B. *Women's Education in India 1813-1966*, Asia Publishing House, Delhi, 1973, p.5.

inception. Beginning of various rational movements in England also made footprints in India. After the long controversy between the 'East' and the 'West', in 1835, the English language and the western type of education were made the general instructions for education by the 'Macaulay Minute'. Though all these efforts were made for the betterment of education, those, in true sense, unconsciously and unfortunately, became confined only among the boys' education. The girls' education was in total darkness as they were just surviving like a shadow behind the hard curtain of 'purdah'- 'the Antahpur'. Actually they were bound to suffer from each and every social custom and norm made only for them, i.e., the child marriage, the 'Kulin Protha' (sense of caste purity), polygamy, child widowhood, and the most horrible custom of being 'Suttee'. The 'suttee', however, raised a great debate in the Privy Council in England culminating in the legislative enactment for its prohibition in 1829 through the continuous efforts of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and William Bentinck. With the beginning of the rational movement in England, the issue of vulnerable condition of the Indian women also came to the forefront.

In the nineteenth century, the question relating to the Indian women, according to the British critic, was not that "what do women want" but was "how can they be modernized". The influential British writers of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries condemned the contemporary Indian religions, culture, and society and their rules and the customs and the rituals regarding women. They argued that at any cost a new gender ideology and modification of the treatment towards women were essential for any positive change. The Indians reconstituted those ideas to fit to their own perceptions. Rajat K. Ray described the impact of such imported ideas on the contemporary social structure and values of India, as "digested and borrowed and inherited elements in such a way that the new culture could not be said to be a pale imitation but was a genuinely indigenous product."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a number of Indian intellectuals defended their own culture and its treatment towards women. Because of the differences of opinion among the Indians themselves on the female education, the canvas of educational development in India was not of a homogenous character.

Similarly there was also a large scale difference among the women in the society based on class, creed and caste etc. It has also been argued by Sumit Sarkar that the reformers of the nineteenth

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<sup>2</sup> Ray, Rajat K. 'Man, Woman and the Novel: The Rise of a New Consciousness in Bengal (1858-1947)', *IESHR*, 16, no.1 (March, 1979), p.3.

century were concerned primarily with modifying relationships within their own families and sought only “limited and controlled emancipation” of their womenfolk. According to Tanika Sarkar, the woman had to provide heavily unpaid and often unacknowledged labour at home. In her opinion “the woman would get more securely stitched into the fabric of lineage, caste and class at a later stage in her life cycle. We tend to absolutise male and female domains- this is so much in feminist writing- and see them as seamless blocs, forming opposite of total power and total powerlessness.”<sup>3</sup> The feminist critique says, the operation of patriarchy is, however, through far more “complicated trajectories, with crisscrossing power lines that fracture both domains and that, at times, unite segments across the blocs.”<sup>4</sup> The women are, perhaps, complicit subjects of patriarchy.

When this was the condition of the women in the contemporary society, it was quite unthinkable that there should be some consciousness for the development of female education. There was wide spread and strong belief that educating a girl would be a curse for her- the curse of widowhood. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, female literacy rate was extremely low in relation to male literacy. Largely, they did not have any formal kind of school education and was largely confined to domestic or household matters. Women from respectable families often studied classical or vernacular literature as “a pious recreation” and girls from propertied class received some education in keeping accounts. But most females learned only the household arts. As the education for the boys were appreciated largely, there was little interest for education of the girls. The colonial government, despite pressure being exerted by the missionaries and the liberals, was unconcerned with the female education. The unmarried missionaries started to arrive in India in the 1840s and were assigned to work with the women and children. But when that Zenana project or, better to say, the private education system became unproductive, the mission authorities substituted with the girls’ schools.

The famous Adams Report of 1835 presented a poor picture of the female education in the Rajshahi district which was under the control of the then powerful ‘zamindar’ Rani Bhavani. Though she was very powerful and educated, all the girl child of that region, from five to fourteen years, were uneducated and even their parents were fully unconscious about it. It is very

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<sup>3</sup> Sarkar, Tanika. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2000, p.21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

surprising that although the noted 'Macaulay Minute' successfully ended all the ongoing debates regarding the state of education in India, it was completely silent about the state of female education even having the 'Adams Report' with it. One reason might be that they still had the fear of interference in the private domain of the native people. As for example, the man like Elphinstone, sympathetic to India, was not very supportive of the abolition of 'Suttee'. Another reason was of course the company's expenses. The company had a strong basic reason for establishment of the English education in the country i.e. to create a group of the English educated natives with English education and wealth making becoming the parallels. So there was no basic need for the promotion of female education. Even in their own country in England, the female education had no popular base. The womenfolk in the lower class population there, completely deprived of education, as the upper class women, was not enjoying any better condition. There was the system of 'boarding school' for the upper classes but was very limited in number. The condition was almost the same even in the 'Victorian Age' too. So when the condition prevailing in their own country was no better for development of the female education, their awareness for betterment of the condition of the native women was very uncommon.

Still there were some differences among them. A group of liberals and the Christian missionaries took the first initiative for developing the female education in India. The Calcutta School Society, with Raja Radhakanta Deb at its head, began to promote the female education. He became a patron of the female education and assisted in formation of the 'Calcutta Female Juvenile Society' (founded in 1819 by the Baptists). In 1824, it became attached with the Bengal Christian School Society. This society brought Miss Mary Anne Cooke in India for the spread of female education. She, however, opened thirty schools for the "respectable" Hindu girls. "The schools enjoyed patronage of the Hindu gentlemen and were staffed by the Brahmin pundits, but they failed to attract girls from the higher castes. The religious instructions deterred the prestigious families but pupils from the lower castes or the Christian families were lured to the schools by gift of clothing and other items."<sup>5</sup> But still there were seventy schools throughout Bengal (Calcutta, Chinsurah, Burdwan, Dacca, and Chattagram) with approximately one thousand two hundred and seventy students (according to the 'Samachar Darpan'). Whatever might be the success rate of these schools, they somehow started a new trend in education.

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<sup>5</sup> Forbes, Geraldin. *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2 Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 39.

Ultimately, with the foundation of the Bethune School on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1849 by John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune in Calcutta, development of the female education got a momentum. The foundation of this school was converted into a movement of the female education with Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Madon Mohon Tarkalankar, Prosonno Kumar Tagore et al. being its soldiers.

### **Genuine Indigenous Product:**

It was from the middle of the nineteenth century that the institutionalized system of education began to take shape. It was not that only the colonial government took the initiative but it was a continuous process of negotiations and renegotiations between the colonial government and the indigenous intelligentsia. Regarding the question of the female education along with the colonial educational regime, the indigenous educational regime was also important. Both the initiatives marked the 1850s as the watershed years when the institutional and the ideational infrastructure of the primary, secondary and tertiary education was developed on a rapid scale. As it is already said that spread of education in India was not a homogenous process, the contestation in the terrain of education occurred in two main areas---1) on the one hand, the asymmetrical relationship between the ruled and the ruler, 2) on the other hand, subordinate-superordinate, hegemon-hegemonized relationship within the Indian society (based on class, caste and gender inequalities). There was a serious absence of liberal views regarding the female education among the nineteenth century male reformers. The debate was going on between the conservatives and the liberals within the realm of the Hinduism, between the Bramhos and the Hindus over the issues like what type of education should be given to the women, what would be the curricula, whether a girl should get similar education like her male counterpart or not. Before 1850, there were very few women who came forward to articulate their ideas about the female education but, by the turn of the century, women were ready to design a curriculum and set up schools for the girls.

Beside this, there was a serious gap between the Hindu and the Muslim societies. This gap was not only between the women of both the societies but also among their male counterparts. Actually there were multiple differences among the Muslim community. In addition to this, they

also remained backward in comparison with the Hindus. The developmental phenomenon was something that was present among the Hindus. One of the major means of this developmental phenomenon was adoption of the Western education system by the Hindus after 1857 (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). The Muslim community had withdrawn into its own shell following the uprising of 1857 and its aftermath.<sup>6</sup> The Muslims were somehow managing by invoking Urdu but the Hindus learnt English to acquire the governmental posts and the other facilities. But, gradually, in many areas, Urdu was replaced by English and, the moment this trend was started, the Muslims started to lag behind. They did not want to learn English as many of them still had, in their mind, the pride of the past Islamic rule during the medieval period. In spite of this, there were also differences in reactions of the Muslims towards the British rule.

### **Syed Ahmed Khan and Aligarh Movement:**

It was actually a division of attitudes between the elite propertied class and the common men. The elite Muslims preferred to be guided by the Western model of modernity while the lower section was under the influence of the ulehmas. The Muslim society, from the very beginning, was greatly influenced by their activities. But because of advancement of the Western education and the beginning of the Aligarh movement, the ulemahs gradually started to lose position in the society. It is true that a system of schools for the Muslims was in existence all over Northern India. But because of the very closeness between religion and education, those schools often failed to be the authentic centers of learning. It was Syed Ahmed Khan, who started to adopt a modernization program for the Muslims and founded, for this purpose, the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh in 1877.

But there was no serious attempt for development of the Muslim women's education and so their position and status in the society at the beginning of the enlightened era of the nineteenth century remained low. Elementary education was a necessity in Islam as everybody had to read 'Koran'. During the medieval period, the women of the ruling and the elite class were very much educated. Many of them had excellent literary skills as we know of Gulbadan Begum's (Babar's

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<sup>6</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. *The World of Women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1996, p.140.

daughter and Humayun's sister) 'Humayunnama'. Hamida Banu, Nurjahan, Salima Sultana, Jahanara Begum, Zebunnesa etc. all were highly educated women of the medieval period. In spite of such a long list of these educated women, "one cannot fail to notice the limitations imposed upon them. Sometimes the Maulavis were reluctant to teach the girl students."<sup>7</sup> In rural society, the women enjoyed some kind of liberation in the context of purdah for economic reasons. But, generally, all the women lived in 'antahpur' observing purdah, and it was a popular custom among the women, both the Hindu and the Muslim. Even in spite of having a long list of the exceptionally educated women in the eighteenth century, the Muslim women's education was limited and restricted. Actually, condition of the women of both the communities, the Hindu and the Muslim, was the same at least regarding the education. Later, from the second decade of the nineteenth century, the missionaries made some good efforts for development of the female education. The 'Samachar Darpan' (a Bengali daily) in its December 27, 1820 issue stated: "At 10 o'clock in the morning of Friday...an examination was held at 'Gouribari', Calcutta. About 150 Hindu and Muslim girls participated in the examination" (one examination was organized by the Female Juvenile Society).

### **Backwardness of the Muslim Women:**

The Muslim women's education, however, got a setback probably in 1835 with the introduction of the English language as the medium of instruction as the Muslim men could not adopt that quickly. Purdah became stricter as one way out of conservatism and orthodoxy. Even after decades of the 1857 revolt

"The conservatism in Muslim society was voiced at a meeting of the Bengal Social Science Association in Calcutta, where Nawab Abdul Latif was reading a paper on Muslim education. Nawab Abdul Latif belonged to that select group of enlightened Muslims in Calcutta, which had been pointing out to their co-religionists, in the post-mutiny period the wisdom of following a pro-British policy and accepting English education."<sup>8</sup>

There, in a discussion, Peary Chand Mitra asked whether similar efforts were made for the Muslim female education like the Hindu's. Maulavi Abdul Hakim of the Calcutta Madrassah

<sup>7</sup> Chakroborty, Uttara. 'Muslim Women at the Cross Road: Quest for Identity Bengal (C. 1400-1947)', *Education and Empowerment Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Kolkata, 2001, p.78.

<sup>8</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. op cit. p.141.

replied “the scriptures had ordained education for both the boys and the girls and, to this end; many Muslim women were renowned throughout history for their learning”.<sup>9</sup> This type of education was imparted within the four walls of home. So there was no necessity for a Muslim girl to go outside the home for education following what the girls of other communities did. Abdul Latif, as far as the record goes, did not utter a single word.

So if we compare the Muslim women’s condition with the Hindu women from the mid-nineteenth century, we can find serious gap in it. Whatever might be the success of education for the women, we cannot deny the true attempt of the liberals and the Brahmos for betterment of the women of our society especially through education. Though several girls’ schools were opened in Dhaka and the surroundings, condition of the Muslim female education was not very considerable. However, a Muslim woman came forward with a daring plan to set up a school for the ‘purdanasin’ girls in Comilla. She was Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, well known for her serious attempt for promotion of the female education. The first school in Calcutta for the Muslim girls was started by Nawab Begum Firdaus Mahal of Murshidabad in 1897. It can be said, in a general sense that the Muslim women came forward for the promotion of their own education than their male counterpart.

Maulana Abu ala Maududi, in his book ‘Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam’ has written that the “Islamist discourse was premised on a natural ‘Islamic order’ whereby women were inherently inferior to men”<sup>10</sup>. The public-private dichotomy was a structural feature of this ‘natural’ sexual hierarchy. Maududi ascribed ‘female inferiority’ to what he claimed was woman’s ‘essential’ nature, i.e. emotional, irrational and overtly sensitive. The principle of equality was considered reprehensible by the Islamists. Similarly, they were strongly opposed to the social intermingling of the sexes and to any degree of autonomy for the women. Unlike the ulemah (and Thanawi) who did not subscribe to any mental or intellectual difference between the men and the women, the Islamists declared the women incapable of learning or of producing knowledge.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Maudadi, Maulana Abu ala. *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*, Taj Company Pvt. Ltd. Lahore, 1935, p.145.



The Islamic order placed the women strictly within the home, endorsed *pardah* and idealized domesticity; the only training the women were deemed fit for was to facilitate their predestined role as good housekeepers and mothers. Even Syed Ahmed Khan himself remained apprehensive of the newly established government schools doing good for the Indian girls (Iraqi 2008). His greatest fear was that these schools would endanger the norms of the already crumbling social order of the elite (Sharif) culture as the girls from all the classes would be together. At the Third Session of the Muhammadan Educational Conference held at Lahore in 1889, he expressed the same strong dislike for schools for the girls. There were two basic arguments which he made in his opposition to the women's education. First, he believed that education should come first to the Muslim men who, in turn, would filter it to the women in their households. According to him, the concept of the women getting education first, and men falling behind, would jeopardize gender relationships and, thereby, life within households would be fractured. His second argument was mainly built against the usefulness of the government-sponsored system of education for the girls. He questioned the suitability of this education system to the needs of the Indian girls and women, particularly the Muslim women.

Despite pressures of religious orthodoxies, social prejudice and class/gender bias, the Muslim women, at the start of the twentieth century, successfully emerged from isolation of the traditional roles as the self-aware individuals, determined to claim a greater role in public affairs. The theme of the women's education was taken up by all the communities including the Muslims. This topic was first raised at the all-male Muslim Educational Congress in 1896, and, in subsequent years, "there were vigorous attempts by the Muslim women to lobby for the women's education and the entry in politics"<sup>11</sup>. In 1906, Sheikh Abdullah and his wife, Wahid Jahan Begum, established a separate school for the girls at Aligarh. In 1909, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) began an institution for the Muslim girls in the district town of Bhagalpur in Bihar but it soon became closed. Later, in 1911, she established the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School (in memory of her husband and, now- a- days, a renowned school in Kolkata) in Calcutta (Forbes 1998). But there were differences in the levels of education among the Muslim women mainly based on religion and their socio-economic status.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.156.

## **Hindu Women and the Society**

As is already noted that the most important step in institutionalizing the girls' education was the foundation of the Calcutta Female School, 1849 by J.E.Drinkwater Bethune, legal member of the Governor General's Council and president of the Council of Education. But, in 1863, it became clear that the upper caste prejudices in the female education are continuing. Geraldine Forbes, in her study, has shown that how and why the women enforced the prohibition against the female education and the main prejudice was that the learned woman would become widow immediately after her marriage. Many of the women who learned to read before 1870s reported hiding their accomplishments from other women. So by examining the cases of Rassundari Devi (who wrote the earliest women's memoirs, 'Aamar Jivan' 1876), Haimavati Sen (1866-1932) or Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) and of few others, we cannot reach any generalized conclusion about the progress of the Women's education in that period. These headstrong women were only a minority.

Since the time of the Governor Generalship of Lord William Bentinck, there is some evidence of the governmental encouragement for development of the women's education. This was also evident in the Wood's Despatch of 1854. Actually, the problem was that the Indian norms and social customs could not be matched up with the British system of schooling. The idea of sex segregation and, in some areas, complete seclusion, meant the girls had to have female teachers and separate institutions. The widely accepted idea of youthful (child) marriage limited a girl's school going years. In the field of the female education, Mary carpenter's name is of great importance. She was a great English social reformer. She came to this country and tried to give a new lead to education of the women. Her contribution in this field was to suggest that the main obstacle in promotion of the female education was the universal want of the female teachers and that this should be met by establishing a Female Normal Training School.

Female education, however, got the momentum with establishment of the government schools such as the Bethune School and the schools sponsored by the reformist-religious institutions such as, first of all, the Brahmo Samaj and, later, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society etc. with all supporting the female education. The Brahmo Samaj in

Bengal led the movement of female education and equality between the genders. The Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya was established on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 1873 and, by 1878, that school had merged with the older Bethune School to become the Bethune College, an affiliate of the Calcutta University. In 1883, Kadambini Basu and Chandramukhi Basu received their B.A. degree from the Bethune College, to becoming the first women graduates in the British Empire.

In the field of medical education, introduction of the Dufferin Fund in 1882 expanded medical access and education to both the British and the Indian women. At the turn of the century, medical education, among the women, became very important. Kadambini Ganguli, Abala Basu etc. are some of the important names in this field.

### **Further Developments:**

Between 1849 to 1882, as per the Hunter Commission Report on Indian education, serious efforts were made to set up primary schools for the girls and the teacher training institutions. The report, however, recommended more liberal grants in-aid for the girls than for the boys and special scholarships and prizes. In the next two decades, higher education expanded rapidly. As for example, where there were only six girl students in the Indian universities in 1881-82, it was 264 by the turn of the century. Then establishment of the Mahakali Pathshala (1893) by Mataji Tapaswini was of great importance. This school was a 'genuine Indian attempt' at developing the female education as it received no financial assistance from the foreigners and employed no foreign teacher. Founders of this institution accepted the school model for the female education but opposed the co-education and implementation of one syllabus for both the sexes. Its aim was to educate girls on strictly nationalist lines (almost dreamt similarly like the revivalists of that time, as it was the age of 'Hindu Revivalism' or reawakening) in the hope that they might regenerate the Hindu society. This was a project consistent with that of the nationalist 'revivalists', who, according to Tanika Sarkar, did not automatically oppose reform 'in the name of resisting colonial knowledge'. But it is very true that those nationalist 'revivalists'(though not in the line of liberal reformers) also believed in the relationship between progress and female education and looked to a future where Indian women would play a large role in the affairs of the country. From the nationalists' viewpoint, education and respectability in an Indian woman was

required to help her retain the culture of her home or country from the outside influences. Thus, despite the woman being educated, it was at the behest of the man who allowed her in minimal participation in, for example, rallies against the imperial administration. At the same time, the works of those nationalist 'revivalists' cannot always be supported specially during the ongoing debates on the 'Age of Consent Bill' and some incidents in Maharashtra as Tanika Sarkar has commented that women's body became the area of politics.

The group of 'new women' of the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the twentieth century became strong critics of the British Policy in India. Here we can cite the examples of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. During the Swadeshi Movement of 1905, the female voice became very strong and, in various parts, they engaged themselves in organizing people for the movement. The year 1898 saw some changes in the educational policy of the government with the appointment of Lord Curzon as the viceroy. Actually the British Officials in India saw a direct link between the English education and the rise of nationalism. They viewed the Indian National Congress and its leaders as a microscopic minority created by the Indian Universities and cut off from the rest of the population. Curzon strongly believed that the first and the foremost cause of political unrest in India was 'the education we have given to the people of the country'. But it was too late to lament on Macaulay's decision to introduce the English education. So Curzon formally abandoned the doctrine that the state should not interfere in education but thought that the state should have the initiative and control a planned system from the centre and the result was the Universities Act of 1904. My proposed work would see whether the new change in the educational policy affected the female education or not.

The first generation of the educated women found a voice, they wrote about their lives and conditions. The second generation was the true representative of them. They articulated the needs of women, critiqued their own society and the foreign rule and developed their own institutions. From the limited and confined boundaries of the early nineteenth century, female education had been stretched considerably to the early twentieth century.

As the year 1849 is considered as the landmark in the history of the female education in India in general and in Bengal in particular, this study would start its journey from establishment of the 'Calcutta Female School' (the Bethune School). In the next three chapters, there would be detailed dealings of development of the female education afterwards, the changing nature of

womanhood, period of nationalism with formation of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Hindu Revivalism with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and specially the year 1905 at its end, as the period of new awakening-the Swadeshi movement and a new cultural consciousness with Rabindranath Tagore and his 'ashrama' in Santiniketan taking a centre stage.

The second chapter, namely, 'Imperatives and Progress' would be dealt with the Government's attitudes and initiatives towards development of the native females' education and their stand regarding the Bethune school. In this chapter, there would be a portrayal of J.E.Drinkwater Bethune with his vision and mission for development of the female education and, after his death in 1851, the government's attitudes and initiatives to that particular question of the female education. The third chapter, 'Changing Perceptions and Demands' would address the issues like the origin of Reformation in the context of India, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian reformers and their consciousness of the condition of their womenfolk. It was also a very strong point of interest that what did modernity mean to the intelligentsia- whether they thought of women emancipation or only wanted to have 'trophy-wives' who would not only increase their social status but would also lead domestic life up to the mark. If we analyze the scenario of the second half of the nineteenth century, we can find the continuous change in the mentality, attitudes and demands of the intelligentsia with the span of time. This chapter would seek answer of those causing the differences. The changes in their perceptions and the contemporary social condition also left effect on the newly built school's infrastructure and ideological bases.

The fourth chapter, namely, 'A Caged Bird: Women in the Bengali Society' would address the issues like women's own perception for themselves and how far they became successful as the educated women. It is important here to remember that whether they got space from their male counterparts as professionals, as a whole what meant education for them, and, also, how much they were conscious of their 'self-ness'. There were also differences among the women-institutionally educated and self-educated. In this chapter there would be some case studies of the educated women along with the detailed study of the Muslim society. Though the women's condition in both the communities was almost the same, there were still some differences, mainly in the thought process of their male counterparts. For the concluding period of the nineteenth century, it is very important to address the issue of women's political consciousness of the time and the study of women in that context. This, to some extent, led a new beginning of the cultural consciousness with the 'Tagore family of Jorasanko' being at its centre.

The concluding chapter would be a remembrance of the whole journey, with beginning of the Swadeshi movement and a new cultural atmosphere in Santiniketan, which may be portrayed as culmination of the women's educational development and, lastly, women's position in the beginning of a new century.

There are several works done on development of the female education in the colonial period. The works of Geraldine Forbes, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Bharati Ray, Aparna Basu, Malavika Karlekar, Gitoshree Bandana Sengupta et al. are noteworthy. Besides these secondary sources, this work will deal with primary sources too. For the official records, I have consulted the National Archives of India, New Delhi, the Shastri Bhavan Library, New Delhi and the West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata. For the indigenous sources, I have concentrated only on the Bengali journals and newspapers and selected, from too many, the 'Sambad Pravakar'(the famous Bengali Daily), the 'Bamabodhini Patrika' (the first journal for the Bengali women, 1863-1920, with Umesh Chandra Dutt as the editor), the 'Banga Mahila'(the first women fortnightly, 1870, with Mokshada Devi, sister of W.C.Bonnerjee, the first President of the INC, as the editor), the 'Abala Bandhab'(1869, Dwarakanath Ganguly was the editor who concentrated on the all-round rehabilitation of woman's life, mind and status), the 'Bharati'(1876, Swarnakumari Devi and her two daughters, Hiranmoyee and Sarala Devi, managed editing of this brilliant journal for years enriching the Bengali literature not only by poems, novels and plays but even by writing books on music, popular science, politics and patriotic essays of rare quality) etc.

There were also other noted newspapers and journals to give portrayal of the contemporary society, but, in this work, I could not go through the pages of those due to shortage of time. Those untouched pages, I hope, would also provide lot more knowledge about the women of the then society, their thoughts, and their demands. One must admit that it is very difficult to perfectly portray the periodization of women's emancipation in general and development of their education in particular within a short space, time and scope as this study provides me. Here lies the limitation of my work. I wish to overcome those in my bigger study in future.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Imperatives and Progress**

Prior to the Despatch of 1854 from the Court of Directors, female education was not recognized as a branch of the State system of education in India. The attention of the authorities does not appear to have been directed to the subject until many years, after they had adopted definite measures for the education of boys...In none of the general despatches relating to educational matters submitted to or received from the Court of Directors during the first half of the (nineteenth) century is there any reference to the education of Indian girls and women. It would seem that the authorities both in England and India were of opinion that any attempt to introduce female education, when there was no demand for it, might be regarded by the people as an interference with their social customs.<sup>1</sup>

The East India Company was convinced that there was no genuine demand for female education. It was a profit-oriented company. It did not come to India to promote education, much less to its women. The East India Company, however, followed a strict rule of non-interference with the socio-religious life of the 'native' people. That rule of non-interference was the main reason for the Company's disinterest in the matter of female education. Even same was the case for promotion of the boys' education.

The Company's Charter Act of 1813 asked the government to devote not less than a lakh of rupees annually to education. It was the first legislative enactment which recognized that education will be promoted out of the public revenues. But, the fund made available was to be spent mainly on teaching of the Indian classical languages, Sanskrit and Arabic, and on translations into those languages. During that time, some British officials were largely in favour of revival of the ancient Indian learning. With the existence of that broader concept, there was also a preconceived notion of non-interference and the fear was expressed that the new policy, began with the Macaulay Minute (1835), might seriously offend the Indian sentiments.

Now, when the question of female education, the Company's government comes continued its policy of non-interference up to decade of the 1850s. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, some official surveys, conducted in different parts of India, threw some light on the condition of education of women. "In Madras, Munro reported in 1822 that 5,480 girls attended the indigenous primary schools as against 1, 78,630 boys. In Bombay, no girl attended the

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<sup>1</sup> Richley. J. A. (ed.) Calcutta, Superintendent, Government Printing, Bureau of education, Selections from Educational Records, Part II (1840-1859), Printed at Calcutta, 1922, Reprinted by National Archives of India, New Delhi, 1965, p.32.



indigenous public schools between 1824 and 1829”.<sup>2</sup> In Bengal, William Adam reported (William Adam’s Report of 1835 on the state of female education in Bengal) that:

The notion of providing the means of instruction for female children never enters into the mind of the parents; and girls are equally deprived of that imperfect domestic instruction which is sometimes given to boys. A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by the women and not discouraged by the men, that a girl taught to write and read will soon after marriage become a widow, an event which is regarded as nearly the worst misfortune that can befall the sex; and the belief is also generally entertained in native society that intrigue is facilitated by a knowledge of letters on the part of the females. Under the influence of these fears there is not only nothing done in a native family to promote female instruction, but an anxiety is often evinced to discourage any inclination to acquire the most elementary knowledge...<sup>3</sup>

In his Report, Adam also pointed out that in the single district of Rajshahi, there is the number of 1, 34,336 girls of the teachable age growing up in total ignorance. He particularly cited the examples of some zamindaris which were run by the lady zamindars, such as Rani Bhavani of Natttore, Rani Suryamani and Kamal Mani Dasi et al. They were known to possess a competent of knowledge of Bengali accounts and writings. But there were no initiatives from their side for upliftment of the women from the miserable condition they live, at least through education. Adam also mentioned in his report about the disciples of *Chaitanya Mahaprabu*. He said

Other exceptions to the general ignorance are found amongst the medieval Vaishnavas or followers of Chaitanya, amounting in Natore probably to fourteen or fifteen hundred individuals, who are generally able to write and read and who are also alleged to instruct their daughters in these accomplishments. They are the only religious body of whom as a sect the practice is characteristic. Yet it is a fact that as a sect they rank precisely the lowest in point of general morality, and especially in respect of the virtue of their women.<sup>4</sup>

The Company’s government was also aware of the activities of the missionaries and their involvement in development of the female education through the establishment of schools in various places. The Government directly, however, neither took part in those activities nor encouraged them for promotion of the female education. Though, in Adam’s Report of 1835, mentioned a detail about the missionary activities since the starting of the Female Juvenile Society of 1822. Since 1840 onwards, there were ongoing discussions for development of the

<sup>2</sup> Mathur, Y.B. *Women’s Education in India 1813-1966*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973, p.19.

<sup>3</sup> William Adam’s Report on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar, Calcutta, 1868, pp.131-32.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

female education among the ‘native’ intelligentsia. However, the problem with the ‘native’ people regarding those missionary schools were the admission of the lower class people, imparting education on Christianity and ultimately the fear of conversion. One of the noted members of the ‘Young Bengal’, Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjea, wrote to J.E.D. Bethune (Legislative Member of the Supreme Council of India and President of the Council of Education):

Many Hindus of respectability are, I know from personal observation, very desirous in the abstract of instructing their females. They see the palpable benefits which education has conferred upon their Western sisters, and often wish they could boast of such accomplished wives and daughters as those of their European neighbours, so that I think many would instruct the female sex, if their reputation and perhaps caste were not at stake.<sup>5</sup>

There was, however, a continuous urge from the side of the ‘native’ intelligentsia in 1830 onwards for development of the condition of the women in the country. Many a times there was appeal to the government also to take some initiatives in that particular subject. But it was not before 1854 that the government did take any interest in it.

### **Changing Attitude: ‘Frank and Cordial Support’**

The government for the first time came to direct contact with the subject of female education after establishment of the Calcutta Female School (later known as the Bethune School) in 1849. The school initially was established as a complete individual effort of J.E.D. Bethune. Bethune, in his inaugural speech on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1849, commented on his purpose of not involving the Government at the initial period of establishment of the school.

He said that

It was impossible to overlook that, before I could hope to establish this as a Government institution in a matter of such deep importance to the welfare of the country, there must be consultations and debates, and, perhaps, even references to the authorities at home. I must have surrendered something of my free of power of action, and especially delays would have intervened, which of all things, I most deprecated. I must have been prepared too to show to the Government assured means of success, before they could be asked to sanction the novel measure, and out

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<sup>5</sup> Extracts of Krishna Mohan Banerjea’s letter to J. E. D. Bethune on Female Education, 1849, Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi. Bara, Joseph. Yagati, Chinna Rao. Sankhdher, B.M. (ed.), *The Development of Women’s Education in India: A Collection of Documents 1850-1920*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp.8-9.

of all this I foresaw inconveniences and difficulties arising in my mind which more than counterbalanced the obvious advantages of such connection.<sup>6</sup>

From the very initial period, however, the school began to face various problems. It was promised by Bethune in his speech that no girl from the lower class families would be admitted. The problem started with this particular issue. Soon after the school started working, a tendentious rumour was afloat that, contrary to the promise made initially, girls from 'lower origin' were being admitted to the school. One of the associates of the school, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, vehemently protested and emphasized that all girls were from the respectable families. "The admission committee had to remain under the critical gaze of the public and the press and often there were allegations sometimes false and sometimes partially true."<sup>7</sup>

Another problem was the continuous shortage of girl students and limitation of their school going years. Dakshinaranjan pointed to the typical law of the Hindu customs. According to that, a girl was to be married at the age of eight or nine (Rule of Child marriage) and a girl used to go to the school only after five or six years of her age. So she could not get education for not more than four to five years and that time period was too short to acquire cognizable knowledge. Dakshinaranjan commented that "although for some very rich *kulin* families marriageable age of girls exceeded nine years, for most of the girls coming from ordinary middle class families nine was the age limit. Parents of ordinary means would not dare to violate this norm."<sup>8</sup>

Due to the ongoing social oppositions, Bethune decided to take support from other institutions to the cause of spreading female education in Bengal. It was the government whose support and co-operation Bethune asked for. Bethune wrote:

I am of opinion that the time is come when all that is needed to secure their complete success is a declaration on the part of Government that it looks on them with a favourable eye. It may seem incredible after all that the Government has done in the cause of education that such a declaration should be thought necessary in order to convince the people of this fact, but among the shameless expedients to

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<sup>6</sup> This speech of Bethune was published in the Bengal Harkaru and in Indian Gazette, May 8, 1849.

<sup>7</sup> Ghosh, Sunanda. 'Bethune The Man and His mission', *Bethune, His School and Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Kolkata, 2006, p.29.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

which the opponents of female education have resorted has been an unblushing assertion that the Government is not merely indifferent but actually hostile to it.<sup>9</sup>

He became able to convince Lord Dalhousie that there was an urgent need to lay down a policy regarding girls' education. He insisted that it was high time government took up the issue directly. Lord Dalhousie took lead in this matter and issued orders that no single change in the habits of the people is likely to lead to more important and beneficial consequences than the introduction of education for their female children and that "a great work has been done for the successful introduction of native female education in India by the Hon'ble Mr. J.E.D. Bethune and it has been placed on solid and sound foundation".<sup>10</sup>

In reply to Bethune's request of taking greater interest in providing 'native' females' education, Lord Dalhousie wrote in his minute dated 1 April, 1850, that:

Mr. Bethune has, in my humble opinion, done a great work in the first successful introduction of Native Female Education in India, on a sound and solid foundation; and has earned a right not only to the gratitude of the Government but to its frank and cordial support.

I therefore fully assent to the requests he has made in the letter now before me and if my colleagues should take the same view. I recommend that the communications to the Council of Education and to the Court of Directors shall be made forthwith.<sup>11</sup>

It is here important to mention that though the Company's government did not take any initiative of their own but was now not apprehensive of the promotion of female education. Based on Lord Dalhousie's minute, necessary steps were taken in the very next letter from the Government of India to the Government of Bengal on 'Female Education in Bengal' dated 11 April 1850.

The success which has been accomplished in so short a time, far exceeding any expectation its most sanguine supporters would have been justified in entertaining at the commencement, receives a double value from the consideration that it has been achieved by the exertions of a private individual and cannot be attributed to the influence of the power of Government.

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<sup>9</sup> Letter of J.E.D. Bethune to the Governor General on female education dated 28<sup>th</sup> March 1850, Richley .J. A. (ed.) op cit. pp.47-48.

<sup>10</sup> Mathur, Y.B. op cit. p.25.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Dalhousie's Minute on Female Education in connection with Bethune's experiment, 1 April 1850, Richley, J.A. op cit. p.50.

The Governor-General in Council requests that the Council of Education may be informed that it is henceforward to consider its functions as comprising the superintendence of native female education, and that wherever any disposition is shown by the natives to establish female schools it will be its duty to give them all possible encouragement and further their plans in every way that is not inconsistent with the efficiency of the institutions already under their management. It is the wish also of the Governor-General in Council that intimation to the same effect should be given to the Chief Civil Officers of the Mofussil calling their attention to the growing disposition among the natives to establish female schools, and directing them to use all means at their disposal for encouraging those institutions and for making it generally known that he views them with very great approbation.<sup>12</sup>

The policy of the Indian Government regarding the 'native' female education was first laid down in the Despatch of 1854 (known as Wood's Despatch). By that time the Company's Government realized that the importance of female education in India could not be overrated and also observed that there was an increased desire on the part of the many of the natives to give a good education to their daughters. "By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men. We have already observed that schools for females are included among those to which grants-in-aid may be given and we cannot refrain from expressing cordial sympathy with the efforts which are made in this direction."<sup>13</sup> There was a declaration from the Governor-general in Council to the government of Bengal that the Government ought to give to the native female education the frank and cordial support. Unfortunately, the initiatives failed to achieve its initial success because of the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857. The Revolt, however, caused a major setback to the Government initiatives in development of the female education. With the end of the Revolt, the Company's rule also came to an end. From 1858 onwards, it was Her Majesty Queen's Government and, from the very initial period, the Government was guided by the policy of social and religious neutrality.

Lord Stanley's Despatch of 1859 sounded a more cautious note when it observed that "both the difficulties and the importance of female education are adequately appreciated by the officers of the Department of Education"<sup>14</sup> and invited by the views of the Governor-General in Council as

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<sup>12</sup> Letter from the Government of India to the Government of Bengal on 'Female Education in Bengal' dated 11 April 1850, Richley, *ibid.* p.53.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Mathur, Y.B. *op cit.* p.29.

to the “nature and degree of the influence which may safely and properly be exerted by the officers of the Department of Education to promote the extension of schools for females”.<sup>15</sup> So there was a slow progress of the official effort to support the education of women.

### **Bethune School: A Journey with the Government Initiative**

It is known to us that there was no involvement of the Government in the school affairs from the very initial period. But we can find that Bethune continued to keep informing the Government about the happenings of the school. Though the Government did nothing of their own, it never showed any disinterest. Somehow from the beginning, the school had connection with the government authorities directly or indirectly. During the foundation-stone laying ceremony of the school at the west of the Cornwallis Square (now Bidhan Sarani, Kolkata) on November 6, 1850, the East India Company’s Attorney presented the title-deeds of the ground (it was a Government land, Bethune exchanged the Mirzapur land with it) to Bethune and Dakshinaranjan. Sir John Hunter Littler, Deputy Governor of Bengal, and Lady Littler were also present in the ceremony. The main ceremony of laying the foundation-stone was conducted by Sir Littler. Previously, Bethune requested Lord Dalhousie in his letter whether it would be feasible to name the institution after Queen Victoria. But the Court of Directors was still afraid of the conservative feeling. They thought that “present state of female education was such as to warrant the unusual proceedings of applying for the sanction of Her Majesty’s name to the Female School at Calcutta.”<sup>16</sup> But on the inscriptions of copper-plate and silver trowel, there was the name of the Her Majesty Queen Victoria:

IN THE REIGN OF  
HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY  
VICTORIA,  
THE FOUNDATION STONE  
OF THE

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. ‘History of The Bethune School and College 1849-1949’, in Nag, Kalidas. (ed.) *Bethune School and College Centenary Volume 1849-1949*, Bethune College, Kolkata, 1949, pp.14-15.

HINDU FEMALE SCHOOL  
IN  
CORNWALLIS SQUARE CALCUTTA...

Even during the erection of the school building, on 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1850, the best architects of the time, Messrs Burn was called to take up the construction which was to go by the blue-print he had earlier drawn. “On 20<sup>th</sup> November the plan was sent to the Military Board with the instruction to Captain Fraser of the Military Department of the East India Company to superintend the construction of the buildings.”<sup>17</sup>

In the Letter of 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1850, J.E.D. Bethune wrote to the Governor General Lord Dalhousie

...the time has come when this important step in the system of education of the Natives can be taken with a reasonable hope of success. I wished the discredit of failure to rest with myself alone, if my expectation had proved abortive, and that the credit of the Government should not be pledged to the measure until its success was assured.<sup>18</sup>

Bethune and Lord Dalhousie shared very good rapport among them. It was because of Bethune, Dalhousie became interested in the subject of development of the female education in India and the Government also changed their policy of non-interference. Lord and Lady Dalhousie, however, took unusual interest in women’s education and particularly in Mr. Bethune’s school. After the sudden and pre-matured death of Bethune, Lord Dalhousie personally undertook the charge of the school. It is in record that after Bethune’s death, the Governor-General used to bear the whole expenses at his own cost, which has been about Rs. 700/- per mensem. The Bengal Harkaru however reported that his anxiety began for the future of the school after his retirement from the present office. Lord Dalhousie, on behalf of the Governor-General in Council, requested the Court of directors to accept the direct charge of the ‘native’ female school. The Court of Directors, however, readily agreed but suggested that some fee should be realized from the students. Dalhousie thanked the Court of Directors for their ready assent but opposed their suggestion of levying fee upon the students.

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<sup>17</sup> Chakraborty, Uttara. ‘About a Dream School: In Search of the Dreamer: John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune’, *Bethune, His School and Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Kolkata, 2006, pp.63-64.

<sup>18</sup> Letter of J.E.D. Bethune to the Governor General on Female Education dated 28<sup>th</sup> March 1850, Richley, J.A. op cit. p.48.

The Governor- General in Council wrote:

Fees in such cases have not been found to work badly, but where the experiment of female education is concerned, we would not interpose the risk of even a small fee to the successful accomplishment of the design of the benevolent founder of the institution.<sup>19</sup>

After some negotiation, however, the matter came to be settled. Lord Dalhousie left India on March 6, 1856. As had been previously arranged, the Government took charge of the school after his departure. Lord Canning, successor to Lord Dalhousie, as well as Lady Canning were much interested in its affairs. Lady Canning requested the leading men of the town to send their daughters to the school in large numbers. During that time, Cecil Beadon, one of the secretaries of the government, was in the charge of the school. He, however, made some suggestions for improvement of the school. One of them was to constitute a strong managing committee with the leading and influential Hindus of Calcutta.

The Government notified in The Calcutta Gazette of the 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1856 the constitution of the following Committee for Bethune's School:

President: Sir Cecil Beadon; Members: Raja Kalikrishna Bahadur, Raja Pratabchandra Sinha, Rai Harachandra Ghose Bahadur, Amritalal Mitra, Ray Prannath Choudhury, Ramratna Roy, Kasiprasad Ghosh; Hony. Secretary: Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.<sup>20</sup>

The new managing committee on December 24, 1856, under the signatures of the president and the secretary, issued a circular letter to the Hindus of Calcutta and its suburbs about the school. The school committee, however, did not add anything new to the school curriculum and rules. It circulated the same thing what Bethune thought. They said,

The Government have appointed us a committee to manage the school founded by the late Mr. Bethune...None but the daughters of the respectable Hindus are admitted...reading, writing, Arithmetic, Natural science, Geography, Needle-work-these subjects are taught. They are instructed through the medium of Bengali. Lessons in English are given to those only whose parents and guardians wish it.

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<sup>19</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. p. 21.

<sup>20</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. pp.22-23.



No fee is charged from the girls. Books are also supplied free. Those who live at a distance from the school and are unable to bear the cost of conveyance are allowed free use of the carriages and 'Palkis' of the school.<sup>21</sup>

The school was, however continuing, but still the roll-strength of the school showed only marginal increase over the years. In his letter dated 15 December, 1862, Vidyasagar forwarded the following statements which indicate the state of affairs.

**Expenditure by the Government of Bengal on the Students of Bethune School during 1851-1861**

Year	No. of Students	Expenditure		
		Rs.	As.	P.
1851	28	1984	10	9
1852	38	8229	12	3
1853	43	7718	10	0
1854	42	7622	5	6
1855	45	7776	13	6
1856	55	7489	3	0
1857	51	8360	11	9
1858	50	7693	9	3
1859	56	7766	0	0
1860	72	7964	4	9
1861	79	7371	13	6

Source: Samanta, Amiya Kumar. 'Vidyasagar and Female Education', *Education and Empowerment of Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Calcutta, 20001, pp.278-298.

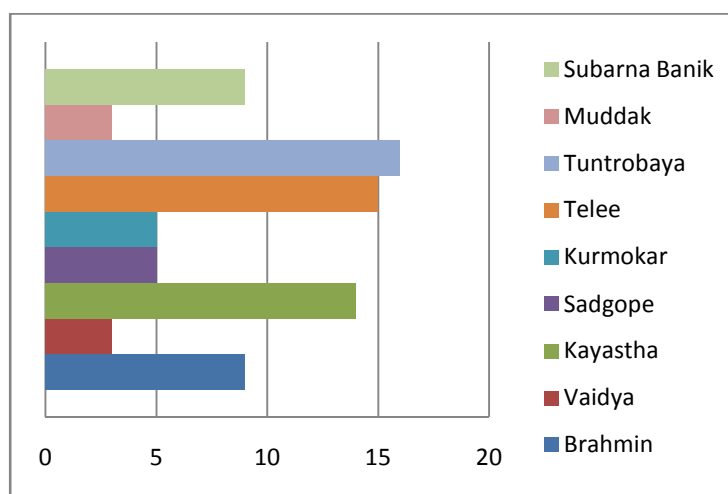
Vidyasagar in that letter, along with mentioning the number of the students, also mentioned about the class and the castes. This report was of 1861, and he made the record without any comment.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.23.

### Number of Female Students from Different Caste in Bethune School, 1861

Caste	Number
Brahmin	9
Vaidya	3
Kayastha	14
Sadgope	5
Kurmokar	5
Telee	15
Tuntrobaya	16
Muddak	3
Subarna Banik	9
Total	79



Source: Samanta, Amiya Kumar. 'Vidyasagar and Female Education', *Education and Empowerment of Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Calcutta, 20001, pp.278-298.

The above mentioned table is, however, showing that even after a decade after the establishment of the Bethune School, the admission of girls from the higher castes was much less in number than those belonging to the lower and middle castes. The seclusion of the Brahmin girls, however, was continuing. The other castes lower down the social ladder, showed much interest in female education. One of the major causes for the women backwardness was the strong practice of child-marriage which was strongly prevalent among the Brahmanical society. "As girls were given marriage at the age between eight and ten, education was considered redundant and without much purpose".<sup>22</sup> Also interesting is the fact that the expense in 1851 jumped four times the very next year and thereafter remained static for a decade.

However, the Report of 1863-64 from an account given by H.Woodrow, Inspector of Central Division regarding the Bethune school was not satisfactory. He reported:

<sup>22</sup> Samanta, Amiya Kumar. 'Vidyasagar and Female Education', *Education and Empowerment of Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Calcutta, 20001, pp.278-298.

...after fifteen years of labour the results are scarcely such as to give encouragement. The girls marry at about ten years of age and cease attendance just at the age when their progress is most apparent. The little girls when first admitted are excessively irregular, they absent themselves for every trifling reason and often without any reason at all. Consequently, as in all other girls' schools, much time is lost in the first two years, and the majority of the children are unable to read and understand even simple stories...The average cost to Government of each child in attendance to the Bethune school is about Rs. 10/- a month."<sup>23</sup>

Later, the Bethune school began to charge fee from the girls. A monthly fee of one rupee was introduced in December 1866. But as soon as it was introduced the number of pupils fell off considerably. The Government somehow became conscious about the matter of profit making. The school was, however, becoming a way of burdensome expenses without any fruitful result. There was also an ongoing need for the female teachers. So, with the increase in number both of schools and scholars, it was felt necessary to start something like a normal school for training of female teachers in Calcutta. A normal school for the Christian women was already in existence. Miss Mary Carpenter, a philanthropic English lady, came to India and reached Calcutta on November 20, 1866 and stayed here for some time. She came in contact with some ardent men supporters of female education like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, Monomohon Ghosh and Dwijendra Nath Tagore and "broached to them the necessity of a non-denominational normal school in the Metropolis".<sup>24</sup> The demand for the female teachers in the girls' schools was continuously rising up. She prepared a scheme for that. It was stated that the Bethune School's building should be used for the purpose of the proposed normal school.

Vidyasagar, as the secretary of the school, vehemently opposed the proposal and eventually resigned from that post. In a letter to the Lieutenant-Governor on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1867, Vidyasagar wrote:

I need hardly assure you that I fully appreciate the importance and desirableness of having female teachers for female learners; but if the social prejudice of my countrymen did not offer an insuperable bar, I would have been the first to second the proposition and lend my hearty co-operation towards its furtherance. But when I see that success is by no means certain and that the Government is likely to place

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<sup>23</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. p.26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.27.

itself in a false and disagreeable position, I cannot persuade myself to support the experiment.<sup>25</sup>

Vidyasagar was not against the Normal school for women teachers as he himself had suggested, in the letter to the Government, that he was in favour of setting up the 'Normal school' in other areas with liberal grants-in-aid so that people are allured to give up their prejudice about women working as teachers or taking training in the Normal schools. His point was that Bethune school's growth was not that much well what was expected, though the government continued to bear the expenses. "He was apprehensive that the reaction of the Hindu society against the proposed Normal school might adversely affect the existence of the Bethune school itself."<sup>26</sup> He also wrote in the letter that "...it is very desirable that there should be a well-organised female school in the heart of the metropolis, to serve as a model to the sister institutions in the school in the interior."<sup>27</sup> The Government, however, favoured Miss Carpenter's scheme of opening up a Normal school in the Bethune School building. With the approval of the Lieutenant-Governor, Mrs. Brietzche became the Lady Superintendent of the Bethune and the Normal schools for three years on a salary of Rs.300/- per month on 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1869. The Government of India sanctioned Rs. 12,000 per annum for the Normal school. The General Report of the Public Instruction for the year 1868-69 described the new arrangements as:

The Bethune School has been placed on a new footing and is being organized as a Normal School for training native female teachers. It will include an adult class of native ladies besides the pupils who are to be trained as teachers and the ordinary school classes for children who will now be instructed entirely by Mistresses, Pandits being altogether excluded.<sup>28</sup>

The fate of the Normal school, as was said by Vidyasagar, ultimately became true. It did not progress up to the expectation of the authorities. The school lasted for three years with less

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<sup>25</sup> Extracts from the Letter of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar to the Lieutenant-Governor dated 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1867, Richley, J.A. op cit.

<sup>26</sup> Samanta, Amiya Kumar. op cit.

<sup>27</sup> Extracts from the Letter of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar to the Lieutenant-Governor dated 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1867, Richley, J.A. op cit. pp.97-98.

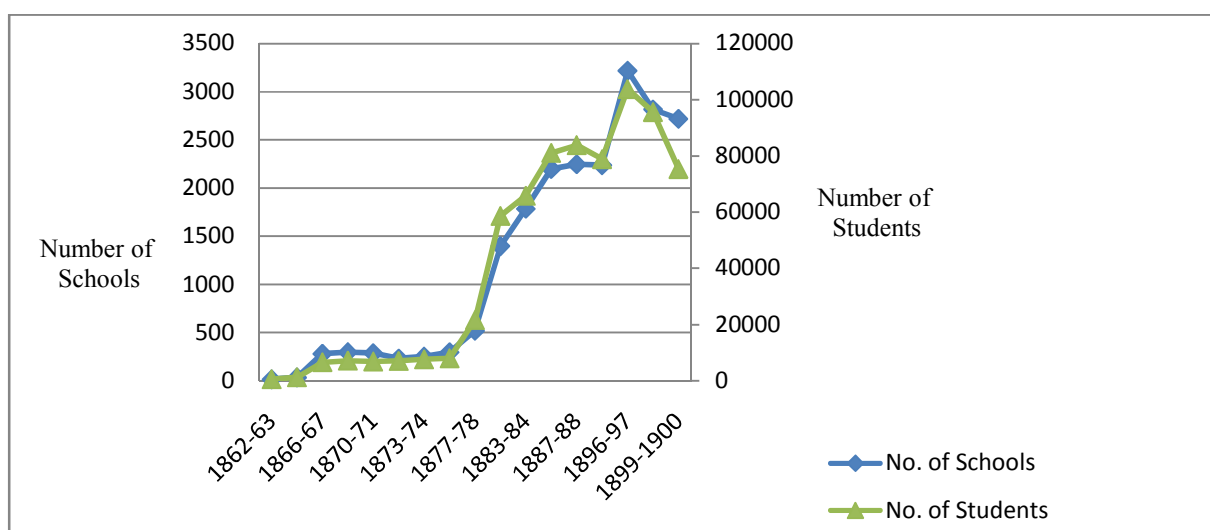
<sup>28</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for the year 1868-69, Printed in Calcutta, Government Printing Press, Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi, pp.123-124.

success. The government could not be satisfied with this state of affairs. The Government passed orders for abolition of the Normal School on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1872, in a letter to the D.P.I. as follows, “On a general review of the whole subject, it is clear that after a three years’ of experiment the Female Normal School has unquestionably failed”.<sup>29</sup>

So the Female Normal school became abolished and the Bethune School went back to its former position. The school remained under the direct control of the Government for some time more. In 1873, a new committee, was, however, formed with J. B. Phear and Monomohon Ghosh as the President and the Secretary respectively for the future betterment and further progress.

### Slow and Steady Progress

**Growth of Number of Schools and Students during the Year 1862-1900**



Source: Prepared from the General Report on Public Instruction, Bengal, for the years 1862-1900, Printed at Calcutta, Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi.

After the introduction of the grant-in-aid system and the frank and cordial support from the Government (1854, Wood’s Despatch) for the promotion of female education in India, there was a slow but steady progress up to the end of 1870s. The above mentioned graph is showing the

<sup>29</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. pp.30-31.

year wise growth of number of schools and number of students. There was, however, a general improvement of female education but the development on this ground was not a satisfactory one. Along with the Brahmo Reform movement, the general demand for the female education, led the Government to introduce a more liberal education policy in 1882 (the Hunter Commission) as the above mentioned graph is showing a rapid increase in both the number of schools and students since 1882 onwards.

It is already mentioned that the Despatch of 1854 approved giving grant-in-aid to the female schools and the Government was of the opinion of giving the ‘frank and cordial support’. It was stated that no tuition fee would be charged if the school house was provided and other expenses were borne by the school. Halliday, the then Deputy Governor-General, however, having construed the language of the despatch as the sincere desire of the Court to promote female education in India, wanted something more. “He suggested that whenever a suitable school house is provided and attendance of twenty girl students is promised, the payment of all the expenses of maintaining the school shall be defrayed by the government.”<sup>30</sup>

Halliday, however, consulted Vidyasagar about setting up the girls’ schools. With encouragement from the Governor, Vidyasagar, between November 1857 and June 1858, established as many as forty female schools in four districts. Due to some hassle, Vidyasagar later resigned from the Government post. The success in development of the female education, however, was not up to the mark. Even, in 1859, the Secretary of the State in a Despatch to the Government of India expressed his dissatisfaction with the progress of women’s education in India and put his opinion as to how the Government could exercise more influence to promote extension of the female schools. In the letter, dated 7 April 1859, the Secretary of State wrote:

The time seems to have arrived when some examination may be instituted into the operation of the orders despatched from this country in 1854, for the prosecution of measures on a more extended scale for promoting education in India. Such an examination seems more especially required, since the measures, and particularly the more recent measures, of Government for the promotion of education have been alleged to be among the causes which have brought about the recent outbreak in the army of Bengal, and the disquietude and apprehension which are believed to have prevailed in some portions of Her Majesty’s Indian territories.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Samanta, Amiya Kumar. op cit.

<sup>31</sup> Extracts from the letter of the secretary of the State to the Government of India, 7 April 1859, A Collection of Despatches from the Home Department on the subject of Education in India, Calcutta 1870, No.4.

However, during this time, the establishment of the municipalities and the local bodies helped the development of the female education. The municipalities included the representatives of the Indian people. “Unlike the British Government, therefore, they had no hesitation in expending money for the establishment and maintenance of girls’ schools.”<sup>32</sup> Though there was existence of different views regarding the female schools among the members of those local bodies, they did a good job “to the education of women by establishing special primary schools for girls, wherever necessary and possible”.<sup>33</sup> The General Report on Public Instruction for 1862-63, stated that:

The increase in the number of girls’ schools within the year has been remarkable. On the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1862, only 15 girls’ schools were in existence in connection with this Department, and the number of scholars was reported at 530. At the same date in 1863 the number of schools had risen to 35 and the number of scholars had risen to 1,183. Both schools and scholars had doubled within a period of twelve months. The increase is entirely the result of native effort and may be traced directly to the growing influence of the young men who have received the advantages of a high University education in the different colleges throughout the country. It is a hopeful sign of real progress which it is well to note.<sup>34</sup>

Here it is important to note the words about progress of the female education as was ‘entirely the result of native effort’. It was the new movement organized by a band of highly educated Brahmo youngmen under the leadership of Brahmananda Keshub Chandra Sen. The concept was ‘*Antahpur Strisikhsha*’ or home education for the women in 1862-63. The scholars included the grown-up women. By the year 1866-67, “the number of girls’ schools in connection with the education department increased about three hundred and the number of scholars to about six thousand”.<sup>35</sup>

It is here to make a comparative study between the years regarding the development of female education. The General Report on Public Instruction for 1869-70 shows that

The girl’s schools have increased from 281 to 298 (comparing the last year’s report), the gain being 17, all of them for natives. The pupils at the same time, have increased from 6,563 to 7,124, or by 561. The total cost per head has risen from Rs. 23-1-3 to Rs. 26-8, but the cost to the state has risen from Rs. 8-8-1 to Rs. 8-10-1

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<sup>32</sup> Mathur, Y.B. op cit. p.30.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1862-63, op cit. pp.67-68.

<sup>35</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1866-67, ibid. pp.121-22.

only...Beyond the fact already stated, that there has been an increase of girls' schools and also the attendance of the students, there is nothing satisfactory regarding the state of female education.

The attempt that has been made to get together a class of adults to be trained as teachers in the Bethune School, has at present met with no appreciable success; and the normal school at Dacca, though maintaining the position it has held for several years past, has shown no marked improvement. The Rajshahi school is quite in its infancy, and its progress has been retarded by the difficulty of procuring a competent mistress. The ordinary girls' schools do not seem to improve in quality. Altogether, there is more that is disheartening than cheering in this branch of educational work.<sup>36</sup>

During the year 1870-71, there decreased the girls' schools from 298 to 287, the students from 7,124 to 6,799 and the per head cost from Rs. 26-8 to Rs. 23-13-3.<sup>37</sup> However, as per that year's record, there was nothing new to mention about development of the female schools. But the great obstacle to success of Bethune's adult class was, however, something different. It had been recorded that the

Lady Superintendent, who, after holding her post more than two years has recently, announced that her religious convictions make her reluctant to give instruction to adult females in the secular elements of education, while she is debarred from imparting to them the precept of mortality under the sanction of the Christian religion. There is little doubt, remarks the inspector, "about the fate of an institution in which the conscientious head believes success to be a sin", and adds, "It is unfortunate that the religious scruple was not felt before the appointment was accepted"<sup>38</sup>

"In 1872-73, 233 schools were enjoying grants with the total no of 7,025 students. In 1873-74, it was 251 schools with 7,586 students."<sup>39</sup> The report of 1874-75, however, stated that on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1875, there were 297 schools with 7,977 pupils. There was a general increase from the past some years in the number of schools and the increase was of 4 per cent. These included 132 zenana schools in Calcutta and the neighborhood, with 1,680 pupils, and each zenana teacher being reckoned as a school. The state expenditure on girls' schools rose from "Rs. 62,991 in 1873-74 to Rs. 67,972 in 1874-75 when the gross expenditure grew from Rs. 1,66,409 to

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<sup>36</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1869-70, *ibid.* pp.41-42.

<sup>37</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1870-71, *ibid.* pp.36.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.46.

<sup>39</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1873-74, *ibid.* pp.42-45.



Rs. 1, 82,295”.<sup>40</sup> It had been stated in the record that the foregoing remarks were chiefly applicable to Bengal proper. In Behar, female education hardly existed. In Cooch Behar, on the other hand, the seclusion of women was not a principle rigidly followed and, with the necessary condition of funds, no special difficulty was likely to affect the education for girls especially of those in the lower classes. In Orissa, there were plenty of girls educated as a fashion, but there was a very strong repugnance to public schools. Girls of the lower classes were found in ‘*pathsalas*’, but no respectable girl would go.

The same year’s Report, however, recorded Mr. Woodrow’s note on the progress of female education in Calcutta:

Female education is making slow but steady progress in Calcutta. There were on 31<sup>st</sup> March last 46 girls’ school containing 2,697 girls, and 131 zenana teachers giving instruction to 1,635 girls. In classifying zenanas, it has been the practice to consider each circulating teacher as a school. On this assumption there were in all 177 girls’ schools attended by 4,332 girls. Of those 1,466 were the daughters of the European and Eurasian parents and the remaining 2,866 were the Hindus. The total cost of government of these schools was Rs. 41,978, on which the Bethune School, which contains only 72 girls on its rolls, takes up Rs. 6,108.<sup>41</sup>

### **Hunter Commission: A Landmark**

After the Despatch of 1854, the next education commission report was of 1822, (the Hunter Commission Report). It discussed problems of the education of women with greater insight. It pointed out that even in the most-advanced province of India, 98 per cent of the girls of school-going age were still outside the schools. Actually, there was no demand for education of the women in a broader social scale. The system of child-marriage caused the withdrawal of a large portion of the girls from school at a very early age and so prevented them from completing their education. This, in turn, affected the supply of women teachers. Even the General Report on Public Instruction for 1899-1900 stated the obstacles in the way of advancement of female education in Bengal as:

1. The system of early marriage.
2. The social objection to allowing the grown-up girls to attend school.

<sup>40</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1874-75, *ibid.* pp.92-93.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p.94.

### 3. The want of female teachers.<sup>42</sup>

In order to remove the difficulties in the way of developing the female education, the Indian Education Commission (1882) recommended that grant-in-aid rules should be more liberal in nature for the girls' than the boys' schools. It also recommended the grant of concession in fees, the award of prizes and the institution of scholarships, especially for those who were above twelve years of age. Mixed schools for the boys and the girls, other than the infant schools, were not encouraged by the commission, as they were unsuited to the conditions of the country. It was decided that the schools would not be placed under the management of the local bodies unless so desired.

Training school for the women was recommended and liberal aid was promised to those under private management; "inducements were to be offered to the wives of schoolmasters, to widows to qualify themselves as teachers so that a system of pupil-teachership could be established".<sup>43</sup> Grants to the zenana agencies and to local associations for the promotion of women's education were also recommended for an increase in the number of female inspecting agencies, "for the revision of textbooks and for the establishment of an alternative standard for high schools corresponding to the matriculation examination".<sup>44</sup> In its brief comment on these recommendations, the Government of India "had nothing to add to what the Commission say" on the subject of female education. All their proposals appear to be suitable, "and are generally approved by local governments." The policy of the Government of India henceforth was to follow the principles laid down by the Indian Education Commission for the promotion of women's education. After publishing the commission's report, there was a first and stable increase in the field of education of the women.

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<sup>42</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1899-1900, *ibid.* pp.122-23.

<sup>43</sup> W.W.Hunter, Report of the Indian Education Commission, Calcutta, 1884, Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Female Education: Bengal Presidency**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Schools</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
1877-78	519	21,587
1882-83	1,398	58,622
1883-84	1,785	65,813
1886-87	2,198	81,054
1887-88	2,247	83,823
1890-91	2,238	78,865
1896-97	3,218	103,743
1897-98	2,817	95,613
1899-1900	2,719	75,331

**Source:** Prepared from the General Reports on Public Instruction, Bengal, for the years 1877-1900, printed at Calcutta, Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi

The above table is, however, showing the general picture of the girl's schools and the girls' students since 1878. The above number of girls' students is included of those girls' who attended the boys' schools for elementary education. After the Recommendations of the Indian Education Commission, the above table is showing that there was a general increase in both the number of girls' schools and number of students. There was, however, an all through average increase; only the year 1899-1900 saw a decrease in both the numbers. It was probably the because of the outbreak of plague epidemic in and around Calcutta during the years.

### **Government's Role in Higher Education:**

Under the Brahmo educational movement, the higher education of women became prominent. In the mean time, Bethune School became amalgamated with the '*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*' in 1876. The later, however, opened a new horizon in the history of female education. This school initiated higher education for the women with the 'masculine subjects' like the core science groups, philosophy and logic. It is already discussed that the quality of education and quantity in number of the students were never up to the mark. Monomohon Ghosh, the then secretary of the Bethune School, was also very much attached to the '*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*'. On the other hand, Bethune School was almost a burden on the Government expenses. It was Monomohon

Ghosh who took the main initiative and, ultimately, a decision was taken for the amalgamation and the new body of the two schools came into existence as the Bethune School.

The school, from then onwards, started to run with a new aim to prepare the girls for the university examination. Kadambini Bose was the first to pass the F.A. examination from this school. So, then, college classes were opened in early 1879 and the college classes were attached to the Bethune School till 1888. The net grant of the Government to the school was raised from Rs. 650/- to Rs. 750/- a month. Kadambini Bose from the Bethune School and another native Christian girl from Dehradun, from the Free Church Normal School, passed the F.A. examination. As the first women in the British India, Kadambini and Chandramukhi Bose passed the B.A. examination from the Bethune College. After that Kadambini went for the Medical education, whereas Chandramukhi completed her M.A. from the same institution in 1885. The General report on Public Instruction stated that:

During the past eight years the institution has passed 6 candidates at the B.A., 6 at the F.A. and 12 at the Entrance Examination. Two of the graduate students are now in the instructing staff, Miss Chandramukhi Bose, M.A. being the Lady Superintendent and Miss Kamini Sen, B.A., second mistress in the school department. The Government of Bengal has recently transferred to the committee a sum of Rs. 15,900, being a portion of amount originally subscribed for perpetuating the memory of the founder.<sup>45</sup>

Women's achievements in the higher education became more worthy of honour when the Bethune College got affiliation of the Calcutta University in 1888. In previous years candidate passing the B.A. examination from this institution were admitted to the degree by special grace of the Senate. There was a letter from the Secretary of the Bethune School committee to the Director of Public Instruction dated 24<sup>th</sup> January 1888:

the affiliation of the Institution to the Calcutta University up to the standard of B.A. examination will give a definite status and increase its dignity and popularity. The present mode of presenting its graduates to the Vice-Chancellor is not quite approved and it is thought that the Lady Superintendent would not only be more fitting to present her pupils in her capacity of principal but also sign the forms of application for F.A. and B.A. candidates. The college classes have achieved such a

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<sup>45</sup> General Report on Public Instruction for 1887-88, op cit. pp.76-77.

measure of success at the University Examinations that the question of their formal recognition is no longer in the stage of experiment...<sup>46</sup>

The Registrar of Calcutta University took the matter up with the Government of Bengal.<sup>47</sup> Next important initiative of the Government was the inauguration of a system by Her Excellency the Countess of Dufferin to provide medical aid to the women of India. “Apparently Lady Dufferin was asked by Queen Victoria to pay special attention to the question of medical care for the Indian women before she left England”.<sup>48</sup> So the Dufferin Fund was created in 1885. Very soon medical classes for women were opened in nearly all the provinces. The popularity of taking medical education and later also as a profession was increasing among women. A large number of scholarships were also introduced by the Dufferin Fund. “Many girls and women from Bombay, Madras and Punjab were now declared to qualify for the degrees of M.B. and L.M.S. in Bengal.

In Bengal, however, the Government was not ready to give the necessary permission for the admission of the female candidates to the Calcutta Medical College at the very first request from the side of the aspirants. “Miss D’Abreu passed the F.A. examination in January, 1881 and Miss Abala Das passed the Entrance Examination in the previous December from the Bethune School, with the first grade scholarships of Rs. 25/- and Rs. 20/- respectively.”<sup>49</sup> An application was made to the Council of the Medical College of Calcutta for their admission but the request was turned down. Madras, at that time, proved to be more liberal and they joined the Madras Medical College where the provision existed for the superior instruction of women in medicine. It was again during the time of Kadambini Ganguly (already married to the great Brahmo leader Dwarakanath Ganguly) that the issue of admitting women students in the Calcutta Medical College came to the forefront.

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<sup>46</sup> Letter From the Secretary, Bethune School Committee to the Director of Public Instruction, Calcutta, the 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1888, on the Affiliation of Bethune College with Calcutta University, File No.4, No.182, Bethune College Archives, Kolkata.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from the Registrar, Calcutta University to The Director of Public Instruction, Bengal dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 1888, File No.4, Bethune College Archives, Kolkata.

<sup>48</sup> Gourlay, Jharna. ‘Medical Women and Female Education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century India’, *Education and Empowerment of Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Calcutta, 20001, pp.117-38.

<sup>49</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. p.41.

Kadambini passed the B.A. examination in 1883 and decided to go for medical education. Previously, the Medical College rejected the application forms of the two aspirants. Now the Brahmo leaders, headed by Dwarkanath Ganguly, started agitation against the college rule. But before the movement could gather momentum, Sir Rivers Thompson, the then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, intervened. He, however, decided that no sufficient reason existed for exclusion of the duly qualified young ladies from the study of medicine in the institution. With the Government Resolution of the 29<sup>th</sup> June, 1883, the Medical College of Calcutta opened its gate for the women students. It was of course a landmark in the history of female education in Bengal.

Another important step, taken by the Government regarding the subject of female education, was the introduction of co-education in the Presidency College in 1897. Prof. Rowe, the then Principal of the Presidency College, and Dr. C.A.Martin, the executive official of education, with the help of some radical Brahmo youngmen, took the initiative. In the year 1897, two girl students were admitted in the F.A. class. They were Amiya Ray (she was the daughter of Rajaninath Ray, Deputy Comptroller-General of Indian Treasuries) and Charulata Ray (daughter of Dr. Prasanna Kumar Ray, Professor of Philosophy in the same college). But it was not any easy or simple incident. Not only the society but also the students of the Presidency College vehemently opposed the action. The college authority, the guardians of the two students and even the Government became so much criticized that the Lieutenant-Governor had to interfere.

The secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor, Michael Finucane, reported the incident as:

The Lieutenant-Governor's attention has lately been drawn to the discussions in the news papers about the admission to the Presidency College, under which your orders two lady students, and I have laid before his Honour the note which you wrote in reply to your unofficial reference, in support of your action, in the matter. His honour thinks that an important change of the kind should not have been introduced without obtaining the previous order.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of being so much disturbed, the two girl students did really well at the end of their F.A. examination. Amiya Ray stood first in the Presidency College and got the Third position in the University whereas Charulata Ray passed the examination in second division. The Presidency

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<sup>50</sup> Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal- B. Proceedings, for the month of September 1897, File AC/20 1), No.263, West Bengal State Archives, Kolkata.

College, however, never forgot them as the centenary volume of the college remembered them with great dignity. It was written there:

An interesting innovation was made in 1897 when two girl students, Amia Ray (daughter of Rajaninath Ray, one of the most distinguished students of an earlier generation) and M. Charulata Ray (daughter of Prof. R.K.Ray) were admitted to the first year class. But the experiment was more or less confined to these two pupils, and although girls students were on rare occasions admitted to the rolls, co-education did not become a regular feature of the College until about half a century later.<sup>51</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The Government attitude and initiative towards the development of 'native' female education in India was of a complicated character. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the modern education to the women was started with the efforts of the missionaries. The Government, however, had no direct connection with them. It was observing the strict rule of non-interference in the socio-religious matters of the 'natives'. As the women were considered with utmost delicacy to the native society, the Government also remained silence even up to the second half of the nineteenth century.

The 'native' intelligentsia, however, was not satisfied with the education imparted in those schools run by the missionaries, because of the education from the Bible and also the admission of the girls from the lower classes. It was until the establishment of the Bethune School, the Government did not take any initiative for the development of female education. It was Lord Dalhousie first who came in direct involvement with the particular subject of female education. It was not true that the Government was not aware of the state of female education but they were quite hesitant in order to take any direct initiative. The Despatch of 1854 introduced the grant-in-aid system for the girls' schools. It is important to note that they did not direct any order for the establishment of schools in various districts and localities. If we take the case of the Bethune School, the Government was very much dissatisfied (came under direct control of the government in 1856 when Dalhousie left India) with the school and considered bearing the expenses as burdens. It was Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar whose utmost effort made the School

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<sup>51</sup> Sengupta, Subodh, Chandra. *Presidency College Centenary Volume*, Presidency College, Kolkata, 1955.

stood and existed. It is interesting to note that lower class families were found to be more enthusiastic in sending their daughters to school than the 'learned' Brahmins.

In 1882, the Indian Education Commission recommended that whatever progress was made so far in the female education was totally the efforts of the 'native' gentlemen. Though the usual growth in number of students was slow, the period between 1870-74 saw a rapid decrease in both the number of schools and the school attending students. It was probably because of the emergence of the radical and more progressive Brahmos did not believe in any sexual discrimination especially in education and so promoted higher education for women. It was also very unfortunate that, during that time, the Lady Superintendent of the Bethune School was imparting the religious teaching which was strictly prohibited in the rules of the Bethune School. Even decades after, the notion (in the early decades of the nineteenth century the missionaries did the same thing and it caused apprehension among the 'native' intelligentsia) of the European women did not change.

However, with the more liberal policy of the Education Commission of 1882 (also known as Hunter Commission), the decades after 1880s saw some rapid and balanced progress in the field of women education, though the Muslim women, from very initial period, lagged behind. With the emergence of the radical Brahmo movement in 1870s, the path to higher education for women became opened, whereas introduction of the medical education for the women made the path widened. But, in both the cases, it can be found that the Government was not apprehensive in giving the necessary permission. In 1897, it was probably for the first time the Government took some initiative to start co-education in the Presidency College and allowed admission of two girls in the F.A. class, though the 1882 Education Commission's recommendation was against the introduction of mixed or co-education. Their effort, however, made no fruitful impact and the plan was dropped ultimately. At the last it can be said that the Government, however, followed a strict but liberal policy for the development of female education in India.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Changing Perceptions and Demands**

Sir,

Much has been said upon the subject which I have undertaken to bring to the public notice...the subject is, should females be educated or not. This is a subject which deserves the attention of every generous mind, and ought to be considered in every respect as an important one. Some of the Native editors in their Presidency, have already given their opinion in the negative by declaring that, "we do not see any solid advantage in teaching them; because they will not be able to procure money; on the contrary they will be apt to make mischievous deeds daily, which will bring men into eternal misery and shame".

...but why should they not be educated? This is, Mr. Editor, very amazing! Well I beg to ask them two or three words which are written in the following lines. Do not women possess a thirst after knowledge as the men do? Do they not possess a real desire of examining worldly happiness as the others? Do they not possess a desire of changing their sad condition in which they are distressed? Do they not possess a human feeling and human sense?... that the objection which they brought is not fact, and utterly inconsistent with reason- education is a thing which makes man certainly happy and guides him through the just path of virtue and happiness. It polishes our disposition, refines our characters, nay it is the ornament of human nature and the solid basis of human happiness. A life without it, is just like a brute."<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the letter expresses the obvious mentality of the people of the period towards female education. Very few felt the need of educating the women. Some claimed that there were certain systems of female education in the ancient and medieval times, but the fear of conversion and other misdeeds in the medieval period put women in the strict observation of '*purdah*'. The continuous and increasing social customs and prejudices such as child marriage, '*Kulin*' polygamy and the strict rules for the widowhood made the women's condition miserable and deplorable. Lastly, there was the barbarous practice of '*Sati*'. The strictness of these things, however, made education invaluable and unnecessary to a woman's life. There were very few and scattered examples of the educated women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In general, condition of women was the worst. Actually, it was not the men always but the women themselves who were the worst obstacle to education because of belief in various superstitions, such as, a learned woman would soon become widow or would be unable to get bridegroom in life. These superstitions gradually evaporated during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Earlier, '*pathsalas*' in the villages were the sources of imparting education to both boys and girls. The girls studied there at least up to their marriage. The introduction of the Permanent

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<sup>1</sup> The letter was published in the 'Reformer', 12 May, 1833 and was addressed by Sree Ram Chatterjee to the editor Mr. Prosonno Coomar Tagore.

Settlement (1793), however, changed the land-man relationship which, in turn, affected financial conditions of the villagers. The '*pathsalas*' were closed and that was also an important reason for the end of female education. The ruinous conditions of the villages coupled with early industrialization and road communication gradually led to the experience of new urban centres. But with urbanization, confinement of the women within '*Antahpur*' became stricter. On the other hand, it was also the time when new ideas and things came from the West. In their cultural tastes and habits, the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century Bengali gentry of Calcutta were eclectic. A variety of traditional norms coexisted with the new customs acquired from the Western traders and administrators.<sup>2</sup> The second part of the above mentioned letter, however, shows the changing mentality on the part of some common people. The coexistence of both the views, conservatives and liberals, was an important feature of the nineteenth century. The changing mentality of the new liberals, however, led to new demands which fortunately included betterment of the women's condition, of which education was an important part.

The arrival of ideas from the West during that time, however, largely influenced the question of modernity. In the writings of the British critics, the question of modernity came to be equated with advancement of condition of the women. The writings of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and those on ideas of liberalism, utilitarianism, nationalism and rationalism etc. inspired the 'native' intelligentsia in a big way. Leaving behind the traditional customs and practices, those ideas somehow helped them to think along a new line. Apart from them, there were men like Raja Rammohan Ray and '*Pundit*' Gourmohon '*Vidyalankar*' who were initially educated on the traditional lines but could realize the importance of female education for the better development of the society. In true sense, they were much ahead of their time. First of all, among the reform programs, the abolition of '*Sati*' was the most important. The efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy for the abolition of that brutal practice and the British government's kind cooperation for that are legendary. The practice of '*Sati*' was abolished with introduction of the legislative act of 1829. Apart from this, Rammohan Roy was also a pioneering figure in educational development in general and female education in particular.

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<sup>2</sup> Banerjee, Sumanta. *The Parlour and the Streets Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1989, p.147.

In fact, Roy was equally in favor of the female education. He argued “When the two grand epics-the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were written, the Hindu women were not kept in seclusion. The zenana system was quite unknown, and the members of the softer sex were allowed to appear in public and attend meetings on great occasions. Learning, too, was not a forbidden fruit to them.”<sup>3</sup> Gargi, Maitreyi and Lilavati were all able to hold their own against any sage or savant of their times. Truly, female education was quite common in those old days and, it was only in the later times that fell into disuse. Rammohan Roy’s advocacy of the female education helped, no little, to draw people’s attention towards it, although no tangible measure was taken in that direction until the arrival of John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune.

The male dominated patriarchal society of that time never felt any necessity to educate the women, and believed that the women were short of intelligence and, so, the efforts to educate them would be a failure. When it was the general mentality of the male society, Rammohan Roy had that courage to say “Who has examined duly the mental ability of the womenfolk in general so as to be in a position to comment that they are found lacking as far as the intelligence level is concerned?” He questions the society that “since it has not till date provided (or opened up) the avenues of formal and structuralized medium of education for the womenfolk, how is it possible to even question their mental ability”. He registers his strong opposition against the prevalent psyche of the society concerning the women at large. He comments that every married lady is only considered as a cook, bed partner, and housekeeper. This ultimately brings her down to the status of a slave.<sup>4</sup>

After this, the first book supporting the female education was written by Gourmohon ‘Vidyalankar’ in 1822 under the patronage of Raja Radhakanta Deb. As it was strongly believed that the educated women would become widows soon, Gourmohon Tarkalankar wrote:

There is no such opinion in any ‘*shastra*’ that if the girls got education, it would be a curse for her and she would soon become a widow. It is only those women who try to spend the free time in idleness create such superstition. And if it was true, all

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<sup>3</sup> Saxena, V.K. *The Brahma Samaj Movement and its Leaders*, Anmol Publications, New Delhi, 1989, p.23.

<sup>4</sup> Rammohan Rahanabali, Calcutta, 1973, pp.170-71. (1819, Calcutta, during the ongoing debates on the prohibition of ‘Sati’) “*Stree lokdiger budhahir porikkha ke kon kale loiachen je tahadigoke alpobudhhi kohen? Aapnara bidyasikhsha, gyanopodesh stree lok ke prai dan nai, tobe tahara budhhihin iha kirupe nischoi koren? Tini kathor bhasai bolen akjon naari akadhare randhuni, sajjysangini o bishswasta grihorakshi matra. Sakoler patni dasyabritti kore*”. (translation mine).

the educated women mentioned in the puranas and even now would not be able to become educated. Now a days we can see the foreign ladies are educated like their men folk, do they become widow? <sup>5</sup>

In the second part of the book he gave some examples of educated women such as Maitreyi, Sakuntala, Anasuya, Chitrlekha, Lilavati in the ancient times and Rani Bhavani, Hoti Vidyalankar, Shyamasundari of the modern times and opined that becoming educated by no means they were deprived but it increased their honour.

There was another such man during that time who advocated for female education to a great extent. He was Radhakanta Deb of Shovabazar. In a very general sense, it appears that Radhakanta Deb was an orthodox conservative Hindu, no less than any other leading men of the contemporary time. Actually, he had some contradictions within him. As David Kopf says: “Rammohan was far more traditional than he was generally acknowledged to be, where as Deb was much more liberal than he was posthumously given credited by his critics for being.”<sup>6</sup> We may find two different kinds of strands in his character. One was his initial active support to the missionaries for the dissemination of knowledge among women in this country. Another was his total adverse reaction to the abolition of ‘Sati’ in 1829 by the legislative act. He was one of those leading people who believed that “Hindu society should be allowed to practice its own customs without any interference from the government.”<sup>7</sup>

David Kopf, however, suggests: “It might be noted that Radhakanta actively supported missionary efforts in educating girls even though this may seem contradictory to those who know him only as the defender of the women’s right to burn as widows.”<sup>8</sup> As he belonged to the upper strata of the Hindu society, he had a clear distinction in his mind regarding imparting education for the girls. He was aware of the missionary education which was a continuous source of attracting girls from the lower and poor classes of the society. He realized that no upper caste Hindu would send their daughters to such institutions. There was also the fear of

<sup>5</sup> Basu, Swapan. *Unish Satoke Stree Siksha*, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata, B.S. 1412 (c. 2005), p.25.

<sup>6</sup> Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance, the Dynamics of Indian Modernisation, 1773-1835*, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1969, p.193.

<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharjee, K.S. *The Bengal Renaissance Social and Political Thoughts*, Classical Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1986, p.78.

<sup>8</sup> Kopf, David. op cit. pp.195-196.

conversion, as it was the prime aim of different missionary societies. He, himself, also believed that women should be educated, but within the strict observation of 'purdah'. He believed that women should be educated in the 'Antahpur' by maintaining the Hindu family tradition. When the 'Calcutta Female School (Bethune School)' was established in 1849 by Sir John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune, Radhakanta Deb started a girl's school in his house at Shovabazar, Calcutta, only fifteen days after.

Bethune School was, however, founded with the aim that pupils only from the upper class Hindu families would be admitted. It seems that the purpose of foundation of Radhakanta Deb's school was to show his disapproval for women going to schools. But it is again very surprising that when,

the Bengali newspapers of progressive thoughts, such as, '*Sambad Pravakar*' and '*Sambad Bhaskar*', supported the school vigorously, a few others, presumably of the old school, took to spreading calumny. Raja Radhakanta Deb, the doughty champion of women's education, in a letter to Bethune, wrote of these publications as "Certainly the vituperation of a malignant mind that cannot rest without doing evil".<sup>9</sup>

The only fear of Radhakanta Deb was, however, the fear of conversion. Because of that, in the later years, he withdrew his support from the missionary schools. It was not only he but the orthodox section of the Hindu feared of conversion. It was the general cause of the decline of those schools as the Hindu educated sections withdrew their support. Radhakanta Deb, as was alarmed by the question of conversion of the Hindus to Christianity, continuously moved away the converted Christians from the high posts. "As the native secretary of the school, he secured the termination of services of Rasik Krishna Mallik from Hare School and Krishna Mohan Bandyopadhyay from Pataldanga School in the early thirties, not on ground of incompetence, but on those of their religious and ethical beliefs."<sup>10</sup> Radhakanta was one of those who attempted in 1848 to terminate the service of Kailashchandra Basu from the Hindu College because of his conversion into Christianity.

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<sup>9</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. 'History of The Bethune School and College (1849-1949)', in Nag, Kalidas. (ed.) *Bethune school and College Centenary Volume 1849-1949*, Bethune College, Kolkata, 1949, p.15.

<sup>10</sup> Bhattacharjee, K.S. op cit. p.77.

The promotion of '*Antahpur Siksha*' was, however, the opinion of most of the educated Hindu orthodox men. Prasanna Coomar Tagore was the contemporary of Radhakanta Deb. He took oath in the Brahmo religion. The Brahmos were, however, the followers of Raja Rammohan Roy and believed in the following of an enlightened Hinduism which he called the Brahmonism rather than accepting the Christianity. Prasanna Coomar Tagore was an ardent supporter of the promotion of female education. In his weekly 'Reformer', he wrote in a reply to a reader's letter:

A writer under the signature of H.D. Sircar, whose letter will be found in a preceding column, has made some very just remarks on the importance and utility of educating the Hindoo women. It is a very mistaken notion to suppose that the early education of a child should be commenced when he arrives at an age at which he can be sent to school...but his moral and physical education begins even from the mother's lap - an education which is of far greater importance in fitting one for a useful member of society than the acquirement of any particular language, art or science...the education of man may be properly divided into two branches; the one which enables him to direct his career to a happy goal. The former is acquired in the school or by the help of the private teachers; but the latter is almost exclusively the province of home care and solicitude...the women, upon whom devotes the physical and the first (therefore the most important) part of moral education...we have hitherto considered the importance of female education only as connected with a proper education of man...the emancipation of the fair sex from the degrading thralldom of ignorance and superstition is surely a subject of the last importance, and ought to occupy a prominent place in the attention of every friend to India.<sup>11</sup>

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and his followers (some leading figures being Tarachand Chakravarty, Rasik Krishna Mallik, Krishnamohan Banerjee, Ramtanu Lahiri, Radhanath Sikdar, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Peary Chand Mitra et al.) namely, the 'Young Bengal' were characterized by the most secular and rationalized free thinking. This group, however, mostly flourished between "the departure of Raja Rammohan Roy for England in 1830 and the return of Prince Dwarakanath Tagore from England in 1843."<sup>12</sup> It is said that the "Young Bengal movement was rather stormy in appearance and character than it was in the later stage."<sup>13</sup> After the publication of a paper on the necessity of female education in 1828 in the 'Parthenon' by the students of the Hindu College, it was the Derozians who used to publish

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<sup>11</sup> Editorial Comment, published in the 'Reformer', 4 August, 1833.

<sup>12</sup> Majumdar, B. *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas, from Rammohan to Dayananda*, Bookland Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Bhattacharjee, K.S. op cit. p.103.

papers related to female education in their journal, '*Gyananewshan*' (finding of knowledge). Through its pages, they started to attack the age old mentality of the Hindu orthodoxy.

“Ramgopal Ghosh, another eminent alumnus of the Hindu College, offered two prizes, one gold medal and one silver, to the best and the second best writer of an essay on the necessity of female education in 1842. The first prize was won by Madhusudan Dutt and the second by Bhudeb Mukherjee, both of whom rose to eminence as literary figures in after life.”<sup>14</sup> In 1840, also Krishnamohan Banerjee in his prize-winning paper on 'Native Female Education' urged the prime necessity of liberally imparting education to Indian women. Female education was considered necessary for emancipating women from their enslavement of ignorance and prejudices. He held that the “true genius of the country could not be liberated so long as its women folk would suffer the tyranny of antiquated customs.”<sup>15</sup>

The path breaking incident in the development of female education was the establishment of the Calcutta Female School in 1849 by Bethune. It opened the door of institutional education to the upper class Hindu women. In the history of educational development in India, including female education to a large extent, there was a stalwart. He was Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. He was an educationist as well as a social reformer. There were always long drawn debates on various social customs and practices, especially regarding the miserable condition of the women. But after Rammohan Roy and abolition of '*Sati*', there was no such active movement that the government faced against any of the age old poor practices. It was Vidyasagar in 1850s that made a long way for introduction of the act of Widow-remarriage. In 1856, he was successful as the Widow-remarriage Act was passed by the British government.

For Rammohan, it was easy to abolish '*Sati*' because of the “constant presence of the state power and law enforcing apparatus”.<sup>16</sup> But for Vidyasagar, the question of success was not that easy. Because the Act of 1856 only legalized the marriage of the widows, but it did not have that broader social acceptability; “nor was it possible to enforce it with the help of the police

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<sup>14</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. p.10.

<sup>15</sup> Bhattacharjee, K.S. op cit. p.116.

<sup>16</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. 'Caste, Widow-Remarriage and the Reform of Popular Culture in Bengal', in Sarkar, Sumit. & Sarkar, Tanika. (ed.) *Women and Social Reform in Modern India A Reader*, Vol.I, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2007, pp145-171.



force.”<sup>17</sup> The limited success of the program of widow-remarriage was, however, confined to the educated and liberalized group of the new enlightened men society. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, however, argues that it was not the defeat of the reformers but the power of tradition which refused to be reformed.

As the Bengali society cannot be seen as a unified one, there was also the increasing legitimacy of widow-remarriage among the educated '*bhadrolok*' which had been constructing in the nineteenth century new 'models of womanhood'- to suit the socio-psychological as well as political needs of the time. It is true that Vidyasagar neither challenged the power structure of the Hindu society nor offered any radically different ideological alternatives. This becomes apparent if we look at his two treatises on widow remarriage. In his first treatise, Vidyasagar

“had discarded the use of reason, for he believed that people were not amenable to reason and were only governed by '*shastra*'. So, he went on interpreting and reinterpreting the shastra, trying to prove that his reform had sanctions within the corpus of traditional religious texts. In the second one, he, however, appealed for a change of the local custom or '*desachar*'.”<sup>18</sup>

Same was the case with his educational reform program. But, in a very general sense, it can be said that his educational reform program was much more successful than his social reform program of widow-remarriage. Vidyasagar's idea of mass education, however, included female education also. Regarding female education, he almost held identical views with Bethune. He was very much attached to the school of Bethune for the first two decades since its foundation. On Bethune's request, he became the honorary secretary of the school in 1850 and, in 1856, when the school's management was taken over by the government, Vidyasagar “was appointed secretary of the managing committee of which Sir Cecil Beadon became the president.”<sup>19</sup> Vidyasagar's active participation helped in making more systematic curriculum in this school, which consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, natural science, geography and needlework. The medium of instruction was in Bengali, but English was taught to those, whose guardians desired for that. In the primary level education, however, Vidyasagar himself put emphasis on the vernacular studies.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Samanta, Amiya Kumar. 'Vidyasagar and Female Education', *Education and Empowerment of Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Calcutta, 20001, pp.278-298.

The Court-of-Directors, however, decided to allow grants-in-aid to the female schools. Vidyasagar had already established a girls' school at his own initiative at Jowgram in Burdwan district with the help and assistance from the local gentry. It also got Rs. 32/- as monthly grant from the government and was running well. In those rural schools there was no such boundary against admitting students of lower castes, unlike the Bethune school. They, in fact, "aimed at mass female education, an agenda very dear to Vidyasagar's heart."<sup>20</sup> With the government encouragement, he, between November 1857 and June 1858, established almost forty girls' schools mainly in the districts of Hooghly, Nadia, Midnapore and Burdwan. On the assurance of Halliday, he spent an amount of three thousand four hundred and forty rupees from his own pocket. He was successful in enrolling as many as 1370 girls in these schools. He, however, got the money after a long existing bureaucratic hassle which "exposed the insincerity and hollowness of the government's policy on female education."<sup>21</sup> Chandicharan Bandopadhyay, biographer of Vidyasagar, has testified that "these schools survived for long and contributed substantially to the cause of female education."<sup>22</sup>

Seeing the hollowness of the governmental education policy, Vidyasagar left the government job before he was reimbursed. Later on, he also resigned from the post of the secretary to the Bethune School. He "did not endorse the setting up of a Normal School for training of the suitable female teachers for the female schools and, on this issue he eventually resigned from the post of secretary of the Bethune School."<sup>23</sup> Yet he did not cut all contacts with his dream school. Till the last days of life, he used to go there. One year before his death, Vidyasagar took Sushilabala, wife of Hemendra Singha, to admit her in the school and there, he met an old staff of the school. "He cried for long in front of the stone statue of Bethune. When Chandramukhi Bose (student of Bethune College) passed the M.A. examination as the first woman, he became very happy and blessed her with the Shakespeare omnibus."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Bandopadhyay, Chandicharan. *Vidyasagar*, Pratham College Street Sanskaran, Calcutta, B.S. 1394 (c.1987), pp.496-498.

<sup>23</sup> Samanta, Amiya Kumar. op cit.

<sup>24</sup> Das, Banimanjari. 'Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar o Mahamati Bethune Samporko', in *Itihase Nari: Sikhsha*, Pashimbango Itihas Sansad, Bethune College, Kolkata, 2001, pp.119-121.

### **Brahmo Initiatives:**

Another ardent supporter of female education was Keshub Chandra Sen, a leading personality of the Brahmo Samaj. In 1862-63, Keshub Chandra started his '*Strisikhsha*' movement to impart home instruction to females. In 1863, Umesh Chandra Dutta, another Brahmo, started the '*Bamabodhini Sabha*' (and published the '*Bamabodhini Patrika*'). Soon this Sabha merged with Keshab's '*Antahpur Strisikhsha*' and worked together to spread home education among the women folk.

However, progress of female education was seriously impeded by the dearth of trained female teachers. Due to social backwardness, it was not easy to have an adequate number of female teachers. At that time, the custom of early marriage was prevalent in the society. The girls attending public schools were stopped and called away from schools for getting married and thus were cut off from all means of further improvement. So, it was necessary to provide a system of education for the adult ladies in their own homes. For this reason, the Female Normal School and the adult school was opened on February 1, 1872. The grant of two hundred rupees per month for a year was promised by Miss Mary Carpenter on behalf of the National Indian Association of England. The number of pupils rose to twenty four at the end of the year. It would not be out of place to mention here that, with very few exceptions; they belonged to the respectable families and even got married. Of these twenty four pupils- only four were unmarried while seventeen were married and three were widows.

The curriculum was framed according to need. Different books were recommended for each class. Keshub Sen firmly believed that no substantial progress in society was possible without emancipating women first from the fetters of ignorance, superstition and the inhibiting customs. He wholeheartedly supported Vidyasagar's agitation for the widow remarriage and took an active part, in 1859, in staging the '*Bidhaba Bibaha Natak*' to create public opinion in its favour. Early marriage and polygamy were also roundly condemned by him. He advocated in his lecture entitled, 'Female Education in India' (May13, 1870)

“that a sound education should be given to women if their miseries were to be alleviated. It was education alone that could help them to play a prominent role in life and society and this was necessary in the interests of social and national regeneration. He suggested that the vernacular should be used as the medium of

instruction and through this medium ideas about religion, morality, science and literature might be communicated to women.”<sup>25</sup>

He believed that the creation of a large body of well-trained female teachers to tackle the problem of female education was the need of the hour and that the only way to meet the need was to establish a large number of normal schools in each of the presidency towns. In addition, the need of zenana instruction should also be seriously attended to as long as the system of seclusion of the women prevailed in the country.

Around this time, Annette Akroyd, a young utilitarian educated at the Belford College, London was attracted to Keshab's idea of women emancipation and came to India. However, “Keshab's somewhat conservative views did not satisfy either Annette or the more radical wing within the Brahma Samaj.”<sup>26</sup> Keshab's school in the premises of Bharat Ashram, however, could not give lessons of higher mathematics, geometry, logic and philosophy to the women. Basically, it would be fair to assume that Keshab Chandra Sen and his followers' prime aim was the creation of potential brides. They believed that a “well-trained young woman did not need arithmetic and science to help her in the kitchen or to make intelligent conversation. In fact, such subjects could unnecessarily tax the brain and distract from a girl's primary goal of happy, uncomplicated domesticity.”<sup>27</sup>

The system of imparting education to the women, however, created a gap between the Brahma Samajists. The more progressive radical Brahmos like Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay, Durga Mohon Das, Shib Nath Shastri, and Annada Charan Khastagir et al. were not satisfied with the education offered in the Keshab's Bharat Ashram. They believed in the same education and in the same curriculum for the boys and the girls. “They believed in greater equality between the sexes and, for them, education was the most effective way of realizing this goal.”<sup>28</sup> Dwarkanath Ganguly, editor of the famous journal ‘*Abalabandhab*’ along with Monomohon Ghosh, Durgamohon Das et al. established a residential girls' school of high standard, namely, the

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<sup>25</sup> Chattopadhyay, Kanailal. *Brahmo Reform Movement: Some Social and Economic Aspects*, Papyrus publications, Calcutta, 1983,

<sup>26</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. *Voices from Within Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991 p. 162.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 162-163.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p.163.

*'Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya'* under the supervision of Annette Akroyd. Its aim was to prepare the girls for the university examinations.

But, unfortunately, the school became closed in 1875, although temporarily, because of Annett's marriage to Civilian Henry Beverage. The school again was opened in 1876 with the utmost effort of the progressive Brahmos with a new name '*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*'. Though this school was run on private efforts, the standard of education was higher than any other institution of that time. On the other hand, though Bethune was a government run school, its standard was very low, almost at the lowest ebb of primary education. In the mean time, in 1873, Monomohon Ghosh became the secretary of the school with the new managing committee. He was also attached to the '*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*'. A comparison between the two schools, however, portrayed a very sad picture. Justice Phear, the President of the Bethune School Committee, suggested the amalgamation of the two schools for better development of the female education.

This proposal was supported by Sir Richard Girth when he became the president. Monomohon and Girth had a very good relation with each other.

“Monomohon's professional skills as well as zeal for women's education were tested when the proposal for amalgamation of the schools was on the anvil. A long term plan for the revival of Bethune school was necessary. When this proposal for merger was first considered and reported by Justice Phear, it was taken very seriously by the people who were concerned about the fate of the Bethune school. Monomohon took great care and initiative and things moved at a reasonable speed. At that time Mrs. Swarnalata Ghosh (wife of Monomohon) and Ananadamohan Bose were joint secretaries of the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya. The school merged with Bethune school on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1878. Two members of the Banga Mahila Vidyalaya managing committee, Durgamohan Das and Ananda Mohan Bose, were coopted in the managing committee of the new Bethune School.”<sup>29</sup>

Monomohon's next step was to seek necessary permission from the Calcutta University for the girls to sit for the entrance examination. And here Kadambini Bose became the first woman to pass the entrance. When Kadambini appeared in the entrance examination, his responsibility further increased. He had to take other necessary steps for extending educational opportunities for the women in Bengal. “Now that the Calcutta University had removed the bars, it was a

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<sup>29</sup> Ghosh, Sunanda. 'Monomohon Ghosh: The Architect of Bethune College', *In the Footsteps of Chandramukhi*, 125 Years of Bethune College, Bethune College, Kolkata, 2004, p.13.

challenge to Monomohon to convince the government to extend the facilities of the school so that the students are getting teaching instructions for college courses.”<sup>30</sup>

Monomohon Ghosh was considered an ardent champion of the women education. There were also other rational thinkers who thought on the same line of women emancipation. There were so many examples of the educated men of that time to have taught their wives in houses mainly in the night time. Sasipada Banerjee was a man of such zeal who started his reform work only at home. He first started to give education to his wife and sister-in-law even in the day time. How difficult his task was can be realized from a contemporary document which records:

When Sasipada commenced to teach his wife there was a hue and cry against it for it was then not customary to teach females. Moreover, for a young wife to speak with her husband during the day and received instruction from him was a great social offence, which the community could not easily pass over...in short time, almost all the elderly females of the house, not to speak of the girls, began to gather round his wife and sister-in-law to receive instructions...”<sup>31</sup>

He next took his wife out of ‘*Purdah*’ to his English friends and to different public places. This created a sensation and an outcry of protest arose from different quarters. It was, however, a common incident of that time. He was the man who became conscious about the insanitary and unhygienic condition of the labour room as his first child was died of that. It was customary of that time to set apart the unhealthiest room of the house as a confinement room for the expectant mother. He wanted to put an end to this practice and abolish this state of affairs. His second child, however, had a safe birth.

### **Issues of Modernity and the Identity:**

In the broader context of the nineteenth century the question of modernity came to be equated with the condition of women in the country. From the above mentioned scenario about the Indian intelligentsia and their consciousness of the miserable condition of their women, it becomes apparent that there were several different strands among them regarding the question of women. And those divisions portray some clear cut picture about their notion and vision. The questions arise: what was the real intention of the male society in making arrangements for education of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.14.

<sup>31</sup> Chattopadhyay, Kanailal. op cit.

the girls? Did they want education for the women emancipation as a whole or for their own sake of interest to get a good 'trophy-wives' or it was for the development of society?

In the first half of the nineteenth century, education of the women was supposed to have no market value. The early leading persons of the nineteenth century viewed reform programs and the education for women simultaneously. It is also not true that the women society as a whole was completely illiterate. There were some examples of educated women. The women of the leading families of the then Calcutta were educated (the women of the Tagore family both of Jorasanko and Pathuriaghata, Deb family of Shovabazar etc.). It was probably because of that Raja Radhakanta Deb of the Shovabazar Deb family did not oppose the women education, conducted by the missionaries, though he strongly opposed the government interference in the age old customs of this country (he even opposed the prohibition of 'Sati'). The general notion was that "some primary education was necessary for them to increase their domestic value and so opportunities were restricted to that purpose only."<sup>32</sup>

The year 1835, however, marked the watershed year in the history of education in India. It was the year of the 'Macaulay Minute' which enacted introduction of the English language as the medium of instruction and also the western knowledge for imparting education. The Derozians were the first to come into the contact of the flows of new ideas from the West, which ultimately changed their traditional notions. They also raised the female question and started writing regarding the importance of female education. But, they failed to gain mass support because of their too much radicalism in each and every mission. Actually, the Hindu society was then a depot of conservatism and orthodoxy, which did not allow their women to become educated. Even when Bethune opened his school in 1849, he addressed the meeting with the purpose to give girls some vernacular language teaching including sewing etc. "so that the girls could be trained to be 'good mothers, wives and daughters'."<sup>33</sup>

Whereas to educate women with the notion of making them good mothers, wives and daughters was a largely accepted fact over a long time span. It was from then, when Prosonno Coomar Tagore wrote in his 'Reformer' in 1830s about the necessity of female education for moral and

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<sup>32</sup> Ghosh, Sunanda. op cit. p.21.

<sup>33</sup> Bethune' Speech on May 7, 1849. Published in 'Bethune, His School and Nineteenth Century Bengal', Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Kolkata, 2006.

physical education to the child up to even the end of the study period of this work. By and large the notion of female education was the same. But, later, with the growth of the new enlightened group of intelligentsia, the want of literate wives increased to a large extent so that they could build their conjugal lives with greater reciprocity. Previously marriage was not depended on the consent of the two individuals but on the consent of the whole family. But from the second half of the nineteenth century, this system began to change. In many cases, the decision was taken by the two individuals. For this reason, there was a large scale demand for the educated females.

Earlier the Young Bengal and later the Brahmos knew their progressive ideas would fail to strike a sympathetic note if their wives were illiterate and superstitious. Many married women received their education from their husbands at night. Such was the example of Kailashbasini Debi (author of “Janoika Grihabodhur Diary”) as she got education from her husband Kishori Chand Mitra. Saradasundari Debi (mother of Keshab Chandra Sen) also got education from her husband. There were lots of such examples. It was also important for the new educated enlightened group to have educated wives for their “own fight against patriarchal family norms.”<sup>34</sup> Here it is important to note that usually the women of the Tagore family got education within their house (zenana system), but Debendranath Tagore had sent his eldest daughter Saudamini to the Bethune school in 1851, on the request of the then patrons of the school. Apart from her, the other contemporary members of the Tagore family such as, Swarnakumari Debi, Gyanadanandini Debi all were home educated.

The early Brahmos believed in women emancipation but their views had some particular features

- Their concept of modernity was equated with development of women’s condition and their education.
- According to them, education for women would have some specific characters.
- They believed more in the ‘*Antahpur Siksha*’ than the private institutionalized school education.
- They did not think of the women as the professionals.

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<sup>34</sup> Ghosh, Sunanda. op cit. p.21.



“With the encouragement from their husbands, wives came to understand the importance of domestic hygiene, use of modern furniture, dressing children well etc.”<sup>35</sup> What was the notion of the Brahmos regarding the education of women? This is to be found in the pages of the *‘Bamabodhini Patrika’* and even the women voiced in the same way. As for example, Gyanadanandini Debi was a modern woman in its true sense. She revolutionized the typical wearing of Sari and introduced the new method of wearing it, went to Britain without being escorted by any male member of the family and entertained her husband’s British colleagues to a dinner in a professional manner, but, ultimately, she argued in the same traditional way “that feminine success lay in the ability to be a competent wife and mother.”<sup>36</sup> A few years later, Priyambada Bagchi, a graduate from the Calcutta University, wrote in the *‘Antahpur’* in 1892, “on the need for women’s education to be more feminine in orientation”. Radharani Lahiri, who had been associated with the progressive Brahmo attempts of introducing education for the girls, felt, nonetheless, that despite all that women learned, ‘housework is the most important’.”<sup>37</sup>

Even in 1902 (B.S.1310), the mentality of that group of people remained the same. Amritalal Gupta wrote in the *‘phalgun-chaitra’* issue of B.S.1310 of the *‘Bamabodhini Patrika’* with the heading “*Sikkhito Mohilar Daitwo*” (Responsibility of an Educated Women):

...the reason we consider for the higher education of women is the proper upbringing of their child. We all know that a woman of good character and well virtues would impart good education to her children...if the educated women don’t take the responsibility of their children, don’t look after for their behavior and character, then who the else is there to take care of these things!...if the women after getting higher education surrender the educational responsibilities of their children in the hands of the tutors and spend their own time on reading novels and entertainment or make their children comfortable with the new dresses and various material things then there is no hope for the boys of this country to become perfect men.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ghosh, Sunanda. op cit. p.22.

<sup>36</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. ‘Kadambini and Bhadrolok: Early Debates over Women’s Education in Bengal’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.21, No.17 (Apr. 26, 1986), pp. WS25-WS31.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *‘Bamabodhini Patrika’*, *‘Phalgun-Chaitra’* issue of B.S.1310 (c.1902) (translation mine), “*aamra je sakol karone romonidiger uchchosikhsha atyanta prayojon bolia mone kori tonmodhye santan palon o santandiger susikhsha Bidhan pradhan karon. Ekatha aamra sakolei jani je sachchoritra o gunoboti matar putrokanyagani gunoban ebong gunoboti hoia thake...erup abasthai susikhkhita ramanigon Jodi santandiger sikhshar tattwabadhan na koren, choritrer unnotir protti dristi na rakhen, tahader aachar byabohar bishoye satarko nah on taha hoile aar kei ba dristi rekhibe?...tanhara Jodi uchchosikhsha paiao santandiger samasto bhar bharate sikhkhok digger hoste arpor koren ebong nijera ingraji bangala golper bohi path koria amod-promode samoi kataia dan, athoba Jodi*

On the other hand, another group of the Brahmos was more progressive and radical in their nature. Leading names in this field were Dwarkanath Ganguly, Durgamohon Das, and Shib Nath Shastri et al. Education for women meant to them complete emancipation of the women, be it political, social, or economic. They neither believed in any limited kind of education for women nor found any inferiority among the female sex. They were, however, of the opinion that education imparted to the boys and girls would be the same. It was because of their enormous effort, the door to higher education became opened to the girls'. Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Basu became successful as professionals in 1880s with the blessing of that more progressive group of the Brahmos.

We find the expression of their progressive thoughts in the pages of the monthly journal '*Banga Mahila*' (Bengali Women, 1870, editor was Mokshada Debi, sister of W.C. Bonnerjee, the first president of the Indian National Congress). It published in the issue of '*Aashar*' (Bengali month), B.S.1282 (c.1875), "Stree Loker Prakrita Swadhinata" (the actual freedom of the women):

...There are so many books for the development of Bengali women, so many published articles, so many lectures - but what good has been done? People will say of course there are so many developments. But I think it was far from having any good as the present educational system decreased our status to the English women. Everyone may think that I have totally lost my mind because the English women can't have any fault on their side. They are completely free, they can go wherever they wished to go by walking, cars, horse-carriage, with husbands or friends. They don't face any barrier around them. They even have the right in sitting in the Parliament...on the other hand, you are (native women) also educated, somehow able to discuss scientific things, then why am I thinking about your misery? But the readers, if you think thoroughly you will realize that I am not saying any vague things.

The English women get education in well manner. Becoming educated and knowledgeable they may realize that, how much is that painful to live under one's dominance and sympathy. But nothing to do - they are deprived of job value...is there really any need of this kind of education?... we are also suffering from the same condition. So I pray to the intelligentsia for God sake, please give us real freedom...I also pray to my sisters, please don't think that you have got your real freedom, if you are permitted to take food with the men or allowed to go to outside with them. If you become able to take ultimate care of yourself, that is, however, the real education and freedom.<sup>39</sup>

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*balokbalikadigoke kebol uttom aharjo samagri dan koria, monorom mulyoban porichchede sushovito kotia, sudhui bhog sukhe avastya koren....taha hoile edesher cheleder aar manusher moto manush hoibar asha kothai?"*

<sup>39</sup> '*Banga Mahila*', '*Aashar*', B.S.1282 (c.1875), (translation mine), "Bangaramonigoner unnotir janya kato pustaki proniti hoiache, kato prabandhoi prakashito hoiache...kintu ki upokar hoiache? Aneke boliben- upokar hoiache boi ki. Kintu amar bibechonai upokar hoa dure thakuk, pratyuto bartaman sikhshar doshe ingraj mohilagoner nyai, krome amra nana prakar kleshe potato hitechhi. Aamar ekatha suniya hoito pathakborgo bhabiben amar

Another issue of 'Banga Mahila' (Chaitra, B.S.1283), published an article on "Bishwabidyalaye Stree Lokdiger Porikkha" (examination of the women in the University examination):

The members of the Calcutta University decided a new thing for the development of female education. They have made the rule that the native women can sit for the Entrance and First Art examination with the university's boy students. It is not at all simple thing that the intellectual members of the University senate body have accepted the fact that the women have the same right like the boys to get education.

But the problem is how will the women become eligible to sit for the examination? Because the existing female schools do not impart any high standard education, there are very few schools where from students may appear for those examinations. But the conditions of other schools need to be improved...the members of the university have given the necessary permission for the higher education for the girls, but it's now challenge to the government and the reformers to improve the existing condition of the schools and the quality of education.<sup>40</sup>

Later on, Keshab's educational ideas changed with the national line of education. Through his 'Indian Mirror', he objected to the "amalgamation of Banga Mahila Vidyalaya with Bethune School."<sup>41</sup> The result was the foundation of the Victoria College in 1882 by him to inculcate

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*buddhivrangso hpoache, notuba ingraj mohilagoner aabar dosh ki? Tanhar sampurno swadhina, jekhane ichche seikhanei jaitechen, padobroje, janarohone, ashwarohone, akakini, swamir sohit ebomg bandhu bandhober sohit, prakashya sthane jottechcho bhromon korite tanhader kichumatro badha nai. Tanhara parliament mahasabha o ananya prokashya Sabha sthane jaija bosibar upojukto sthan paitechen...edike aapnarao lekharora sikhiachen wbong bigyanshatrer alochona koriteo sakhpam hoachen tobe aami kano tanhader dukkhko kalpana koritechi? Pathakgon aapnara sthichitte bibechna koria dekhile bujhite pariben je aamar e kalpana nitanto amulak nohe. Bilatio streegonke uttom rupe lekharopasikhsha deoa hoi. Tanhara gyanoboti o bidyaboti hoia iha bilokkhon pure bujhite paren je, poradhin hoia poranne protipalito hoa dusahosinir klesh! Bujhile ki hoibe- sammansil prodhan prodhan byabshai o karjaloy probhiti tanhadiger sommukhe rudhdhodwar...aamra lekharora sikhsha koritechi, athocho ei sochoniyo abastha hoite udhdhar hoite paritechi na. akhon kritobidya mahasoidigernikot kritanjolipute prathona kori je, ingraji pranalite amadigoke swadhinota na dia jatharto swadhinata dan...e sthane snehopatri mugdhoswavaba voginidigokeo ekti bishoye sabdhan koria ditechi. Tanhara jano swadhinotar asha morichikai bhranto hoia rurushdiger samokokkhko hoia bhojon o bhromonkei prakrito swadhinata mone na koren. Aapnake aapni rakhkhonabekkhon korite sikhsha korai prokrito swadhinota o sikhsha.*

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 'Chaitra', B.S.1283 (c.1876), (translation mine), "Kolkata Vishwavidyalayer savyagon tanhadiger gato adhibeshone etoddeshiyo streelokdiger gyanonnoti sambondhe ekti upai bidhan koriachen. Tanhara niom korachen je, edeshiyo streelokgon purushdiger nyai vishwavidyalayer entrance o first art porikksha dite paribe. Iha samanya alhader bishoi nohe je, sikhshabishoye purushdiger sohit streelokdiger je soman adhikar taha vishwavidyalayer savyagon swikar koriachen ebong jahate tahara vishwavidyalayer Porikkha niomer fol jubokdiger sohit somanbhabe bhog korite pare tahar upai koriachen.

*Ekkhone katha hoiteche je, kebol porikkhar Bidhan hoilei ki hoibe? Upojukto sikhshar byabostha na hoile mohilagon kirupe ukto porikkhar upojogi hoiben? Je sakol Balika vidyalay songsthapito hoiache, tahate uchchosikhshar kono byabostha dekhite paoa jai na...vishwavidhyalayer sovyogon streegoner porikkhar byabostha koria jerup udarotar porichoi diachen, government streegoner uktoporikkhapojogi sikhshar uttom byabostha koria streesikhshar gourob bridhdhi koren, ei aamader prarthona."*

<sup>41</sup> Indian Mirror, 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1878. Keshab Chandra Sen violently objected to the amalgamation of Banga Mahila Vidyalaya with Bethune School on the ground that "a notoriously un-Hindoo school should mix with one strictly

indigenous tradition. This institution, however, can be considered as the predecessor of the ‘*Mahakali Pathshala*’ in 1893 which soon had 23 branches in the mofussil. It was, however, the era of the Hindu Revivalism. The activities of the late nineteenth century reformers were considered as a threat to the degradation of the Hindu religion. As we know, even now religion has the strongest power over everything.

Partha Chatterjee, in his ‘Nation and its Fragments’, has made detailed comments on the attitudes of such new nationalists educationists. It was feared that the English education will engender the westernized beliefs and behaviours among the Indian women. “The mid nineteenth century ideas of reform gave way to a strong current of conservatism in which what was indigenous and traditional was sought to be glorified. The new brand of nationalism with a strong Hindu undertone made a distinction between home and the outer world.”<sup>42</sup> “The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality”.<sup>43</sup> There should have a marked difference between the modernization of men and women. However, they did not suggest that women should again go back to the ‘*andarmahal*’. They preached for “classicized tradition, reformed, reconstructed, fortified against charges of barbarism and irrationality.”<sup>44</sup> They were of opinion that women must be educated, even they should get higher education, but they also must respect the superior national culture.

### **The Three Pioneering Schools: Some Questions**

The three schools of the nineteenth century- the Bethune School (1849), the ‘*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*’ (1876) and the ‘*Mahakali Pathshala*’ (1893) are known for making some pioneering efforts in the development of female education. Each of those schools was established with different objectives and set up from different perspectives. The three schools, however, were established over a half of the century and were unique in their features.

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Hindu school.” His objection was mostly due to the introduction of some western habits, such as, eating of meat, using forks, and wearing socks, among the students by Miss Annett Akroyd.

<sup>42</sup> Ghosh, Sunanda. op cit. p.24.

<sup>43</sup> Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, p.126.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.127.

Bethune School was established at a time when there were only minor attempts to initiate female education, either through publishing articles in contemporary journals and newspapers or by setting up local small schools for girls by some rich individuals. Missionary schools, however, were making some efforts in promoting female education starting from the early decades of the nineteenth century. But they could not achieve much success because their main aim was to spread Christianity as they continued attracting girls from lower strata of the society.

At the opening ceremony of the Bethune School (then was called the Calcutta Female School by Bethune himself) on May, 1849), the founder Bethune said,

...I thought, too, that you could not fail to discover, as soon as you began to reflect at all upon the matter, how infinite is the importance of the part which every mother has to perform in the education of her offspring...and this is not felt in childhood alone, but in every relation of life the power of female influence is acknowledged...Further it was a hopeful reflection that the seclusion and the ignorance to which your females have been so long condemned do not belong to the oldest customs of your nation, that they are themselves innovations, brought in, as I believe, by a courtly imitation of your Mahammedan invaders...it was reasonable then to hope that you would gladly welcome the proposal to put an end to the barbarous state of degradation of the female sex, which did not characterize the earliest and most flourishing period of Hindu history...a general system of domestic education is and for a long time must be impossible in Bengal, from the mere want of proper instructresses...it is well understood by you all that the plan which has been uniformly followed in the Government Schools, of not meddling with the religion of your children, is to be strictly followed here. There are some, I know, who are very apt to sneer at the notion of learned females, and they may form an idea of the sort of education which we propose to give these girls, which I think it very likely that I should be ready to join with them in ridiculing...As far as literature therefore is concerned, we shall make Bengali the foundation, and resort to English only for some of those subsidiary advantages, and when we know that the communication of such knowledge is not in opposition to the wishes of the parents. Besides which, there are a thousand feminine works and accomplishments, with their needles, in embroidery and fancy work in drawing, in many other things which I am not half to describe as my friend Mrs. Ridsdale, whose province it will be to teach them. The knowledge of these things will give to your children the means of adorning their own homes, and of supplying themselves with harmless and elegant employment...Finally I take this opportunity of reminding you that I shall request you from time to time to assemble at my house, in order that I may know by direct communication with you, whether the school is conducted to your satisfaction, whether there are any particulars which you wish to have altered, and in short, to strengthen still more and more the assurance which I know you have at this moment of my anxious desire that it should be conducted in all respects in such manner as to be satisfactory to you and beneficial to your children.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> This speech of Bethune was published in the Bengal Hurkaru and Indian Gazette, May 8, 1849.

The purpose of mentioning Bethune's speech here is to emphasize that the school was established keeping in mind the demands of the local intelligentsia of the then society for female education. What they thought and what were being published in the journals and newspapers, however, got an outcome with establishment of the school. It can also be said that Bethune school was the culmination of those expressions regarding female education. Bethune, however, realized that nothing would be successful without the acceptance of the society in general and the Hindu conservatism in particular. For the need and necessity of the female education, Bethune did not utter a single extra word other than what the supporters of female education and the published papers propagated. But the school had success in attracting people from the notable families, though the attendance rate of the pupils was not that much high. As, at that time, nothing was thought regarding the standard of female education, Bethune school continued to suffer from the low quality rate.

The next was the establishment of '*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*' in 1876 by the progressive radical group of the Brahmos. Actually the issue of female education led to a split in the '*Brahmo Samaj*'. Whereas Keshab's group of the early Brahmos continued to sustain its view of limited education for the girls, without learning the science subjects, logic and philosophy as those made no value in a girl's life, and emphasized education as makers of good and polished daughters, wives and mothers, the new group of Dwarkanath Ganguly, Shib Nath Shastri, and Durgamohon Das et al. found it important to promote higher education for the girls. They did not differentiate between the two sexes, male and female, and also education for them. They believed that the girls also had the same ability as their male counterparts and so could deserve getting higher education in the university. So, the school was the place to making the students eligible for that. The standard of this school was also very high. Considering the situation of that time, the school did not flood out with huge number of students but succeeded in making its aim to prepare girls for the university examination. It was the time when the typical Hindu conservatives did not accept the issue of educating the girls, the orthodox Brahmos still thought of limited, polished and furnished education for the girls while the school established by the new Brahmos made a landmark in the history of female education.

The next important incident in the history of female education was establishment of the '*Mahakali Pathshala*' (1893) with the aim to educate the girls in the strict nationalist educational

ideals, so that they could regenerate the degrading Hindu society. It was the time when the ideological phenomenon of nationalism-revivalism gained its momentum and this school was established with the aim, not to give western education to the girls (its model was somehow similar to the Victoria College) and also not to promote co- education and similar syllabus for the girls like the boys. The founder of the school *Mataji Maharani Tapaswini* had come to Calcutta with a mission: to promote female education in harmony with the Hindu religious and moral principles. She believed that Hindu society could be regenerated from within. The basic principles of the Mahakali system are given as follows:

- The strict observance of Shastric injunctions in matters of domestic life.
- The inculcation of *Patibrata Dharma* as exemplified in the lives of *Sita*, *Sabitri*, and *Anasuya* etc.
- The observance of the duties of a Hindu female as daughter, sister, wife, mother, and lastly relative and neighbor.
- The culture of the intellect of the girls and imbuing their minds with knowledge of their literature and history such as is contained in the *Kavyas* and *Puranas*.
- The teaching of economic duties such as sewing, cooking, keeping accounts, drawing *Alpana* etc.<sup>46</sup>

This school published its own text-books, *Mahakali Path*, parts 1 and 2 (Bengali reader specially meant the girls), *Mahakali Sanskrit Path*, *Mul Ramayana* (portions of the original *Sanskrit Ramayana* with their Bengali translation), *Sadhwi Sadachar* (intended to teach morality to the girls on Hindu precedents), *Prasnottormala* (a catechism also meant for the training of girls on the above lines), *Stutimala* (a book of hymns or *Stotras* with Bengali translation), *Shiva Puja Paddhati* (ritualistic notes).

The institution had seven classes and, in the highest class, Sanskrit *Raghuvangsa*, *Rijupath*, *Upakramanika Byakaran* were taught with *Bangla Byakaran*, *Kadambari* and *Kabita Prasanga* in Bengali. The syllabus was praised by the Hindu gentlemen of the middle class. The school was started in 1893 with thirty students but gained so much popularity that, in 1903, the number of students increased to 450, a roll strength far superior to any girls' school at the time, that of

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<sup>46</sup> Ghose, Latika. 'Social and Educational Movements For Women and By Women 1820-1950', in Nag, Kalidas. (ed.) *Bethune school and College Centenary Volume 1849-1949*, Bethune College, Kolkata, 1949, p.145.

the Bethune school, in particular, being very much lower. This figure shows how much popular the school was among the masses. The idealism of national education with the Swadeshi movement also became wide spread this time. The main reason for the popularity of this school was the strictness of giving education on traditional lines, unlike the Bethune school and the college. So when the much older Bethune school and the college failed to influence the broader base in the society, the *Mahakali Pathshala* easily did that.

The brief assessment of the three schools, as noted above, however, shows that the schools were established at the need of time. It also shows how much people's mentality had supported the foundations of those schools. It was also the contemporary socio-political and cultural consciousness that got an expression through the establishment of the schools.

### **Rabindranath Tagore: The Era of a New Cultural Consciousness**

We are of the opinion that, up to some extent, the whole responsibility of imparting proper upbringing of the boys depends on the general education and knowledge of our mothers and sisters. It is their natural duty...if the women give proper education to the children, there lays the utility of her own education. Now a day, women of our country are getting higher education. If they distribute their knowledge in vernaculars, then, besides the imaginary portrayal of Goddess Lakhshmi (goddess of wealth) of the Bengali family, they would become the imaginary portrayal of Goddess Sarasvati (goddess of knowledge).

Every girl should have such a book as textbook in school and also should be the subject of examination. The girls should have the knowledge of some day to day domestic business, such as, to give medicine to patients, to tie the bandage of injuries, to make necessary food for the sick, to note down time to time condition of the sick, etc. and all of these should be included as parts of female education. The men folk are day by day becoming tensed and sick because of tough educational methods and competition in examinations and in job market. So it is the responsibility of the women to make and keep the men fine and happy. Now if they also start competition of becoming educated with their male counterpart, then that is the win of the university- but defeat of our national beauty and good health.<sup>47</sup>

It was Rabindranath Tagore's view regarding the female education. It seems clear from the above text that he promoted limited education for women which meet up the basic needs of

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<sup>47</sup> 'Bharati', 'Jaisthya', B.S.1305 (c.1898)



domesticity like most of the nineteenth century people. He was totally against that women would go outside for job. So, he thought on the traditional line and that has justification. But the problem is portrayal of women in his literary works is completely different. We cannot find the expression of his typical thinking of limited education for women in many of his contemporary literary creations. In the short stories which were written in the same year of B.S.1305 (c.1898), the women characters were not portrayed in the manner of good mother, good wife or a good womanly figure who can take very good care of her domesticity, rather they were the creations of complete expression of personality and womanhood.

It is here important to give some portrayal of those dream female figures. In the story, '*Adhyapak*' (Professor), the heroine '*Kiran*' was seen with a book in her hand, and she was reading a poem of Shelley. So whatever Rabindranath mentioned in the pages of '*Bharati*' does not match with *Kiran*'s need of reading poem. It would not help in any way to increase her sense in domesticity. She also qualified in the B.A. examination and that too in first-division. On the other hand, the hero of this story also appeared in the same examination with her. But he failed to qualify. Rabindranath, however, showed the superiority of woman over the man. In another story of 1305, '*Rajtika*', we find the story of *Labanyalekha*, *Kiranlekha* and *Sasankalekha*. They were not only beautiful and educated but also known for their intelligence and strong political intellectual as they harassed a lot their brother-in-law, who was a strong supporter of the British rule.

Like these women of Rabindranath's short stories, in real life also the numbers of educated women in the nineteenth century were not many. There is a story, named '*Khata*' (Notebook). There we find the story of a girl, *Uma*, who loved to write the things which were utmost personal in her life. But "her educated husband thought that educated woman soon become widow, he snatched her notebook and he and his family members used to have big laugh on her and destroyed something which was strictly personal to *Uma*."<sup>48</sup> Here the fear of that educated husband whether for *Uma*'s widowhood or for death of him is a matter to think deeply.

In Tagore's literary creations women were well educated. *Giribala* of the story '*Megh o Roudra*', *Ratan* of '*Postmaster*', *Kamala* in the novel '*Noukadubi*', *Bimala* in '*Ghore-Baire*', all were

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<sup>48</sup> Bhattacharya, Sutapa. 'Rabindranather Kathasahitye Narisikkhar Chitrayan', *Education and Empowerment Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Kolkata, 2001, p. 332.

educated, whatever might be the interest of their educators. Writings on women education and the spread of man-woman love through it started with Rabindranath only. The stories of *Bihari-Binodini* in '*Chokher Bali*' and *Hemnalilni-Ramesh* in the '*Noukadubi*' were something like that. It is known to us all that Tagore never gave too much importance to institutionalized education. But in his novel and short stories, there are the examples of both women being educated at institutions and also at homes.

In his educational ideas, there is much emphasis on creativity. But for a long time, he did not have any belief in women's power of creation. He commented in his speech on Ramabai in Maharashtra in 1891 - that woman has the power of accepting and receiving anything, but lacks the power of creativity. But, on the other hand, in his work '*Nastanir*', he highlighted *Charulata*, the heroine of the story, with creative skill in 'her' literature. *Charulata* started writing much later when *Amal* (her brother-in-law) was already a writer. But as soon as her writing was published, Tagore compared it with that of her critics like *Amal* and *Manmatha Dutta* (her husband) and praised *Charulata* for her simple natural writing.

The Tagore family of Jorasanko, however, started a new cultural consciousness through practice of music, dance, literary works etc. Rabindranath Tagore was also an obvious part in it. He was fond of painting also. In his story 'Chitrakar' (Painter), "he had written a story of a lady painter. Her name was Satyabati. From her very childhood, she was in love with it."<sup>49</sup> Establishment of the Santiniketan Ashrama in 1901 was a strong expression of this cultural consciousness. There, the wives of the teachers practiced design making with the intense encouragement of Tagore. Santiniketan Ashram opened its door to the girls from 1908. There was no difference in curriculum of the boys and the girls. As the boys used to get training in music and dance, the girls also had to do works which boys normally did. The overall anti-traditional cultural movement of the nineteenth century got a new dimension with the foundation of the Ashrama and also with starting of the co-education there.

On the one hand, Tagore voiced his strong discontent over higher education of the girls in the pages of 'Bharati', the Bengali Journal (he also expressed his discontent over Sarala's higher education and her getting job far away in Mysore). It echoed the strong voice of the Brahmos

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.339.

regarding female education. On the other hand, at the same time, there is a different portrayal of the women characters in his literary works. Likewise, his heroines were also diffident in leaving home, going out to take education and accept jobs, falling in love and selecting husband etc. Tagore, it seems, was struggling with different notions about gender and domesticity and was probably unable to take a strong position.

### **Conclusion:**

The nineteenth century is marked as a watershed in the history of female education in India. On the one hand, this century witnessed the co-existence of typical Hindu orthodoxy and some kind of liberalism. The group of the liberals was again split within itself. Each and every group had its own notion regarding female education. So when we talk about the 'native' intelligentsia, their consciousness and views on female education we can't get any symmetrical picture.

The first group, the orthodox, was, however dead against any well being of the women, such as, abolition of 'Sati', widow remarriage, female education, prohibition of child marriage etc. They staunchly believed that they were following the strict Shastric order. But 'Pandits' like Gourmohon Tarkalankar and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar redefined *shastra* many times and opined that there were no such instructions in the *shastra* that the women were treated in a barbaric manner. The practice of 'Sati' was prohibited with the 1829 Legislative Act, but the other things such as the widow remarriage or the female education were difficult to impose legally. So the prejudices continued to survive among the conservative-orthodox *Hindus* even in the more enlightened period of the second half of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, there was introduction of the female education and establishment of the primary schools for girls by the missionaries since 1822 with the establishment of the Female Juvenile Society. But their efforts were, however, discarded by the then leaders of the Hindu society, namely, Radhakanta Deb, Raja Baidyanath Ray, and Prosonno Coomar Tagore et al. The main cause of withdrawing their support from the missionary schools was admission of the girls from the lower classes of the society and fear of conversion. In the then leading families of Calcutta (Deb of Shovabazar, Tagores of Jorasanko and Pathuriaghata etc.), practice of limited

education for the women was in existence. The leaders, however, thought in the same line of imparting education to the women and also education in the '*Antahpur*'.

The emergence of the 'Young Bengal' and their radical thinking, and also the continuous publications for the need of female education in the journals and newspapers opened a new horizon for the development. The western influenced ideas changed their traditional notions of many things. There was a demand for institutional education for the girls. The Bethune School (1849, then was known as the Calcutta Female School) was, however the culmination of that new demand. Though the school started with twenty one girls on roll, the regular attendance rate was poor. So the school failed to attract a larger population for development of the female education. The school somehow managed to survive with the tireless efforts of Vidyasagar and the governmental help.

From 1850 onwards, the Brahma movement gained momentum with the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen, as the pioneering figure. But again their ideals of female education had its limitation. Purpose of education was, to that extent, to make a girl a perfect, polished and also knowledgeable daughter, wife and mother only. There was no such objection in giving women the freedom. The denomination of '*Purdah*' was one of the important characteristics of their concept of women liberalization. But they strongly opposed gender equalization between the boys and the girls especially regarding matter of the same syllabus. The early Brahmos, however, did not recognize the 'masculine' subjects like, science, philosophy, logic etc. for the girls.

From 1870 onwards, the new Brahmos came into being. That new group of the Brahmos (Dwarkanath Ganguly, Durga Mohan Das et al.) was more progressive and radical in their thinking. They did not believe in any gender discrimination. Their concept of women liberty was to give women the higher education like their male counterparts, so as they would become successful as professionals in later years. Earlier, no one could think that women would go outside their home to do 'job'. Banga Mahila Vidyalaya was established in 1876 with the aim to prepare the girls for the University examination. It was totally a new concept to the tradition-ridden Bengali society. Though there was not any whole-hearted acceptance for that, it was also not totally rejected. That school, however, was merged with the Bethune school and, from 1878 onwards, there was only the Bethune School.

On the other hand, there was no general acceptance of the western model based schools and colleges. So, during the period of Revivalism-Nationalism, there was the emergence of Mahakali Pathshala, based on strict line of the nationalist education. It had, however, large scale acceptance among the masses. It can be said that the then society accepted female education and also educational institutions for them but also obeyed the Shastric injunctions regarding women's in family and society.

Lastly, the whole era of nineteenth century saw a new development with Rabindranath Tagore and the Santiniketan Ashram as founded by him in 1901. The new cultural consciousness of the late nineteenth century through literary creations with music and dance, in which the Tagore family of Jorasanko had a huge contribution, got its space with formation of the Ashrama in Santiniketan. Though Rabindranath had different types of complexities within him regarding type and style of the female education, Santiniketan ashram opened its door for the women from 1908.

So the female education got transformed from one type to another throughout the nineteenth century. The generalist view on female education says that it never had full acceptance in the Bengali society. But the efforts of the reformers cannot be denied. They made a strong base for the development of female education in the twentieth century.

## **Chapter 4**

### **'A Caged Bird': Women in the Bengali Society**

Why was I born as a girl!...if I was born as a boy and had news of my mother's condition... just like a free bird I would have flown to her side. But what can I do? I am a caged bird.<sup>1</sup>

It was Rassundari Devi's (the first Bengali autobiographer, born in 1809) regret, regret of being a woman. We may consider her as a representative of the society, particularly of the women. It was more or less a regret of the women of the contemporary society. It was a curse to them, of being a woman; as they had to go through various types of dominations and obstacles throughout lives. Incidents like child-marriage, 'kulin' system of marriage, 'suttee', or to live the horrible life of widowhood were all reflective of the patriarchal domination in the then society. It would be wrong to say that the women of that time were totally illiterate. Traditionally, education for them was limited to reading sacred literature. Female education was informal and largely limited to practical matters. Women from the respectable families often studied classical or vernacular literature as "a pious recreation," and girls from the propertied class received some education in keeping the accounts.<sup>2</sup>

Here it is important to mention that in Adam's Report (William Adam's Report on Education, 1835), there is the example of Rani Bhavani, the famous zamindar of Natore. She was well educated and skillful enough to maintain her property. There are also some other examples of educated women in the then society. In some reputed families in Calcutta, such as the Deb family of Shovabazar, the Tagores of Jorasanko and Pathuriaghata etc., the significance of female education was recognised. In the introduction of his book 'Adhyatika', Parrychand Mitra (born in 1814) wrote that there was a system of education among his grandmother, mother and other women relatives. Beside this, there was tradition of female education among the Vaishnavites. After the death of Chaitanya Mahaprabu (1533 AD.), his great disciples educated their wives and daughters for expansion of the Vaishnava religion among the women. It is true that the purpose was totally religious but it actually helped to create a tradition of female

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<sup>1</sup> Devi, Rassundari. 'Aamar Jibon' (My Life), B.S. 1275 (c. 1868), p.27, "Aamar narikule kano janmo hoiachilo? Aamar jibone dhik!... aami Jodi putrosantan hoitam, aar maar asonno kaler sambad paitam, tobe aami jekhane thakitam, pakhir moto uriya jaitam. Ki koribo, aami pinjor badhdho bihonggi."

<sup>2</sup> Dutta, Kalikinkar. *Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Condition in the Eighteenth Century, (1707-1813)*, Calcutta, Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyay, 1961, pp. 23-4.

education among the Vaishnavites. Even in the beginning of the nineteenth century, this tradition was in existence in Nadia and Shantipur (two main strongholds of Vaishnavites). Not only of their own group, were those Vaishnavis also used to visit other families in the society to spread education among women folk. As for example, Debendranath Tagore once mentioned that, in his childhood, he saw the Vaishnavis to come to their house for the educating the women.

Unfortunately, the above scenario of the female education was not the overall general condition of the women and their education in the society, rather the opposite was the rule. Lack of female education was very much related to the social oppressions upon them such as the child marriage, widowhood, *kulin* polygamy etc. Though child marriage was a socially prevalent system across every caste and class, the tremendous oppression of the widowhood and the *kulin* polygamy were mainly confined to the upper castes women. On the other hand, there was also poverty and social oppression through untouchability, but compared to the women of lower classes the upper caste women suffered the prejudices of the widowhood or the *kulin* polygamy. What was common among both the strata was the lack of education. From the middle of the eighteenth century, the changing economic pattern of the society, female education was almost a lost phenomenon. Along with that, the super imposed systems of the child marriage and the *pardah* destroyed even the feeling for necessity of the female education. On the other hand, as the lower caste women were free from the *pardah* or confinement in the '*andarmahal*' (inner house), education did not mean any value to them.

There was a wide spread common belief that a girl who could read and write would never find a husband or would soon become a widow.<sup>3</sup> It is here important to note how social prejudices and superstitions could, in the name of preserving tradition, wipe out one's own common sense, consciousness and, of course, the moral values. So not only there was the patriarchal domination, the women themselves posed great obstacles in the path of progress. It was the women who themselves believed in all that sins involving in girls' education. Here the memoir of Haimabati Sen (c.1866-1932), "Because I am a woman" A Child Widow's Memoir, from the colonial India, is an important example. It shows that, even in the second half of the nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Borthwick, Meredith. *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, P. 61.



century, how much the above mentioned prejudices and superstitions shadowed the women's lives. It is true that, because of the new Brahmo consciousness, she got the opportunity to remarry, to study and to become a lady doctor. But her early life, after becoming a child widow at the age of ten, was pathetic as like her numerous predecessors of the first half of the nineteenth century.

As a child, a striking feature was her closeness to her father, who allowed her to wear boys' clothes and to study with her boy cousins, although her mother and grandmother were very much against her father's wishes. Her female relatives, however, found for her a very suitable husband of the age of forty-five when she was only nine and a half years old. It was, of course, most commonplace to find a huge gap between widower-grooms getting remarried to child-brides.<sup>4</sup> Haimabati also narrated how her own relatives too abused her for "devouring" her husband: "All their lamentations were for that old drunkard and whoremonger who had been their son-in-law for only a few days...I found in him no sympathy for them."<sup>5</sup> Along with other relatives, even her mother and grandmother blamed her literacy for her widowhood. As Haimabati wrote how one relative commented "Everybody knew that she would be widowed if she learned to read and write."<sup>6</sup>

In general, the situation was no better in the second half as compared to the first half of the nineteenth century. Only it can be said that women this time could get some better opportunities to live a normal life. But whatever social reforms were introduced by the nineteenth century reformers or mainly the Brahmos, in particular, the age-old stagnant mentality of the common masses did not change. While considering the comparable efforts of the social reformers of both the halves of the century regarding the betterment of the condition of their womenfolk and their education, it can be said that the reformers of the first half were much ahead of their time. The works of Raja Rammohan Roy, Raja Radhakanta Deb and Gourmohon Tarkalankar are of noteworthy. It is already mentioned in the previous chapter that Raja Radhakanta Deb was of a very complex character as he criticized the abolition of the 'Suttee' on the one hand, and

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<sup>4</sup> Sen, Indrani. 'Resisting Patriarchy Complexities and Conflicts in the Memoir of Haimabati Sen', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 24, 2012, vol XLVII, no.12, p.56.

<sup>5</sup> Forbes, Geraldine & Raychaudhuri, Tapan. (Ed.). *The Memoirs of Haimabati Sen: From Child Widow to Lady Doctor*. Chronicle Books, New Delhi, 2011 P.99.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

emphasized the importance of female education and patronized Gourmohon 'Vidyalankar', the noted 'Pundit' in Sanskrit and the superintendent of the Calcutta Book Society, in writing his first book supporting the female education, "Stree Siksha Bidhayak" (containing "evidence in favour of the education of the Hindoo Females, from the examples of illustrious and highly educated women, both ancient and modern") on the other. Whatever might be the success of the early reformers for the development of female education; they actually pioneered the journey towards women emancipation through education and brought some ray of hope amidst darkness.

It is known to us that the journey of female education in India was started with the efforts of the missionaries after the Charter Act of 1813. In 1818, Robert May, of the London Missionary Society, first opened a girls' school at Chinsurah. But Amongst the foreign agencies, the Female Juvenile Society was the first to appear in this field with some success. It was constituted in Calcutta sometime in the middle of 1819 by the European ladies under the auspices of the Baptist Mission of Calcutta. The objective of the Society was to open free school for the Bengali girls around the city and it started its first school at Gouri Bere, Ultadanga in June, 1819. During the first few months, only eight pupils attended. In April 1820, with a Bengali lady teacher being found after diligent search, the number of girls also rose to thirteen. The school was named after the Society- the Female Juvenile School. It should be noted that the education, imparted on the girls in these schools, was most elementary. They, however, made considerable progress in their studies and were invited by Raja Radhakanta Deb, the secretary of the Calcutta School Society, to sit for the annual examinations along with the boys of the Calcutta School Society's schools in 1821 and 1822. The progress of the girls, numbering forty in the latter year, elicited much praise from those present.<sup>7</sup>

Another such society was "Ladies Society for Native Female Education" in Calcutta and its Vicinity. It was founded on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1824 under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society. To help the society, Miss Mary Anne Cooke (latter married to Rev. Isaac Wilson), a philanthropist from England, came to Calcutta in 1821. She set to work and, by March 1823, the number of girls' schools rose to fifteen. It was very difficult for Miss Cooke to visit those

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<sup>7</sup>Bagal, Jogesh, C. 'History of The Bethune School and College (1849-1949)', in Nag, Kalidas. (ed.) *Bethune school and College Centenary Volume 1849-1949*, Bethune College, Kolkata, 1949, p.3.

distantly situated schools throughout the day and teach the girls in each of them. So there was a proposal from the Society to start a Central Female School with Mrs. Wilson being the superintendent. The Hindus, headed by Raja Radhakanta Deb, Raja Baidyanath Ray, Raja Shib Krishna and others, helped the society in more ways than one. Raja Baidyanath Ray donated twenty thousand rupees in 1825 for this purpose. The foundation-stone of the proposed central school was laid on the south-east corner of the Cornwallis Square by Lady Amherst, the Society's Patroness, on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1826 with great ceremony.<sup>8</sup>

The schools under the various missionary societies, however, brought around two hundred girls in Calcutta into the light of education against the orthodoxy and conservatism on females' education, according to Samachar Darpan. But the efforts of the missionaries to educate the native girls did not last long, as they failed to catch the imagination of the people. The missionaries wanted to turn their schools into so many proselytizing centres. Even in the mofussil areas, members of the respectable classes gradually withdrew their daughters from schools. These missionary schools became the resort of women of the lower castes and the Christian converts. Compulsory study of the Bible being the main reason why these schools were not popular with the Hindus. Leading Hindus like Raja Radhakanta Deb, ardent supporter of female education, had to withdraw support only on this ground.

The withdrawal of the support of the Hindu headmen was definitely a drawback for those missionary schools. A Correspondent from Chinsurah wrote in 'Samachar Darpan' of March 3, 1838 as follows:

“A few benevolent European gentlemen and ladies, indeed, made some attempt to introduce female schools, but they have failed, excepting in one or two places, where a small number of the very lowest classes attend the schools for the sake of clothing and other rewards.”<sup>9</sup>

Though the missionaries failed to achieve much success in the cause of promoting female education, the native gentlemen did not stop their voice for it. The year 1829 was remarkable one because, as is already discussed, after enormous efforts of Raja Rammohan Roy, the Government

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<sup>8</sup> Bagal, Jogesh, C. op cit. P.5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.9.

of Lord William Bentinck passed the Prohibitory Act for the abolition of “Suttee”. It was also during this period, the new enlightened group of ‘Young Bengal’ (disciples of Derozio and the new group of the Hindu College) began to raise their voice for developing the condition of the women and that also through educating them. In their paper ‘Parthenon’, they wrote in 1828 an article advocating female education, although it was suppressed by the college authorities for advocating progressive views.

But the newly found trend of women education was continuing as Ramgopal Ghosh, another eminent alumnus of the Hindu College, offered two prizes in 1842, one gold and one silver medal, to the best and the second best writer of an essay on the necessity of female education. Before establishment of the ‘Calcutta Female School’ in 1849 (later known as Bethune School) by Sir John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune, there was a free female school, established in Baraset by Nabin Krishna Mitra and Kali Krishna Mitra in 1847. It is said that Bethune got the idea of setting up a free school for the native girls in the heart of the city of Calcutta after visiting the school at Baraset.

The typical institutionalized journey of female education was initiated, however, with establishment of the Bethune School on 7<sup>th</sup> May, 1849 with twenty-one girls on the roll. As the opening and journey of the school has already been discussed in the previous chapters, it’s the time here to mention about the women of that period, the representatives of the new era of institutional education. Apart from its importance as a separate educational institution for the native girls, the Bethune School actually helped to change the mind set up of the indigenous society. Among the first pupils of the school were Bhubanmala and Kundamala, the two daughters of Pundit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar (famous Pundit of the Sanskrit College). It is important to mention here that Pundit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, himself not even being a Brahmo or the member of the ‘Young Bengal’ group, was really a progressive man. But surprisingly, we are unable to know the later life of those two girls that how much they were educated or why they remained completely unfocused.

### **Self-Reflections:**

Actually it is very difficult to find out women's own perception about themselves mainly during the entire time span over the first half of the nineteenth century because of non-availability of records. The only evidence in this matter, probably, was Rassundari Devi's autobiography "Aamar Jivan". It will be very unfair to think that the women of that time were only mute spectators or unable to think individually. But every forcefully imposed prejudice, superstition and duty ultimately made them silent at least in the public life. Of course, they lamented for their fate as being female (girl child's birth was considered as a curse widely, even today) in their private talks with other women. It is vindicated in one such conversation among the village women as found in Rassundari Devi's autobiography. It is true that she was much luckier than the other girls of her time. She was born in 1809 and was unmarried up to 1821/22 which was quite important in considering the time period. She lost her father in her very childhood and her mother was quite a strong woman. She had her mother, one widow aunt (father's sister) and, probably, an unmarried uncle in the house. Her mother probably got the freedom of being strong in mind and to express her decision because of the absence of her mother-in-law or Rassundari's grandmother. The conversation was:

(Place: Pond attached with the inner house, bath place for the women)

1<sup>st</sup> woman: whoever would get the girl (Rassundari) would be lucky enough.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: so many are coming!!! But her mother is not agreeing....

3<sup>rd</sup> woman: but there is no way to say no...you have to give your daughter to someone stranger.....there is no value of being a girl child.....it's a big fake thing...<sup>10</sup>

Apart from those women who were educated in terms of keeping the accounts of their zamindari mainly after husbands' death and others belonging to some respectable families which were out of the prevalent social prejudices, the other women who could read texts were mainly the religious

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<sup>10</sup> Devi, Rassundari. op cit. P.23. (translation mine), "aakjon bolen meyetike je pabe se katokal kamona korecha. Anyajon uttor dan, anekei nite asche, kintu ma dai na. Aar akjon bolen, na dileo to hobe na. akjon ke to ditei hobe. Meyeder jiboner ki aar kono mulya ache? Meyechele hoa micha".

texts. For some of them it was a pious recreation or some used to read those to forget their grief about the loss of their husband and also children. For Rassundari, it was her mother, who instilled in her a deep love for God (*parameshwar*). In the later years, she was very much convinced with the belief that it was her *parameshwar*, who was giving her strength to do all the household works in house of her in-laws. Her deep emotional attachment with her God ultimately led her zeal to reading the religious texts and later to writing. She, in her childhood, on the wish of her uncle, used to sit with her male cousins and other boys of the village in the outer portion of their house (*baithakkhana*). There a missionary lady teacher used to come to give them lessons. But she could not sit there for a long time because the female education was not recognized. “By the age of fourteen, she was filled with a desire to study, but was frightened with the attitudes of the people who said that it augured ill if girls took to books. They pointed out that the ‘*bhadrolok jati*’ would be threatened and girls, they sneered, might even think of pushing men out of jobs.”<sup>11</sup> Overhearing such conversations on the increasingly controversial issue of girls’ education, Rassundari used to tremble with fear:

Let alone voicing my innermost feeling, my heart used to quiver at the thought of anyone guessing how I felt: so much so that if I saw a sheet of paper which have written on, I used to look away. This was in case anyone accused me of wanting to study. But within my mind I kept praying to ‘*parameshwar*’, please teach me how to read and write. Once I have learnt, I will read religious ‘*poonthies*’ (manuscripts).<sup>12</sup>

This feeling of fear about women education was, however, continuing in the later period also. As we find, Haimabati used to study secretly in her in-laws’ house after completing all the household works. In the age of fourteen, Rassundari (sometime around 1822/23), though having the full desire to study, was aware of peoples’ attitude towards female education that it would make their male counterparts jobless. Considering the period of the first half of the nineteenth century when mentality of the common people was bounded by the age-old social norms and prejudices, it can even be taken but what cannot be taken that the same shameful mentality of the common masses existed even in the decades of 1880s and 1890s.

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<sup>11</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. *Voices from Within Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1991 p. 115.

<sup>12</sup> Devi, Rassundari. op cit. P.24.

Kadambini Ganguly, the first lady doctor in the country (1886), became a threat not only to the women of the respectable families but also to men. “Claiming no concessions to her sex, she had succeeded in a number of examinations where she competed equally with men.”<sup>13</sup> Her achievements, both in her medical career and political responses, got attached through the pages of ‘*Bangabasi*’ (Resident of Bengal), a journal of Hindu orthodoxy in 1891. The orthodox group, however, launched a slander campaign against Kadambini, accusing her of being a fitting and therefore despicable - example of a modern Brahmo woman. “Though by then Kadambini was a mother of five, and a responsible house-wife, the author of the article accused her of being a whore.”<sup>14</sup> Haimabati Sen (1891) was also subjected to sexual harassment at the workplace by the assistant surgeon, Badrinath Mukherji, who was her superior there:

“The assistant surgeon was given the duty of helping the new lady doctor (viz, herself) learn her work. He would come to the hospital and talk rubbish. He would begin to talk of things which caused disease. When he raised the matter of shameful diseases, I moved away and told him, ‘I shall read up on the disease in books’. But he was not one to listen to that. The dirty beast said whatever came into his mind.”<sup>15</sup>

After Haimabati Sen became a doctor, she complained about the financial discrimination among the doctors of both sexes. Whereas a Male doctor, a senior man, used to get Rs. 1000 in a particular delivery case; he pays the midwife Rs.100 and to the lady doctor (Haimabati) only Rs. 50, leading her to complain in her narrative:

Lady doctors and midwives were but pawns in the hands of the male doctors...when I thought of these things, I lamented that fact we were born as women.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of having various critiques and sexual harassment, women of the nineteenth century ultimately became successful in public domain, may as authors or professionals. It is a very

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<sup>13</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. ‘Kadambini and Bhadrolok: Early Debates over Women’s Education in Bengal’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.21, No.17 (Apr. 26, 1986), pp. WS25-WS31.

<sup>14</sup> Borthwick, Meredith. op cit. pp.324-5.

<sup>15</sup> Sen, Indrani. op cit.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

general feeling, that the women had their journey from total illiteracy to the establishment as professionals, mainly in fields of teaching and medical jobs, thorough the wish fulfillment of the men. As Padma Anagol argues, improvements in the status of women came about from the nineteenth century onwards, not as the product of a process of consciousness assertion on the part of the Indian women, but through the programs of social reform devised and carried out by Indian women as the passive recipients. She states that, “When I began my study I was interested in locating a ‘feminist consciousness’. The Possibility still interests me, but as I understand more about the lives of women at that time, the more misguided I feel it is to expect that kind of perception then.”<sup>17</sup>

Somehow, actually, it is true that women voiced on the line of their male counterparts. The early Brahmos (Keshub Chandra Sen and his followers) were progressive but up to some extent. They wanted female education not to allow women to work outside their home, but to have polished wives, to whom they could match their mental wave length. The literate wives could also take part in their western influenced ideas. Female education, however, was for them to make good mothers, wives and daughters. Even they did not believe in the female education in girls’ schools but in the ‘*antahpur siksha*’ (zenana mission). Even the first generations of the educated women from the Tagore family of Jorasanko (Swarnakumari Devi, Gyanadanandini Devi etal.) were educated from the zenana mission. The *Bamabodhini Patrika* (first editor Umesh Chandra Dutt, 1863) was the journal of women, run by the ‘*Bamabodhini Sabha*’, used to publish writings of the women authors. It was of no doubt that this journal first brought the women’s thought process into limelight by publishing their articles, but if we go through the pages of that, we may feel that the authors were only talking on the line following their men folk.

“Whatever subjects are there to study, for women to learn the household work perfectly is most important. No one would praise that woman who don’t know the domestic work properly, though she might be highly educated in other things...on the one hand the men are known for their sharp intelligence, strong character, the women are like blooming buds, soft, sensitive, merciful...the difference between the two sexes make it clear that who are for which work. Education is very much important for both the sexes. Education for women would ultimately increase her soft nature for the well being of the society. Whatever good a well educated mother can do in the family, no other can do the same. In the present time much more conversation and controversies are going on regarding female education. Some are thinking women should get same education like men, there should be no

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<sup>17</sup> Anagol, Padma. *The Emergence of Feminism in India 1850-1920*. Ashgate Publishing, London, 2006, p.3.



differentiation. Others think that women should get a smaller portion of elementary education, According to them, same education like the boys would destroy women's motherly nature...But it is clear that proper education would not deviate women's mind from their first and for most duties of religion and domesticity...if the mother is well educated it will help for the upbringing of her child."<sup>18</sup>

“We cannot deny the duties of the educated women for the upbringing of her child and also for the education to them. The actual cause which we consider for the higher education of women is to deliver good education for her child. We all know that the children who are of good character and well mannered get everything from his/her mother... If the women are not well-educated then how could she know the mannerism to her child? How could she talk to him/her? How could she know about the matters for their education, happiness etc.?”<sup>19</sup>

### **Women at the Cross-Road:**

It is here important to note that even in the year 1903, almost after a decade of Kadambini's and Chandramukhi's successes as women professionals, the general mentality of the male society did not change accordingly. In the first half of the nineteenth century, sometime around 1835, there was publication of a letter in 'Samachar Darpan' from Chinsurah with the title "Chunchura Nibasi Streeganasya" (the women from Chinsurah). It is unknown that who wrote that letter. But whoever had written that, it must be said that he/she was much more ahead of the time. It read

<sup>18</sup> Miss \* Lahiri. 'What the Women should Learn', *Bamabodhini Patrika*, No.142, B.S. 1282, (c.1875). (Translation mine), "Naarijatir sikkhoniyo jato bishoi ache totsamudoier modhye garhostho karjoi sarbbapekhkha prayojoniyo. Stree lok jeporiman I bidyalav karun na kano anyo je kono bishoi sikhsha lav korun na kano, sundor rupe grihokarjo na sikhile kichutei tanhar gourab nai...akdike purush jatir jamon tikhno budhdhi, drirho adhyabosai provriti gun dacha jai anya dike stree jatir o seirup preeti, bhakti, sneho, doya provrti komol bhab dristo hoi. Ubhoijatir ei bhinno bhab dorshon o alochona koriya dekhle kahar jibon kon karjo poripalone srijito hoiache taha spasto upolobhdhi hoite pare...bidya sikhsha purusher nyai narir o atibo prayojoniyo. Naari jati sampurno sikhito hoia aapnar komol bhab ke aaro bordhito korla samajer mongol sadhan kore ihai abhipreto. Sushikhhita mata songsarer jato upokar korite paren amon aar kaharo sadhya nai...bartoman samoi e naarijatir sikkhita samondhe anek badanubad choliteche. Kaharo mote naarijatike kathor bishoi sakal sikhsha diya sakal bishoye purusher samokkhito korite chesta kora uchit bolia sthir hoiteche. Kaharo mote stree lok ke alpo sikhsha deoai kortobyo bolia bodh hoi, karon tahara bolen adhik gyan uparjon korile komol naari prakriti kathor hoia jaibe ebong songsarer proti tahara udasin hoibe...tobe iha spasto bojha jai je prokrito sikhsha paille naarigon dharmo o songsarer proti udasin na hoia barong tot protipalone odhik jatnoboti hoiben...maata uttom rupe sikkhito hoile santan protipalone jamon upojukto hoite paren amon aar kichutei nohe."

<sup>19</sup> Gupta, Amritalal. 'Duty of an Educated Woman', *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Falgun-Chaitra, B.S.1310, (c.1903) (translation mine), "santan palon o santandiger sikhsha bidhan bishoye sikkhita mohiladiger daittwo ki gurutaru. Aamara je sakol karone ramonidiger uchchosikhsha atyonto prayojon bolia mone kori tanmodhye santan palan o santandiger susikhsha bidhan prodhan karon. E katha aamra sakele jani je sachchoritra o gunoboti maatar putrokonyagani gunoban o gunabati hoia thake...ramonigon uchchosikhkhaiti sikkhito na hoile santandiger songe kakhon kirup byabohar korite hoibe, santandiger sakhkhate kirup kathabarta bolite hoibe, tahadiger sikhshar janyo, sukher janyo, aamoder janyo ki ki bishoi abolombon korite hoibe-ei sakal gurutaru bishoye kirupe gyanlav koriben?"

1. Like the other women of the world wide civilized countries they should also get the right of education.
2. Like the other women why can't we get the opportunity to talk to the men?
3. The women of this time don't want to be exchanged like the cows and other material things. Child-marriage, polygamy and dowry-system should be stopped forever.
4. The women should get financial independence.
5. If the husband has the right to get remarried after the death of his wife, why the widow wife would not get the same opportunity after her husband's death.<sup>20</sup>

However, these demands were not that easy to get proper attention. It took a long time, even the twentieth century also had to be completed. From the third quarter of the nineteenth century, education for women became a status symbol for the newly emerged Brahmos. The controlled learning for the girls had an increasingly significant role in the evolution of the modern Bengali society. Though there was always a division between education of the boys and girls, women got a new opportunity of expressing themselves publicly either through writing in the contemporary journals or through by public appearances. "There was a concern not only with education but also with how women, long confined to the inner recesses of the home, should conduct themselves in public."<sup>21</sup> It was Gyanadanandini Devi, the wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian member in the Indian Civil Service, who made a break away from the traditional Hindu wearing of sari by replacing it with proper draping up and also popularized the sari blouse. The Brahmika sari, as it was called, was an extremely useful innovation for the generation of women coming out of '*pardah*'.

However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, there emerged two trends regarding female education- the first one was led by the early Brahmos (Keshub Chandra Sen, Umesh Chandra Dutt et al.) who believed in the controlled education for women which would help them to become good mother and good wife. So when Sen established 'Victoria College' for girls', he received enormous support from women as well as his male co-workers. In 1882, he wrote in the prospectus of that newly built college, that "he felt that there was a need to train girls for their

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<sup>20</sup> '*Samachar Darpan*', '*Baishakh*', B.S. 1242 (c.1835).

<sup>21</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. 'Kadambini and Bhadrolok: Early Debates over Women's Education in Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.21, No.17 (Apr. 26, 1986), pp. WS25-WS31.

‘special duties’ in life.”<sup>22</sup> Even the modern women of that time voiced in the same way. Gyanadanandini Devi with her child, who, in fact, without the consent of the Tagore family, travelled to Europe to her husband’s work place with his friend, wrote consequently in the journals about the prevalent view that “feminine success lay in the ability to be a competent mother and wife. Even a graduate from the Calcutta University in the year 1892, “Priyambada Bagchi, wrote in ‘*Antahpur*’ (The Home), a journal for women, on the need for women’s education to be more feminine in orientation.”<sup>23</sup>

The other or the second trend was led by the new Brahmos (Shibnath Shastri, Annadacharan Khastagir, Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay, Durgamohon Das et al.) who were the believers of the same education for the boys and the girls. For the university education of the girls, the editor of the journal ‘*Abalabandhab*’ (friend of poor women), Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay, with the help of Monomohon Ghosh and Durgamohon Das, established a high standard girls’ boarding school, “*Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya*”. Annett Akkroyd, a well educated British lady became the superintendent. It became closed in 1875 because of Miss Akkroyd’s marriage with Civilian Henry Beverage. But it was reopened in 1876 with the new name “*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*”. From this school, Sarala Das (elder daughter of Durgamohon das, later Mrs. P.K.Roy) and Kadambini Basu (maternal sister of Monomohon Ghosh and later wife of Dwarakanath Ganguly) started to take preparations for the university entrance exam. In the mean time, Sarala got married and Kadambini passed the entrance with the second division in 1878. But in 1878, the Bethune School and the “*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*” became united and so Kadambini passed the entrance as the student of the Bethune school. She was the first lady to create history as a regular student because, two years earlier, Chandramukhi Bose passed the examination as the irregular student.

It was for Kadambini only the college classes were opened in the Bethune school in 1878-79. Till 1880, admission to the Bethune school and the college were restricted to the Hindu girls only but, from now onwards, the Bethune College opened its door to everyone irrespective of class and creed. In 1882, Kadambini and Chandramukhi Bose passed the B.A. examination from the Bethune College and became the first graduate women in the British Empire. After that, Chandramukhi Bose completed her M.A. examination and Kadambini Bose took the medical

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<sup>22</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. op cit.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

career. Their achievements, however, increased the number of ambitious students. In 1880, Kamini Roy and Subarna Prava Bose passed the entrance examination. In 1881, Abala Das, Kumudini Khastagir, Virginia Mary Mitra, Nirmala Mukhopadhyay, Priyatama Dutt and Bidhumukhi Bose passed the entrance. In the convocation ceremony in 1887, the Vice Chancellor informed that, in the last year, twenty three women passed the entrance while four the F.A. and three the B.A. examination. In 1890, Bidhumukhi Bose and Virginia Mary Mitra became the first medical graduate from the Calcutta University. In the convocation ceremony of 1891, the deputy vice Chancellor congratulated the B.A. and the M.A. passed students and said “no community can be said to be an educated community unless its female members are educated.”<sup>24</sup> After passing her M.A. examination, Chandramukhi Bose started teaching in the Bethune College and, in 1886; she became the first Indian Lady Principal of the college.

The year 1897, however, marked a landmark in the history of female education, as it was in this year, co-education was started in the Presidency College. With the active efforts of the then Principal of the Presidency College, Rowe C.A.Martin (officer of the education department) and some progressive Brahmos, two students of the 1897 F.A. class became admitted in the Presidency college with the male students. They were Amiya Ray (daughter of Rajaninath Ray, Deputy Comptroller-General of Indian Treasuries) and Charulata Ray (daughter of Dr. Prasanna Kumar Ray, Professor of philosophy in Presidency College). It, however, raised huge controversy all over the country. But in spite of having continuous attack on them, those two students never stopped from going to college and, after the two year course of the F.A., Amiya Ray stood first in the college and stood third in the whole university. Charulata Ray passed in the second division.

As it is already discussed about two different trends in the development of female education, here it is important to mention that there was also difference among the self-educated and institution-educated women. It is interesting to notice that the self-educated women of the nineteenth century became much more expressive about their life, the condition of womenfolk, and the social problems. The writings of the latter half of the nineteenth century, be it autobiography or articles in journals, were made mostly by the self-educated women or women who at least got education from their husbands or were zenana educated. The educated women who never visited institution

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<sup>24</sup> Sengupta, Gitashreebandana. *Spandita Antorlok Atmochorite Nari Pragatir Dhara*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 1999, p.79.

were much more advanced in the writing skill. It is difficult to find out the answer why those institution-educated women were silent, barring one or two examples (*'Jiboner Jharapata'* by Sarala Devi Chaudhurani), about their life, their experiences and their whole journey.

### **Changing relationship with Husband:**

Rabindranath wrote 'Nastoneer' (short story) in the Bengali year 1308, that is the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. It was the story of a Bengali lady, Charulata, an educated lady, who tried to find out her 'own space', private and secret, far from her day to day domestic responsibilities, far from her husband's busy schedule as an editor of a English news paper. It cannot be said that Tagore totally imagined that particular character. It had some reality. As a member of the rich family of the Tagores of Jorasanko, Rabindranath Tagore had some knowledge about the loneliness of the women of those well-to-do families.

Actually the very concept of finding 'own space' was very much a product of the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was something like that women's whole life was made for the service of others. There was nothing as their own. It is evident from Rassundari's writing that how much hectic was women's day to day work, like a vicious cycle which never ended. In that very concept, a huge joint family, uncontrolled child birth and patriarchal domination did not give them any space for their 'own'. Husband was always seen as a distinct figure, while women were never considered as a separate identity. They were only supposed to work throughout day and night with some exceptions of three to four hours and were machines of re-production.

But as men's views began to change coming in touch with the western ideas of liberalization or, better to say, new knowledge, they became conscious about the development of female's education. They were probably feeling its necessity to educate their wives, so as to have someone in the house with whom they could share their ideas, to have emotional attachment. It was all because of the western ideas and reading of the English classic of love and affection, they became conscious about the right of their wives. Some of the educated men of the contemporary period began to give their young wives lessons in the night. As it was the only time when they at least were able to talk to each other. There were many such examples. Keshub Chandra Sen's mother

Saradasundari Devi got education from her husband. The same was to Kailashbasini Debi (author of “Janoika Grihabodhur Diary”).

The concept of exchanging letters became important as in many cases the husbands had to leave their young wives in the ancestral house for the purpose of their job in distant provinces, or study in abroad. In many cases both of them were young, so simultaneously there developed a friendly relation between husband and wife. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was a distant issue to have a friendly relationship between husband and wife, mainly because of child marriage. The Brahmos from the latter half of the nineteenth century changed the situation widely. They were the first generation of people who were able to take their wives outside the confined four walls of the house. Mixing with people made the women free from their typical mindset about strangers. Gyanadanandini Devi was from a remote village in Eastern Bengal. It was her husband Satyendranath Tagore who made herself free to the outsiders, through education as well. “On a number of occasions, she entertained her husband’s British colleagues to dinner in a manner, which, according to an English woman, displayed ‘perfect propriety’.”<sup>25</sup> Swarnakumari Devi (Rabindranath Tagore’s elder sister, wife of Janakinath Ghoshal, the famous political figure and Brahmo leader and editor of the journal ‘*Bharati*’) also performed the role of a very good host. She, known as a novelist, started the “Sakhi Samiti” in 1896 (the first women organization run by women) with the following objective:

“Three years ago a woman’s organization named Sakhi Samiti was formed so that women of respectable families should have the opportunity of mixing with each other and devoting themselves for the cause of social welfare. The generous Rani Swarnamoyee has helped the Samiti immensely by the gift of Rs. 1025 for the work of the Samiti. The first aim of the Samiti is to help the orphans and widows. This will be done in two ways. In those cases where such widows or orphans have no near relations or if these relations have not the means of maintaining them the Sakhi Samiti will take their full responsibility. In other cases the Samiti will give them monetary help as far as possible. In the cases of those women whose full responsibility the Samiti will take they will educate them and through them spread women’s education. After they have finished their education they will take up the work of the zenana education. the Samiti will give them remuneration for their work. In this way two objects will be accomplished. Hindu widows will be able to earn through service to others according to the sanction of the Hindu religion, an

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<sup>25</sup> Karlekar, Malavika. ‘Kadambini and Bhadrolok: Early Debates over Women’s Education in Bengal’. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.21, No.17 (Apr. 26, 1986), pp. WS25-WS31.

independent living, and a way will be found for the spread of female education.”  
(Translation from ‘*Bharati*’ and ‘*Balaka*’, 1898)<sup>26</sup>

During that period there were several instances of love-marriage mainly between the Brahmos. Both the daughters of Keshub Chandra Sen (Sucharu Devi and Suniti Devi) married to their pre-known persons. Kamini Roy, a student of the Bethune College, married a civilian Kedarnath Ray at the age of thirty in 1994. Sarala Devi also had a very late marriage and that too happened ultimately at the request of her mother, Swarnakumari Debi. She was the first woman who went out of Bengal for the job purpose.

The Brahmos of the latter half of the nineteenth century, in true sense, opened the new doors for the women of the society. They might have differences of opinion among themselves, but they were the true believers of the female empowerment.

### **Hindu Revivalism and Political Consciousness:**

The cultural innovations which prepared the ground for political developments during the Swadeshi period and also known as the Hindu Revivalism was best illustrated by the foundation of the Mahakali Pathshala School in 1893 by a wealthy female ascetic, Mataji Maharani Tapaswini. The specialty of this school was that it received no financial assistance from foreigners nor employed any foreign teacher. Though the founders considered it as a model school for the development of female education but opposed the system of co-education and same syllabus for the both sexes. “Their aim was to educate girls on strictly national lines in the hope that they might regenerate the Hindu society.”<sup>27</sup> The nationalist “revivalists” of the project who, in view of Tanika Sarkar, “did not automatically oppose reform “in the name of resisting colonial knowledge.”<sup>28</sup> Despite their differences with the liberal reformers, “they too believed in the

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<sup>26</sup> Ghosh, Latika. op cit. p.148.

<sup>27</sup> Forbes, Geraldin. *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2 Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.49.

<sup>28</sup> Sarkar, Tanika. ‘Rhetoric Against the Age of Consent’. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28, no.36, September 4, 1993), pp.1869-78.

relationship between progress and female education and looked to a future where Indian women would play a large role in the affairs of the country.”<sup>29</sup> It published its own text books which included a catechism for the training of girls’ in keeping with the Hindu percepts as well as books on moral science. This syllabus was praised by the “Hindoo gentlemen of the middle class who believed that much of the female education then in existence demoralized and denationalized the young Hindu women.”<sup>30</sup>

The school soon gained enormous popularity even than the Bethune school. A decade earlier, Keshub Chandra sen, the Brahmo leader, had undertaken “a similar project in opening the Victoria College as an institution where higher female education would not be based on a ‘male’ curriculum.”<sup>31</sup> “But in the Brahmo school, the academic curriculum was only supplemented by the ethical Hindu education; it was not set up to systematize the traditional education that middle-class girls had, until then, at home.”<sup>32</sup> Maharani Tapaswini, however, based her curriculum on the orthodox Hindu norms.

When the female educational movement was going on with its full force, the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 with its typically opted policy of political moderation. Soon after the formation of INC, Dwarakanath Ganguly (Kadambini’s husband) started agitating for the women’s representation at the annual sessions. As a consequence, the 1889 session included six women, of whom Kadambini was one. She delivered vote of thanks in English and was hailed by Annie Besant as being “a symbol that India’s freedom would uplift India’s womanhood.”<sup>33</sup>

As it was the first entry of women into politics, the Swadeshi movement of 1905 saw its rapid spread especially in the phase of passive resistance. Women largely joined in the boycott and picketing movements. They started picketing in front of the shops used to keep foreign things. Their main slogan was to use everything Swadeshi. Even during the secret revolutionary planning, they used to give shelter to the revolutionaries and worked as the messengers.

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<sup>29</sup> Forbes, Geraldin. op cit. p.50.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Angles, Dagmar. *Beyond Purdah 1890-1939*, Oxford University Press, London, 1996, p.166.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.167.

<sup>33</sup> Sen, Indrani. “Resisting Patriarchy Complexities and Conflicts in the Memoir of Haimabati Sen”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 24, 2012 Vol. XLVII No 12, pp. 55-62.



Here it is important to remember the name of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. She was famous for her literary creations (in *Bharati*, *Balaka* etc.), her musical sense in the society. She was the composer of the song '*Bandemataram*' (hail to the motherland). She also wrote and composed the song '*Ateet Gourabkahini Mamo Baani, Gaho Aaji Hindustan*' (Hindustan, sing today about the old glory of this country) which was sung in the 1901 annual session of the Indian national Congress. She became the editor of the journal '*Bharati*' in B.S.1306 (c.1899) and it was the time when the Swadeshi movement in Bengal was at its peak. She was extremely a politically conscious person. The 'Bangabhanga' movement, boycott program to foreign things and promotion of Swadeshi had shaken the normal life of the people. Sarala, was however, very much attracted to the political extremism. She was the worshiper of '*Shakti*'. She converted '*Bharati*' into a politically conscious nationalist journal. She wrote, "The primary aim of the journal was no more literary creations as such, instead it was the creation of a nationalist fervor."<sup>34</sup> It was actually just the beginning which, in later years, helped the women to participate in politics actively.

### **Muslim Women's Journey:**

Traditionally Muslim women received some sort of elementary education within the strict privacy of '*andarmahal*'. They received elementary education mostly of a religious and moral nature. The first step of education to them was the introduction to Koran, through a lesson in Arabic letters. It is true that the position of the Muslim women was better than their Hindu counterparts regarding various social customs and superstitions. In fact, the Muslim women enjoyed some kind of rights such as consent to marriage, the right to obtain ancestral property etc. "The Mohammedans participate in all the prejudices of the Hindu against the education of their female offspring", (Reports of the State of Education in Bengal 1835: William Adam). When William Adam wrote these lines in his report, he was expressing the dismay of the typically Victorian mind confronted with the 'enduring differences of India which the British had come to rule.'<sup>35</sup> Since the medieval period, there were lots of examples addressing the issue of the Muslim female education. The

<sup>34</sup> Chaudhurani, Sarala Debi. '*Jiboner Jharapata*', Rupa, Kolkata, B.S.1388 (c.1981), pp126-27. (translation mine), "je sahityer angina chilo komol astoron pata, kamalaloy saraswatir nikunjo, ta holo smashan basi rudrer bhim nortonbhumi, aar tar taale taale sakoler paa apni porche ichcha koruk baa na koruk".

<sup>35</sup> Chakraborty, Uttara. '*Muslim Women at the Cross Road: Quest for Identity Bengal (C. 1400-1947)*', *Education and Empowerment Women in South Asia*, Bethune School Praktani Samiti, Kolkata, 2001, p. 75.

women of the ruling and the elite classes were very much educated and, in many cases, established themselves as the good authors. But they also observed strict the 'purdah'. So the condition of the Hindu and the Muslim women was almost the same at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When female education was started by efforts of the missionaries, the Muslim women also took part with their Hindu sisters. 'Samachar Darpan' in its December 27 (1820) issue stated: At 10 o'clock in the morning of Friday...an examination was held at Gouribari, Calcutta. About 150 Hindu and Muslim girls participated in the examination."<sup>36</sup> Priscilla Chapman in her book, 'Hindu Female Education' referred to the early nineteenth century attempts at education of the Muslim females. In 1822, when the Muslim men opposed the western education and the English language, "a Muslim lady of Shyambazar (name unknown) came forward to aid Miss Cook in latter's campaign for women's education."<sup>37</sup> That unknown woman went door to door with the request to send the Muslim girls to the schools set up in Shyambazar, Entally, Janbazar, and Mirzapur.

The problem with the Muslim men was their total rejection of the English language at least in the initial years, whereas their Hindu counterparts made considerable progress by accepting it. They started to get government jobs also, mainly after 1835 (Macaulay Minute and the introduction of English as the official language). It was the point of time from which the Muslim society started to lag behind. The next point of time was the Revolt of 1857, from which onwards the Muslim men just turned their back on the Western education and started to dream about their old past glory. It was not until the Aligarh Movement of the 1870s led by Syed Ahmed Khan, the modern Muslim leader that the Muslim society began to see the change. So when the Hindu Reformist movement had already started with the Brahmos and the liberals, the Muslim society kept its doors closed to the new horizon of modernity. As the development of female education was one of the parts of the program of modernization, the Muslim women started late their journey in comparing with the Hindus.

It is, however, important to note that unlike the Hindus, the Muslim women moved forward for the betterment of their condition and also for development of the Muslim female education. The

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<sup>36</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. *The World of women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1996 p.144.

<sup>37</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. 'The Early Muslim Bhadramahila: The Growth of learning and Creativity, 1876 to 1939', in Ray, Bharati. (ed.) *From the Seams of History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p.113.

conservatism of the Muslim society regarding female education was, however, discussed in a meeting of the 'Bengal Social Science Association' in Calcutta where Nawab Abdul Latif was reading a paper on Muslim education. The so called modern leaders of the Muslim society, such as Syed Ameer Ali, were present in that meeting along with Nawab Abdul Latif. In that meeting, Parry Chand Mitra asked a question regarding Muslim women's education and advised the similar efforts for that like the Hindus. The reply came from Abdul hakim, the Maulavi of the Calcutta Madrassah. He said, "The scriptures had ordained education for both boys and girls and to this many Muslim women were renowned throughout history for their learning. But such education was imparted within the home. It was unthinkable that the Muslim girls following the examples set by girls in other communities should go outside the home for education."<sup>38</sup> However, the modern leader Abdul Latif remained a silent spectator.

The credit for being the pioneer in formal education of the Muslim women in Bengal goes to Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani of Paschimgaon in Comilla. At a time when Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in North India and Abdul Latif in Bengal hardly thought of the necessity of female education beyond the elementary education, Faizunnessa foresaw the importance of acquiring western education both for the boys and the girls. So she established a school in 1873 at her residence in Paschimgaon (now the Faizunnessa Degree College). In 1901, she founded an English middle school named after her daughter Badrunessa. The Faizunnessa Girls' Pilot High School was designed for the '*pardanashin girls*'. She was assisted in her efforts by Kalicharan De, the famous Brahmo leader of Comilla. A hostel was subsequently added to the school. "Many women who later became eminent studied in this school, though the initial response from the Muslim community was lukewarm."<sup>39</sup>

The second girls' school, Hossainpur Girls' School for Muslim women, was established in 1895 in Sirajganj in Eastern Bengal by a Muslim woman Khairunnessa Khatun. But it did not last long like Faizunnessa's school. It came to an end most probably after her death. "The two schools were

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<sup>38</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. *The World of women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, the Netherlands, 1996 p.141.

<sup>39</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. op cit. p.115.

unique in the sense that both were village schools meant for village girls. Both were founded by the endeavors of two village women.<sup>40</sup>

The first school in Calcutta for the Muslim girls was started by Nawab Begum Firdaus Mahal of Murshidabad in 1897. The first woman to launch a systematic and compromising campaign for women's education was Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. She learnt Bengali from her elder sister Karimunnessa and English from husband Sakhawat Hossain. She dedicated volume II of her book '*Motichur*' to her elder sister, who herself was a poet, though her poetry was always under cover due to pressure of the Muslim orthodoxy. Rokeya founded her dream school '*Sakhawat memorial Girls' School*' in Calcutta in 1909. But the journey of the school would not be included in this work as its time period is up to 1905. One of the Muslim girls who attended higher education was Latifunnessa. The '*Bamabodhini Patrika*' of May, 1896 (no.376) mentions of a Muslim lady, Latifunnessa, who passed the final examination of the Campbell Medical School in 1896, securing the second place among the fifty-five students. But any further detail about her is still unavailable.

The late nineteenth century can be categorized as a period of women's awakening and the early twentieth century as one which saw the birth of women's movements in Bengal. If we compare between the two sections of women- the Brahmos and the Muslim '*bhadramahila*', the more similarities are visible than the differences. On the one hand, there were Swarnakumari Devi, Kadambini Bose, Sarala Debi, and Abala Bose et al. who were the pioneering figures in the development of female education in the Hindu society. On the other hand, there were Faizunnessa Chaudhurani, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, and Nurunessa Khatun et al. to be the same for the Muslim women. They wore the same style of dress, they read almost similar kind of books and wrote and published, "Fortunately, most of the women we focus on, in both the Brahmo and the Muslim communities, wrote and their stories have reached us through the works they have left behind."<sup>41</sup>

Though the Muslim women started their journey late, their progress was quite advanced, sometime even more than their Hindu or Brahmo sisters, especially in the field of literary works.

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<sup>40</sup> Chakraborty, Uttara. op cit. p.91.

<sup>41</sup> Amin, Sonia Nishat. 'The Early Muslim Bhadramahila: The Growth of learning and Creativity, 1876 to 1939, in Ray, Bharati. (ed.) *From the Seams of History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p.109.

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was such a woman who advanced herself much more than her time. Though she is known for establishment of the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School (1911) in Calcutta, her literary creations are also of noteworthy. Her excellent literary skill and radical thinking had a fine mixing with each other. Probably, it would be difficult to find one more writer of her time who could think in her way. Her scientific mentality and future foresight got a fantastic way out in her creation of the 'Sultana's Dream' where she dreamt of a lady land. There women were on complete freedom in each and every sense. For such development, the root cause was the women freedom and to use science in each and every sphere of life. In her 'Sultana's Dream' she wrote:

"I became very curious to know where the men were. I met more than a hundred women while walking there, but not a single man.

Sultana: "Where are the men?"

Sister Sara: "In their proper places, where they ought to be."

Sultana: "Pray let me know what you mean by their proper places."

Sister Sara: "O, I see my mistake, you cannot know our customs, as you were never here before. We shut our men indoors."

Sultana: "Just as we are kept in the zenana?"

Sister Sara: "Exactly so."

Sultana: "How funny." (Sultana burst into a laugh. Sister Sara laughed to.)...

"They (men) should not do anything, excuse me; they are fit for nothing. Only catch them and put them into the zenana."<sup>42</sup>

(In this story, Sultana is the writer, who dreamt of such a place, called Lady Land;

the whole conversation in the story took place in her dream with an imaginary lady

about an imaginary place.)

The above mentioned story, 'Sultana's Dream', was published in 1905, in Indian Ladies Magazine. Rokeya was a radical thinker in its true sense. It was not the age of global radical feminism, so it was a tough task for her to write in that mood and also to publish in a magazine. Her another important article was "*Stree Jatir Abonoti*" (Degradation of Women), published in 1903 (B.S.

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<sup>42</sup> Hossain, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat. *Sultana's Dream*, *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Uttaran, Dhaka, B.S.1413 (c.2006), pp. 488-89.

1310) in Girish Chandra Sen (first translator of Koran into Bengali) edited “*Mahila*” (Woman). It was published in three consecutive volumes of “*Mahila*” with the name “*Alankar* or Badge of Slavery” (Ornament or Badge of Slavery). It was in this article, Rokeya first expressed her views about the freedom of womanhood. Here she wrote:

Men used those religious texts as ‘orders of god’ to betray us...those are nothing but men’s own interpretation of religion and religious texts to dominate us and to deprive us from ours’ natural rights.<sup>43</sup>

But, later, because of wide spread discontent among the masses, she had to change some debatable words in the next issue. She was quite strong in thinking extreme to achieve something. Regarding financial freedom of women, she said:

We can do anything to achieve same position like the men. If freedom can be achieved through independent income we would like to that. If necessary we will work as lady clerks, lady magistrates, lady barristers, lady judge...everything. And after fifty years, becoming lady viceroy, I will make the women of this country queens. Why will we not income? Don’t we have legs, hands or brain? What we don’t have? Whatever hard works we do in in-laws house, wont that would be enough to do our business freely?<sup>44</sup>

It was Rokeya and some examples of her excellent views. When the Muslim male society was only the observant of new changes, the women society came forward. It was Faizunnessa Chaudhurani who first thought of separate medical hospital for women and, in 1893, it was established in Comilla. Both the groups, the Muslim educated women and the Hindus and the Brahmos women had very good connection among them. As it is on record that Faizunnessa Chaudhurani was a very active member of the ‘*Sakhi Samiti*’ in Calcutta. Both of the groups can

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<sup>43</sup> Hossain, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat. ‘*Alankar* or Badge of Slavery’, *Mahila* 1903 (B.S. 1310) “*aamadigoke pratarana koribar nimitto purushgon oi dhramagranthagulike ‘ishwar er aadeshpatro’ boliya Prakash koriyachen...ei dharmashastraguli purush-rochiti bidhibyabastha chara aar kichui nohe...*” (English translation mine)

<sup>44</sup> Hossain, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat. ‘*Stree Jatir Abonoti*’, *Rokeya Rachanabali*, Uttaran, Dhaka, B.S.1413 (c.2006), p.38 “*purusher samokakhhota laver janyo aamadigoke jaha korite hoi, tahai koribo. Jodi akhon swadhinbhabe jibika arjon korile swadhinata laav hoi, tobe tahai koribo. Abashyak hoile aamra lady kerani hoite aaromvo koriya lady magistrate, lady barrister, lady judge- sob I hoibo! Panchas batsor pore lady viceroy hoiya e desher samosto nari ke “rani” koriya felibo!! Uparjon koribo naa kano? Aamader ki haat nai, na paa nai, na budhhi nai? Je porishrom aamra “swami”r grihokarje byabohar kori, sei porishrom dwara ki swadhin byabsai korite paribo na?*” (English translation mine)

be seen within a larger ground of enlightenment mainly through the development and improvisation of the female education.

The success of women education can be seen in two ways. One, who received institutionalized education and later became successful as professionals. On the other hand, it is said that, if education was the visible hallmark of the '*bhadramahila*', literature was her medium of self-expression. These were the two areas where she participated outside the realm of the domesticity. But where education required a literal 'stepping out' of the home, literary activity involved only an imaginary one. Thus women, who could not attend school because of purdah, were free to write.

### **Conclusion:**

It's very difficult to get a reliable picture of women's status and struggles due to non availability of information. But we may get some scattered pictures which reflect the condition of the women of that time. The women of Rassundari's autobiography were aware of the deplorable condition of the women, at least they talked among themselves at their free time. We may see that they even thought of being deprived as women. On the other hand, it was also true that women themselves were the main obstacles to their development. In the autobiography of Haimabati Sen, covering the decades of 1870s, one finds how majority of women were staunchly against the education of women. There was an age old belief that educated women would become widows.

Development of female education with progressive thinking and setting up of girls' schools and colleges failed to change the innermost superstitious attitudes of the Hindu women. Apart from them, the women who got the light of freedom and education and support of the male members were lucky of getting those. Their male folk wanted their education (though sometime in a limited way) and tried to make them polished and mannered with the vision to make 'good daughter, good wife and good mother'. It perhaps became the custom of supporting the female education from 1860 onwards and that mentality continued to exist for a long time. What is important was that the women somehow talked in the same lines like their male counterparts. It seems that, as was evident in the pages of journals and autobiographies, written by them, they did not have any

demand of their own. The women, however, were quite satisfied with what they were getting from the men. Even the educated women like Gyanadanandini Devi or Radharani Lahiri were of the same opinion about the women education as their husbands.

The notion of female education gradually changed with emergence of the new radical Brahmos who thought of higher education for the women and also allowed them to become professionals. The contemporary radical journals like '*Abalabandhab*' (editor was Dwarakanath Ganguly, he was the ardent supporter of female education with higher studies and also job for women and one of the founder members of the '*Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*') and '*Banga Mahila*' (editor was Mokshada Devi, sister of W.C.Bonnerjee, the first president of the Indian National Congress) published several articles supporting the higher education or, better to say, value education for the women. But it is unfortunate that we are deprived of knowing the life and struggle and also mentality of the first professionals like Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Basu.

In the age of political consciousness, however, women were not lagging behind. Here Sarala Devi Chaudhurani was a name of great importance. As the Hindu or the Brahmo women always talked along the line that their male counterparts wanted, such was not the case with their Muslim sisters. It is possible that as the male reformers of the Muslim society were almost disinterested about the education of their womenfolk, the women themselves came forward to arrange their own education. Even the writings of them, sometime, were more progressive than the Hindu or the Brahmo women writers. Such was the example of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. None of the writers of that time were able to show such confidence and guts like Rokeya. She had set the stage for more opportunities for the succeeding generations.



**Chapter 5**  
**Conclusions**

It is now evident from the above study that the development of female education in the nineteenth century India was not a symmetrical process. There were different views and strands, attitudes, acceptance and rejection on the issues related to the subject. But education for women can be seen as a strong, independent and also interrelated socio-cultural aspect of the contemporary time rather than a mere sub section in improvisation of women's life in the nineteenth century Bengal. Female education, however, can be portrayed from three different perspectives -1) Imperatives and progresses achieved due to government's attitude and initiatives towards the development of female education. 2) Changing perceptions and demands of the time leading to changing notions and attitudes of the native intelligentsia for the development of female education. 3) Changing perceptions of women about themselves from being 'A Caged Bird' in the Bengali Society.

### **From Non-interference to Reasons for Popularity:**

First of all, the government's attitude towards the female education was based on the demand-profit relationship. From the very beginning of the female education, the government did not take any initiative of their own. Their policy of non-interference in the 'native' socio-religious life continued almost up to the second half of the nineteenth century until and unless there was strong demand for their participation in the development of female education from the intelligentsia. With the establishment of the Bethune School in 1849 and, sometimes later, Lord Dalhousie's active participation with Bethune in his school, made the government aware to making initiatives for developing the 'native' female education.

With the introduction of the Wood's Despatch of 1854, the government first expressed its view for developing the women education in India with a sympathetic attitude, 'frank and cordial support' and grant-in-aid system. But this, however, made no rapid increase in both the number of schools and, specially, in the number of students. There was very low progress up to publishing the second recommendations of the Indian Education Commission in 1882. The government was never in a mood to take a strong stand to change the general attitude of the society towards education of their womenfolk. Though the government's supportive hands were there for developing the women's education, the main initiatives had to come from the 'native'

people. Society, in a broader sense, was still apprehensive of allowing their girls in attending the public schools and this was especially true for the higher castes. Among them, the zenana education was largely popular. The general people even had the fear of religious conversion in participating the 'foreign' government's initiatives for developing the female education.

In 1882, the Hunter Commission recommended a more liberal governmental policy for development of the women's education. It is here important to mention that it was the time when the anti-British sentiments were cooking up in various regions of the country. It was the government's populist measure to attract people towards their more liberal policies framed on demand of the intelligentsia. It was also the time of opening up of liberal medical policies for the 'native' women. Since 1882, we may see rapid progress in both the number of students and the schools. The radical Brahmo movement also helped for the development.

On the one hand, it is true rarely the government took initiative of its own for the development of women's education in this country; on the other hand, it is also true that they were never hesitant to give necessary support in this particular field. Before 1882, the government policy on female education was largely based on their typical mentality of getting profit from that. After 1882, it was, however, largely based on the reason of popularity among the society and its people.

### **Having Trophy-wives or Women emancipation:**

On the other side, the early mentality of the educated 'natives' to the development of female education was largely based on the superior-inferior complex. They thought of giving 'some' education to their womenfolk. There were various gaps among them in their views on female education. The early reformers like Radhakanta Deb, Prosonno Coomar Tagore et al. were familiar with the concept that the women should get education. In some families of the then society, mainly, of the wealthy and the rich, there were traditions of giving women the basic education. It was their general initiative to start up the female education at home.

Side by side, this period saw the rapid and radical emergence of the 'Young Bengal', the new and the westernized educated Bengali young men and the disciples of Derozio. Their concept for the promotion of female education was different. After becoming educated on the western ideals

of education, they equated education with modernity in the extremely stagnated society. To them, education for women largely became a pillar to grow modernity. They had huge demand for the educated girls with whom they could at least share their thinking and ideas. But this group of the young men was much ahead of time. Their radical thinking and rejection of the typically age-old customs and rituals of the Brahmanical society failed to radicalize the then society. Their movement failed to produce any strong base. If they could get success, female education in Bengal also might have got success earlier.

When the Bethune School started its journey in 1849, it was not any path-breaking way for the intelligentsia, rather, for them, it was an experiment to see to what extent the development process of the female education could be successful. The people who were actively connected with the school education tried their best to open up a new horizon with the Bethune School considering it being the centre in the field of women's education. But the general society was still not in a position to accept free movement of the girls through the school education. Even during the Brahmo movement under the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen and others, the female education, both at the school and at the higher levels, did not get any space. The liberal Brahmos, in spite of having various liberal ideas, were very much against the formal institutional education for the women. The very concept of education for women that it should be able to make them good mothers so that they could impart good education, moral and physical, to their children was sustaining since the time of the early reformers of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Brahmo concept of the reformism and the modernity did not think of emancipation of women through higher education. They mainly believed in the importance of '*Antahpur Sikhsha*' which could make the women perfect and polished daughters, wives and mothers. The Brahmos were not against giving permission to the women to go outside or free mixing with the male members of the society. They were even fond of women taking part in the socio-religious-cultural activities with their male counterparts.

In fact, it was this view regarding the female education was one of the main reasons which led to break up among the Brahmos. The neo-liberal group of the Brahmos led by Anandomohan Basu, Dwarakanath Ganguly et al. were not satisfied with the type of education prescribed for the women by the Brahmos. They believed in more liberal kind of education and also in higher

education for the women. They were even the first to support that women also should be able for the professional jobs. It would be wrong to say that their movement was a failure although it was true that they did not have much a strong base. But their effort to make the women successful through opting for higher education was continuing with increasing number of students in the Bethune College. From 1880s onwards, we also see the examples of women becoming successful as the professionals.

Both the views of the two groups of the Brahmos were in co-existence for a long time. The problem with the nineteenth century reformers was that there was always an absence of homogeneity in outlook which was an obstacle to achieve to make a strong base among the masses. The egoistic nature of them also was a constraint to the general development of the female education. For example, Keshab Chandra Sen established the Victoria College to hit at the ongoing popularity of the Bethune College under the leadership of the new Brahmos. His opinion was that the purpose of his college was to spread the nationalistic view on education against the westernized educational system perceived by the new Brahmos. If both the groups were in favour of the same line of education, the development might have taken place more rapidly. The ego clash and the politics within the personalities and also the groups acted as the deterrents to the development of female education. Here it is important to mention how much the intelligentsia was divided among them. Mary Carpenter, a philanthropist from England, showed that the intelligentsia of Ahmedabad, Bombay and Chennai were much progressive and united in their goal of achieving the women emancipation through education and so got the success earlier. But then the Bengali intelligentsia was lagging behind.

It was also from the same time, mainly from 1880s onwards, the Hindu revivalism began to take place as a new political phenomenon. This new group, however, was a strong critic of the westernized modernization. They started to take pride in the ancient glory and heritage of India. The glorified portrayal of the women also became a part of their political agenda. Their policy of giving opposition to the westernized reformers was successful to a large extent. Worshiping the mother goddess for power and strength was a popular policy of the group to counter the British and those who criticized them for the general degradation of the women in the society. Mahakali Pathshala was the outcome of this phenomenon and, of course, providing education on that nationalist line was successful in attracting people. But it should be wrong to say that those who

got education in the Bethune College and on westernized lines were not aware of the political situation of the country. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, a student of the Bethune College and belonging to a staunch Brahmo family, was an active supporter of the political extremist movement and also of the revolutionary activism. She also participated in the anti-partition movement and was strong to voice her political opinion through the pages of her edited journal, the '*Bharati*'.

The Muslim society, however, did not feel that strong a need for the promotion of the female education. It is not easy to understand their attitude. It is true that the Muslim women could read and write at the very elementary level as they had to read 'Koran'. Their men folk were satisfied with that and so opposed to any formal and institution based education for them. Later, it was the Muslim women themselves who came forward for their own development through education.

### **Women's acceptability:**

Apart from those women who used to get little bit of education, the Vaishnavis and the women of the rich and wealthy families, mainly of the zamindars, condition of the rest of the women was too pathetic to describe. The inner world of the women in a house, where the male members of the same family did not get entry, was only guided by the traditionalist rules and the customs. The aged women were the head of that world. A little girl, however, after attaining four to five years of age, could not get the opportunity to enjoy the world outside her home. At the age of six or seven, she became married to an unknown aged man. From then onwards, her day to day life was controlled by the commands of the aged women in her in-laws' house. The men of that time, who could at least think of some progressive ideals, had no access to the lives of the women, even not of their own wives.

In the autobiographies of Rassundari Devi and Kailashbasini Devi, namely, "*Aamar Jibon*" and "*Janoika Grihabodhur Diary*" respectively, there are examples of several other women who thought of advancing themselves but they had no platform to express their views. They really had the urge to get education. But the presence of the aged women in the families compelled the younger ones to follow the same lines of their seniors as they grew older after some time. It was

thus something like a vicious cycle. So the pathetic livelihood of the women persisted over generations. Even the men of the society, who tried to do any reverse of the situation, failed to achieve much success because of the same senior women who were strictly against the female education for fear of widowhood and also on believing that educated women would get no bridegroom.

The condition changed a bit with emergence of the Brahmo movement. Their ideals, philosophy and views helped a lot for the changing condition of the women. But the rural areas were out of touch of the movement. There the same age-old mentality was still in existence. In the wave of the educational movement for the women, the girls started to go to the schools but the head women of the family in many cases were not supportive of it. The early Brahmos, however, were in support of the limited and the stereotype education for the women. The idea for education of the women to them was largely guided by the ideas of the social up gradation, not their emancipation. It was the later Brahmos who took initiative for the higher education for them and also were in favour to allow the women for taking up jobs. The women, however, showed the desired result.

The Muslim women, on the other hand, were more progressive than their Hindu and Brahmo counterparts. They took initiatives for their education and opened up schools in many places which were not that starved of students as like the early Hindu schools. In their literary works also, the Muslim women showed much radical thinking regarding the societal norms. Authors on the other side (the Hindus) were not that much radical in their writing. It can be said that the dependency of the Hindu and the Brahmo women on their male members of the families did not allow them to think of their own whereas the Muslim women were free from that dependency. As the Muslim men did not take care of the education for the women, the women themselves came forward and took up the job.

The condition of the women in the nineteenth century can be identified with problem of the gender oppression. The day to day lives of the women were controlled by the social norms and were under the domination of the male society. There was hardly anyone to come out this inherent vicious circle. Whatever the men had decided for upliftment of the women was considered as a parameter. The women had to exist within those sets of doings admitted by the men. The men thought that if the women would get the ultimate freedom of doing and choosing

jobs, the men would be deprived of financial autonomy and the women would be more successful in their professions. It is their suffering from the inferiority complex which caused all their negligence to the women. The limited education for the women, education to make good daughter, good wife and good mother and the super emphasis on those 'three g's' were all parts of their fear of facing the societal imbalance. The male dominated society, however, because of their fear psychosis and complexities within them, did not give space to the women over most of the time span of the nineteenth century.



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