

PREFACE

According to Amartya Sen, “Inequality between men and women is one of the most crucial disparities in many societies, and this is particularly so in India.” From my childhood I observed in the village areas many social injustices, inequalities, oppression and the like towards women. My interest in women’s history started when I attended one seminar of Geraldine Forbes, former professor, State University of New York in 2005 in the department of History, University of North Bengal. As a woman this is my quest and inspiration to select such type of theme of the research. My interest in women of colonial Bengal started while reading the documents of the women’s associations that came to represent the voice of progressive Bengali nay Indian women. I found that the nineteenth century Bengal was a time of great intellectual excitement. Accepted values were closely questioned as part of the reaction to changes brought about by the imposition of colonial rule. There were heated debates among some personalities and leading intellectuals on the issues such as widow burning, child marriage, the status of women, and the merits and demerits of female education.

It is a fact that, at this stage some of the enlightened people began to think over such issues and initiated reform movement and obviously the ‘question of women’ was a prime factor of this movement. But the initiatives undertaken by the thinkers and reformers were not supposed to be sufficient and very likely some women personalities came forward to play some important role to strengthen the voices of women against social injustice. Logically, the women sought resort to the foundation of women associations so that their voices could be ventilated against all odds that impaired the status of women. This background resulted positively and a huge number of women associations came to the platform with a voice to challenge the age old injustice done to the women of Bengal nay India.

Yet, little scholarly work has so far been done to assess this contribution. But it is necessary to evaluate minutely the role and impact of these associations on the social, political and cultural development of women in Bengali society. This work is concerned with the founding, growth and activities of the women’s associations. It makes an appraisal of the role of the associations in women’s development from 1865-1943. It highlights the associational efforts in the fields of education, search their power and authority from votive force, socio-political rights and empowerment and other related issues. A major objective is to examine the changing nature of the programmes undertaken by the women’s associations

and to investigate how far these associations were successful in achieving the contemporary needs of women.

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