

Chapter– 4
Islam and Muslim Education in Undivided
Bengal: A Historical Retrospect

Spread of Islam in Bengal

Education of Muslim Women in Bengal

Muslim Education in Bengal during Pre-colonial Era

Muslim Education in Bengal during Colonial Era

Muslim Education in Bengal during Post-colonial Era

Muslim Women's Educational Movements in Bengal

Begum Rokeya and Her Contributions

Observations

CHAPTER-4

ISLAM AND EDUCATION IN UNDIVIDED BENGAL: A HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

4.1. Spread of Islam in Bengal

History reveals that India had commercial relationship with Central Asia, West Asia and Middle East since long past. As a result, migration of peoples from various parts of those regions to Indian territories was commonly in vogue. Following this trend many Arab travellers visited Sind and left the records of their visits. It is known that even before the establishment of Muslim rule in India, the Muslim savants had toured this country to study Indian medicine and Science (Gupta, 1976). Contextually it is of special note that after the establishment of Islam in Middle East, the Abbaside Caliphs of Bagdad (750 to 1142 A.D.) took keen interest in Indology. As a result, Indian Scholars were sent to Bagdad and Muslims scholars came to Sind to study Sanskrit works on various social and physical sciences.

The first recorded contact in this respect as divulged in the history was in 771 A.D. That year a Hindu astronomer and mathematician reached Bagdad and introduced to the Arabs the Arabic version of the 'Brahma Siddhanta' of Brahmagupta. Another remarkable incident took place in 886 A.D. when under the patronage of a Hindu King a linguist of Sind translated the Holy Quran into a local vernacular (Imam, 1975:2-3). History bears the witness that during those days the relationship between the Muslims and the Hindus was friendly as they used to show their respect and interest towards each other's religion. Later on, with the development of Islamic Renaissance in Middle East, the Arabic preachers started spreading Islam in Indian territories.

In addition to the Arabian preachers, Central Asian traders too spread Islam in Indian soil, and the trend was further continued by the noble and gentle Sufi Saints. Finally invasions of Muslim rulers and their continuous rule facilitated the spread of Islam in Indian subcontinent (Begum, 1992:66). Though the most organized Muslim invasion in India took place in 711 A.D. in Sind and the Arab armies under the leadership of seventeen year old Umayyed General Muhammad-bin Qasim captured the whole of the lower Indus valley, a noteworthy long time was passed over after the said incidence for the establishment of Muslim kingdom in this territory. Actually it was Muhammad Ghorī who captured Ajmer defeating Pirthiraj in the second battle of Tarain in 1192 A.D. and introduced Muslim kingdom there appointing his Turk slave Qutub-Uddin-Aibok as the governor of that newly captured dominion.

In the following year (1193 A.D.) Qutub-Uddin-Aibok took possession of Varanasi and Delhi and afterwards he expanded the kingdom capturing Goalior, Anhilabar and Kanauj. After Mohammad Ghorī had been killed in 1206, Qutub-Uddin-Aibok became the first of the Sultans of Delhi. Within next twenty years the whole of the Ganges basin came under the control of his Delhi Sultanate. Thus Qutub-Uddin-Aibok set up his throne in Delhi and established Muslim slave dynasty in Indian soil on a strong base. In the words of Sherwani, "a new culture, a new way of life, a new religion, a new view of art and architecture were grafted into this country" (Sherwani, 1968:3). In Bengal, Muslim rule was first introduced in 1204 with the partial conquest by Iktear Uddin Muhammad-bin-Bakhtiar Khalgi. But it is divulged in the history that Bengal contacted with Islam much earlier than its conquest by the Muslims.

Though the Muslim traders, preachers and conquerors played important role in spreading the religion of Islam in Indian subcontinent, the supreme credit goes to the Muslim Sufi Saints who came to the territory of Bengal much earlier and resided there up to the last days of their lives. The remarkable names in this context are: Shah Sultan Baijid Bostam (874 A.D.), Shah Sultan Rumi (1053 A.D.), Shaikh Bhahauddin Zakaria (1170-1226 A.D.) and Baba Adam (1199 A.D.). According to popular belief, these Sufi Saints used to perform miracles, cure diseases and help fulfil desires. As a result, their sayings and saintly deeds created a new stir in the religious lives of Bengali masses. It is interesting to note that these Sufi Saints preached the essence of Islamic religion without emphasizing its orthodox aspects. They mainly emphasized on spiritual, liberal and humanitarian aspects of Islam (De, 1982:4; Imam, 1975:17; Uttardhani, 1999: 20-21). At present the doctrine of Sufism is considered as an issue of great controversy to the Islamic scholars. But none can deny the contribution of the distinguished Sufi Saints in respect of propagating Islam in Indian soil (Alam, 1989:21-22).

However, various social, religious and political factors expedited the growth and spread of Islam in Bengal. In addition to Muslim missionaries and Sufi Saints, Muslim rulers, officials and nobles too played vital roles to propagate Islam and to constitute Muslim society in Bengal either by establishing marriage alliances with local people or by mass conversion of the indigenous communities. Apart from the benevolent services, they also established many institutions of Islamic learning for widening Islamic spirit within the general masses and to spread Islam in Bengal especially in rural areas (Begum, 1992:64-68).

In fact Islam as a religion flourished in Bengal when the common people, particularly the low caste Hindus, were ill-treated and exploited by the higher caste Hindus and peoples of authority. It happened because the ancient India was hierarchical and organized around the 'Varna System' that was central to the country's polity at that time. Of the four Varnas, the first two, viz Brahmin and Kshatriya, jointly constituted the ruling class who used to rule and exploit the peoples belonging to the rest two Varnas, viz Vaishya and Sudra (Bhatia, 1974:38-39).

The hierarchical enumeration was also based on series of propositions, mainly religious. The first three Varnas i.e. Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya were characterized as 'Dwij' or twice born. It was believed that these classes bear the sacred thread and are by scriptures given the rights of bestowing gifts, offering sacrifices and studying the scriptures (the Vedas). But the Sudras were devoid of any place or position in Hindu religion as if they existed for the sole purposes of serving the other superior classes (Bhatia, 1974:41). Thus the society was divided into the privileged and unprivileged classes. The caste system which regulated several other aspects of social life and organisation complemented the political division of the society into two broad classes, and later on, it not only proved a source of perpetual civil strife but also of political conflict between the two. In such a situation, invitation of the Muslim Sufi saints for taking shelter beneath the umbrella of Islam attracted and inspired the exploited low caste Hindus as well as their free minded aristocratic coreligionists towards a large scale conversion (Mahmud and Mimi, 1998:76).

Incidentally they came in touch of the Muslim Sufi Saints and became charmed to observe and experience their well behaviour, simplicity, devotion, generosity and greatness. On the other hand, those Sufi saints took the great opportunity to engage wholly these masses in Islamic universal modes of human rights, justice and equity and codes of ethics. As a result, an enormous number of them became whole-heartedly attracted and cordially submissive towards the religion of Islam and ultimately they professed their belief in it. Actually, Islam attracted these masses by virtue of its monotheism and equality that led them to take shelter beneath the umbrella of Islam by considering it as a religion of humanity, peace and tranquility (Mahmud and Mimi, 1998:76). Thus it is lucidly perceived that in Bengal conversion from Hinduism to Islam took place through several agencies of foreign origin and that's why Bengal Muslims are some heterogeneous groups of various socio-ritual backgrounds (Begum, 1992:68).

Virtually at the initial stage, Islam was propagated in Bengal not followed by a corresponding widening of knowledge of Islamic ideals. Because the original Islamic scripture of Arabic language was inaccessible to the local converts and there was no convenient local version of it. As Islamic views were commonly misinterpreted by the partially literate ulemas, the local converts failed to accumulate the Islamic knowledge exposed in the original text. These stumbling blocks before the converted Muslims in Bengal massively hindered them from understanding of Islamic ideals and principles and grasping Islamic spirit in mind. As a result most of them were in fact ignorant of real Islamic notions and found much more traditional in nature and practising the local pre-Islamic customs in their day to day livelihood.

4.2. *Education and Women in Bengal*

Different empirical studies on women indicate that women have a status and prestige in the present century throughout the world. They are playing important roles in the society. Analysis of Muslim women's role in contemporary societies also reveals women's position in several ways. But question arises— did the vast population of Muslim women in Bengal get expected position in the past decades and are they enjoying satisfactory status today? The present study has been designed to make a situation analysis of Muslim women of erstwhile Greater Bengal with special reference to their present educational status. The findings will be exposed in the subsequent chapters. Let us try to have a manifestation of their past educational status in the ongoing chapter.

In fact studies on Muslim women of Greater Bengal regarding their education or status in the past decades were very scanty. Hence it is very difficult to portray the statistical picture or characterize any simple illustration of their educational retrospection. As Muslim women have occupied a significant part of Greater Indian Society since a historical past, we can reasonably assume from sociological point of view that their past educational status was exposed in historical evolution, social norms, values and traditions, customs and conventions and expectations of Indian society. In this context it may be revealed from the history that there were distinct stages of rise and fall in the status of Indian women. At the dawn of civilization during the Vedic age, Indian women in general used to enjoy very high status. They had access in every field of social life where they were treated as men's friend and their co-worker but never their inferior.

During that time they used to discuss political and social problems freely with men and thus they were man's equal even in the field of intellect. Moreover, woman had the privilege of adoption, and pre-puberty marriages were not in vogue. In matter of selecting the partners in marriages, women also used to enjoy equal rights. There was also references made to 'swayamvara' marriages where women were given chance of selecting their partners (Devi, 1982:9). Though sons were preferred, once born, the daughter was given all the privileges enjoyed by the son. In case of education, a daughter was not discriminated from the son. There were many women who became Vedic scholars, debaters, poets and teachers (Menon, 1981:4).

In fact there was no seclusion of women and they used to move freely in the society. Even in the religious functions, they occupied a prominent position. For instance, a large number of girls were fairly conversant with religious rituals. They used to compose and chant Vedic hymns and offer sacrifices to gods as independently as men. Very often they had love marriages that were subsequently blessed by their parents. Moreover, the custom of 'Sati' was totally unknown to the people and if a woman became a widow, she was not required ascending the funeral pyre of her husband. The widow could, if she liked, remarry or follow the custom of 'Niyoga' that allowed her having conjugal relations with husband's younger brother or some other near relative till she got some children (Ghosh, 1989:2-3). But after the ending of Vedic period, the position of women deteriorated considerably when they were begun to be treated as appendage of men with a distinct and meekly accepted conception of their family duties and obligations (Devi, 1982:9).

The Hindu law giver Manu had made womenfolk entirely dependent on man and subjected them to the authority of fathers, husbands, and sons in different periods of their lives as daughters, wives and mothers. Manu propounded his dictum, " By a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons; a woman must not be independent at any stage of life. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshiped as a god by a faithful wife..." (Wadly, 1988:30).

This disgraceful position of women continued throughout the rest Hindu period and was also reinforced by Muslim masters. It is because at the dawn of their rule and domination in the land of India, the Muslim masters, in order to ensure local supports, followed the policy of non-interference over the existing social tradition and values of the people of Indian society. Later on, in the medieval period which is treated as the period of Muslim Renaissance, the Muslim rulers appeared in the scene as social reformers. They changed so many customs, traditions and even age-old established rules of the society to the end of justice. But it is a matter of regret that the issue of justified women status was overlooked and bypassed by them which may be noted as their silent approval on the existing inhumane position of women and may also be expressed as a symptom of their malintention of exploiting the womenfolk by keeping them under the subjugation of males (Mahmud and Mimi, 1998:76-77).

Even though the said inhumane position of women continued at the initial stage of British rule in India. Because, like the Muslim masters the British rulers too, primarily followed the policy of non-interference over the social and religious lives of the people of India to win their cooperation in the administration of the country. So, women went down imperceptibly in social status during the first stage of their rule. They had to lead a cloistered life and practically the busy world was out of their reach. They moved within the narrow sphere of their kitchen as if their work, life and activity are comprised of cooking, child bearing and rearing, catering to the relatives-in-law and husband.

As a result, these women were in general lagging much behind in respect of their educational attainments and social mobility in comparison with their male counterparts. In the words of Keren Leonard, "Women in Indian society traditionally were members of a stratified society characterized by the ideology and practice of inequality. Throughout the sub-continent, social, economic and political power resided with men, even in matrilineal groups in tribal communities with female forming system" (Leonard, 1979: 95). At the later stage of British reign in India, the rulers engaged themselves for the development of the local natives. They founded a lot of educational institute for this purpose and tried to upgrade the local natives with the flow of westernized education. In fact, in India, women's education appeared as an integral part of Westernization. But the most deplorable fact is that it was not common to the vast masses of lower economic status. As a result, the comparative backwardness of Indian women in respect of educational status remained censurable up to a long extent.

The progress of literacy in India shows that the overall female literacy rates were full of despondency even from the very beginning of the twentieth century to its next three continuous decades. The rates of female literacy as calculated in 1901, 1911, 1921 and 1931 were 0.69 per cent, 1.05 per cent, 1.81 per cent and 2.93 per cent against male literacy rates of 9.83 per cent, 10.56 per cent, 12.21 per cent and 15.59 per cent respectively (adopted from Jehangir, 1991: 55 and Year Book, 1999:616).

However, the state of Muslim women education in India up to the initial decades of the present century as we can detect from the study of its social evolution is mere miserable and disappointing. The major part of British rule in India may be noted as a curse for the Muslims in general and for rural Muslim women in particular in respect of their educational growth. Throughout the British period, Muslim women lagged far behind in attaining formal education and also in the process of modernization in comparison with the women of other communities and also in comparison with the male counterparts of their own. Though there is serious scarcity of statistical data, one can portray very doleful scenery with the available limited data and literatures in this respect. For instance, the census report of 1921 indicates that in an average out of one hundred sixteen Muslim women there was only one who could read and write. Thus in 1921 the percentage of literate Muslim women was 0.86 while it was 9 per cent for the Muslim males. Throughout the next decade Muslim women literacy rate further increased only 0.64 per cent and became 1.5 per cent in 1931 against their male counterparts that stood 10.7 per cent (Mondal, 1997: 22-23).

Successively the state of women education in greater Bengal in the past centuries was in general unpleasant and particularly for the Muslim women it was worse. During the medieval period the orthodox traditional leaders (Moulavis) in the institutions of traditional learning (maktabs) imparted Muslim education. But these traditional leaders didn't inspire female education, rather they usually expressed negative attitude towards it. As a result, Muslim women were devoid of those opportunities. On the other hand, the medium of instruction of those institutions was Arabic which was not easy accessible to most of the Bengali speaking Muslims. Hence, the greater portion of Muslim males of Bengal was in fact indifferent towards such education. During the Mughal period, emperors patronized learned scholars and granted huge funds for the construction of madrasahs but due to strict purdah practices and conservative outlooks prevailing in the society, Muslim women were again kept far away from these institutions by their guardians.

Though "what's the Bengal thinks today, the rest of India thinks it tomorrow" is a well-recognized statement, we can sum up that the said tenet was not applicable for Muslim masses in greater Bengal. Because, in the colonial era when the British introduced English learning in Indian sub-continent to provide a positive bond between the rulers and the ruled and set up English school in several areas, all the communities except the Muslims welcomed it. This is evident from the fact that in 1824 when the British started a Sanskrit college for the Hindus in Calcutta, the Hindus violently opposed it and pleaded for an English institution while the Muslims of Bengal refused to accept English learning offered by the British.

Even after the foundation of Calcutta Madrasha in 1781, the so-called Muslim ulemas continued their action against English learning so strongly that the British Government could not introduce there English language up to 1829. This led the British to follow discriminatory policy in education towards the Muslims and as its inevitable effect the entire Muslim mass of Bengal lagged far behind in education.

In the nineteenth century the educational problems of the women of Muslim community in Bengal became more complex. This was undoubtedly due to the non-permissible age at which girls were usually withdrawn both for marriage and for purdah. As the Muslim population of Bengal was without the means of instruction, Lord Macaulay showed keen interest for their educational upliftment. Special consideration was given to the disposal of a large endowment fund constituted by Haji Muhammad Mohsin of Hooghly in 1806. By using the said fund, the government founded Hooghly College in 1836 for the sake of Muslim education.

But the disappointing fact is that the said institution was not provided with the provision of women enrolment. Moreover it attracted the Hindus more than the Muslims. However, after Macaulay had pronounced 'Modern English Education' as government policy in 1837, Persian was ceased to work as the medium of court business with a view to helping the new policy (Mondal, 1997:81-82). Unfortunately the decline in Muslim women education in Bengal continued throughout the past centuries and even up to a long extent of post-independence. Though there is no specific national statistical information in this regard, we can assume the comparative educational backwardness of the Muslims from various Census Reports.

According to 1991 Census Report of West Bengal, the Muslims have constituted there 23.61 per cent of total population. The report also discloses that there are only four districts in this State territory having significant number of Muslim population. The districts are Murshidabad, Malda, West Dinajpur and Birbhum, where the Muslims have constituted 61.39 per cent, 47.49 per cent, 36.75 per cent and 33.06 per cent of total population respectively. It is further delineated from the said report that the rates of female literacy in the said districts are disappointing as those stand at 29.57 per cent, 24.92 per cent, 27.87 per cent and 37.17 per cent respectively against the State level female literacy rate of 46.56 per cent. So, one may assume that female literacy is notably lower in those districts where the number of Muslim population is comparatively higher (Statistical Abstract of West Bengal 1994-95:102).

Moreover, a lot of examples can be made to signify comparative educational backwardness of Muslim women in West Bengal or greater Indian society. For instance, it is held from a sample survey that the literacy rate of Muslim women in India was only 19 per cent in 1985 against their male literacy rate of 48 per cent (Hamid, 1985 as quoted by Mondal, 1997:23). Another study titled "State of Education among the Muslims of Rural West Bengal" was conducted under ICSSR Major Research Project in 1991-92 where six Muslim dominated villages under six different districts of West Bengal were studied intensively. This inquiry too registered a sorrowful state of Muslim women literacy in all the study villages which stood 20.68 per cent, 34.03 per cent, 23.42 per cent, 21.50 per cent, 21.95 per cent and 17.48 per cent and on the average 22.89 per cent only (adopted from Table 8.1 in Mondal, 1992:155).

It is very difficult to have a retrospect on Muslim women situation in Bangladesh as no study on this particular issue has been accomplished there till today. Yet we can assume Muslim women's status from the analysis of women situation in general. However, it is revealed from pacifistic observation that situation of women in Bangladesh in general is depressing on account of complex cultural factors shaped by historical evolution and social expectations. Considering the above reality a feminist scholar pointed, "women are not regarded as equal partners in the development process with men and are not given equal opportunities to develop themselves as resources under the existing socio-economic milieu...A visibly male bias pervades all educational programmes. The drop-out rates are very high particularly for female students leading to a wastage of national resources" (Duza, 1992:3).

In fact, the Bangladeshi women could not attain the expected literacy standard due to robust seclusion throughout the past decades. For instance, in 1974 the literacy rates (for the population of 5+ years) were 14.8 per cent for female, 32.9 per cent for male and 24.3 per cent for national level. In 1994 the said literacy rates have risen to 24.0 per cent for female, 45.0 per cent for male and 34.0 per cent for national level. Thus the female literacy rate in independent Bangladesh over the last two decades increased only 9.2 per while the male literacy rate increased 12.1 per cent. So, the gap in male-female literacy rate increased further 2.9 percent over the last two decades. It is worth mentioning that in Bangladesh the Muslim constituted about 88 per cent of total population. So, reasonably we can assume that the Muslim women's literacy in Bangladesh was alarming up to the middle of the previous decade.

4.3. Muslim Education in Bengal during Pre-colonial Era

The development of Muslim education in Bengal at the initial phase of Muslim rule was somewhat different. Because, Bengali Muslims were a less distinct and more backward section in comparison with the Muslim of Uttar Pradesh and the Punjab and territorially they were more concentrated in the east (Imam, 1975:207). But with the gradual expansion of Muslim rule, a large number of educated and upper class Muslims from various places came to Bengal as traders, officials, teachers, physicians, military personnel etc. Subsequently they settled down in this province and thereby introduced a new cultural pattern into the local Muslim society. In fact, the advent of Muslim rule during medieval period was a turning point of Indian history. Through this rule the immigrant Muslims brought with them a rich cultural heritage from Arabia and other places of West Asia which enriched the Indian societies by influencing its socio-cultural process in various ways (Mondal, 1997:58).

Apart from this the Muslim rulers played a pivotal role in the development of education throughout the country. The fundamental role of education during those days was "the purification of soul and it was regarded as a preparation for life and life after death" (Jaffer, 1972:39). Even though religious bias was prevalent in the context of education, the Muslim rulers and scholars significantly contributed in various fields of learning, viz science, medicine, art and philosophy (Peer, 1991:24). The system of education in Bengal as well as in whole of India before the advent of Islam was under the control of Brahmins, the most privileged caste in Hindu religion. But during the medieval period when the Muslims captured the power and set up their kingdom, a radical change occurred in this respect.

Because the Muslim rulers for the first time felt the great need to educate the common people. They started taking an interest in establishing various types of educational institutions, religious as well as secular, which were also kept open for all masses irrespective of caste, economic class and social position. In addition to these, some renowned Muslim theologians took the initiative in establishing learning centres for the common Muslims. On the other hand, the managers of mosques and shrines started running Maktabs with the help of local well-to-do Muslims.

Generally the Imams of the Mosques were appointed in Maktabs for imparting primary religious education among the learners. These sorts of prayer leaders were known as Mouluvi. The interesting fact was that most of such Mouluis were partially literate, as they had no mastery in arts or philosophy but very limited command over Arabic language, Tajrid (Quranic pronunciation) and Qirat (art of Quranic recitation). Though the Mouluis were capable of reading out the Holy *Quran* very well, very few of them were conversant with the meaning of what they read. So, normally these prayer leaders used to teach their students the Arabic alphabet with an end to make them able to read out *Al-Quran*. The purpose of imparting such education among the students was to help them memorize some Quranic verses so that they can perform their day to day religious practices. As a matter of fact, most of the teachers usually used to refrain themselves from making the students aware of the real implications of what they teach. Though in few cases some teachers used to transmit the meanings or interpretations of the verses of *Al-Quran*, it was not necessary on the parts of the students to comprehend what was taught (Peer, 1991:25).

For secondary education, the students used to attend the Khanqahs which were also usually attached with the mosques. Higher education was imparted in the madrashas through the supervision of Ulemas. The madrashas were small in number and located mostly in towns and cities. There was variability in course of instructions in madrashas that led the students of Islamic learning from madrasha to madrasha and from place to place throughout the country (Mondal, 1997:76-77).

During the rule of Alauddin Hossain Shah (1493-1605) and the greatest Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605), education received a great impetus. They were wholehearted patrons of learning and learned men. Their patronage drew the attention of many distinguished scholars to their courts. Their fundamental policy was mainly to increase the knowledge of arts and sciences, and to this end, they liberally patronized learned scholars irrespective of race, religion, caste and creed. Various secular subjects were widely taught and developed under their patronage (Chowdhury, 1982).

Similarly Emperor Jahangir maintained the tradition of patronizing scholars and learned men. He made the provision of using assets of the heirless departed persons in educational activities. His successor Emperor Shahjahan also took many steps to advance knowledge and learning. But Firuz Shah Tughluq (1351-1388) and Emperor Aurangajeb (1659-1707) deserve special mention for the expansion of Muslim learning during pre-colonial era. They established numerous Mosques and Madrashas for the spiritual and educational upliftment of Muslims. Further Firuz Shah Tughluq through compilation of *Tariq-a-Firuzshahi* has made an admirable boon in history while Emperor Aurangajeb is glorified for *Fatwa-e-Alamgiri*, an erudite authority of Islamic rules and regulations.

4.4. *Muslim Education in Bengal during Colonial Era*

The brisk expansion of British dominion in Bengal as well as in greater India during the early phase of colonial era (1757-1818) brought a critical change in political, social and educational spheres of Indian society. The Muslims could not forget that they had just lost their empire to the British and could not reconcile themselves with the British rule while the Hindus found no difficulty to make a satisfactory adjustment with it (De, 1982:11). However, since initial stage of British rule in Indian subcontinent, the rulers had the intention to introduce western learning there for various reasons. The evangelists and missionaries were also interested for the promotion of English education as a means of propagating Christianity in Indian soil. The liberalists and utilitarianists too were proud of the superiority of English culture and were anxious that at least a small section of native people in the subcontinent must imbibe it (Mondal, 1997:78).

Actually the British had the intention to rule over the Indian subcontinent by any means or tricks. But from the very beginning of their rule they largely felt the need of local people's assistance to run the administration smoothly. They rightly understood that English education would provide a positive bond between the rulers and the ruled and thus help them in ensuring colonial stability. As a result, soon after taking the authority of Indian Empire, they introduced learning for English language in colonial India. Sir William Adams carried out the first survey of education made by the British authorities in 1835. This survey transpired that education imparted by the primary schools and makhtabs at those days was by and large secular, and its coverage was unusually widespread (Alam, 1989:37).

The East India Company took a detail note of it and in the same year they introduced English as a medium of instruction for education. In 1837, they further approved English as the only official language and later on in 1844 Lord Hardinge (the then Governor General) declared Knowledge in English language as essential pre-requisite for government services. The most despondent fact in this context is that the British rulers though introduced free primary education in 1812, never attempted to make it universal rather than to attain their purposes. As a result, the education system that ultimately came after 1844 under the patronage of the East India Company suddenly closed the door of education for the vast Bengali speaking common masses (Muhith, 1999:125-126).

Moreover, due to the said sly stunt in British policy, within a short period English language replaced Persian (the language used in government offices since Mughal period) and became a passport for securing jobs under the British administration as well as to run the countrywide mercantile houses. Incidentally, the landlords and rich citizens throughout the country, particularly of Bombay and Calcutta favoured the introduction of English education and worked with the British officials for setting up English schools in several areas.) It is important to note that all communities except the Muslims welcomed the system of education introduced by the British. Even the Muslim aristocrats who were renowned as academicians refrained themselves from admitting their wards into English schools. In this way Muslims lagged behind the other communities. This uneven growth of education helped the British to successfully apply the *divide et impera* policy (De, 1982:11; Mondal, 1997:78).

History reveals that at the early phase of British rule, Warren Hastings in response of Muslim appeals founded Calcutta Madrasha in 1781. But the poignant fact is that the British founded the Madrasha not with the noble desire to promote educational growth in the Muslim Community but with a narrow intention to create lower subordinate Muslim staff in government offices. The most depressing fact is that due to violent opposition of a group of fanatic Ulemas, English classes were not opened there until 1829. This group also opposed to the introduction of Bengali in the institution considering it a 'Language of Idolatry' (Hunter, 1871:176).

On the other hand the British Government showed indifferent attitude towards Calcutta Madrasha in terms of maintaining its houses, introducing time befitting modern subjects, appointing learned teaching staff and providing necessary funds. It is learned from a statistics that the yearly average governmental expenditure for this Madrasha from 1781 to 1824 was Rs. 30,772 only against the yearly average expenditure of more than Rs. 150,000 for only 20 to 25 students enrolled into Fort William College. However, due to administrative inefficiency as well as shortage of fund from the part of government, Calcutta Madrasha did not run well and in fact it became a dwelling place for the immodest lascivious (Alam, 1989: 34-36; Hunter, 1871: 196).

Actually Muslim upper classes had a negative attitude towards English education as they lost their supremacy and political power in the hands of the British. Moreover, they were hesitant to utilize the educational opportunities offered by the British because of the apprehension that such alien education would destroy their religious and cultural values (Mondal, 1997:79).

On the contrary British officials cast a very suspicious look upon the Muslims because they thought that the Muslims from whom they seized power had dreams of regaining formal political supremacy. Particularly after the 1857 revolt, Muslim situation in Indian subcontinent further worsened. It happened because the British learned that the Muslims had taken the leading role and done their best to uproot the political power of the East India Company. As a consequential effect, the British started showing distrust towards the Muslims and followed discriminatory policy upon them which further reinforced the antagonistic attitude of the Indian Muslims towards the British and their English education (Mondal, 1997:79; Peer, 1991:37-38).

The educational situation of the Muslims in Bengal became so declined that in 1871-72 academic sessions out of 1287 college going students in Bengal and Assam, the number of Muslim students was only 52 (4.02%). At that time despite Muslim majority (50.16%) in Bengal, their representation as candidates for Entrance, F.A. and Degree Level Examinations was recorded 3.8 per cent, 1.2 per cent and 1.1 per cent respectively (Hoq, 1969:36-37). It is disclosed from another statistics that in 1885 there were only 2 Honours Graduates, 9 Pass Course Graduates, 3 Law Graduates, 12 F.A. level qualified and 44 Entrance level qualified persons among the Muslims in Bengal (Sharma, 1996). As British authorities altered the administrative, economic and educational system, the situation of the Muslims in Bengal as well as in the whole of India had fallen in tremendous problem. Ultimately the Muslims lost their position and a new type of personality developed within them. Consequently the Muslims began to lose more and more of their liberal tendencies and orthodoxy became their preoccupation (Mondal, 1997:80).

Virtually the suppressions of British officials towards Muslim movements in various socio-religio-political issues made the Muslims more secluded and isolated in all matters. Thus during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries the educational level of the Muslims became significantly low in proportion to their numeral strength. It is of special note that the Muslims usually considered Arabic as divine language and Persian as essential cultural element for them. Hence, when the British administratively revoked Arabic and Persian languages and in lieu of them imposed English, the Muslims in general considered it as serious religious hurt and colossal attack on their education, culture and religion. These feelings generated hostile attitude in the minds of Muslim masses towards British rulers as well as English language. They started avoiding the opportunities provided by the British and ultimately converted into the most backward community (Mondal, 1997:80).

On the other hand, in Bengal, the dominance of Hindu elites over education and cultural life in general became so impregnable that they occupied almost all the controlling positions in administration and politics. Even in the Hooghly College which was founded in 1836 with a large endowment fund of the Muslim philanthropic Hazi Muhammad Mohsin, Hindu students established their absolute majority. In fact, this institution failed to transmit any positive change in the educational attainment of Bengali Muslims but largely attracted the Hindus. It is revealed from the enrolment registrar of the said college that in 1850, out of 409 enrolling students the number of Muslim students was only 5. Such a state of affairs had been for long a point of grievance to the Muslims in Bengal (Ahmed, 1974:12).

Nawab Abdool Luteef took a note of this grievance and vigorously pointed, "In justice to the endower, who was a Mohammedan...his money should be laid out chiefly to the advantage of his co-religionists" (Luteef, 1877:23 as quoted in Ahmed, 1974:13). He also conducted a restless movement from 1862 A.D. to 1873 A.D. for justified use of Mohsin's endowment fund for the greater interest of the Muslim community. This logical movement made the British Government aware to remove the grievance of the Muslim community on Mohsin endowment question and ultimately Mohsin's endowment fund became free from unjustified penetration by the government. Later on three other colleges were established from the profit of that fund in the Muslim dominated areas like Dhaka, Chittagonj and Rajshahi for the greater benefit of the Muslims of Bengal. It is important to note that Nawab Abdool Luteef cordially tried to remove the anti-British sentiment from Muslim minds (Alam, 1989:31).

In the year 1857, the Government of India founded a full-fledged university at Calcutta for the educational upliftment of Indian natives in general and Bengali masses in particular. But as the Hindu elites possessed almost the absolute dominance of that university, the vast Muslims of Bengal did not get the expected benefit rather they had been again fallen in qualms and remorse. To overcome this situation, the prominent Muslim leaders of Bengal started to plead for a separate educational institution. As a result, the special difficulties and obstacles that stood in the way of education and social progress of the Muslims became the subject of frequent discussion by the Government of India. Yet, no definite action was taken to promote Muslim education in Bengal for a long time.

Later on a resolution was issued by the Government of India in 1871 where Earl Mayo regretfully admitted, "so large and important a class, possessing a classical literature replete with works of profound learning and great value, and counting among its members a section specially devoted to the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge, should stand aloof from active co-operation with our educational system and should lose the advantages both material and social, which others enjoy" (Resolution of India Education Proceedings, as quoted by Ahmed, 1974:11).

Successively in the same year (1871) an initiative was taken by the Government to reform and enlarge the Madrasha system and to this end Government of Bengal submitted a report to the Government of India on the 17th August 1872. The Government of India gave general approval to the policy formulated in the said report in a resolution issued on 13th June 1873. This resolution reviewed the alarming state of Muslim education in Bengal and also the schemes submitted by the Government of Bengal to overcome the situation. After the approval of the scheme by the Government of India, George Campbell, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (1871-1874) issued a resolution on the subject of Muslim education which was declared by Nawab Bahadur Syed Amir Hossain (CIE) as "Magna Charter" of Muslim education. Actually George Campbell showed a careful interest for the growth of Muslim education in Bengal as he observed that the great Mohammedans of Bengal were especially without the means of instruction. His policy had a two-fold aim to offer a simple education to the general masses and to reform the system of education at all stages in order to make it more practical (Campbell, 1893:307 as stated in Ahmed, 1974:12).

During the second half of the nineteenth century some enlightened Muslim leaders came forward for the development of Muslim education in Bengal as well as in the whole of India. Among them Abdur Rauf, Nawab Amir Ali Khan Bahadur (1817-1879), Moulvie Abdool Luteef (1828-1893) and Syed Ameer Ali (1849-1928) were most remarkable. These four leaders directed their full attention for strengthening Muslim education within British administrative framework. Abdur Rauf's *Anjuman-i-Islam Calcutta* (1855), Nawab Amir Ali's *National Mohammedan Association* (1856), Abdool Luteef's *Calcutta Mohammedan Literary Society* (1863) and Syed Ameer Ali's *Central Mohammedan Association* (1876) played the most vital parts in moulding Muslim minds in Bengal and neighbouring areas (De, 1982:15).

It is worthy to note that Syed Ameer Ali's *Central National Mohammedan Association* (CNMA) played a very important political role in 1880's. Because it placed a memorandum before the government regarding the state of education and employment situation of the Muslims in public services and moved to the Government for its action. After the death of Abdool Luteef in 1893, this association took absolute leading but unfortunately for various reasons within the next few years the early activities of the said association had lost its urge and motion (De, 1982:15-16).

Analysis of the colonial Muslim society in Bengal also reveals that some Muslim Legal practitioners in Bengal motivated to move into action for education and modernization of the Muslim Community with the gradual loss of the said organizations (CMLS and CNMA). And ultimately they formed an association named "*Mohammedan Reform Association (MRA)*" in 1896 (De, 1982:17).

The said association published "*The Moslem Chronicle*" that played an important role for the educational development of Bengali Muslims. As an effect, an incipient middle class was forming in Bengali Muslim society at the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But the growth of middle class sustained a setback due to poor spread of English education at mass level (Mondal, 1997:85).

However, during the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century, a general consciousness was developed among the vast Indian Muslims. This time they understood their depressing position in the sphere of educational attainment, economic status, share in government services and political participation. Such awareness also inspired them to the projection of the demands of social advancements. Many enlightened Muslim leaders at this stage came forward and stretched their untiring and devoted efforts to organize Muslim movements for their expected educational growth as well as to ensure their greater emancipation.

In such a situation, Lord Curzon became the Viceroy of India on 30th December 1898, who within three months he outlined a formidable programme of reforming the educational system to a radical alteration. For the greater emancipation of the Bengali Muslims, he also initiated administrative as well as political reforms under the coverage of '*Partition of Bengal*' which after a long struggle came into force on the 16th October 1905. But due to violent opposition from a significant part of Bengali population and some other influential natives, the Government of India at last declared the 1905's promulgation of '*Partition of Bengal*' as void on 12th December 1911 (Ahmed, 1974; De, 1982).

The Muslim became sorely frustrated and strongly resented for the annulment of the '*Partition of Bengal*'. They gathered at a meeting called by Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka and presided over by Khawaja Muhammad Yusuf (the then member of Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam) on 30th December 1911 where Mohammedan representatives of Bengal recorded deep sense of regret and disappointment for the said annulment. But shortly after the territorial adjustment, the then Viceroy Lord Hardinge visited Eastern Bengal and Assam in January 1912. On the 31st January 1912, he met a deputation of the Muslims of Eastern Bengal. The Viceroy gave the Muslims assurance that their interests would be safeguarded under the new administrative set up (Ahmed, 1974:300-301).

In addition to that assurance, Lord Hardinge made the declaration that he would recommend to the Secretary of the State for the constitution of a university at Dhaka and the appointment of a special officer for education in Eastern Bengal. Prominent Hindu leaders like Ashutush Mukherjee and Dr. Rash Bihari Ghosh strongly opposed the declaration. But due to unremitting pressure from Nawab Salimullah and other influential Muslim leaders, the Government of India at last established the proposed university at Dhaka in 1921 to uphold the educational attainments of the vast Muslims of Eastern Bengal. It is an interesting note that through establishing this university the Government of India for the first time morally established that the Muslims of Bengal were lagging in education and government opportunities. But Mr. Philip Hartlog, the first Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University, pointed, "Muslims were educationally backward, they were not intellectually inferior" (Ahmed, 1974:51).

4.5. *Muslim Education in Bengal during Post-colonial Era*

The colonial rule of the British has ended in Indian subcontinent followed by the emergence of India and Pakistan as independent countries. As an inevitable consequence of this emergence, the Greater Bengal has been divided into two parts. Thus Hindu dominated western part has formed a State named West Bengal under Indian Union of States as per article 1(1) of the Indian constitution. On the other hand, the Eastern part of Bengal formerly as a province of Pakistan formed East Pakistan but has ultimately constituted the independent sovereign country Bangladesh in 1971 through a great war of liberation. So, the education of Bengali Muslims in post-colonial era should be analysed on the basis of different geo-political aspects of the said two parts.

However, it is a fact that since the ending of the British colonial rule up to a long span of time no expected change in respect of educational growth has taken place among the Muslims of Greater Bengal. Rather the educational status of Bengali Muslim masses further declined because of their poverty and governmental policies. For instances, the initial years of independent India were characterized with the withdrawal of special facilities provided to the Muslims in the field of education. On the contrary in independent Pakistan, the people of western province (presently Pakistan) were held in absolute political power and they treated the Bengali masses of the eastern province (formerly East Pakistan) as mere second class citizens. As a result, the Bengali Muslims of both the areas were fallen in tremendous pressure of administrative deprivation continued up to the later few decades. Due to such deprivations they became frustrated which acted adversely on their educational upliftment.

In fact at the last phase of the colonial rule in India, the British rulers took a keen note on educational backwardness of Indian Muslims and, therefore, they granted some privileges for the Muslims in the field of education. For West Bengal these facilities were composed of special provisions of admission of Muslim students in Hooghly College, Islamia College, Lady Braborne College and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School. But it is a matter of regret that soon after attaining independence, the Government of India had withdrawn the said facilities without providing any alternative means. Thus the lack of adequate opportunities, feelings of deprivation and fear of minority status led the Muslims of West Bengal to a general dissatisfaction and parochial tendencies in respect of their educational upliftment (Mondal, 1997:87).

History of educational growth in India reveals that from the dawn of its independence the government as well as different private organs took ample initiatives for the establishment of different educational institutions. The Government of India also sanctioned special provisions for the educational development of the backward masses belonging to the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. But it is a matter of regret that the need of educational upliftment for the backward Muslim community of West Bengal was totally overlooked and bypassed by the government. As a result, the Muslims of Bengal are altogether passing a detestable state of educational advancement. Different scholars portrayed their doleful condition. Mondal stated, "For various reasons the Muslims themselves have not come forward to identify and spell out their problems. They appear to have fallen in the vicious cycle of poverty, depression, frustration, backwardness and isolation" (Mondal, 1997:87).

The educational status of the Muslims living in pre-independent Bangladesh was more terrible due to unjustified administrative policies imposed on them by the rulers belonging to the erstwhile West Pakistan. In this respect it is worthy to note that at the time of forming Pakistan in 1947 no linguistic or cultural factors were taken into consideration, rather it was happened only on the basis of religious line between the Hindus and the Muslims. As a result, there was the obvious difficulty of establishing and maintaining understanding and cooperation between its provinces which were vastly different from each other in terms of linguistic background, cultural temperaments and geographical location. In fact a distance over 900 miles across a rival nation separated the two provinces of Pakistan.

East Pakistan was absolutely inhabited by the Bengali Speaking population while the main spoken languages of West Pakistan were Panjabi, Sindhi, Beluch and Urdu. Bengali, due to its extensive and distinguished literature was worldwide recognized as a prominent language. Yet the ruling authority in their Educational Conference of November 1947 adopted the resolution of recognizing Urdu as the *lingua franca* of Pakistan. Subsequently on 21st March 1948 Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the then Governor General of Pakistan, declared in an assembly held at Curzon Hall of Dhaka university, "Urdu, Urdu and only Urdu should be the State Language of Pakistan". The above declaration of Jinnah was the most sensitive part of long planned blue print of the West Pakistani ruling authority who in fact wanted to continue naked exploitation over vast Bengali speaking population of East Pakistan through interrupting their normal educational development as well as consciousness of self-determination.

Understanding the said filthy tricks of the then ruling authority, the vast population of East Pakistan became rigorously discontent and burst into agitation. The patriot Bengalis irrespective of their religious and political beliefs took an oath to make the declaration ineffective and establish Bengali as State Language at any cost and ultimately they formed an action committee to this end. As a part of the said oath, some self-immolating animated Bengali youngman on 21st February, 1952 violated the curfew declared by the Pakistan rulers and made slogans in favour of Bengali Language. The Pakistani Police opened fire on them and put an end to the lives of the brave Bengali sons, viz Salam, Shafiq, Rafiq, Jabbar and Barkat. The patriotic sacrifices of these celebrated souls severely strengthened and organized the consciousness of the whole Bengali nation, and due to their unsparing obstruction— the Pakistani authority at last was bound to recognize Bengali as a State Language through a bill passed in the parliament on 7th May 1954.

The then Pakistani authority once again adopted unethical tricks to keep the Bengali masses under their subjugation. For instances, the main source of earning foreign exchanges in Pakistan at those days was exporting jute and tea which were produced in East Pakistan. But the Pakistani authority never used the profits for the advancement of East Pakistan, rather those were used for the benefit of industrial growth in West Pakistan. They also followed discriminatory policy on the masses of East Pakistan in respect of their economic development, administrative recruitment and political share. Their unjustified and immoral policies adversely acted upon the educational growth of vast Bengali masses of East Pakistan (Brown, 1974: 206-209).

4.6. Muslim Women's Educational Movement in Bengal

History reveals that the wave of women's educational movement for emancipation at first originated in Europe on account of the two great revolutions, viz the Industrial Revolution (1769-1825) and the French Revolution (1789-1815). After the World War-I, the said wave gained special momentum by the process of political and social evolutions and soon it spread throughout the world (Akanda, 1992:5). Accordingly the movements for women's emancipation through education took place in Muslim societies of Indian sub-continent. But the most interesting fact is that in the context of this sub-continent, both the male and female Muslim scholars and social reformers equally contributed at the elementary phases of the said movements.

For instances, in 1896, Shamsul Ulema Moulvi Mumtaz Ali started from Lahore the epoch-making weekly journal named *Tehzibun-Niswan* for the women. The editor of this journal was his wife Mohammadi Begum. In 1908, this couple originated the weekly *Phool* for children edited by Miss Nazrul Baqar, a teenager, who was educated by an English governess. During the same year Allama Rashidul Khairi began to publishing the famous *Ismat* from Delhi that mainly depicted the problems and sufferings of Muslim women in their day to day life. Another young lawyer named Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah who was a former student of Sir Syed Ahmed started the monthly journal *Khatoon* in 1904. This journal strongly advocated the abolition of the strict purdah practices prevailing in Muslim society at those days. He also opened the first English School for Muslim women at Aligarh in 1906. For these deeds Sheikh Abdullah faced tremendous opposition from his co-religionists and even from the old fashioned Hindu gentry of Aligarh (Ansari, 1986:195-197).

However, the educational movements for the emancipation of Muslim women belonging to Bengali society started in 1920's. It is a matter of great admiration that in spite of the rigid social customs and other restrictions a few emancipated women cooperated in the progress of female education. Their cooperation largely strengthened the growth of this essential social need. Those sagacious women firstly emancipated themselves with the lights of education. Then they firmly entered into the national and literary functions and made remarkable contribution in raising the social and economic status of their sisters who were living in seclusion and under the subjection of the males. Among the Muslim ladies of Greater Bengal the worth mentioning names in this context are: Bibi Taherunnesa, Karimunnesa Khanam (1855-1926), Nawab Faizunnesa (1834-1903), Begum Ferdous Mahal, Khujista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardiya (1874-1919), Begum Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) etc.

Bibi Taherunnesa as a devoted activist of women educational movement published an inspiring article on the issue of "Need and Benefit of Women Education" in the renowned Bengali periodicals '*Bambodhini*' in 1865. Karimunnesa Khanam as a wholehearted promoter of female education attentively tried to remove the stagnant subordinate position of women of her days by developing their consciousness through education. Begum Faizunnesa as a prominent patron of women education founded a Girls' School in Comilla in 1873 and for unparalleled generosity she received the title of Nawab in 1889 from the British Government in India. Begum Ferdous Mahal (the wife of Nawab of Murshidabad) as a devoted supporter of women education founded a Girls' School at Calcutta in 1897 (Alam, 1989:114).

Khujista Akhtar Banu (the mother of Hossain Shahid Suhrawardy) was the first noble lady of her days receiving the highest university degree; and as a mark of her dedication towards expansion of female education, she established a Girls' School at Midnapore in 1909. Begum Rokeya was a renowned publicist and activist for female education who established a Girls' School at Calcutta in 1911 and selflessly worked throughout her life for the emancipation of women. This self-educated noble lady on account of her glorious sacrifices was recognized as the 'Pioneer of Bengali Muslim Women's Emancipation'.

These enlightened and dignified women rightly realized that women should be developed as entire human beings and must possess dignified position in all spheres of life, familial, social as well as national. As strict purdah system created obstacles in their way, they had to wage the war of liberation from inside the courtyard. In their demands for equality with men they were also equipped with the Muslim Personal Law. They only had to say, "Let us have the rights granted to us by the Quran and the Prophet". Not unexpectedly, they had to face stiff opposition from the conservative Muslims, especially from the so-called fanatic ulemas (Alam, 1989:113-114; Sheela Raj, 1986:119).

As the movements for the emancipation of Muslim women were closely associated with the gesture of modernization, those received sympathy and support from the modernist people. In the twenties and thirties of the twentieth century, the movements did not raise questions about equal status and opportunities of women, rather those were mainly concerned with the advocacy of women's literacy. The questions of gender equity came up at the later phase of the movements.

Roughly the movement for women's emancipation in Bengal can be divided into three phases. The first phase (1910-1947) was focussed on undivided Bengal that dealt with the problems of rigid 'Purdah' observance and the demand for women's literacy and school enrolment. The 1920's and 1930's were the period of the 'Khilafat Movement' and the development of Muslim nationalism in India. The movement for the emancipation of Turkish women and other Middle-Eastern women which was going on in the twenties and thirties inspired Muslim modernists in Bengal to agitate for women's emancipation at home.

The second phase (1947-70) of the Muslim women's movement in Bengal was mainly centered on erstwhile East Pakistan that saw the growth of women's organizations in urban areas of the then East Pakistan. During this period, Muslim women substituted Hindu women in all the women organizations of East Pakistan (formerly East Bengal). In this phase, though women's organizational activities were increased, no recognizable movement for the emancipation of women was evident other than activating some important measures in favour of women by amendment of 'Shariah' through promulgation of Muslim Family Law Ordinance in 1961.

We see a large number of women were emancipated in this phase, but their emancipation was the result of the general process of modernization and not due to any feminist movement started by the women. Compared to the first phase, there was also less of women's movement in the second phase. The most important women organization that developed during this phase was 'All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA)' (Jahan, 1975:21-26).

The ongoing feminist movement in Bangladesh that has been started in 1972 with the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign country may be identified as the third phase of Bengal women's movement. This phase may also be marked for growing awareness amongst women about women's problems though no concrete programme or organisational leadership has yet come forward. The post liberation period saw a scramble by Bengali women to move into the positions of organizational leaderships left vacant with the departure of non-Bengali women. In this phase APWA was renamed Bangladesh Mahila Samity and a number of women forums have sprung up with or without branches on both local and national issues. The leading women organization in this context are: Mahila Parishad, Lekhika Sangha, Women For Women, UBINIG, Narigrantha Prabortana, Proshika, Nijera Kori and Nari Pashha etc.

A number of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) as well as Voluntary Organisations (VOs) funded by foreign donors are also actively working for the development of women's situation in Bangladesh. Almost all the leading political parties in Bangladesh have women branch. Currently, female leaders head both the ruling Awami League and its principal opposition— Bangladesh Nationalist Party. They are holding the offices of Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition respectively. Both stand on the strength of mass movement which is very meaningful politically and has important implication for change and shift in the political attitudes as well as aptitude. On the whole, in Bangladesh women irrespective of religion are entering more and more in all spheres of social functions and even in those areas formerly restricted for them (Jahan, 1975:27; Akanda, 1992:10).

4.7. Begum Rokeya and Her Contribution

India produced several dignified, altruistic and scholarly women of which very few are originated from the Muslim community. Roquiah Khatun who is now popularly known as Begum Rokeya (1880-1932) is one of those few women. Due to her cordial endeavour the history of women's liberation among the Muslims of Greater Bengal entered into an epoch-making phase. Really, this Royal Lady selflessly contributed a lot to the development of Muslim society of Bengal. She belonged to such a period of Indian history when India had just started to play an active role to shake off the colonial rule of the British. During her times the Indian Muslims were far behind the Hindus and other communities in education, political participation, economic activities and changing modern attitudes. Particularly the educational condition of Muslim women belonging to Bengal was so depressed that some scholars pointed, "The idea of education as an avenue of social progress did not percolate down to common Muslim men and women. Indoor education of Muslim girls through lady tutors and learned ulemas was common only to the aristocrat families where common Muslim girls were far from such opportunities" (Mondal and Begum, 1999:234).

In such a vulnerable situation the movements for women's emancipation in Bengal was started by Begum Rokeya who dedicated her entire life to expand education among the girls and women of Muslim society. The interesting fact is that this noble lady herself received no formal education besides being tutored at home in classical learning up to an elementary level. Yet, she rightly realised that time befitting modern education could ensure overall emancipation of women by enabling them to achieve economic independence and renounce strict purdah observance.

So, first of all she went ahead and stepped into the so long prohibited domain of modern western education and thus enriched herself by acquiring the valuable jewels from there. Then she paid her full attention towards organizing movement for education and social reform for the benefit of Muslim women. Ultimately she crossed all the hurdles and set herself towards accomplishment of her long cherished dreams i.e. emancipation of her fellow sisters and compatriots from the ignorance, illiteracy and all forms of social injustice done by patriarchy and fundamentalism (ESHON, 1992:6).

For the purpose of motivating Muslim masses towards female education, she wrote a lot about the new social order that was emerging at her time. She had some able collaborators like Begum Morium, Begum Shakina, Begum Farooque, Begum Sultana Mowaidzada, Begum Shamsun Nahar Mahmood etc. They became enlightened by dint of her close cordial association and virtuous teachings and worked with her in organizing the munificent movement for the emancipation of women (Ibrahim et al, 1993).

Begum Rokeya was born in an aristocratic landlord family on 9th December 1880 at Pairabandh, a village under the district of Rangpur of undivided Bengal (presently under Bangladesh). The name of her father is Zahiruddin Mohammad Abu Ali Saber who was a learned man and respectable person having good command in Arabic, Persian, Urdu and English in addition to his native language Bengali. Rokeya had two brothers and two sisters born of the same mother. But her father insisted only her brothers to learn Arabic and Persian as well as Urdu and Bengali and later on sent them to St. Xaviers College in Calcutta to study English in order to enter the Civil Service.

It is relevant to note that Rokeya's father was aware of the need to educate his sons to meet the changed circumstances, but he paid no heed to educate his daughters what might be normally expected from a literate and aristocrat person like him. Actually, Zahiruddin's family like other aristocratic Muslim families of that time was completely conservative where strict purdah system was considered as a prestigious tradition and sending the girls to school or educating them other than basic learning for religious practices were highly objectionable. As a result, Rokeya and her sisters were brought up in strict seclusion within the four walls of their houses without any provision of formal education. Rokeya's elder sister, Karimunnesa, learned Bengali from her brother, but when the relatives caught her reading, they criticized her and married her off at a young age.

Rokeya was also an avid reader, but cautioned by the bitter experience of Karimunnesa, she adopted very careful steps to continue her learnings. Incidentally, she had an ally in her elder brother, Ibrahim Saber, who used to teach her both Bengali and English at dead of nights when rest of the family members were fallen asleep. Actually Ibrahim Saber was very much in favour of women education and he desired that intelligent Rokeya should continue her study. So, he arranged Rokeya's marriage to one of his acquaintances, Sayyed Shakawat Hussain, who was a civil servant and also a firm supporter of female education. Shakawat Hussain was a widower of thirty when he married sixteen years Rokeya in 1896. Yet their married life was extremely happy one. As Shakawat Hussain was highly pleased by the literary of Rokeya, he encouraged her literary talent and also urged her mix with the educated Hindu and Christian women of the town (Minault, 1998:256-257).

Shakawat Hussain also inspired his wife to read widely and to express her views in written form. Being influenced from such encouragement Rokeya in 1903 in a Bengali Women Magazine of Calcutta published her first article which advocated against women's seclusion. In this context it is worthy to note that Rokeya never stood against modest behaviour and polite dressing for women; she herself observed purdah in the manner prescribed in *Al-Quran*, but she strongly criticized the ludicrous customs of purdah system prevailing in Muslim society. She expressed her views against Burkha and bulky clothing imposed to women that blocked and hindered their normal movements, transformed them into well protected luggage while travelling in general transports, and prevented them from crying out in case of fire, and bound them to be incinerated rather than be rescued by the strangers. So, she wrote, "I am not against the rules of purdah as prescribed by our religion but I condemn the conventional rigidity of the system, which is neither sanctioned by the Quran nor approved by the Sunnah."

Actually, she was in favour of women's participation in various social activities by maintaining their modesty and chastity as approved by classical Islam. But she observed quite an opprobrious picture in the society in respect of purdah observance for women. Her pointed observation and sharp feelings about the prevailing custom of strict purdah observance by means of veiling or seclusion leads her to write the feminist utopian fantasy 'Sultana's Dream' in 1905. In this capricious short story she presented an excellent vision of an imaginary ladyland where women were the rulers, handled all the traditionally male jobs, and kept their entire menfolk in seclusion by means mardanas as opposed to zenanas for doing jobs as homemakers.

She also described the ladyland as an egalitarian state where the streets are passed inside the flower gardens, cooking is done by concentrated solar heat, transports are flying machines, fields are cultivated by means of electricity, and religion is one of truth and love. Her husband, the first reader of the manuscript of *Sultana's Dream*, pronounced it 'a terrible revenge'. Indeed he was very impressed and sent it for publishing in a Madras-based English periodical and the magazine published it at once.

Unfortunately Rokeya's beloved husband, a genuine supporter of female education, had severe diabetes in an early age; and he began to lose his eyesight in 1907. In 1909, realising that he had no expectation to live long, he urged his wife to start a girls' school at Bhagalpur and gave her Rs. 10,000 for this purpose in addition to the Mahr amount. Ultimately in the same year he died and Rokeya founded a girls' school at Bhagalpur to perpetuate the memory of her husband. The school was named Shakawat Hussain Memorial Girls' School and started with only five girls. But due to violent opposition of the so-called orthodox local masses and conspiracy of her stepdaughter's husband she was bound to close the school in 1910 and move to Calcutta immediately.

But she was so eager and devoted towards expanding female education that as a concrete expression of her convictions, she re-established "Shakawat Memorial Girls' School" with only eight students on 11th March 1911 in a rented house of Calcutta situated at 13 Wali Ullah Lane. Her selfless and great initiative was published with high importance in *The Mussalman*, the most remarkable Muslim patronizing fortnightly of those days.

The Mussalman in its Friday, 31 March, 1911 issue illustrated "We are glad to announce that Mrs. Sakhawat Hossain has already translated her proposal of starting a girls' school into action and that the school was already opened on the 16th of this month. Strict purdah is maintained both at school as well as when girls are conveyed to and from it. She has already made enormous sacrifices for the cause of female education and will, as the reader is aware, she devoted the rest of her life to the actual management and conduct of the institution she has opened... Her pupils are expected not only to become literate but good women too. We trust the Mohammedan public in Calcutta will not lose such an opportunity of educating and training their daughters and sisters (as quoted in Alam, 1989:112-113).

As an affluent widow Rokeya had enough financial independence to overcome initial resistance against her girls' school. But unexpectedly the bank in which she had deposited her inheritance fell in bankruptcy and failed to refund her deposited money. So, Rokeya faced tremendous economic hardship and tried to find patrons (Minault, 1998: 258). Finally she received financial support from a lot of patrons. Among the patrons and well wishers, the remarkable names are Nawab Syed Samsul Huda, Judge Amin Ahmed, G. M. Kashemi, Nawab Baruddin Haider, B. M. Malbari. Aga Khan, Mrs. P.K. Roy, Mrs. Hakam, Mrs. Sakina Chowdhury, Lady Chamesford, Lady Karmichael, Abdul Karim Zamal, Maulana Mohammad Ali, Sher-e-Bangla A. K.Fazlul Hoq, Justice Syed Sarfuddin, Ahmed, Syed Ahmed Ali, Waliul Islam, Moulavi Abdul Karim, Binoy Bhusan Sarker, Mojibur Rahman, Nawab Sirazul Islam, Sir Abdur Rhaim, Nawab Nabab Ali Chowdhury, Syed Hasan Imam, Sultan Jehan Begum and Sorojini Naidu etc.

It is known that Sorojini Naidu was so charmed and satisfied with Rokeya's deed that even from sickbed she expressed her gratitude and wrote, "Will you allow a stranger like me to write and tell you from my sickbed how greatly I have sympathized with your brave work for several years, and how deeply I have admired your self sacrifice and devotion in not only founding but so ably sustaining your work of education for Muslim girls. Need I say how proud I am, when any sister of mine, Hindu or Muslim comes forward to do such patriotic Work?" (Alam: 116-17, 128).

However, by dint of Rokeya's cordial, selfless and restless efforts, within three years the number of girls in Shakawat Memorial Girls' School rose to 39 and in 1916 it exceeded 100. In 1927 the school upgraded to junior level and later on it became a full-fledged high school. In 1931 a batch of girls from this school for the first time appeared at the entrance examination under Calcutta University and accomplished very satisfactory result. It is pertinent to say that being convinced by the result of the school, the government at last took over the charge of the school on 19th December 1935. At present it is a famous Girls' High School in Calcutta, located at 3 Lord Sinha Road. This institution has been very successful in producing innumerable good students both from Muslim and Non Muslim communities (Alam, 1989: 115-117, Mondal, 1999:236-237).

Besides setting up the Girls' school, Rokeya was active in organizing the *Anjuman-i-Khawateen-i-Islam* in Calcutta in 1916 which was essentially meant to draw out Muslim women from traditional families. This organisation made a great contribution in promoting conscious and interest of the poor Muslim women towards education, child-care and hygiene.

Hence Rokeya was not only an educationalist, but also undoubtedly a social activist, a committed and dignified publicist. She contributed her entire knowledge and energy into a career of active social reformer through writing, lecturing and organising groups for social action. She also travelled extensively throughout the country for delivering lectures and attending conferences with a view to helping her social and educational mission. She carried on social work and activities staying at Bagalpur, Calcutta, Ghatsila, Aligarh and other places. As a writer she was very radical and courageous with a brilliant analytical insight to depict the position of Muslim women.

She wrote a good number of articles, novels and comics on social issues and women's problems with a view to removing the orthodox prejudices in which the Muslim society was then immersed. In fact, she was an 'observer participant' who wrote from her personal experience, observation and judgement. She perfectly examined the educational and social backwardness of Muslim women in Bengal of her time and delineated it in her writings. Through her literary works she carefully made scathing attacks on unequal relationship between men and women and propagated the need of women's emancipation. Among the best of her literary contributions are Matichur (named after an Indian Sweetmeat), Sultana's Dream (with Bengali version as Sultanar Sapna), Aborodh Bashini (Dweller of Harem), Narir- Adhikar (Women's Right), Nari Sristi (Creation of Women), Ardhangani (A half of ones corporeal entity), Strijatir Abonati (Downfall of Women) Sugrihini (Good Housewife), Niriho Bangalee (innocent Bengali), Unnatir Pathe (Towards Development), Lukano Ratan (Hidden Jewel), Educational Ideals for the Modern Indian Girls, Subeh Sadek (The Very Dawn) etc.

She rightly pointed that Muslim women are backward and suffering from a lot of disabilities due to their isolation, seclusion and ignorance owing to lack of education on general subjects and religious injunctions as well. In her writings she talked about the existing inequality, unfair means and prejudices of the society towards women and questioned validity of the subordinate position of Muslim women in the light of true Islamic prescriptions. She also raised her solid coherent voice against all these conventional humiliating practices imposed upon the Muslim women which were neither sanctioned by *Al-Quran* nor by *Al-Sunnah*. She strongly advocated that girls should be properly taught and trained and women's role should be recognized and integrated in social process.

In her famous article *Strijatir Abonati* she patiently pointed the causes of downfall of women, and to help the solution she urged upon them saying, "We must have desire to go side by side with men in this world and believe that we are not slaves. We must be ready to do anything that will make us equal to men. If we can achieve the equality by independently earning our livelihood, we must do that. Why should we not do what we can? Haven't we our heads? Legs? What do we not possess? Can't we earn our living with the same labour that we have to expend in our houses?"

Thus the writings of Begum Rokeya not only portrayed the real picture of the plights of Muslim women of her time, but also distinctly played a very great role as a catalyst in the social liberation of the distressed women as well as in the reconstruction of the greater Muslim society during the first half of the twentieth century (Minault, 1998: 259, Mondal, 1999: 233-239).

Apart from those dignified roles, Begum Rokeya might be regarded as a true nationalist and patriot. Because she expressed her resentment against the colonial rule of the British and their policy of breaking Hindu-Muslim unity seeding and spreading communal poison in Indian soil. She may also be regarded for her non-communal feelings and expressions. Indeed, she is the only feminist amongst the leadership of women's emancipation movement. None of other women coming after could be compared with her.

But unfortunately this royal lady had a very short span of life as she passed away only at age of 52 on 9th December 1932 and was buried in a small graveyard located at Sukchar near Sodhpur Railway Station of the district of North West Bengal. Her sudden death though caused a serious setback to the growth of Women's emancipatory movements, hopefully, yet, some of her followers like Samsun Nahar Mahmood (1908-1964) and Begum Sufia Kamal (1901-1999) in Bangladesh and Mukshuda Khatun in West Bengal spread her thought and ideas and movements to a greater extent. As a result, an educated section of Muslim women crystallized in greater Bengal which gradually grew up in the second quarter of the twentieth century (Mondal, 1999: 241).

4.8. *Observation*

Bengal contacted with Islam before the commencement of Muslim rule in Bengal. Muslim Sufi Saints played the most important role in this respect. Later on, with the conquest of Muslim rulers various social, religious and political factors expedited the growth and spread of Islam in Bengal. The common people, particularly the low caste Hindus who were misbehaved and exploited by the higher caste Hindus were attracted by virtue of its monotheism, justice and equality that led their large-scale conversion towards this religion. Thus Bengal Muslims are some heterogeneous groups of various socio-ritual backgrounds.

The advent of Muslim rule during medieval period was a turning point of Indian history. Through this rule the immigrant Muslims brought with them a rich cultural heritage from Arabia and other places of West Asia which enriched the Indian societies by influencing its socio-cultural process in various ways. Though religious bias was prevalent in the context of education, the Muslim rulers and scholars significantly contributed in various fields of learning.

During the rule of Alauddin Hossain Shah (1493-1605) and the greatest Mughal emperor Akbar (1556-1605), education received a great impetus. They were wholehearted patrons of learning and learned men. Their patronage drew the attention of many distinguished scholars to their courts. Their fundamental policy was mainly to increase the knowledge of arts and sciences, and to this end, they liberally patronized learned scholars irrespective of race, religion, caste and creed. Various secular subjects were widely taught and developed under their patronage.

The brisk expansion of British dominion in Bengal as well as in greater India during the early phase of colonial era brought a critical change in political, social and educational spheres of Indian society. It is because the British had the intention to rule over this subcontinent by any means and that is why they introduced learning for English language in colonial India.

The Muslims of Bengal ordinarily considered Arabic as divine language and Persian as essential cultural element for them. But the British rulers administratively revoked these languages and in lieu of them imposed English. Bengal Muslims became annoyed of the British policy and refrained themselves from admitting their wards into English schools while the others gladly accepted the said policy.

Warren Hastings in response of Muslim appeals founded Calcutta Madrasha in 1781. But the most depressing fact is that due to violent opposition of a group of fanatic Ulemas, English classes were not opened there until 1829. Due to administrative inefficiency as well as shortage of fund from the part of government, Calcutta Madrasha did not run well and in fact it became a dwelling place for the lascivious.

On the other hand, the dominance of Hindu elites over education and cultural life became so impregnable that they occupied almost all the key positions in administration and politics. Even in the Hooghly College which was founded with the endowment fund of a Muslim philanthropic, Hindu students established their absolute majority. Nawab Abdool Luteef took a note of it and cordially tried to remove the anti-British sentiment from Muslim minds and due to his effort colleges were established in Dhaka, Chittagonj and Rajshahi for the greater benefit of the Muslims of Bengal.

During the second half of the nineteenth century some enlightened Muslim leaders came forward for the development of Muslim education in Bengal. Due to their motivation a general consciousness was developed among the vast Indian Muslims and they started movement for '*Partition of Bengal*' which was initially attained in 1905. But due to violent opposition from the other part Government of India lastly declared the promulgation of '*Partition of Bengal*' as void in 1911 and as a supplement to uphold Muslim education of Eastern Bengal established a university at Dhaka in 1921.

The colonial rule of the British has ended in Indian subcontinent followed by the emergence of India and Pakistan as independent countries. Yet detestable condition of Muslim women living in Greater Bengal with regard to their education was continued up to a long time. However, positive changes have been occurred in their position due to constitutional safeguards for the minorities in India as well as emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign country.

Women have occupied a significant part of Greater Indian Society since a historical past and they used to enjoy very high status. They had access in every field of social life where they were treated as men's friend and their co-worker but never their inferior. In case of education, a daughter was not discriminated from the son. There was no seclusion of women and they used to move freely in the society. Even in the religious functions, they occupied a prominent position. But after the ending of Vedic period, the position of women deteriorated considerably when they were begun to be treated as appendage of men with a distinct and meekly accepted conception of their family duties and obligations.

In the medieval period the Muslim rulers changed customs, traditions and age-old established rules of the society to the end of justice, but unfortunately the issue of justified women status was overlooked by them. The British rulers too, primarily followed the policy of non-interference over the social and religious lives of the people of India. As a result, women went down imperceptibly in social status during the first stage of their rule. The major part of British rule in India may be noted as a curse for the Muslims in general and for rural Muslim women in particular in respect of their educational growth.

Unfortunately the decline in Muslim women education in Bengal continued throughout the past centuries and even up to a long extent of post-independence. According to 1991 Census Report of West Bengal, female literacy is notably lower in those districts where the number of Muslim population is comparatively higher. It is difficult to have a retrospect on Muslim women situation in Bangladesh as no study on this particular issue has been accomplished there till today. Yet it is revealed from pacifistic observation that situation of women in Bangladesh in general is depressing.

However, we can rightly admire a few Muslim women of Greater Bengal who made remarkable contribution in raising the social and economic status of their sisters who were living in seclusion and under the subjection of the males. The worth mentioning names in this context are: Bibi Taherunnesa, Karimunnesa Khanam, Nawab Faizunnesa, Begum Ferdous Mahal, Khujista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardiya, Begum Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain. But among the lists Begum Rokeya on account of her glorious sacrifices may be recognized as the 'Pioneer of Muslim Women's Emancipation in Bengal'.