

**INVESTIGATING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:
A STUDY ON THE WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS OF COLONIAL BENGAL
(1865-1943)**

A Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal

For the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

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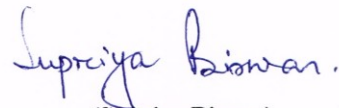
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August, 2016

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled *INVESTIGATING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON THE WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS OF COLONIAL BENGAL (1865-1943)* has been prepared by me under the supervision of Dr. Ichhimuddin Sarkar (I.Sarkar), Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal. No part of this dissertation has been prepared on the basis of any academic work or award as such done previously.



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She has carried out the work at the department of History, University of North Bengal.

Incidentally the candidate is under the category of New Ordinance.

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INVESTIGATING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON THE WOMEN

ASSOCIATIONS OF COLONIAL BENGAL (1865-1943)

ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem

Women movement and women power has had a long tradition in the history of India. In the traditional era, women power was recognized in the *Shakti* cult. But this perception was not merely a reaction against male domination or oppression or even a negative approach in seeking power and authority from a votive force. This idea did not even comprehend women to be subordinate or inferior in the terminology of the gender system. Women themselves have ever been considered as the source of unlimited power. This tradition was particularly strong in Bengal where women have always enjoyed a special reverence.

In spite of the above perception and also due to outstanding efforts of a few enlightened personalities like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Henry Vivian Derozio, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda and even Mahatma Gandhi for the emancipation of women, the general condition of women in colonial India nay Bengal was far from satisfactory. It was 'gender', but class and caste also did make differences. The social process linked class, caste and gender question together and particularly this is applicable in the case of women of the middle class society. All these factors combined to produce an unenviable scene of Indian society and Bengal was not an exception. But the women voices were not so silent as it appears to be. There were women who sought to build the self-esteem in the society and through various movements countered the despite and hopelessness that prevailed among the women folk. They developed strategies and political forums not only to re-establish identity but to dictate and divert the policy of the colonial Government for their cause. Because the goal of empowerment and of course dignity in the society largely depended on the help and co-operation of the Government as well as to legitimize their rights in the society. But unless and until a certain position was reached, and the women could attain minimum strength, they were unable to influence the state policy to their desired goal. Fact remains that the colonial Government was either silent or unwilling or unable to alter cultural patterns and social psyche that put women inferior in the family or in the socio-economic structure of the then society. This situation may be taken as a background to urge "community organizations, particularly women organizations" to mobilize public

opinion and strengthen social protest against oppressive institutions like polygamy, dowry, child-marriage and to mount a campaign for the legal rights of women. Thus, the uplift of women in colonial Bengal and even that of India became a joint tusk of educated Indians and the Government (i.e. Colonial Government) which facilitated socio-cultural movements of women in colonial Bengal. Thus, a background was created for the emergence and growth of organized and institutional movements for the emancipation of Indian women from the age-old superstitions and injustice which made them victims of the circumstances. Thus in the above trend the women of Bengal became conscious about the repressive social practices and came forward to redress their grievances through various means and political programmes.

Bengali women's political participation and social protests, however, were expressed in the form of attending public meetings, forming socio-political associations, joining political demonstration and so on which not only brought to light the nature of social injustice against Indian women but also had their signals of protest on the alien power for the high-handedness against the Indians. There were, in fact, many socio-political associations and from the emergence of the *Brahmika Samaj* (1865) down to the formation of the *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (1943), we come across women associations of various names to come together to highlight women issues.

Keeping in mind the above background of women problem and the mechanism to demonstrate protest for the cause of emancipation, the proposed dissertation is a humble attempt to present a history of Bengali women who expressed their grievances through some associations. The dissertation is supposed to start from 1865, the year when *Brahmika Samaj* (1865) came into existence and end with the foundation of the *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (1943).

Within this period women issues came into light in these associations namely *Bamabodhini Sabha* (1863), *Brahmika Samaj* (1865), *Banga Mahila Samaj* or *Bengal Ladies Association* (1879), *Arya Nari Samaj* (1879), *Sakhi Samiti* (1886), *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* (1910), *Anjumane Khwatine Islam* (1916), *Nari Siksha Samiti* (1919), *Bangiya Nari Samaj* or *Bengali Women's Association* (1921), *Saroj Nalini Dutt Nari Mangal Samiti* (8th February, 1925), *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* (1929), *Bengal Congress Mahila Sangha* (1938) and so on and then expressed their views in different forms and dimensions. At the stage the *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti*, established in 1943, had her multipurpose activities

in inspiring the women problems for their emancipation and also to record voice of protest against injustice prevailed at that time.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The present dissertation “*INVESTIGATING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY ON THE WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS OF COLONIAL BENGAL (1865-1943)*” deals with women associations which emerged in Bengal and fought for the cause of women who were the victims of inequality and social injustice. Making of women associations particularly in Bengal and the activities of women through different associations forms a fascinating study. In the nineteenth century a few enlightened Bengali social reformer took the initiatives to remove the disgraceful life of women of Bengal who suffered by the age long evil customs of the society. As a result of nineteenth century reform movement vis-a-vis gender consciousness, the women of Bengal were inspired to establish their own associations to search their power and authority from a votive force and after that socio-political rights and empowerment. So, the study aims at bringing to lime light the changing pattern of the women of Bengal through their associations.

Scope of the Study

The period of the study starts from 1865, a significant year in the history of colonial Bengal. It was in this year that, the first women association for the women named *Brahmika Samaj* was established and this event by itself constituted an important stage in the growth of women associations of colonial Bengal. This year also witnessed that, for the first time Bengali women especially Brahma women participated in that association from their confinements of the four walls and in that sense, it was a revolutionary step in the history of colonial Bengal. The present dissertation ends at 1943, of course another significant year which rather legitimized the voice of women in history and obviously signified a turning point in Bengal for the cause of women empowerment. So, the study covers a period of nearly one hundred years i.e. from 1865-1943.

Survey of Literature

Regarding the thesis literary documents and materials are available but there are some limitations of the document. A few primary sources have been utilized. The following reports, contemporary periodicals, journals, magazines, memoirs, autobiographies, original

writings, newspapers throw some light on the theme. Some of the examples of this category are:

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Methodology of the Study

The modern scientific historical and analytical research methodology has been adopted to construct the present dissertation. Both the primary and secondary source materials have been collected from various archives, libraries, centre for women’s studies etc. A thorough checking and cross checking of the source materials have been made to know their authenticity. Interoperation of the sources was made impartially and impassionedly.

Chapterization of Thesis

For the presentation of the different aspects of the history of women associations of colonial Bengal, the thesis has been organized and arranged in the following eight chapters including introduction and conclusion.

CHAPTER- I : Introduction

CHAPTER- II : Nineteenth Century Social Reform and Women Question of Bengal

CHAPTER- III : Gender Consciousness – i) Impact of Western Education

ii) Role of Contemporary Periodicals

CHAPTER- IV : Women Associations in the Making

CHAPTER- V : Women's Associations and the Beginning of Women Participation in Politics

(i) First phase (1865-1896) - Search for Power and Authority from a Votive Force.

(ii) Second phase (1897-1943) -Search for Socio-Political Rights and Empowerment.

CHAPTER- VI : Women Associations of Bengal and Its Interaction with Other Sister Associations of India

CHAPTER- VII : Women of Bengal in the Era of Self Identity

CHAPTER- VIII : Conclusion

University of North Bengal

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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.

University of North Bengal

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Date-

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The study titled *Investigating Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: A Study on the Women Associations of Colonial Bengal (1865-1943)* is an outcome of a research work to be submitted for Ph.D. degree in the University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur, Darjeeling, West Bengal. The present work is a study which neither may claim full credit for new discoveries nor is a major breakthrough in the study of the *Investigating Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: A Study on the Women Associations of Colonial Bengal (1865-1943)*. It thus stands as an attempt to research the subject, which in some points is fully introductory in nature and shows some scope of study in future. Constructive criticism in this respect is always welcome.

Acknowledgement of help is not a routine affair, but is a sincere and genuine recognition of gratitude to those who have help and support in the entire process at the different levels in course of the study. At the outset, I have no words to express my deep sense gratitude and acknowledge my ineptness to my revered Guide and Supervisor Dr. Ichhimuddin Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal, who, in spite of his heavy commitment, has taken care for guiding and encouraging me at every stage of this work. As a real supervisor, he has not only influenced my thinking in shaping the research-plan and objectives in a systematic manner, but also helped to resolve many tangled issues by authoring valuable suggestions.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to all the faculty members of the department of History, University of North Bengal for providing me necessary help and assistance.

I have received immense help from the staff of National Archives of India, New Delhi, Indian Institute of Advance Study Centre (IIAS), Shimla, Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, New Delhi, National Library, Kolkata, State Archives, Kolkata, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata, Centre for Women's Study, University of Jadavpur, Centre for Women's Study, University of North Bengal, Central Library, University of North Bengal, Departmental Seminar Library (History), University of North Bengal, North Bengal State Library, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, Central Library of Gour Mahavidyalaya, Malda, West Bengal, District Library, Malda, West Bengal and so on. I must thank all the staff, officials and members of these academic and research institutions.

I am extremely grateful to the University Grant Commission for giving me the opportunity to enjoy the study leave for two years (August 2014-July 2016) in terms of Faculty Development Programme (FDP) to complete this research work.

I must express my indebtedness to my college authority and specially Dr. Prantosh Sen, ex-Principal of this college who stood by me in various circumstances and facilitated me to enjoy the leave as well as to carry on the present research work. I would like to thank my colleagues particularly Dr. Pulak Kumar Kundu, Dr. Chandra Ghosh, Sri. Krishna Mohan Mandal for their encouragement to complete my work.

Next, I am also thankful to Anjashi Sarkar (Sona), Madam Mrs. Ayesha Sarkar and friend Roshani Rai who have ever been inspired me psychologically and I do believe in many ways their encouragement helped me in various situation.

Above all, I am thankful to my grand-mother Smt. Sahachari Biswas and parents Sri. Sunil Biswas and Smt. Jyoti Bala Biswas who have been so helpful while this work was ongoing. Though a simple word of thanks will perhaps not be enough to them, because their contribution in my life is unending. My indebtedness to my family is indeed hard to acknowledge properly. My elder brother Sri. Sujoy Biswas, younger brother Sankar Biswas, sister Sima Biswas and husband Goutam Sarkar also helped and inspired me in many ways. The list would be incomplete if I do not mention my baby (son) Abhik Sarkar. When I got the study leave he was just one year old and for my engagement to study I did not care him satisfactorily. I am really grateful to them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

NMML	: Nehru Museum and Memorial Library
RNNB	: Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal
MRS	: Mahila Rashtriya Sangha
NSS	: Nari Satyagraha Samiti
SSD	: Satyagrahi Sevika Dal
AICC	: All India Congress Committee
AISF	: All-Indian Students' Federation
AIGSSA	: All India Girl Students' Association
ABGSA	: All Bengal Girl Students' Association
MARS	: Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti
CMARS	: Calcutta Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti
MMARS	: Muslim Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti
BPMARS	: Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (Nikhil Banga Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti)
NSS	: Nari Seva Sangha
JWH	: Journal of Women's History
MR	: Modern Review
CWMG	: Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
GOI	: Government of India
IFUWA	: Indian Federation of University Women's Associations
L M S	: Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades the field of Women's Studies has emerged as one of the significant areas of academic inquiry that promotes a kind of interdisciplinary platform for the study of gender. In fact, this realm offers a long-needed critical as well as analytical investigation on various theories and style of explanation in social sciences. In course of new interpretations of many accepted theories vis-a-vis to judge many issues through gendered lens, Women's Studies as a modern discipline encourages many scholars to delve into research and focus on women's traditional experiences. In this way, mode of Women's Studies have changed radically and negating traditional style of investigation, there are changes in the perceptions as to the status and dignity of women by adding different arguments into the existing body of knowledge.

Through the centuries the condition of Indian women as a whole has been based on the so called mythic models found in the *Ramayana* and *Puranas* or elsewhere which is taken as the basic texts to judge the social position of women. Accordingly, Sita, Draupadi, Shakuntala, all of whom are supposed to be silent sufferers as well as archetypes of Indian womanhood. Having been patterned on such models the Indian women have ever been represented as passive and dynamic in fulfilling the desire of men in their life.

History records how in the Pre-Vedic and Vedic period there was at least women could enjoyed equal position with men and at least to some degree and this was more particular when a women was allowed to sit next to men to perform *Yagnas* i.e. Vedic sacrificial rituals. We come across the examples of philologist and grammarian like Gargi and Maitreyi whom at least ancient India produced as intellectuals of those days. But gradually these qualitative aspects of women have been eclipsed for a long time. There are scholars who identify *Manu Smriti* for the inferior status of women. Whatever may be the fact, one cannot deny the codes of patriarchy which has time to time undermine the position of women and find logic in the argument that women must be honoured and kept happy in the home or in a family through her engagements in household duties. It is a wonder that, how the

Indians could forget the basic tenet of our agrarian society where there is a deep rooted concept of mother i. e. *Ma* which is personify with Mother Earth.

Needless to say that, the achievements of the Indian women right from the Vedic period down to our time there are examples where the women have all along been equal partners with men and their role has been acclaimed in many testing grounds. But it is a paradox that attempts have been made to justify the degraded status of women by ignoring a realistic presentation about women. Not only *Sati*, lifelong widowhood, child marriage or caste endogamy have victimized the Indian women and obviously these social formula created obstacles national progress. It is not denying that, these sort of malpractices were presented and followed by deriving sanction from the *Dharmasastras* and hence it was obligatory to follow in order to respect the Indian tradition and some social rules but there was challenge and the nineteenth century reform movement brought about a new enlightenment which not only awaken the Bengali society but also professed to reinstate the Indian women in a dignified position.

At present various mechanism are being under taken by the researchers and scholars 'to stimulate desirable changes in women's status rather than reinforcing reactionary values. The purpose is to examine and redefine the conceptual frameworks and disciplines so as to evolve new formulations which could accommodate women's experiences.' In this way, one may look at women's studies as means of instrument for women's development and as a necessary step to explore many constraints which some way or other or through vague excuses had made women very much subservient to their co-partners i.e. men.

The present dissertation is thus an attempt to record the nature of male domination or oppression or even a negative approach in placing the women of Bengal in their desired position. Indian women have a tradition to get recognized as a *Shakti* cult and in that sense they may be considered as a source of unlimited power. But how far they been enjoying a special reverence is a question till date. A woman as a source of unlimited power and this tradition is seems to be strong in Bengal and it is not unlikely that, the protesting voices of Bengali women have come to the open forum through various ups and downs. Enlightened personalities

like Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and even Mahatma Gandhi had taken initiatives for the emancipation of women, but the crisis was so deep rooted that the general condition of Indian women nay Bengal was far from satisfactory. The social process by and large linked class, caste and gender question together and particularly this is much more applicable to the case of women of the middle class society.

All the above mentioned factors were combined to produce an alarming scene of Indian society and obviously Bengal was not an exception. But the women voices were not as silent as it may appear to be. In our research, there is an attempt to present Bengali women who sought to build their self-respect in the society and in the long-run through various movements countered the ignoble and hopelessness that prevailed during a couple of centuries. It is likely that, the developed strategies and political forums to re-established identity but to dictate and divert the policy of the colonial Government for their cause. It is nothing new that, the goal of empowerment and of course dignity of women in the society largely depends on the sympathetic co-operation of the Government which could legitimize the rights of women in the society. But unless and until a certain position was reached and the women could attain minimum strength, they were not able to influence the state policy to their desired goal. In our research, it has been shown that, the women of Bengal were silent for a time but not for long. Bengali women not only influenced the Government to win over all the hurdles to the path of empowerment and the whole situation prompted the Bengali women to develop voices from within and in the background they developed community organizations and women associations to mobilise public opinion in favour of their protests against oppressive institutions like *Sati*, polygamy, dowry, child marriage and so on through campaigns for the legal rights of women. In this light, our study shows, that the uplift of women of colonial Bengal and even some parts of the then India was turned into a joint task of educated Indians and the colonial Government. This may be taken as a background leading to the emergence and growth of organized vis-a-vis institutional movement for the emancipation of Indian women from the age-old injustice to them in various circumstances. Through this attempt women of Bengal became consciousness about

the repressive social practices and with a genuine spirit came forward to redress their grievances through various means and socio-political movements.

It may be noted that, Bengali women's political participation and social protests were expressed in the form of attending public meetings, forming socio-political associations, joining political demonstrations and the like which not only brought to light the nature of social injustice against Indian women and some time had their signal of protest against their alien power for the high-handedness against the Indians. There were, in fact, many socio-political associations right from the emergence of the *Brahmika Samaj* (1865) down to the formation of the *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (1943), we come to know women associations of various names to come forward to highlight women issues. The activities of all the associations and organizations had a vision not only to protest against injustice but also to inspire action of social change.

The present dissertation is thus an attempt to examine some women issues and side by side the activities and programmes of the associations of Bengal which took up many schemes to explore the actual picture of the condition of women in Bengal and at the same time to record that, women would no longer be treated as a social problem rather to present as one-half of humanity in shaping human destiny.

At this stage, it may be relevant to present a short sketch of all the chapters of the dissertation and side by side to note the significance of the time period (i.e. 1865-1943) in order to justify the study as a whole. As it stands our present study starts from 1865, a significant year in the history of colonial Bengal. It was in this year that, the first women association for the women named *Brahmika Samaj* was established and this event by itself constituted an important stage in the growth of women associations of colonial Bengal. This year also witnessed that, for the first time Bengali women especially Brahmo women participated in that association from their confinements of the four walls and in that sense, it was a revolutionary step in the history of colonial Bengal. The present dissertation ends at 1943, of course another significant year which rather legitimized the voice of women in history and obviously signified a turning point in Bengal for the cause of women empowerment.

The first chapter entitled 'Introduction' is intended to highlight about the basic concept and the theme of the dissertation.

The second chapter is to deal with the background of the great social reform movement of nineteenth century initiated by Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Henry Vivian Derozio, Keshab Chandra Sen and others which brought significant changes in Bengali society. Under the caption 'Nineteenth Century Social Reform and Women Question of Bengal' tends to survey the changes vis-a-vis 'women question' that had shaken the age-long injustice done to the women folk in the name of so called *Shastric* injunction.

'Gender Consciousness – i) Impact of Western Education ii) Role of Contemporary Periodicals' is the main theme of the third chapter of the dissertation. Here in an attempt to focus the significance of the introduction of western education and how this factor contributed to transform the Bengali society with special reference to the changing scenario of Bengali women. The western impact had initiated the concepts of freedom and romantic love, turning away from traditional values, represented by the chaste 'good' women of the past, the new images exercised a strange fascination. The western impact is thus supposed to have brought about a protesting voice of the Bengali women so as to strike on the entire social and psychological fabric of the country. It may be noted that, many columns of the contemporary periodicals and journals of our period of study adequately illustrated the growing spirit of change and these aspect have been detailed here in support of various source materials.

The fourth chapter 'Women Associations in the Making' has delineated the background for the emergence of the women associations in colonial Bengal. It is a fact that, the awareness produced by the male reformers was reflected in the world of women. As a result, women realized that they have the need to organize themselves and this was reflected in the formation of women's associations. From the second half of the nineteenth century, social reform movement, coupled with other aspects of social change, brought about a considerable transformation of the roles and status of women as well as of their self-perception. How a male-initiated

movement, later turned into a feminist movement through associations, is an area of interest that this chapter points to.

The fifth chapter is an interesting part of our dissertation and the main theme is on 'Women's Associations and the Beginning of Women Participation in Politics'. The entire chapter has however been examined from two angles - (i) First phase (1865-1896) - Search for Power and Authority from a Votive Force (ii) Second phase (1897-1943) -Search for Socio-Political Rights and Empowerment. The study as a whole centres on how and when women of Bengal started to participate in the politics. Thus in the first phase, it has been highlighted how women with different social and familial background participated at first in the male established women associations and responded differently in various ways to the process of modernization and reform movement and later on took the role to establish their own associations. The second phase deals with the women's struggle for franchise and their achievements, the national movement and feminist consciousness, politics and protest against social injustice and so on through various means of women's associations of Bengal.

The sixth chapter 'Women Associations of Bengal and Its Interaction with Other Sister Associations of India' analyses the activities of women's associations which did not confine within the boundary of colonial Bengal and the subject matter has been highlighted from three angles namely (a) Personality Based Associations, (b) National Movement Oriented Associations and (c) All-India Based Associations. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that had developed in various parts of India and in that sense, they maintained interaction and interconnection with other sister associations of India.

The seventh chapter with the caption of 'Women of Bengal in the Era of Self Identity' concentrates on the involvement of women in different activities or issues outside the traditional sphere of the domestic world particularly in the areas of employment, political participation, rights and the like. Incidentally, the era of self identity sought to legitimize constitutional rights, transformation of the women's status, socialisation of legal rights etc.

The last chapter happens to be the 'Conclusion' that tends to make a survey of the entire dissertation which has been depicted in the relevant chapters. It may also be noted that, an exhaustive bibliography related to the work has been incorporated and in addition there are a few appendices which seem to be relevant to clarify many points of the dissertation.

CHAPTER- II

NINETEENTH CENTURY SOCIAL REFORM AND WOMEN QUESTION OF BENGAL

At the dawn of civilization, during the Vedic age, women occupied an exalted position in society. After the Vedic period the status of women deteriorated considerably. The outstanding change has been the change from freedom to bondage and from honour to disgrace. The notion of patriarchic control over women in Hindu society in Bengal was a common factor from post-Vedic age to eighteenth century. During this period woman completely dependent on man and subjected she to the authority of a father, wife and mother.¹ From the first decade of the nineteenth century started the contrast in the Bengali society by the foreign trends. As a result, psychological change started tremendously in the society. The ‘condition of women’ did not become a major social reform issue until the nineteenth century. The period prior to British rule in Bengal had seen numerous changes in the position and status of women.² In Calcutta and the *mofussil* as well, the *antahpur* was the centre of the female world. Women carried out the daily domestic routine within the *antahpur*, an inner courtyard surrounded by a kitchen and living apartments. According to one missionary visitor to a Calcutta *zenana*, it was “a collection of dirty courtyards, dark corners, break-neck staircases, filthy outhouses and entries, overlaid with rubbish or occupied by half-clad native servants, stretched about on charpoys, or on the ground indifferently.....narrow verandahs and unfurnished, or semi-furnished and very small rooms.”³ With this, it may be noted that, *pardah* there was the system by which men exercised ultimate control over women’s psychology and manners. The performance of *bratas* undeniably played an important part in conditioning a woman to her ideal role in society and the family.⁴ Polygamy and *Kulinism*, dowry, female infanticide,⁵ child-marriage, *Sati* burning, *pardah*, lack of education, ban of widow remarriage etc. were the main characteristics of social structures in colonial India nay Bengal.

The most important efforts for social reform in nineteenth century Bengal was a intricate response to the presence of British colonial rule. British attitude to Indian society in the early nineteenth century was not alike critical. They did not attack contemporary social customs, but adopted a policy of ‘non-interference’.⁶ The

British rulers introduced new ideas about women's roles and capabilities and these ideas were adopted by progressive Indians. In spite of the above perception and also due to outstanding efforts of a few enlightened personalities like Raja Rammhun Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Henry Vivian Derozio, Keshab Chandra Sen and even Mahatma Gandhi for emancipation of women, the general condition of women in colonial India nay Bengal was far from satisfactory. It was not 'gender', but class and caste also did make differences. They realised that, the condition of women is one of the most remarkable circumstances in the manners of nations.

The 'women's question' was a central issue in some of the most contentious debates over social reform in the nineteenth century.⁷ Two issues dominated many of these movements. First, it related to the status of upper-caste Hindu widows and was linked up with questions regarding 'Sati' and widow-remarriage. Second, pertains to education of women and the making of a new middle class culture entailing new codes of morality, new formation of the home as the insulated private sphere and a new codification of customary law.⁸ For the women's movements it meant that, reformers had to seek traditional sanction for the proposed liberation of women from certain customs and imposed obligations over the ages. This tendency in looking back to the past itself developed two dimensions. While some depicted a perfect condition for women in the Vedic ages, others sought *Shastric* injunctions to prove the invalidity of some practices. The fact that, religious sanction was resorted to legitimise social reform, there was another crucial link between religious and social reform in India. In India, where religion and social structure were organically interwoven. Caste, hierarchy, sex inequality, untouchability and social taboos flourished because of the sanction of religion.⁹ Social reform consequently constituted a part of the platform of all religious reform movements. In this regard, the activities of Christian missionaries may be taken as the first initiatives for the emancipation of women.

Before Rammohun Roy, the Danes at Serampore, and Chinsurah and the French in Chandernagore had prohibited *Sati* within their jurisdiction much before the East India Company had taken any step against it. In 1772 some British officials and Christian missionaries had appealed in futile to the Government to stop this practice. In March 1799, William Carey witnessed a *Sati-rite* for the first time in his

life, and it shocked him terribly. After that, Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar, a great Sanskrit scholar, he declared in 1817 that the practice was completely voluntary and was by no means compulsory. On the subject of *Sahamarana* (burning oneself in the pyre of the husband) he said that, the *Shastras* varied, but they were all are one regarding the necessity of leading an ascetic life. He positively said that, there was nothing wrong in renouncing *Sankalpa* (determination to perform the rite) or in persuading a widow to renounce her *Sankalpa*. He asserted that, *Anumarana* (burning oneself in a separate pyre after hearing the news of one's husband's death) was purely voluntary and had no *Shastric* restriction behind it. Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar was the former, while he only adduced theoretically arguments but the later, the man was Raja Rammohun Roy successfully launched a strong agitation against that evil practice.¹⁰

In fact, Raja Rammohun Roy's attempts to reform society, religion and the status of women can be taken as the starting point of nineteenth century social reform movement in Bengal. In 1815 Rammohun Roy founded '*Atmiya Sabha*' ('an association for the dissemination of religious truth and the promotion of free discussion of theological subjects') in Calcutta and it took the shape of '*Brahmo Samaj*' on August 20, 1828. It was the culmination of the religious thought and activities of Rammohun Roy as well as it emerged as a major religious reform movement of the middle class educated Bengalis, based on the essential principle of monotheism. It also marked the beginning of the Brahmo movement. After Ramohun's death in 1833, the leadership of the Brahmo movement was taken over by Debendranath Tagore who provided the movement with a better organisational structure and ideological uniformity.¹¹ In 1838 Debendranath Tagore was converted to the Brahmo faith and he wanted to organize a society for attaining knowledge of Brahmo and for propagating religious truth, that is why he founded '*Tattvabodhini Sabha*' on October 6, 1839. In 1840 the '*The Tattvabodhini Sabha*' founded the *Tattvabodhini* School for educating young men in the principles of the new faith. Akshoy Kumar Dutta, a great scholar, a writer and a man of exceptional intellect, was appointed a teacher in that school. On August 16, 1843 Debendranath Tagore started the famous Bengali monthly '*Tattvabodhini Patrika*' with Akshoy Kumar Dutta as its editor. The objective of this *Patrika* were living in different parts of the province, familiar with its activities, to popularize Rammohun's works on

Brahmoism and to publish such matters as would enhance the knowledge of the people and were likely to promote their character.¹² From 1850, the '*Tattvabodhini Patrika*' was practically and virtually becoming the mouthpiece of the new spirit and articles began to be published advocating widow remarriage, women's education, denouncing early marriage, polygamy and intemperance and others.¹³

The Brahma reform movement was in fact taken out of the limited elite circles of Calcutta literati into the district towns of East Bengal by Bijoykrishna Goswami and Keshab Chandra Sen in the 1860s. Keshab Chandra Sen brought in some amount of extremism into the movement, by attacking caste system, by focusing on the question of women's rights, by promoting widow remarriage, inter-caste marriages and by raising the issue of caste status of the Brahma preachers, a position until then reserved for the Brahmans alone. But this radicalism also brought the first rift within the Brahma movement. Meredith Borthwick has shown that, it was a schism between Keshab's followers, for whom social progress and reform were more important than anything else. On the other hand, the followers of Debendranath Tagore preferred to maintain their identification with Hindu society.¹⁴ In 1866, the followers of Keshab Chandra Sen established *Brahmo Samaj of India* and the followers of Debendranath Tagore retain their identity under the rubric of *Adi (Original) Brahma Samaj*. The crises were more expanded when the 'Brahmo Marriage Act' passed in 1872 as Act III. It legalised Brahma Marriages, which allowed inter-caste and widow marriage, but only if the contracting parties declared themselves to be non-Hindus.¹⁵

Progressive Young Brahmans became keenly interested in the education and emancipation of women. Some of them started the *Bamabodhini Patrika* for women and Keshab Chandra founded the *Society of Theistic Friends* with the object of discussing religious questions and working for women's education. A separate society for women named *Brahmika Samaj* (1865) was founded with Keshab Chandra as its Minister. He had also celebrated an inter-caste marriage and was pressing for this revolutionary social change which did not yet have the approval of Debendranath Tagore.¹⁶ Later Keshab Chandra Sen himself retreated from his radical position, condemned the act for promoting "God less marriages" and after that came closer to the Hindu austere Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This gradually led

to another rift in the Brahma Samaj in 1878. When Keshab Chandra Sen arranges the marriage of his minor daughter named Suniti Devi with the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, his followers parted company and formed the *Sadharan Brahma Samaj*. In 1881 Keshab Chandra Sen formed his '*Naba Bidhan*' (New Dispensation) and started moving towards a new universalist religion. But, by this time successive ideological rifts and organisational divisions had weakened the Brahma movement confining it to a small elite group.¹⁷ It is true that, among the reformist organisations the Brahma Samaj in Bengal, which was more modernist in its approach.

Brahma Samaj in Bengal was weakened after the 1870s by internal dissent and divisions. This was followed by the emergence of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in the 1880s. While Brahma Samaj's appeal was to intellect that of Ramakrishna Paramhansa was to the mind of emotions. His disciple Swami Vivekananda believed that, women should be educated first and they should be conscious about their own position as well as to explore the mechanism of reform.¹⁸ Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) was anxious for the emancipation of the Indian women. In his opinion ill-treatment of the women was one of the greatest sins of India. For their emancipation, he laid more emphasis on the growth of education and self-dependency among them then specific social reforms. Swamiji pointed out that "a bird with only one wing cannot fly. Similarly, a nation with her women in shackles can make no progress."¹⁹ Vivekananda drew attention to the very roots of social malaise and lent his authority to the cause of social reform. C. H. Heimsath writes, "Vivekananda's thought marked the culmination of the nineteenth century social revolt."²⁰

Thus, a new regeneration started in Bengal and women as a part of the society got the taste of progress and enlightenment. This trend became much more meaningful with the approach and involvement of elite society, a product of re-awakening of Indian society. In fact, a significant question hinted the mind of the Bengali intelligentsia class as to how the womenfolk could be modernized in all senses. In the nineteenth century some members of the *bhadralok* felt that, their self-respect was threatened by the continuous attack on evils innate in Hindu society. Questions about the position of women in Bengali society by representatives of the colonial power forced the cultural intermediaries, the *bhadralok* reformers, to direct

their attention to this issue. They found that, the position of women in the traditional household did not fit in early with the new set of values transmitted by the British in Bengal. An autonomous process of changing values made some of the *bhadralok* feel repugnance for those customs which seemed to degrade women. So, the *bhadralok* also responded to constant criticism by their colonial rulers, with mixed perceptions of responsibility and guilty, inferiority, and resentment. They had been made to feel that, unless they initiated some changes in their domestic lives they would be regarded as inferiors in the scale of civilisation.²¹

So, in the nineteenth century the “women question” gradually turns into “how can they be modernized”?²² This issue virtually drew the attention of the colonial Government and various devices were taken up to resolve the issue without many disturbances to the traditional faith and customs of the Indian society. Incidentally, James Mill, in his book “*History of British India*” (1826) argued that, women’s position could be used as an indicator of society’s advancement. Mill concluded: “nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women They are held, accordingly, in extreme degradation.”²³

The goal of the male reformers was progress. Without social reform to considerably improve women’s status, regeneration seemed doomed to failure. Humiliated by their colonial status, Indians of the late nineteenth century were passionate with the issues of strength and power. They needed an explanation for the weakness that had led to their defeat and an answer to the question of how to build up their strength. If they accepted the nineteenth-century European theory that, the status of women was essential to the level and strength of civilization and the European conclusion that Indian customs were degrading to women’s status, they gained an explanation for their defeat and a instruction for reform.²⁴

The above suggestion leads us to think over the question of social reform in Bengal and the initiatives taken by Raja Rammohun Roy in this respect. He undertook the crusade to campaign against *Sati* which was the first women’s issue to receive public attention. The custom *Sati* where the women was burnt alive with her dead husband on the funeral pyre. Rammohun Roy attacked the practices of *Sati* on the basis of both appeals to humanitarian and natural rights doctrines as well as

Hindu *Shastras*, with an increasing shift to the latter. Cautious in approach, Rammohun based his arguments for social reform on scriptural authority. He hoped that, social reform would follow the growth of good sense among the people. The worst sufferers of the social degradation and inhuman social customs of the times were the women.²⁵

Rammohun propounded that, the sacrifice in most cases was due to influence or force on the part of greedy Brahmins and interested relatives. It was beneficial to the surviving relatives who inherited the property of the departed and spiritual bliss of the widow was not the main consideration.²⁶ He expressed the view that, *Sati* should be abolished. He published a number of tracts against *Sati*. In 1818 in his first tract he severely criticized the practice and argued that, the rite in its present form was not sanctioned by the *Shastras*. His arguments were sought to be counteracted by Kasinath Tarkavagish, an orthodox Sanskrit scholar. The second tract of Rammohun was published in 1819 and significantly its English translation was dedicated to Lady Hastings. In the tract he refuted the arguments of Kasinath Tarkavagish who had attempted to justify the practice by raising the question of *desachar* (long prevailing custom in the country). In 1820 Rammohun published his “*Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to The Hindu Law of Inheritance*”. In this tract Rammohun criticized the practice, analysing its economic implications and also defended some other fundamental rights of women. He emerged as a protagonist of women’s emancipation and as a humanitarian.²⁷

Lord Hastings was conscious of the need of abolishing *Sati* but he did not think it wise to take any immediate action. In 1823 the Government of India was asked by the Courts of Directors to consider the question of abolition again and was assured of its approval of any necessary measure. The Chief Judge of the Nizamat Adalat, Haringto, advocated its immediate abolition. When the orthodox Hindus filed petition against the Government restrictions on the practice, Rammohun submitted a counter-petition in which he forcefully challenged the controversy that *Sati*, as observed, was a religious performance. He declared that, “all these instances -----are murders according to every *Shastras*, as well as to the common sense of all nations”. He organised an anti-*Sati* awareness party whose members kept watch on

the different burning *ghats* to prevent any such sacrifice in defiance of Government restrictions.²⁸

Contemporary journals with progressive ideas also took up the cause. Rammohun's own paper *Sambad Kaumudi* was in the forefront and the missionary papers *Samachar Darpan* and the *Friend of India* also passionately supported the campaign for the abolition of *Sati*. Later, the weekly *Bagadut* edited by Nilratan Haldar also supported the movement.²⁹ But the orthodox community did not sit quiet. The "*Samachar Chandrika*" launched a campaign in favour of the continuance of the practice and also tried to mobilize public opinion in its favour. In this way, Bengali public opinion was sharply divided into two opposing groups on the question and feelings ran very high. The Christian missionaries of course supported the abolitionist movement with all their might and they also tried to rally public opinion in England against the practice. In this process Rammohun convinced the Government as to the necessity of immediate and total abolition of the practice. Lord Bentinck, the then Government General of Bengal went ahead with his plan and on December 4, 1829, Regulation XVII *Sati* was declared "illegal and punishable by the Criminal Courts". The abolition of *Sati* was great triumph of Raja Rammohun Roy and progressive public opinion in Bengal.³⁰

Social reform movement had achieved there by a great success and it encouraged other social reforms in all over the country. The role of Rammohun Roy and his followers of Brahma Samaj in the anti-*Sati* agitation was undoubtedly was his most significant contribution towards social reform. Rammohun's most important effort was also to establish of women rights in property. In 1823 Rammohun wrote an essay titled "*Hindu Narir Adhikare Anyay Hastakhep*"³¹ because it was very much linked with the system.

It may be noted that, as a consequence of the achievements of the Brahma Samaj as well as that of Raja Rammohun Roy and his followers they were started another phase of social reform movement in Bengal and this centred on the question of widow-remarriage. It is noticed in an account of one of the meetings of the *Atmiya Sabha* held in 1819 that, 'At the meeting in question.....the necessity of an infant widow passing her life in a state of celibacy, the practice of polygamy and of

suffering widows to burn with the corpse of their husbands were condemned.....'.³² Rammohun Roy pointed out in his tract on the '*Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance*, published in 1822, how Indian widows lived in a state of 'abject misery'.

It may be said that, the subject of the marriage of Hindu widows engaged the attention of Raja Rammohun Roy but its main protagonist was Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Though before Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Young Bengal formed *Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge* in 1838 and in that *Society* they criticized the ban on widow-remarriage.³³ The movement for the remarriage of widows was, however, gathering strength in Bengal under the leadership of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Young Iswar Chandra found with his own eyes the evils of society and was pained by the decay and degeneration that had set in on the question of indignity to women. The terrible sufferings of the womenfolk, the immorality of the richer people, and the moral erosion of the people in general made a deep impression on the mind of Young Ishwar Chandra and gave him the will and courage to start a crusade against such social evil. The miserable condition of Hindu widows was one of the inhuman social customs to draw his attention. In August 1850, he wrote an article on the evils of early marriage in the *Sarvasubhakari Patrika*. In January, 1855, Vidyasagar wrote another pamphlet on 'Widow-marriage' (the English version of which is entitled 'Marriage of Hindu Widows') on the basis of a *sloka* which he found in the *Parasara Samhita* that was "A second marriage is sanctioned for women in five situation: if their (first) husbands be not heard of, if they die, retire from the world, prove to be eunuchs or become outcastes or patitas."³⁴ The pamphlet was a clear evidence of his great sympathy for the suffering womenfolk. It caused a stir in the country and started a heated controversy. Finally, J.P .Grant, a member of the Legislative Council, took great initiative in this matter and on July 26, the Act XV of 1856 was passed legalising marriage of widow by William Bentinck.³⁵

In this connection, Rani Bhavani, Zamindar in Rajshahi, was a farsighted lady. She was the first to realise that, Hindu widows should be remarried. Later on, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar introduced it in Bengal. Tarasundari Debi, the daughter of Rani Bhavani became widow at her early age. Perhaps for this she took initiative

for widower marriage. On the other hand, in the year 1756, Raja Rajballabh of Dhaka tried to introduce widow marriage because his daughter became widow. Rani Bhavani and Raja Rajballabh placed the proposal of their daughters' marriage before the pundits (scholars). In those days the Brahmin pundits of Vikrampur, Dhaka and Nadia were the sole authorities of the Hindu society. But to Raja Krishnachandra, the king of Nadia, widow marriage was not valid according to the doctrine of the Hindu *Shastras*. Because of the opposition of Raja Krishnachandra it was not possible for the Rani Bhabani and Raja Rajballabh to introduce and implement the idea of widow remarriage. Yet, the proposal for widow remarriage showed their farsightedness for the cause of women emancipation during that period of time.³⁶ Under the president ship of T. B. Macaulay in 1837, the India commission gave their opinion of remarriage of the Hindu women of high families and urged the government to implement law in this regard. But the *Indian Dharma Sabha* (Religious Society of India) did not accept this opinion.

Rani Bhavani was kind enough to the widows. She offered monthly stipend to many widows. Rani Bhavani made a shelter for widows on the bank of the Ganges and made arrangements for their maintenance. These widows earned their living by spinning thread of the cotton produced in the country.³⁷

In 1841, an anonymous Maharastrian Brahman reformer had advocated remarriage of infant widows as a measure to control their sexuality and make their reproduction capacity socially useful. In 1866, Vishnushastri Pandit started a movement for the encouragement of widow-remarriage through the agency of the Widow Marriage Association, which was started at Bombay in 1865, while his opponents also formed a rival organisation in Maharashtra.³⁸ The prohibition on widow-remarriage became even more wide-spread and it became also a lower caste social practice, despite non-Brahman social reformer Jyotirao Phule's spirited attacks on enforced celibate widows. The reform movement of widow remarriage was started by Veerasalingam Pantulu in Madras presidency, who founded in 1878 a *Society for Social Reform* for this purpose. In 1891, a *Widow Remarriage Association* was formed with the patronage of the prominent citizens of the town. But this enthusiasm notwithstanding, by this time only three such marriages had been arranged by the reformers.³⁹

In Bengal, among certain sections in the orthodox Hindu society, *Kulinism* or polygamy was a much practiced vice. As early as 1822, Rammohun Roy had stressed that, the horrible practice of polygamy was directly contrary to the law prescribed by ancient authors.⁴⁰ After that, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar continued his reform movement, directing it against polygamy and later child marriage and finally secured an 'Age of Consent Act' in 1860 that fixed the age of consent for the consummation of marriage at ten years for women.⁴¹ Side by side, Vidyasagar exposed the evils *Kulinism* and the extent to which it cripple society in his book on widow marriage. He found that, the evils of *Kulinism* and polygamy were inter-connected. A number of petitions against polygamy signed by Vidyasagar, the Maharajas of Burdwan, Nadia, Dinajpore, Rani Sarnomayee of Kassimbazar, Jaykrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and fifty thousand men and women of Bengal were submitted to the Government in 1856. These sought for Government legislation against polygamy "which was practiced on a very large scale in a manner the most offensive to mortality and decency". The Government appointed a committee with Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Digambar Mitra, Ramanath Tagore, Satyasan Ghosal and some other as members to recommend "the best means of giving practical effect to the wishes of the Government of India on the subject of restricting unlimited polygamy among Hindus in Bengal by legal enactment."⁴² In 1871, it was found that 33 *Kulin* Brahmins of Hooghly districts were married to 2151 women.⁴³ On 10 August 1871, Vidyasagar brought out his first book entitled *Consideration Whether Polygamy Should be Abolished*.⁴⁴ In fact, a turning point was approaching when polygamy would begin to be disgraced in Bengali social opinion. By the turn of the century, the practice was beginning to pass away, not through legislation but through the pressure of the influence of modern education and changing socio-economic climate.

But Christian missionaries were particularly vehement in their criticism of Bengali society. The main targets of their attack were those customs most obviously alien to British practice, such as *Sati* and polygamy, but they also strongly disapproved of *purdah* and the lack of education among women. After that, Rammohun also sharply criticized polygamy, child marriage, *Kulinism*, female infanticide and the evils of the dowry system. There were innumerable obstacles in

the way of improving their condition and effecting their resettlement. He published his “*Brief Remarks Regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females, according to the Hindu Law of Inheritance*”. In that he depicted the miserable life which Hindu widows had to lead in those days. In one of the issues of the *Sambad Kaumudi* he made “an appeal to the rich Hindus of Calcutta to constitute a society for the relief of destitute widows, upon the principles of the Civil and Military Widows Fund established by Order of Government”.⁴⁵ He opposed the polygamy that in his will he inserted a clause disinheriting any son or any other heir who was polygamous. These views of Rammohun only reveal his deep understanding of the problem of women’s emancipation.

Later in 1838 Young Bengal established the *Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge*, where they discussed various aspects of western science and stood for a number of social reforms, such as the prohibition of caste taboos, child marriage, *Kulin* polygamy etc.⁴⁶ In 1873, a batch of young men, under the leadership of Nabakanta Chatterjee, formed a league or covenant to oppose child marriage and began to publish a monthly journal called *Mahapap Balya Bibaha* or ‘The Great Sin of Child Marriage.’⁴⁷ In 1877 some young progressive Brahmos organised something like a secret league, one of their pledges being ‘never to encourage marriage between young men below twenty-one and girls below sixteen’.⁴⁸ The controversy fore-grounded the issue of infant marriage. A series of tragedies occurred in Bengal, including in 1890 the death of 10 year-old Phulmonee due to marital rape by her 35 year-old husband, Hari Mohan Maity.⁴⁹ In this respect, it may be mentioned that, Behramji M. Malabari, a Parsi reformer, formulated his *Notes on Infant Marriage and Enforced Widowhood*, both of which he rightly considered to be related social evils. He circulated these notes to important Government officials and public men for their opinion in these matters. At first he did not want State interference for any legislation but sought its moral support.⁵⁰ Finally, regarding the child marriage, the age of consent for the consummation of marriage was raised ten to twelve by legislation on 19 March, 1891 as Act X of 1891.⁵¹ But as census statistics show, child marriage continued to be a widely practiced social custom among all the castes, high and low alike.

According to Swami Vivekananda (previously known as Narendra Nath Dutta), “Reformation in Hinduism means widow-marriage and women liberation so on”. But this reformation would not touch the whole society, specially the poor people or weaker section. He strongly criticized widow marriage reform movement which was abolished by the Government law whenever the whole society would be enlightened with education, then the social evils are subject to be eradicated. He laid emphasis on universal education irrespective of any caste, sex and religion.⁵²

The women question as well as the social reform movement of Bengal got an extraordinary impetus with the spread of education particularly the measures taken by the Christian missionaries. They were especially concerned about the position of women because they saw them as playing a major role in conversion. As mothers, women were the formative influence on the next generation. It could be converted and this was possible to visualise the gradual conversion of the whole of Bengal.

In 1807 first women’s school was opened for Indian Christian girls in Serampore by Hanna Marshman, wife of Rev. Marshman. In 1809 girls school in Calcutta Boubazar Benevolent Institute and in 1818 Janbazar Free School Institute established for girls of without fees. The Christian missionaries were, of course, keen to educate native girls and one of the earliest efforts in this direction was made by Padri Robert May Who founded a girls’ school at Chinsurah in 1814. The *School Society* founded in 1817, also discussed the question of female education. In April 1819, on the initiative of some Baptist missionaries was founded the *Calcutta Female Juvenile Society* with Reverend W. H. Pearce as its president. It took the initiative and started the first girls’ school for the general public of Bengal in 1819 at Gouri Bari (Ultadanga), a suburb of Calcutta. A number of girls’ schools were founded in Calcutta in 1821 under the auspices of the society like ‘Liverpool School’ at Shyambazar, ‘Salem School’ at Janbazar and ‘Burmingham School’ at Chitpur and Raja Radhakanta Deb was one of its chief patrons. He published a book on ‘Female Education’ (*Stri-siksha-vidhayak*), written by Pandit Gourmohun Vidyalkar in 1822, to the society, which did much to give an impetus to women’s education during the six years of its existence. A Governmental Gazette was published in 22nd December, 1823 and it showed that 140 girls’ of both Hindu and Muslim participated in examination of that schools.⁵³

In 1821 some members of the *Calcutta School Society*, succeeded in moving the British and *Foreign School Society of London* to send out Miss Mary Anne Cooke to Calcutta to promote women's education. Miss Cooke started her work under the *Church Missionary Society* and within a year, as many as twenty two girls' schools were founded.⁵⁴

The Ladies Society for Native Female Education under the patronage of Lady Amherst was founded in 1824 and took over the management of the girls' schools run by the *Church Missionary Society*. David Hare was its active supporter and under the guidance of Mrs. Wilson about thirty girls' schools were managed by the society in Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. A central school for girls was started by the *Ladies Society* in Calcutta in 1826. The Christian missionaries also ran boarding establishments for orphans and made arrangements for domestic teaching in upper class families. A notable advocate of women's education was Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjee whose essay on 'Native Female Education' had won a prize of Rs. 200 and high praise. But with all their efforts the Christian missionaries failed to draw girls from middle class families to their schools. The majority of the girls who came to them for education belonged to the lower classes or to Christian families, quite a few came to school lured by hopes of getting clothes, ornaments or their incentives. The main problem in missionary education was its insistence on instruction which seemed to betray a positive motive behind the programme of enlightenment.⁵⁵

In the first decade of the nineteenth century the efforts made by Serampore Missionary for spread of women education in Bengal is remarkable. In 1809, they started their journey to open a separate branch for 40 girls' students. In 1819, William Carey established a girls' school at Serampore. Within 1824 they established 12 girls' school at Serampore and also founded two schools at Birbhum, two at Dhaka and four at Chattagram. But most of these schools were closed in 1838 for economic crisis.⁵⁶

In that period, beside missionaries many foreigners personally took considerable interest for the spread of women education. David Hare was one of them. In 1829, he established a school. But the lack of female students the school

was closed within few years. But he was active supporter of supporter of *Ladies Society* and engaged himself with the activities of women education. With interest he was present in the school of several examinations. For keen interest in women education after his death in 1844 'Hare Prize Fund' was started for his honour. Best essay writers about women education was awarded from this fund.⁵⁷

Side by side, with the Christian missionaries and foreign personality some Bengali intelligentsia and enlightened personalities came forward to spread up the movement for modern education in Bengal. In this respect, one may recall the contributions of Raja Rammohun Roy, the spiritual father of the Bengal Renaissance, who appeared as 'the herald of a new age' was a strong advocate of the cause of female education in India. Pandit Shivnath Shastri comments in 'The Women of India' that, 'have found no greater defender of their rights than the founder of Brahmoism. He defended the legal rights of women, advocated their right to education and enlightenment' and 'above all, devoted all the energies of his noble soul to save them from a cruel death'.⁵⁸

But in case of women education the contribution of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar is most important who once took up the cause of widow remarriage and now turn his attention towards women education. One of the important features of women's emancipation in the nineteenth century was female education. Till the last day of his life Vidyasagar took much interest in the education of women and patronized the *Strisiksha Vidhayini Sammilani*, branches of which were founded in different districts of Bengal to promote the female education. Vidyasagar, while working as the Government Inspector of Schools of Nadia, Hoogly, Burdwan and Midnapore, organized in all forty girls school and twenty model schools in the districts. Vidyasagar continued to take great interest in women's education and was associated with the foundation of a number of girls schools in the province including one at Birsingha village (birth place), Midnapore.⁵⁹ The foundation of the *Hindu Balika Vidyalaya* (later known as Bethune school) in 7th May, 1849 on the initiative of J. E. Drinkwater Bethune, Legal Member of the Governor General's Council and President of the Council of Education, created great enthusiasm in society and the institution came in for both criticism and appreciation. Vidyasagar was the first secretary of the school. Bethune and Vidyasagar devoted much time, energy and

resource to the running of the *Vidyalyaya*. On the two sides of the school carriage was written a Sanskrit *sloka* which means: “The girls also should be brought up and educated with great care.”⁶⁰

Vidyasagar was eagerly interested in the development of vernacular education. In 1853 Vidyasagar founded a free Anglo-Sanskrit school at Birsingha, his native village and encouraged similar efforts in other districts of Bengal. A significant achievement of Vidyasagar was the development of the Metropolitan Institution which was later named after him. Vidyasagar wanted nothing short of complete education for the students, education that would free their minds from prejudice, superstition and inhibitions. To him it was the most powerful weapon for fighting social malaise.⁶¹ Vidyasagar was undoubtedly influenced by both Eastern and Western ideas. He realised the need of a strong base for a really good education. That is why he wrote text-books for school students which have been invaluable for generations. He was one of the makers of the Bengali language. In fact, social reform and Vidyasagar are synonyms in the history of Bengal and all his social or other activities bore the stamp of his manliness and greatness.⁶²

For the sake of modern education of Bengal the contributions of Young Bengal group are also praiseworthy. Because it's sufficiently stepped-up the process of modern education initiated by the Christian missionaries. It may be known to all that who were the Derozians. The most remarkable personality of the nineteenth century was Henry Louise Vivian Derozio (1809-1831). The students of the Derozio were known as Derozians or Young Bengal group. They were the most brilliant students of the Hindu college and were inspired and excited by a spirit of free thought and revolt against the existing social and religious structure of the Hindu society. Their mission seems to have been to expose Hinduism, to denounce it unequivocally. The Derozians were very much conscious about the superstitions and backwardness of the Indian society. Naturally, they picked up the issues stood on the way of progress. They first of all laid emphasis on Western education vis-a-vis eradication of social evils that prevailed in India and Bengal in particular hampering the progressive mode of society of Bengal.⁶³ In this issue they initially tried to draw the attention of the people through media and newspaper.

In fact, quite a few journals were run by the Derozians between 1828 and 1843 to give wider currency to their views and principles. Among their journals *Parthenon* advocated the cause of colonisation and female education. Hindu orthodoxy and superstition were condemned. Another most important journal named *The Bengal Spectator*, Ramgopal Ghosh one of the founders of the paper wrote in a letter that its object was to “keep up a spirit of enquiry amongst the educated natives and to discuss such subjects as female education, the remarriage of Hindoo widows etc. It is in short to be our peculiar organ.”⁶⁴ *Hindu Pioneer*, published in 1835, was one of the main party organs of the Young Bengal group. It incorporated an essay titled ‘on women’ which emphasized for the women of the necessity of human recognition. It is stated that, the male folk seems to have the main responsibility for the establishment of the women’s right, education and the full fledged development of women. Because, development of women was much needed for the men’s fulfilment or progress. So, instead of making them a mere play thing of the men, the men should give the equal status to the women. Human beings are not made for the *Shastras*, *Shastras* are created for the need of the human being.⁶⁵ Based on this perception the Young Bengal group aimed at establishing the saga of women achievements. Because they realised that, the progressive force of a society rooted in the women’s development. Pushing the women back would inevitably lead to the backwardness of our society as a whole.

Female education in Bengal and India as well was a myth in the early nineteenth century to common people except a few very aristocratic families who has private arrangement within their compound. Educated aristocratic families were not in favour to sending their daughters in school for education. Beside social reform and restriction of *purdah* system, they did not like Christian ideology based missionary education. On the other hand, educated aristocratic society seemed to dishonour to read their daughter with lower class girls. They arranged *zenana* education system for their girls and wives.⁶⁶ Though Radhakanta Deb was the supporter of women education but did not agree to send the daughter of upper class families in school. His impression was that, it would be better women could take up *zenana* education to comply with the tradition of Bengali patriarchy. He also took several steps in his own house for the spread of female education.⁶⁷

Before we saw that, in the first half of the nineteenth century the missionaries were the main organiser of female education. But gradually, the female education was inspired by some social reformers with the financial help of some indigenous rich person and sometimes, established private schools with the help of the Government. We have discussed before about the contribution of missionaries and social reformers in the field of the development of female education. Now, we will specially discuss about the indigenous personalities mainly the zamindars and the private schools established by the grant of Government who played a major role in the development of female education. In the third decade of nineteenth century the most famous Bengali personalities were Raja Baidyanath Roy, Maharaja Shibkrishna Bahadur, Maharaja Kalikrishna Bahadur, Gourmohun Vidyalankar, Dwarakanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Chandicharan Tarkalankar, Moti Lal Seal, Haladhar Mallik, Babu Kalinath Ray Chowdhury, Baikunta Nath Ray Chowdhury, Bhavani Prasad Ray etc. who showed their interest in female education. Raja Baidyanath Roy is said to have donated Rs. twenty thousand for the development of 'Central Female School' which was established in 1826 by the impetus of *Ladies Society*.⁶⁸

With missionary and limited Government assistance in female education also added indigenous enthusiasm in the middle stage of the nineteenth century and gradually indigenous efforts became the main thing. Among such personalities two famous zamindars of Uttarpara, Joykrishna Mukherjee and Rajkrishna Mukherjee⁶⁹ at first took the step in establishing girls' school. In 1845 they gave a proposal to Council of Education for the establishment of a girls' school. They requested to the Government to take half responsibility of the school on the condition the rest will be bear by themselves. But the Government rejected their proposal in 1849 by showing financial crisis. In the meantime, the first girls' school was established in 1847 with the initiatives of Kalikrishna Mitra, Pyaricharan Sarkar and Nabakrishna Mitra at Barasat.⁷⁰

Before we already mentioned about the Bethune School. For this school Dakshina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay denoted five *bigha* lands at Mirzapur, one thousand rupees and books of five thousand rupees for the library. Vidyasagar took the responsibility as secretary of the school in free of cost (1850-1869). Raja

Kalikrishna Bahadur became the president of the managing committee. Bethune himself took all the financial responsibilities of the school. He donated all his properties to the school. Madanmohan Tarkalankar helped Bethune through collection of the girls' student from aristocratic families. He admitted his two daughters Bhubanmala and Kundamala in the school. In 1850, in the second edition of '*Sravasubhakari Patrika*', he wrote an essay on female education in which he opposed all the proposals against female education and presented his argument on this. Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore got his eldest daughter Saudamini Devi (1847-1920) admitted into the Bethune School in July 1851. For this reason, in 1851 the number of girls' student increased from 21 to 80. Hence, for the first time Bengali aristocratic families broke their traditional barriers by sending their daughters in Bethune School and they institutionally acknowledged the female education.⁷¹

In the beginning Radhakanta Deb though was the supporter of female education but was not agreeing to send the girls' outside of home. But, in the sixties of the century changed his mind. He supported '*Calcutta Female School*'. In that time Joykrishna Mukherjee and Rajkrishna Mukherjee established a female school at Uttarpara. Besides that, '*Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha*' (1863) founded by the impetus of Joykrishna Mukherjee at Burdwan played an important contribution in spreading female education. This association arranged *zenana* education for aged women.⁷²

In the last part of the nineteenth century through several scholarships provided by the Government and some private enterprise inspired women for higher education and that was also a turning point for the cause of women education in colonial Bengal. But in 1897 personally Begum Firdous Mahal, the Nawab of Murshidabad started to give gold Medal for girls' student who were supposed to take stand first in order of merit in the entrance examination. Besides that, several scholarships were started in the name of different personalities. For example, in 1891 'Mohitbala Prize' was started in Bethune School by private initiative who would stand first place in the entrance examination. After the death of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1891) some highly educated women who were his followers started *Vidyasagar Scholarship* in 1895. Incidentally, it is still going on till date.⁷³

On the other hand, from the second decade of the nineteenth century the female education started in Calcutta and other places of Bengal. Before that, when women education was prohibited in the Muslim society and *purdah* system was strictly maintained in that period an unknown Muslim women educationist of Shyambazar, Calcutta did active co-operation to an English educationist named Miss Cook for the spread and propagation of women education. She took enough initiatives for collection of girls students from door to door, established a school in his own place etc. During this time many Muslim people and their family did co-operation for the establishment of school for women education in Calcutta at Mirzapur, Entaly, Janbazar etc.⁷⁴ But actually from the sixties of the nineteenth century many schools were established to boost up female education in East Bengal by the private enterprise. In East Bengal mainly Muslim dominated society virtually got the importance of modern education after 1870. In this respect, Nawab Foyjunnesa Choudhurani, the zaminder of Pachimgaon, Comilla (1847-1903) took sufficient efforts in the institutional education for Muslim girls. She founded two separate primary girls' schools for secluded women at Comilla town in 1873 - one on the west side of Nanuadighi of Comilla and the other on the shore of Kandi *dighi*. It may be recalled in this respect that, she even founded a hostel with the first one and it is also to be known that she started a monthly scholarship for female students. In 1873, the school established on the shore of Kandi with the name of Foyjunnesa. Though this school was founded as a primary school, but she promoted it to a Junior high school (up to class eight) in 1889 after receiving the award of 'Nawab'.⁷⁵ She gave the chance to read for all level of girls of the society by starting education in Bengali language. Not only the Muslims, all the girls from different religion got the opportunities to learn in that school. Besides that, in 1876 Ananda Charan Khastagir founded a Middle English Girls School at Chattagaon which still maintains high standard as Dr. Khastagir Girls High School.

In 1897, an autonomous school for Muslim girls was founded in Calcutta with the patronage of Nawab Shamsi Jahan Firdous Mahal, the Zamindar of Murshidabad. It was basically a Madrasa. Nawab gave the financial support for the establishment of school building and its responsibility for expanses she declared one hundred fifty rupees as grant per month. Aahsanullah, the Nawab of Dhaka also

donated one thousand rupees for this school. It is said that, about 46 students got admitted in the school in 1898.⁷⁶

In the last two decades of nineteenth century some poets and intelligent persons appeared in the Muslim community and some of them threw light on the necessity of female education. Amongst them, Abdul Latif in 1878 and Nousher Ali Khan Usufjaye in 1890 presented the necessity of female education through their writings.⁷⁷ Specially, from the eight decades of the nineteenth century the situation of the Muslim women in society was being improved by giving importance to female education. In that period, Sheikh Abdullah of Aligarh was the main speaker and initiator of institutional education for Muslim women. Moulavi Abdul Hakim said in the *Bengal Social Association* in 1868 that, the honourable Prophet Muhammed instructed that, “education is necessary for women as well as men”.⁷⁸ By the initiative of Sir Saiyad Ahmed women education was spread in several places of all over India. Amir Ali, one of the reformers of Muslim community admitted the necessity of women education in the last year of the nineteenth century. He commented in *All Indian Educational Conference* in 1899 that, girls’ education should run in parallel way with the boys’ which was held in Calcutta. But his activities were limited in the dialogues and discussions in the public platforms only.⁷⁹ After that, “*Bangiya Pradeshik Mussalman Siksha Samiti*” established on 15th February, 1903 by the president ship of Amir Ali. This association propagated the necessity of establishment of girls’ school and the spread of women education.⁸⁰

In Bengal the development of female education in nineteenth century actually happened with the initiatives of private concerns. Although the efforts and favour of the colonial Government can’t be side lined. In that period, many people of our country realised the importance of primary education for female by the efforts of missionary, some foreign great personalities and progressive liberal social reformers and others. But, the number of women in higher studies was very much poor in that century. Yet, a very few women became conscious as a human about their degraded position by learning and self-establishment through the consciousness of womanhood.

It is true that, reform was readily taken up at a theoretical level. Within the set limits of the wife-mother role, the 'improvement' of the position of women was a relatively safe issue that did not present a vision of imminent social chaos. It implied some changes in domestic arrangements, but not necessarily in social relationships. The '*Strishiksha Bidhayak*' stressed that, women's education did not mean greater freedom of behaviour, nor did it override a women's primary duty to her husband. It was assumed that, women would only be interested in education to enhance their wife-mother role. Women's emancipation gradually became a matter of self-interest, as the *bhadralok* internalized new social norms under the influence of British rule.⁸¹

There were also indigenous reasons promoting reform. Many of the advocates of reform were from high-caste *Kulin* Brahmin groups whose numbers were declining. Their practice of *Kulin* polygamy, by which many women were widowed from childhood or only nominally married to men with whom they never cohabited, left a large number of women barren. The custom of *Sati* and the ban on widow-remarriage contributed to this demographic change.⁸²

It is a fact that, women's status became the main focus of the reforming activities of the colonial state as well as of the educated Indians. To a large extent it was the result of a comparative civilizational discourse of the colonial period. It means when civilizations were ranked, one of the major criteria was the position of women and it was here that, the Indians were increasingly under attack by the western observers, from missionaries to civilians. This gender question was a key issue for James Mill condemning Indian civilization in his seminal work *The History of British India*. So, the Indian intelligentsia also responded to this civilizational critique by advocating and supporting reforms to improve the status of women in Indian society. Another response of the educated Indian elite to such civilizational critiques was to reform Hinduism from within in the light of post-enlightenment rationalism. This phenomenon is often been celebrated in the older historiography as the "Bengal Renaissance" or the "Nineteenth Century Indian Renaissance."⁸³ So, it is a reflection and reaction against attitudes of the western scholars who ever criticized the Indian society because of the disgrace position of women. It seems to have stimulated the intellectual pursuit of some educated elites who perceived the

flaws of the Indian society and took up steps to reform it focusing the women issues from various dimensions.

Notes and References

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2. Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey (U.S.A), 1985, p. 26.

3. Mrs. Weitbrecht, *The Women of India and Christian Work in the Zenana*, London, 1875, p.105.

4. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 15.

5. One form of infanticide was widely prevalent among the Rajputs, the Jats and Mewats in Western and Central India and U. P. and among the Jharjira (Jadeja) Rajputs. Because of difficulties in marrying girls they were killed, when infants, by not being given proper nourishment or sometimes even by rubbing poison on the nipples of the mother's breasts. Another longstanding practice among the Hindus was that of throwing children into the mouth of the Ganges to fulfil certain religious vows. For example, a woman having no children used to take a vow that if she had more than one child, one would be offered to mother Ganges. See Kali Kinkar Datta, *A Social History of Modern India*, The Macmillan Company of India Limited, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 268-269.

6. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 26.

7. 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', an article by Partha Chatterjee in *Recasting Women-Essays in Colonial History*, Kumkum Sanghari & Sudesh Vaid (Eds.), Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2006, p.233.
8. 'Caste, Widow-remarriage and the Reform of Popular Culture in Colonial Bengal', an article by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in *From the Seams of History- Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai, 1997, pp. 8 and 10.
9. 'Caste, Widow-remarriage and the Reform of Popular Culture in Colonial Bengal', an article by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay in *From the Seams of History- Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Calcutta, Chennai, Mumbai, 1997, pp. 14-36.
10. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 235-254; also in Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1990, pp.198-199; Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *Dynamics of Social Change in Bengal (1817-1851)*, Punthi Pustak, Calcutta, 1990, pp.203-206.
11. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 360-367; also in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, First Published-2004, Reprint-2012, p.152.
12. Debendranath Tagore, *Atmajivani*, Calcutta, 1962, pp.75-77.
13. Debendranath Tagore, *op.cit.* p.78.
14. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p.57; see also Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p.152.
15. Usha Chakraborty, *Condition of Bengali Women Around the 2nd Half of the 19th Century*, Calcutta, July 1963, pp. 10-13; also in Nemai Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* p. 156; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p.153.
16. Nemai Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* p.153.
17. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p.153.
18. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 235.

19. Sister Nivedita, *The National Significance of the Life and Work of Swami Vivekananda*, 1910, p.177; see also 'Visvavivek'.
20. C. H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, 1964, p. 27.
21. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* pp. 36-38.
22. Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India-Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, Second Reprint-2000, p.13.
23. Geraldine Forbes, *Loc.cit.*
24. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 30.
25. Nemaï Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* p. 42. Raja rammohun Roy attacked social evils 'in the name of universal moral law, which for him was Western moral law,' and that 'the action on Sati represented the imposition of Western values on Indian Society.' See Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 206.
26. Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *Unobingsa Satabdir Nari Pragati O Rammohun-Vidyasagar* (in Bengali), National Book Agency, Kolkata, 1986, p. 38.
27. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp. 254-255; see also Nemaï Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* p. 201.
28. Nemaï Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp. 200-201.
29. Nemaï Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* p. 202.
30. Nemaï Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp. 204-205; see also Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 208.
31. Pulinbihari Sen, et al (eds.), *Rammohun-Smaran* (in Bengali), Raja Rammohun Roy Smriti Raksha Committee, Calcutta, March 1989, p. 199.
32. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* p. 278.
33. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p.146.

34. *The Bengal Spectator*, May 1842; also in Binoy Ghosh, *Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara 1800-1900 (Samayik Patre Banglar Samaj Chitra, Vol. V)*, Pathbbhan, Calcutta, November 1968, pp. 286-287; Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.* pp. 211 and 217.

35. R. C. Majumdar, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Agents, Calcutta, December, 1960, p. 68; see also Nema Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* p.212; Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.* pp. 217-218 . The first widow remarriage, celebrated in Calcutta on 7 December 1856, was that of Shrischandra Vidyaratna with Kalimati Debi, daughter of Lakshmimani Debi of Palasdanga in the district of Burdwan. Shrischandra Vidyaratna was a son of the well-known Kathak dancer, Ramdhan Tarkabagis, of the village Khantuia in the district of 24 Parganas. Shrischandra was a lecturer in the Sanskrit College and appointed as a Judge-Pundit in the district of Murshidabad. For detail see Binoy Ghosh, *op.cit.* pp. 244, 289-290; Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 286-292; Swapan Basu (Compiled and Edited), *Sambad-Samayik Patre Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj (in Bengali)*, Vol. II, Paschimbanga Bangla Academy, October 2003, p. 162.

36. Moksudur Rahaman, *Natorer Maharani Bhavani (in Bengali)*, Rajshahi, 1988, p. 9; also in Nishith Ranjan Roy (ed.), *Rani Bhabani (written by Akshay Kumar Maitreya)*, Sahityalok, Kolkata, First Pub. January 1990, Third Edition- December 2007, pp. 134-135. Raja Rajballabh consulted the learned pundits of Dravida, Tailanga, Banaras, Mithila and several other places, whom Raja Rajballabh consultates, first referred to the *sloka* in the *Parasara Samhita*. See Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* p. 277; also in Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.* pp. 210-211.

37. Samar Pal, *Natorer Itihas (in Bengali)*, Vol. 1, Natore, Bangladesh, 1980, p.2; see also by S. M. Rabiul Karim, *Rajshahi Zamindars: A Historical Profile in the Colonial Period (1765-1947)*, an unpublished thesis, University of North Bengal, pp.115-116 .

38. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 303-304. In 1870, the reformers suffered a setback when in a public debate in Poona, they were found to be a fault by Sankaracharya of Kabir Math and many of them accepted the ritual of penance.

39. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 305-307; see also Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p.149.
40. Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 218.
41. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Loc.cit.*
42. R. C. Majumdar, *op.cit.* pp. 68-69; see also Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 346-351; Nemai Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp.216-217.
43. Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.*, p. 8.
44. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar published his second book containing views against polygamy on 9 April 1873. Rashbehary Mukhopadhyay of Vikrampur in East Bengal, though himself a polygamist, had, however, fully realised the harmful effects of polygamy and strongly supported Vidyasagar in his zealous efforts to abolish it. To this end he wrote two books, entitled *Ballai Samsodhini* (1868) and *Kaulinya Samsodhini* (1871) and composed some songs which were in wide circulation in East Bengal. See Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* p. 353.
45. Nemai Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp. 206-207.
46. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 146.
47. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* p. 317.
48. Kali Kinkar Datta, *Loc.cit.*
49. ‘Girl-Brides and Sociological Change: Age of Consent Bill (1891) Controversy’, an article by Meera Kosambi in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 26, No. 31-32, 1991, pp. 1857-68; see also in detail Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation-Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2001, pp.191-249; Swapan Basu (Compiled and Edited), *op.cit.* pp. 211-212; ‘Social Reform in Colonial Bengal: Revisiting Vidyasagar’, an article by Manmay Zafar in *Philosophy and Progress*, Vols. LV-LVI, January-June, July-December, 2014, ISSN 1607-2278 (Print), p.116.
50. Behramji M. Malabari, born at Baroda in 1853. He came to Bombay at the age of fifteen where he received encouragement from the Head Master, Rev. William

Dixon, in 1868 to appear at the entrance or Matriculation Examination. He wrote in one of his *Notes*: ‘It is a pity that some of my friends are still harping upon “Government interference”. I want no such thing. It is cooperation from the state, and not coercion, that society stands in need of. And I am glad to find that such cooperation will not be withheld if duly applied for’. *The Indian Magazine and Review* brought to public notice the discussions which Malabari had started on the question of early marriage and reform. On 11 June 1890, Malabari published an appeal on behalf of the Daughters of India. See Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 318-332; also in Swapan Basu (Compiled and Edited), *op.cit.* pp. 214-215.

51. Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 6; see also R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.* p. 69; Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* p. 332; Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* p. 149.

52. Amulyabhushan Sen, *Vivekanander Itihas Chetana* (in Bengali), Basu Nandi And Co. Kolkata, 1372 (B.S), pp.92-93.

53. R. C. Majumdar, *op.cit.* pp. 56-60; see also Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* Calcutta, 1963, pp. 65-66; Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp.106-112; Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op. cit.* pp. 225-228; ‘Unish Satake Banglai Narisiksha’, an article by Arifa Sultana in *Itihas Samiti Patrika*, Sharifullah Bhuinya (ed.), Sankha 25-26, 1406-1408, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, January, 2002, pp.139-140.

54. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Women Education in Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1956, pp.23-24; see also Usha Chakraborty; *op.cit.* p.45.

55. R. C. Majumdar, *op.cit.* pp. 58-59; see also Usha Chakraborty; *op.cit.* p.66; Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp.118-126; Nema Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp.221-222.

56. ‘Unish Satake Banglai Narisiksha’, an article by Arifa Sultana in *Itihas Samiti Patrika*, Sharifullah Bhuinya (ed.), Sankha 25-26, 1406-1408, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, January, 2002, p.142.

57. Gitashreebandana Sengupta, *Spandito Antarlok-Atmcharite Nari Pragatir Dhara* (in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 1999, p.67; see also Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* p. 120.

58. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* p. 111.

59. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp. 153-154; see also Nemai Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp. 222-223.
60. R. C. Majumdar, *op.cit.* pp. 64-67; see also Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Vidyasagar Parichay* (in Bengali), Kolkata, 1960, pp. 46-47; Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* p. 149; Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op. cit.* pp. 232-233; Ghulam Murshid, *Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849-1905*, Sahitya Samsad, Rajshahi University, Rajshahi, 1983, pp. 32-33.
61. Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata Sanskrito Colleger Itihas* (in Bengali), Vol.1, Calcutta, 1948, pp. 56-57.
62. Indra Mitra, *Karunasagar Vidyasagar* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1969, p. 266.
63. Amar Dutta, *Derozio O Derozians* (in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, First published 1973, Third Edition- January 2002, pp.41-46.
64. Amar Dutta, *op.cit.* pp. 76 and 92; see also Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* p. 137; Nemai Sadhan Bose, *op.cit.* pp.81-82.
65. Amar Dutta, *op.cit.* p.87.
66. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 39.
67. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Banglar Stree Siksha* (in Bengali), Kolkata, 1357 B.S. p. 4.
68. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp. 132-133; also in 'Unish Satake Banglai Narisiksha', an article by Arifa Sultana in *Itihas Samiti Patrika*, Sharifullah Bhuinya (ed.), Sankha 25-26, 1406-1408, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, January, 2002, pp. 143-144.
69. Zamindar Jaykrishna Mukherjee and his brother Rajkrishna Mukherjee were well-known for their philanthropy and patronage of public causes *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* was one of them, established on 5th April (Sunday), 1863. See Nilmani Mukherjee, *A Bengal Zamindar, Jaykrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and His Times 1808-1888*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1975, pp. 83-84.

70. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp. 137 and 143; see also Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 232; ‘Unobingso Satabdir Prathambhage Bangladeshe Stree-sikshar Bistar Sambandhe Dui-Ekti Bhabna’, an article by Mallika Banerjee, in *Itihase Nari: Siksha* (in Bengali), Paschimbanga Itihas Sangsad, Bethune College, Kolkata, 2001, p.49.
71. Debendra Nath Tagore wrote to Rajnarayan Basu, and then posted at Midnapore: ‘I have sent Saudamini to Bethune Sahib’s *Balika Vidyalaya*; let me see the reaction of such an example’. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op. cit.* pp.141-149 and 166; also in Dilip Kumar Chattopadhyay, *op. cit.* pp. 233-235.
72. Nilmani Mukherjee, *op.cit.* pp. 153-156.
73. Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *Ami Nari- Tinsho Bacharer Bangali Narir Itihas* (in Bengali), Dhaka, 2001, p.83.
74. Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolon* (in Bengali), University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2002, p. 38.
75. Roushan Ara Begum, *Nawab Foyjunnesa O Purbabanger Muslim Samaj* (in Bengali), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, June, 1993, p.46; see also Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *op.cit.* p.46; ‘Unish Satake Banglai Narisiksha’, an article by Arifa Sultana in *Itihas Samiti Patrika*, Sharifullah Bhuinya (ed.), Sankha 25-26, 1406-1408, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, January, 2002, p. 163.
76. Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*, Brill, Leiden, 1996, p.147.
77. Anisujjaman, *Muslim Manas O Banglar Sahitya 1757-1918* (in Bengali), Dhaka University, 1964, pp. 289 and 424.
78. Maleka Begum, *op.cit.* p. 38.
79. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* pp. 385-386; see also Roushan Ara Begum, *op.cit.* p. 45.
80. Maleka Begum, *op.cit.* p. 44.
81. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 39.

82. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 37.

83. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.* pp. 150-151.

CHAPTER-III

GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS- i) IMPACT OF WESTERN EDUCATION ii) ROLE OF CONTEMPORARY PERIODICALS

‘Gender Consciousness’ and ‘women question’ have had an ambiguous relationship with the nineteenth century social reform movement. Most British colonial and missionary writings viewed the position of women in India before their advent as one of the extreme degradations. In fact, the condition of women in India becomes one of the principle means for the empire to justify its ‘civilising mission’, and to ‘reform’ the ‘depraved’ customs of India.¹ Different reasons had combined to degrade women’s position in the society, of which the arrival of the British and the subjugation of the country was an important one. Child marriage, the refusal of the right to study, the exaltations of the *Puranic* ideologies, in particular the elevation and propagation of the ‘Sita cult’ etc. promoted women’s domesticity and subordination. The enforcement of the ‘*purdah*’, to begin with the Muslim regime and later continued in the post Muslim period forced women to retract within the four walls of their homes. Education and learning was the forbidden, as the belief was encouraged that a married woman casting her eyes on black ink will be forever destined to a life of widowhood. Including that of her performing the ‘*Sati*’ willingly as a pious duty to follow her husband and master, after the latter’s death.² The aim of this chapter is to search for possible explanations, as well as to pin-point of some reasons for gender consciousness regarding women’s question of what nineteenth century Bengali reformers liked to call women’s emancipation. The growth of gender consciousness in the nineteenth century may be attributed to a number of factors. But here some specific points are being highlighted which may broadly be represented from two stand points: i) Impact of Western Education and ii) Role of Contemporary Periodicals.

i) Impact of Western Education

The introduction and growth of western education was perhaps the most important single factor in the Indian awakening. Hence, it is necessary to discuss the growth of western education in Bengal where it first spread among the middle class

people and largely moulded their life and thought.³ The beginning was made with the foundation of the Asiatic Society in January 1784. For an awakening of interest and curiosity in their own past, which largely infused into the Indians a sense of self-respect, the Asiatic Society founded by Sir William Jones played a noticeable role. By laying emphasis on rational knowledge the Asiatic Society helped the growth among the Indians of an intelligent understanding of their national culture through scientific research. The works of Sir William Jones, James Prinsep, Alexander Cunningham, Dr. Maximilian Muller, Horace Hayman Wilson, Charles Wilkins, James Fergusson, Mr. Edwards Thomas, Rajendra Lal Mitra and others unearthed and threw a flood of light on India's great heritage and ancient glory. These instilled into them a floating sense of pride and self-confidence.⁴

In 1781 the Calcutta Madrasa was founded by Warren Hastings and it was followed by the establishment of the Sanskrit College at Benaras in 1792 by Jonathan Duncan, the Resident of the place. The Fort William College came into existence in 1800 and behind the screen there was a whole hearted initiative on the part of Lord Wellesley. The purpose of this college was for training of the young civilians. In a way it prepared the ground for English education and became the meeting place of English officers and Indian scholars. It also gave an incentive to native language and literature.⁵ A landmark in the history of the growth of Western education is the foundation of the Hindu College on 20th January, 1817. The Hindu College was a great success and it surpassed all expectations of its founders. It produced a galaxy of brilliant students whose intellect and knowledge of the English language and literature could hardly be excelled by students of any school in the West. The foundation of the Hindu College, in a sense, marked "the beginning of liberal-education in Bengal" and of "organized instruction on modern lines".⁶ Study of European history and literature made the educated Indians familiar with the prevailing spirit of democracy, nationalism and liberalism of Europe. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the ideas of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume and others began to reach the Indian shores. These made a profound impression on the inquisitive and responsive Bengali middle-class mind. The western impact was first felt in Bengal - "Bengal was moved far more powerfully than the other Indian provinces by the new ideals of freedom and equality of the 18th century European

illumination, which the British brought with them”.⁷ European rationalism and individualism also deeply influenced the Bengali intellectuals. It was Bengal where the British rule was first established and English education was first introduced. So, it was only natural that Bengal was the precursor in the growth of gender consciousness in India in the nineteenth century.

The effects of English literature and Western philosophy on the educated Indians were not insignificant. As a vernacular paper remarked, “It is their Wilberforces, Hampdens, Mills, Brights, Metcalfes, Macaulays, and hundreds of other luminaries, whose liberal principles have captivated us, and we have regarded them as the very model of morality, and hold them in veneration”. As Percival Spear writes, “All this attention was to the new class as water in a thirsty land, avid as it was for respect. When it came from the new world of the West, the source at the same time of so much criticism and scorn, it was balm indeed”.⁸

The current of Western culture and civilization was at that time practically sweeping away most of the educated Bengalis and they devoted themselves to the cause of upholding Hindu cultural heritage and turning the tide of Westernization.⁹ It was only in the third decades of the nineteenth century that efforts were made, more by enlightened individuals than by institutions, to ameliorate condition of the women. In the succeeding years institutions, imbued with liberal outlook, led a movement for improving the condition of womenfolk through diffusion of knowledge.¹⁰ The gender consciousness thus initiated, was a part of the nineteenth century Social Reform Programme. Rammohun and ‘Sati’, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar’s campaigns for widow-remarriage and against Kulin polygamy, the daring radicalism of Young Bengal, and the repeated splits within the Brahmo movement essentially on the issues were closely related to the women’s question.¹¹ Although there was sufficient opposition of this new current by the conservative groups yet the opposition could not find its success because of the lively spirit provided by the influential social group which was a product of the contemporary colonial economy and the ideology.

The simplest explanation, in terms of the influence of Western, and particularly British models on an English-educated group, is not really satisfactory.

They accepted the idea that society's evils could be traced to the oppressed condition of women saw female education and female emancipation as the first steps towards progress.¹² So, in the nineteenth century, as the 'women's question' became a part of the discourse of progress, there was a movement for female education, representing a search for a new model of womanhood as imagined by the educated colonial males.¹³ As early as in 1819, when Bengali women occupied a very inferior social position, Rammohun Roy in his second pamphlet on 'Suttee' observed that, a woman was considered to be no more than a useful creature who could at once be a cook, a sexual partner and a faithful housekeeper.¹⁴ Worse still, men held an extremely poor opinion of women maintaining that women were devoid of all intellectual abilities and could never be educated. However, as English education permeated a segment of urbanised middle-class men, although it was a small group of people, it posed a question as to the existing status of Bengali women. By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, quite a few people like Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore and even Radhakanta Deb, the great leader of the orthodox Hindus, became convinced that women should be given some education. This was thus the beginning of an era when a cross-section of Bengali men became aware of the need to educate and 'emancipate' their women.¹⁵

When the western thinking emerged in Bengal then the Bengali realised about human liberty, the power to win their surroundings, the courage to disobey decision and opinion of their social barriers.¹⁶ In the first half of the nineteenth century the Young Bengal group from the perspective of humanitarianism protested against the orthodox Hinduism. At the end of 1820s the Young Bengal group under the leadership of Derozio vehemently claimed for equal status of women along with offering of education for women. They were deeply influenced by Hume's Empiricism, Bentham's Utilitarianism, Shelley and Byron's Romanticism etc.

Not only that, in 1835, the most famous journal of Young Bengal named *Hindu Pioneer* propagated the necessity of human rights of women in the essay 'on women'. In that essay it was stated that, "Of all the subjects which attracted the notice of the Indian community, the above ought to have the greatest attention; for the domestic state of a people, whatever improvement they might make, will never be ameliorated unless their wives and daughters are educated with the same care as

themselves”.¹⁷ Because the uplift of women is necessary for the fulfilment of men and also in that essay there is a mention that – “.....The idea of superiority over them is therefore most unjust and to enslave them as the men of our country do is to show ingratitude to our universal father, who has given us more strength than women, only that we may defend them”.¹⁸ In fact, the English educated Bengali came out from their believe of fatalism and the Bengali life to some extent became humanize. From this time the tendency of personal individualism was emerging in the Bengali society.¹⁹ It may be said that, the connection between East and West was changing the male-female relationship in many Bengali literatures and this new idea they also applied in their personal life.

Female education was seen, too, as a way of improving marital relations. Madanmohan Tarkalankar, an women educationist and reformer of nineteenth century, expressed the utility of women education such as – if they want they could earn money, they would be able to take counting the income-expense of her family, they would be able to teach her children, if they are educated then they would be able to carry on the fit and happy marital life.²⁰ It was also hoped that, female education would help preserving harmony within the joint family. Many writers stated that, uneducated women were the main cause of dissension. Women were also responsible for the mental outlook of their children. In Bengal the tie between mothers and sons was especially close, where a son’s obedience and closeness to his mother continued beyond childhood, throughout the mother’s lifetime. A favourite example was the mother of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. A scholar summarized it as follows: “the existence of intelligently educated mothers, and sisters, and wives, is essential to the training of a race of intelligent and high-spirited sons, and brothers, and husbands.”²¹

“*Stri-siksha purusher sukher kalpabriksha*” (women education is the source of all male happiness), a Bengali article published in ‘*Subarnabanik Samachar*’ in 1924, highlighted a concept of meaningful conjugal life and the social implication of a happy family leading to a formation of a stable community. Education, as another article preached, trained women to become *sahadharmini* in the true sense of the term, that is, to become faithful partners in the material work and spiritual duties of their husbands – in other words a loveable companion. Such constructions were no

doubt derived from the discourse of Western modernity. The West had already acknowledged the victory of women, as another article in the same journal argued; those waves of change had already crossed the Himalayas and were about to flood the plains. 'For our own good, we must not resist this wave of change'. Female education thus became a pre-condition for the progress of the community, as women were the protectors and nurturers of its lineage, honour and respect.²²

It is a fact that, English textbooks, literature, and in some cases, visits abroad brought awareness of a different world without seclusion or child-marriage, where romantic love seemed to reign supreme in poems and novels (though much less so in reality) and widow were not burnt on forbidden to get married.²³ Introduced with Western education the enlightened Bengali male candidates for the first time realised the lack of mental distance with their wives that was a memorable event in Indian history.²⁴ The famous reformers like Rammohun Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Prasanna Kumar Tagore and others did not get the support and co-operation of their wives, even the newly educated youths feeling their life is not romantic for their uneducated wives. They habituated with the new thoughts and personal lifestyle which were mentally separate themselves from their guardians and wives. As a result, they became separate from their main family. In this contradictory circumstance, they realised the educated and enlightened wives for the necessity of their own life, satisfaction of conjugal relation and for social progress and advancement. Beside these, Ghulam Murshid, a feminist writer said that English ideas had resulted in an increase in affection and sympathy for their daughters who had for so long been much neglected and looked down upon. We can understand this if we read the autobiography of Brahmo leader Kalinarayan Gupta or the autobiography of Brahmomayee Debi, the wife of Durgamohan Das.²⁵

The progressive and conservative alike believed that, educated mothers would improve the physical health and mental strength of future generations of Bengali *bhadralok*. While conservatives believed that educated women would uphold the values the traditional society and that education would help women in leading a virtuous life, the progressive hoped that they would use their influence to bring about a social change.²⁶ In fact, a new theory was gradually emerging in the 1820s and 1830s by which Bengal would become civilized only if its women were

educated along with its men.²⁷ Akshay Kumar Dutta, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Pyarichand Mitra viewed this same theory.

The idea that education would spoil the womanly qualities in women and bring disgrace on their families was gradually disappearing. During the 1850s and 1860s the young Brahmos influenced Hindus to take up the cause of women's education with almost religious zeal. Brahmo leaders such as Keshab Chandra Sen, Bijoy Krishna Goswami, Sivnath Sastri, Aghore Nath Gupta and Umesh Chandra Datta, who were imbued with the newly emerging Western ideas of husband-wife relationship, found it essential to give some education to their partners to help them become better wives and better companions.²⁸

Thus, from the middle of the nineteenth century some individuals started thinking deeply about the nature of conjugal relations. The new owed much to the spread of Western education. Proficiency in English introduced the Bengalis to Western ideas which they internalized. Many in those days had begun to judge the existing social mores by the light of Western morale and ideals. Major social controversies like the abolition of *Sati* and the movement for the spread of female education diverted attention at the time from yet another important change silently transforming the structure of the family. Not many were aware that the relation between a man and his wife was becoming more intimate in the longer term.²⁹ The tendency to judge the social rules, customs and institutions by new lights grew stronger with time. This by itself leads to two conclusions: first, the ideas regarding conjugal relationship were undergoing a perceptible change together with the spread of education; and secondly, the social ills like polygamy, child marriage, extra-marital affairs, unequal marriage etc. which were noticed at the beginning of the century were, obviously, still not obliterated at the end of the century. Together, these factors accounted for the slow velocity at which closer conjugal relations developed in Bengali society despite the rise of the new social ideology. Undoubtedly the age of marriage of women increased slightly over time. Moreover, the numbers of polygamy decreased considerably in course of the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Much of this change can be attributed to the spread of education among the people and constant writing on this subject.

Men inspired by the new ideology believed that if depravity, polygamy or extra-marital affairs were to be done away with, conjugal life would have to be made more attractive.³¹ This could only be achieved, it was argued, by increasing mutual inter-dependence and good relations between the spouses. In many cases mutual mistrust stood in the way of a happy conjugal relation. Even an old man was suspected by his wife. In Bankim Chandra Chattterjee's *Indira* we find that, the mistress of the house did not permit any young women to wait on her old husband; an old maid served him foods. The propounder of the new ideology wanted to make sure that the relation between husband and wife would be placed beyond the reach of all suspicion and mistrust.³²

It may be said that, many of the English-educated *bhadralok* were attracted by the ideal of the correct relationship between husband and wife was that in which the wife was the intelligent companion of her husband's daily life, giving him sympathy and encouragement, counsel and advice, solace and relaxation. Their Anglicized education and colonial employment made it desirable to have a wife with some understanding of this new milieu. They felt that there can be no real happiness in the family, no real home life, no real companionship between two so unequally mated, the intellectual man and the unintellectual women: the woman will be unable to share in the cultivated pursuits and enjoyments of the man, or intelligently to divide with him the serious cares and troubles of this life, and he will be compelled to seek outside his own home the true sympathy and companionship, which he ought to find, but misses within it.³³

On the other hand, the element of English marriage that was most obviously missing, and the lack of which was most sorely felt, was that companionship. Employment under British rule accentuated a sharp division between work place and home, between business and pleasure or relaxation, a division less marked in Hindu society. English ideas stressed that qualities such as understanding and sympathy were particularly feminine. Home had to be a haven from cares and worries, and the wife was there not only a sympathetic and understanding ear to his grievances. She was to enhance his leisure by joining him in it, constantly at his side. In a colonial situation, where the *bhadralok* were being subjected to constant humiliation in their working lives, there was an exceptionally strongly felt need for those qualities.³⁴

It is true that, whether educated or not, the first major event in the life cycle of a girl was marriage. During the latter half of the nineteenth century the nature of this institution began to change. A different style of marriage gradually developed, assimilating new qualities of romantic love and companionship.³⁵ The question of arranged marriages raised a major point of difference between Hindu and English ideals. The English ideal of marriage was intertwined with notions of love and romance. A number of people in nineteenth-century Bengal began to voice objections to arranged marriages, where the partners had usually never seen one another before the marriage ceremony. The ideal of mutual growth in marriage was used as an argument to explain and defend the practice of child marriage, condemned by the British. It was said that, in a society where a woman had a definite role to fill in the household hierarchy, she had to be trained into that role when she was young and flexible, before she had developed independent ideas. Although, the British continued to harp on the barbarity of child marriage. In 1872, a Marriage Act was passed through Brahmo efforts, setting the minimum marriageable age for non-Hindus at fourteen for girls and eighteen for boys. More direct measures were seen to be necessary and were taken in the Age of Consent Bill of 1891.³⁶

The result of reading out new literature not only influenced the mind of the Bengali people in respect of conjugal relation of the foreigners but also injected the idea of freedom in respect of marriage into Bengali society. Since the four decades of nineteenth century the changing attitude in respect of mutual relation between male and female was formed due to regarding out of foreign literature. As a result of this, it was also felt necessary for choosing partner before marriage as per foreign practices. In 1842 Akshay Kumar Dutta remarked that, husband and wife cannot marry with their own choice, he described this as one of the bad social practices. Since the decade of 1850s-60s the demand for selecting partner before marriage was raised. Akshay Kumar Dutta had also an opinion that, meeting and conversation with male and female before marriage were essential. Satyendranath Tagore could not marry according to his own wish and hence wrote a letter to Gyanadanandini Debi with repentance. This was the result of changing attitude.³⁷ As a result of new consciousness, women are not considered as commodity of love, now they can

demand love. From this point of consciousness mutual choice and dislike of husband and wife emerged. This new change is most important in the world of thinking.

Lots of periodicals have been written to put emphasis on women and to improve customs to enable women as suitable partners for men and it happened basically before marriage. It is the reflection of men's hidden desire about the role of women. For example, Gyanendra Mohan Tagore, son of Prasanna Kumar Tagore wanted to make his wife Balasundari Debi (1833-1851) most modern of that age and hence appointed English governess for proper education of his wife. Satyendranath Tagore enquired about his wife through letter from England. He also requested Hemendranath Tagore (fourth son of Debendranath Tagore) to teach English to Gyanadanandini Debi. Girish Chandra Sen used to teach his wife *Varnaparichoy* at midnight when all the members of the house are slept. The attitude was also observed to make wife as life-partners along with mental partner. Moreover, it was also observed in the second half of the nineteenth century to make wife as partner of personal sorrows and sufferings. In all these activities the main thing was new values which made Bengali consciousness regarding wife's prestige in the family. Again it awakened new idea regarding conjugal relations and developed new feelings of love.³⁸

In that connection, the nineteenth century witnessed creation of a new genre of modern medical textbooks and "scientific" marriage manuals, advising men on how to conduct their sex lives within marriage. Some information on sexual relationships can be gleaned from these. Marriage manuals declared that, sex was not only a basic need, but also a source of great pleasure. They gave diverse advice on when to have and not to have intercourse. One manual proclaimed that, it was "unscientific" for a man to have intercourse before the age of twenty-two, for the old to have intercourse with the young, to have intercourse purely for pleasure, or against either partner's will, among other things. Another listed the wrong conditions for intercourse as being with a girl, who has not yet menstruated, without a desire for children, against the woman's will, or during the first days of her period. The menstrual taboo was found in all the manuals and textbooks, although the number of prohibited days varied. In all cases the woman's willingness was crucial in defining the most suitable time for intercourse. Simultaneously orgasm of

husband and wife was described as the fullest form of sexual enjoyment. If these manuals were taken as guidelines, the chances were that a woman would have had as much pleasure and fulfilment from intercourse of her husband.³⁹

After marriage, the birth of children sanctified the marriage bond. Motherhood was the most important function in the life of a Hindu woman. The *bhadralok* showed an eagerness to use new medical knowledge, although it was only accessible to the few who could afford the high cost. In 1848, the report of the Midwifery Hospital in the Calcutta Medical College announced with pride that all of their six or more college graduates now settled and practicing in Calcutta were “habituated called to take charge of the women of the families they attend during their confinements, and that though not required to render manual assistance, except in cases of difficulty, they are always requested to undertake the medical management of every case, both during and after delivery”.⁴⁰ It does show that, some of the *bhadralok* were anxious to try to relieve the sufferings of women in childbirth by employing doctors, and that women acquiesced. In an attempt to solve the problem of the very high infant and material mortality rate, women began to turn to doctors for solutions and that the increasingly frequent use of their services showed a desire to alleviate the suffering of childbirth by taking advantage of new medical techniques.

One way of improving health conditions was for mothers themselves to know something of the new medical principles. In 1857, the first of a continuing stream of mother and child care manuals, based generally of an English prototypes, appeared under the title of *Sisu Palan*, subtitled ‘Infant Treatment’. In this respect, we may refer the statement of Shib Chandra Deb who once wrote that, “ignorance on the part of Hindoo females of the proper management of infants, and the great mortality which arises from this cause” compelled him to write the book.⁴¹ He was not a doctor, but had adopted Andrew Combe’s “Treatise on the Physiological and Moral Management of Infancy” to the circumstance of Hindu society in an “easy and familiar style”.⁴²

This work and those that followed it recommended consciousness and made knowledge of the need and means for improvement known to the *bhadramahila*. In

that connection, a practical knowledge about the health care of where may be cited here when we come across the very personal experience of Shib Chandra Deb who noted about a manual of general instruction for women, published in 1862, which is said to have stressed the importance of prenatal care. Because traditional practices of birth took place in the *sutikagriha* or *aturghar*. This was always the smallest, darkest room in the house, a physical embodiment of the impurity associated with childbirth. Shib Chandra Deb recommended extensive changes in arrangements for the *sutikagriha*.⁴³ Before literacy among the *bhadramahila* had become widespread, however, initiative for consciousness of conditions came from men, who had some knowledge of alternative possibilities. Durga Mohan Das had read many books on childbirth. From these points we may conclude that, there was a new trend of thought process about the notion of male folk who seems to have come out from the domain absolute patriarchy that dominated the traditional society of Bengal. How did it shake the society of Bengal can fairly be understood from another unique example said by Durga Mohan Das. It is said that, when his wife gave birth to their first child in 1861, he is said to have decided that, he could not subject her to the rigors of the *sutikagriha*. In its place, he let her lie on his own bed, on a mattress, to the consternation of his family.⁴⁴ Another illustration may be what happened in the Tagore family of Jorasanko about the change they had initiated in the environment of the *sutikagriha*. It is said that, in 1872 the Tagore family's *sutikagriha* was a sunny room on the third floor of their Jorasanko house.⁴⁵

Thus, there was a beginning of changing scenario of the ritualistic pattern regarding child birth of Hindu families of colonial Bengal. This may be taken as a result of the progressive ideas of the West and virtually in the long run this seems to have inspired the elite women to take midwifery during the period of child birth. There was no dearth of literature to instruct them. A *bhadramahila* helping with a delivery early this century followed the 'modern' practices of bandaging the mother's stomach soon after birth and medicinal precaution.⁴⁶ Available knowledge was certainly widely circulated, although practice may have been slow to change in accordance with new of the hour. The consciousness reflect a desire on the part of educated Bengalis to get benefit from modern scientific knowledge and growing humanitarian concern for the welfare of mother and child. The major part of a

woman's life was still taken up with child birth and child rearing. This resulted the direct lessons that India received from the West. Because, the elevation of motherhood in this way gave the *bhadramahila* an enhanced sense of purpose and boosted their self-esteem.

There is another side of this new development and this was found in the extra financial burden in view of the health care of the women as well as the child caring which came inevitably as a new lesson from the social reality of nineteenth century Bengal. The new definition of motherhood gave the mother full responsibility for the moral as well as physical management of her children. Their strengths and weaknesses were all attributed to her. Shib Chundra Deb was again a pioneer in the field of literature on the moral training of children. In 1862, he added to his volume on the physical aspects of infant treatment with a second part on the moral management of infancy. His sources included selections from *Letters on Early Education* by Pestalozzi, the Swiss pioneer of new child rearing methods.⁴⁷ It was followed by a stream of books such as *Matrisiksa* in 1871, and *Saral Sisui Palan* in 1885.⁴⁸ In the West, the nineteenth century saw the culmination of a new idea that was taken up by the Bengali *bhadralok*, especially the Brahmos. They were attracted by the emphasis on morality in the education of the child. Journals especially for children were started such as Keshub Chandra Sen edited the children's magazine *Balak Bandhu* from 1878, *Sakha*, a monthly journal was also published for children in 1882.⁴⁹ Jnanadanandini Debi edited the magazine by the title *Balak*, an illustrated monthly for children from April, 1885. A year later it was incorporated into the adult journal *Bharati*. Ladies of the Sdharan Brahmo Samaj edited *Mukul* for children from 1895.⁵⁰ and an illustrated monthly magazine for girls, *Sakhi* was started in 1900.⁵¹

By the turn of the century, motherhood had been invested with new meaning for the *Bhadramahila*. It had been raised from a natural function to an exalted duty. In Bengal, reformers propagated the new duties and methods of motherhood with enthusiasm, because they believed the educated mother to be a crucial link in the process of modernization. The new career expectations of the sons and daughters of the *bhadralok* could only be met with the help and cooperation of mothers in creating a suitability 'modern' home environment.

Side by side, another important consciousness saw in the Bengali society that was *pardah*. By the end of the nineteenth century there had been some modifications in the *pardah* system. In general, these were part of the process of ‘Westernization’ associated with rising status under British rule. A combination of external pressures and responses from within Bengali society brought about changes in *pardah*. The arrangements of the colonial administration and provision of a transport network for travel were outside forces that eventually helped to bring about modifications in the *pardah* system. Dress reform and emergence into public society were consciously adopted by the progressive section of the *bhadralok* and gradually taken up by a wider group. These changes had a dramatic impact in the context of the segregated society of nineteenth century Bengal.⁵² Traditional dress was seen by the *bhadralok* as a faltering block in the way of reforming the condition of women. Traditional dress had evolved within a *pardah* society and was inappropriate for appearing in front of men outside the intimate family circle. Women would need to feel their dress provided protective covering if *pardah* were to be discarded. Koilasbasini Debi, one of the first Hindu female authoresses, thought it necessary for women to dress differently if they wanted to benefit fully from public education.⁵³

In that connection, the enlightened *bhadralok*, especially the Brahmos, actively sought a solution to the problem. In 1865, the Brahmo young men’s group, the *Sangat Sabha*, met to discuss a suitable form of dress for modern women. The problem was of immediate importance to them because they wanted to bring their wives into public society, but at that stage they were not able to form any definite conclusions.⁵⁴ Jnanadanandini Debi, one of the first Bengali women to act as official hostess at public functions hosted by her husband. The dress question was therefore, of direct practical relevance for her. Her suggestion was to improve a new form of dress that drew inspiration from diverse groups. The style she invented became known as the *Brahmika Sari*.⁵⁵ Thus, dress reform was initiated by Bengali men, under the influence of alien concepts of modesty, but was soon taken up by women themselves as they perceived that it was a necessary prelude to greater freedom from the restrictions of *pardah*. Although initially limited to a small group, the new form of dress was gradually adopted by all middle-class women.

In part, these changes were the result of a consciousness among the elite *bhadralok* that *pardah* was a form of oppression of women. Women's own preferences played an important part in determining the ways in which *pardah* would be modified. By the end of the nineteenth century the *pardah* system had been considerably modified. The modern *bhadramahila* had a redefined role in the household and in society.

In the second half of the nineteenth century saw another important change in the attitudes of a small segment of educated men towards women's 'liberation' in general and towards female seclusion in particular. The modernized man became conscious of the need for breaking the seclusion of their women in order to pave the way towards women's emancipation. Bengali women, who were only a decade ago expected not to leave their husband's homes for any place other than their paternal homes, started going abroad in the late 1860s. As female education spread and female seclusion became less vigorous among the *bhadralok*, an increased number of women began to participate in social activities outside the context of the family. More important than that, they began to involve themselves in various economic activities.⁵⁶

Though women were not to be given an opportunity to participate in a male world, but to be released from representing of 'modern' virtues, to be of benefit to future generations. Reformers seem to have assumed that woman's reactions to propose reforms would be favourable, and did not see the need to consult them. They saw women as passively grateful objects of reform. Yet women did have some influence in accelerating reform – directly, through active encouragement, and marginally, through acquiescence. Women's perceptions of their own situation were frequently very different from those of men. For men the "women's question" was separate from their working lives, but for women questions such as education or a public social life were connected with the whole form of their existence.⁵⁷

Women's Reaction about Consciousness

In the later part of the nineteenth century women began to realize and became conscious about their age long degradation and at the same time sought means for uplift. However, it is more important to note that, the attitude of women

regarding their own education was changing slowly but steadily. As a matter of fact, they were previously more conservative in their outlook in regard to their education than men. The belief that education would cause widowhood was very popular among women themselves.⁵⁸ They also maintained that, educated women would become unchaste and disobedient to their in-laws and husband. However, the situation changed with the passage of time. But fortunately enough, with the rise of an English-educated middle class, Bengali women's attitude also began to undergo a transformation. By the middle of the nineteenth century, only the Brahmo and the Christians women reflected a favourable attitude towards education. But within a few decades, traditional Hindu women too were becoming aware of the need for female education. In their opinion, men and women together constituted the whole society. Therefore, men alone could not steer the society towards the desired level of progress. Women had a definite role to play in society but they were unable to do so owing to their ignorance and backwardness. There was also the argument that education alone could make better mothers. Uneducated mothers had neither the knowledge of everyday hygiene nor the much desired ability to impart elementary education.⁵⁹

So, during the course of the nineteenth century, by the impact of Western education the pattern of women's lives began to change their degraded position. In reality, the concept of the 'perfect wife' was being redefined. First, there were modifications in the suitable activities for a female at different stages of her life. Second, there was a new and budding sanction of individualism and ultimately, the suitable arena for female action was extended.

ii) Role of Contemporary Periodicals

As has been mentioned that, there will be a discussion of another important factor for gender consciousness i.e. the role of contemporary periodicals. From the early nineteenth century the number of newspapers and journals in India nay Bengal began to increase rapidly. The rapid growth of press, particularly the vernacular press accelerated the growth of peoples' consciousness. In the first half of the nineteenth century women issues were written in many periodicals by enlightened male personalities. But in the second half of the nineteenth century women began to

start written about their own problems in many journals. One may perceive the dynamics of change in positions and strategies regarding certain issues like women's education, child marriage, widow remarriage, women's seclusion, 'reform', self-help, 'work for the country' etc. It is not too much to think that, the women, who wrote in the periodicals, having braved the censure of traditionalist to confess their identities in signed articles, also read what was written about them. This may well be a cause for the change in the dynamics of the local; history also records some changes that were effected here and spread across the country.⁶⁰ Women also experienced increased opportunities for the expression of their individuality. Although women in earlier times were certainly not an undifferentiated group, we do not have sufficient records to go beyond generalizations about their lives. Formal education and particularly the development of publications intended for and written by women gave women a voice.⁶¹

Women Education

From the second decade of the nineteenth century in support of women education important essays were published in various periodicals. These were *Samachar Darpan* (May23, 1818), *Sambad Prabhakar* (January 28, 1831), *Jnananveshan* (June18, 1831), *Bengal Spectator* (April, 1842), *Vidyadarshan* (1842), *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (August 16, 1843), *Sarvasubhakari Patrika* (August, 1850), *Bibidhartha Sangraha* (October, 1851), *Masik Patrika* (August 16, 1854), *Somprokash* (November 15, 1858), *Bamabodhini Patrika* (August, 1863), *Abala Bandhab* (1869), *Banga Mahila* (1870), *Jnanankur* (1872), *Bharati* (1877), *Paricharika* (1878), *Tattva Kaumudi* (1878), *Sahitya* (1890), *Sadhana* (1891), *Antahpur* (1898) etc. In all these magazines it was circulated that, the sorrows and sufferings of women life cannot be removed without women education.⁶² In the beginning of the nineteenth century Christian Missionaries thought about women education or Gour Mohan Vidyalkar expressed his opinion in an essay on '*Stree Siksha*' - all these opinions are equally echoes in the essay published in the *Sambad Prabhakar Patrika*. In the essay on '*Stree Vidya*' (Women Education) the author openly expressed that, illiteracy of women of this country was the cause of all types of harm, violence, conflict, anger, egoism, separatism, laziness and sorrows etc. The author dreamt of that day when mother and sister will advice through books

regarding academic affairs instead of offering bad practices through teachings to sons and brothers.⁶³

It was also written in the *Sambad Prabhakar Patrika* that, only a mother can lead her children honest and virtuous way of life. So, there may not be any doubt that, good manner of women can make also good character of men.⁶⁴ In a letter one Brahmin writer of Chinsura wrote in *Samachar Darpan* in 1838 that, the men and children who are studying must progress in life. But, if the condition of men is changed then do they match themselves with their illiterate wives? After a day's mental and physical work men or male member expects assistance and consolation from their wives. He also wants to express his internal message to his wives.⁶⁵ Thus, for the above purpose a new consciousness emerged from the decade of 1820s. It was thought that, Bengal would be civilized if the male are given education along with women.

The demand and ideology of conjugal life of the educated Bengali who were inspired by new ideology were mutual feelings between husband and wife. For this equality in respect of intelligence level of husband and wife was essential. The differences in the attitude of the husband and wife cannot be removed unless the wife was sufficiently educated. In view of this objective it was written in the *Gyanankur Patrika* that, to days youth demands educated wife. Women must be educated along with men. In the second half of the nineteenth century in different writings on women education, the utility of the study of women was repeatedly emphasized. It was admitted openly and unquestionably that, if the wife was educated then indiscipline would also arise less in the family activities.⁶⁶ Probably, another reason for this was that, if the merit of women education was placed before the Bengali society then the attitude of the conservative family towards women education could be reduced. Because the objections which was raised by the opponents of women education in the first half of the nineteenth century continued at the end of the century. In the second half of the nineteenth century the persons who put their argument in favour of women education launched severe attack against opponents. Madan Mohan Tarkalankar wrote in *Sarbasubhakari Patrika* and protested against the main objections raised by conservative society and at the end he mentioned a few utility points in favour of women education. The points were –

women could earn money if they so wish, they might maintain the accounts of the family, they could teach the children. Moreover, healthy and happy conjugal life was possible only the woman was educated.⁶⁷ It is thus important to note that, in any discussion on women education more emphasis was paid on husband, children and the necessity of society than the necessity of women's own.

In an imaginary dialogue between husband and wife in the earliest women's journal the *Masik Patrika* states: the husband spoke in favour of education to his wife, who was against it. The benefits he perceived were that if a wife could do accounts, then she would understand the family's financial situation and avoid quarrels. She would also be able to manage the property if her husband was absent or dead. The latter point convinced his wife, because she could relate it to cases among her own relatives. In one case her cousin, educated woman, had been widowed at thirty. Her husband's elder brother tried to deceive her, but she understood the accounts so well that he was unable to do so. Another cousin was uneducated and was therefore financially ruined on widowhood. The husband went on with the other major arguments in favour of female education – the extent of female influence on the home and on the next generation. He said that were in Europe a mother is her child's first teacher, in Bengal "the blind led the blind".⁶⁸ In 1898 Kulabala Devi, a woman writer of nineteenth century Bengal wrote in *Masik Patrika* on the importance of female education and specially wrote on this subject. She wrote that, it is an accepted fact that the first and foremost place for education is the *antahpur*. There is no greater well-wisher of a child than his mother. No one can care about the well-being of a child as his mother can. If she possesses a perfect character, there is no need for separate institutions to educate the child. What an ideal mother can teach her child is more effective than what can be taught by a hundred teachers.⁶⁹

In the early 1860s the *Bamabodhini Patrika*, which was founded by the followers of Keshab Chandra Sen, started a scheme of education for girls and women through correspondence, known as '*antahpur siksha*'. This course provided the opportunity for girls to continue with learning even after they were married. This *zenana* education through columns of the *Bamabodhini Patrika* as well as from tutors continued to be a popular method of educating girls for several years. The

Bamabodhini Patrika also noted extensively on the necessity of female education in a number of articles. Most of the writers were women themselves. Smt. Kamini Roy, the Bengali poetess expressed:

“If our women get educated the benefits to our country would be immense: Lack of education has put them in a pitiable state today. Society comprises of both men and women – they have, therefore, equal responsibility to discharge social duties. But our women are unable to do so simply because they are ignorant of what those duties are. This ignorance has given birth to numerous vices in the society today. Lack of education has also prevented our women to enjoy the finer elements of life. They live the life of animals, as it is only the animals that limit themselves to fulfilling primary needs. Illiteracy has reduced women to performing lowly and menial tasks. Had they been educated, they could have shared the duties with men. As a matter of fact, women are better equipped to do certain jobs. A newborn baby knows no one else apart from his mother, his childhood is spent with her and during this time he learns whatever his mother teaches him. Hence a knowledgeable mother can groom her child in the best possible manner. But the saddest part is that the boy child gets all the attention and education – that the girl child deserves no less is always overlooked.”⁷⁰

In another issue of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Barada Sundari, one of the contributors of the journal wrote on the necessity of female education. In her words:

“As education is essential for men, it is equally necessary for women. God has created both the sexes and if He has given the right of education to men, similarly He has also given it to women women are unable to do any work properly if they are not given education from childhood. Our women are simply not aware of how to run a household, how to nurse the elderly parents and how to respect them, or how to rear children and give them proper education..... Some say that educated women become widows while some argue that since women do not need income they do not need any education. Needless to say, these are downright baseless arguments – causing great harm to the nation. If women have the same rights to education as that

of men, how can it cause any harm? Only those who have had a taste of education know the sense of fulfilment it can provide. That we have a high infant mortality rate in our country, that our families are often plagued with fraternal conflicts – are clearly results of lack of education among women. These would not have happened if the women knew how to raise children and how to maintain good relations in a family. With God’s grace, may all the women of our country be educated so that they can make a positive contribution towards the progress of the nation and make our country proud.”⁷¹

The another important journal *Abalabandhab* started by Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay, one of the Brahmo leader of Bengal, made great impact on the first band of educated Bengali ladies and he will no doubt be long remembered as a sincere friend and benefactor of women. Some of Dwarakanath’s writings in *Abalabandhab* were, on the one hand defensive while on the other, moralistic and judgemental on the proper behaviour and demeanour of educated women. Such women, Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay maintained, “should be free from pride and self-conceit and should bring unity among all with their love and sympathy”. He warned that if they “serve their own self-interest they would undoubtedly expose themselves to the charge of negligence towards society and humanity.”⁷²

The *Antahpur*, one of the Bengali journals for women informs how Sasipada Banerjee, the editor of the journal himself managed successfully the education of his two daughters namely Ushabala Debi and Banalata Debi. Its peculiar feature was that, it was written exclusively by women and meant for the women. This was also helpful for the progress of female education. In one of the issues of *Antahpur* Smt. Nagendrabala Devi, one of the contributors of the journal says:

“..... As our women remain uneducated, country is losing its mobility. All human beings require education as urgently as they require food. Just as in the same way food nourishes our body physically, education nourishes us mentally and enriches our mindset. Both men and women are part and parcel of family, so why should there be any discrimination in imparting education..... No educated child would respect his mother if she is

uneducated and inexperienced. He would simply ignore her and no race progress without respecting their mother.....”⁷³

Not only the above mentioned issues, the *Antahpur* also communicated another important aspect of the society relating to women education and it has been nicely reported by Smt. Hemangini Chowdhury, one of the contributors of the journals, in one of the issues she had written:

“The girl child should be reared in the same way as that of the boy child and should be imparted education diligence..... They can make a judicious choice between healthy and unhealthy things, they can use things better and in general their activities would be more conducive to better health. In remote villages where the *Kavirajas* (village physician) are not always available, if women can be taught the very basics of medical science and symptoms of common diseases and medicine, many a time relief can be obtained from diseases and emergency situations can be handled in a much better way.....”⁷⁴

In the later period *Banga Mahila*, *Paricharika*, *Bharati*, *Sahitya*, *Sadhana* etc. played significant role for the same purpose. Historical importance of several essays is too much which were published in these periodicals. From these writings we can understand the contemporary gender consciousness about female education. Side by side, many periodicals for the spread of Muslim women education took important role that is – *Nabanur* (1803-1907), *The Mussalman* (1906-1936), *Probasi Islam Pracharak* (1900-1936), *Basana* (1909), *Mussalman Chronical* (1908), *Banganur*, *Mohammadi*, *Moyajjin* (1930), *Kohinur* (1911), *Saogat* (1918-1946), *Annesa* (1921), *Bulbul*, *Begum* etc. But *Annesa* was the first Muslim women edited journal which was published in 1921 and the editor was Sufia Khatun.⁷⁵ Most of the Muslim women’s journal started in the first half of the twentieth century because of their conservative attitudes about women and society’s backwardness.

Women’s Seclusion

In the first half of the nineteenth century new thinking emerged regarding introduction of women education, the position of women in the society, their

responsibility etc. and also we are listening the word in the air ‘women emancipation’ and ‘seclusion’ etc. On the other hand, it was also observed that, an attempt was made to put a limit on the movement of women. So, two different features of women related issues can easily be experienced in the nineteenth century Bengal.

After the passing of long time in the second half of the nineteenth century essays were written in different magazines giving due importance to eradicate the seclusion system.⁷⁶ In the beginning of the twentieth century it was also written that, the Bengali women were confined to narrow inner apartment and hence their mental development and enthusiasm were obstructed.⁷⁷ In the second half of the nineteenth century education being the male carrier entered into the inner apartment and hence women started to think in many fields in a new way. From this period many women wrote their thinking in different magazines. From these writings we could know the changing attitude of women and different approaches towards consciousness.

One of the most important factors of consciousness and changing mentality of Bengali society was the question of women seclusion. In one of the issues of *Bamabodhini Patrika* wrote on the evils of female seclusion and tried to make the society conscious about all these superstitions. It commented:

“.....keeping women in cages is a heinous crime that is falling to attract anyone’s attention. Many consider that both women and animals need to remain confined to preserve their nature and the men’s honour. But this concept is quite baseless and ridiculous..... Considerable harm is being done to children by keeping their mothers under confinement. As the nature of the children depends on the nature of their mother, women should never be kept in confinement. If kept, it would be against the wishes of the Almighty..... Women are delicate in nature and this practice is weakening them further. How can this be of benefit of the children? By allowing women to go outside, they can be livened up with fresh air and the joys of travelling. Strong and cheerful mothers will bear well nourished and strong children who would contribute positively to the welfare of the nation”.⁷⁸

Again the chief co-operator of Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay in his quest for the emancipation of women was Pandit Sivnath Sastri. We come across in one of the issues of the *Tattvakaumudi* in which Pandit Sivnath Sastri wrote on the evils of female seclusion. He says:

“It is an accepted fact that the entire race does not develop only with the advancement of the male sex. Social inhibition for women is a main retardant to progress. When women are weak both physically and mentally, it cannot be expected that the children they would be able and healthy. These factors have been incorporated in our veins. So, due to the lack of involvement of women in big issues, they are predominantly restricted to petty issues..... If they got the opportunity to exercise their God-gifted talents and the scope to be self-sufficient, is there any doubt that they could have earned a name and fetched many laurels for the country?”⁷⁹

On the one hand, newly educated persons being inspired by modern thinking felt the need to spread the way for women emancipation by removing seclusion and on the other, they described seclusion system as contrary to the principle of civilization. It is the Muslims who were responsible for the introduction of *pardah* system. According to them, before the coming of the Muslim to India in the tenth century *pardah* system was unknown to us. The Bengali social reformers and even the women put their arguments again and again that, the Hindus partly implemented *pardah* following Muslims and partly to protect the women from the temptation of the rulers.⁸⁰ In the six decades of the nineteenth century changed in the attitude of one portion of educated society was noticed in respect of women liberation and especially in respect of attitude of removal of seclusion related issues. But just a decade back, the social reformers focused only on women education. From the 1860s onwards they realized that, the seclusion was the main obstruction of women education i.e. for the mental development of women. Also they felt that, the normal relations between male and female are disturbed due to confinement of women.⁸¹ In view of the realisation a changed attitude in respect of seclusion and the development of the women was observed.

Under such circumstances a part of Bengali women claimed for removal of seclusion along with the consciousness of male. The women consciousness in respect of confinement can be realized from the essays of criticisms launched against the ongoing practices of the then Bengal. They wrote that, no restriction should be imposed on women for taking bath in the Ganges or in the open pond. Besides this, they should not be debarred from coming to their house after bath being exhibiting their whole body with wet-cloth. Even they are not prohibited from talking with their male servants.⁸² Another example in respect of women consciousness about seclusion can be referred here and these were reflected through their writings, such as to make fun shamelessly in a bride chamber, the obscene ritual of 'remarriage' after first menstruation and they were not restricted for participating in a function of 'Swad Bhakshan'.⁸³ So, we may realize the consciousness of women about seclusion as they raised questions against all these practices. In this matter they also said that, if the gentle women from good family with decent dress and with maintaining proper manner go out of home with husband or with other close relatives or meet with close relatives like husband's elder brother and father in-law then the people criticise them.⁸⁴ Many people in that period believed that, the women would lose their chastity if they break *purdah* system or talk with other person. Some educated women raised question in respect of justification of this idea. From these examples we understand their protesting mentality. They claimed that, these complain and apprehensions were totally baseless and argued that European women do not maintain *purdah* system and hence all of them are not unchastity.⁸⁵

Therefore, due to gradual development of women education and reduction of rigidity of *purdah* system especially among the Brahmos women began to participate more in the activities performed beyond the familial barricades. In this case apparently it may be noted that, it started through participation in the prayer meeting by the Brahmo women. This type of incident occurred for the first time in the month of January, 1866. At that time 'Annual Magh Festival' of the Brahmos was held in the residence of Debendranath Tagore and almost fifty women participated in that festival. After the leaving of male members the women were allowed to sit behind a screen in order to listen to religious advice given by

Debendranath Tagore.⁸⁶ A few other women and Brahmomayee Debi, the wife of Durgamohan Das forwarded one step ahead as compared to earlier group of women. These women were present along with other male members on the occasion of weekly *upasana* or prayer of the Brahma society of Barishal.⁸⁷ But they could not perform important something as they were lesser in number. But Brahma women of Calcutta formed first women association named *Brahmika Samaj* in 1865. It was the first women association of Bengal. The discussion of women association will be highlighted in detail in the next two chapters. Again, in the Annual Report of the *Banga Mahila Samaj*, Swarna Prabha Bose, sister of Jagadish Chandra Bose not only supported the movement of women for breaking *purdah* system and talking with other men but also she noticed that, those women who were previously inactive in the social gatherings or felt uneasy they are now more unhesitating and free in this kind of environment. She also said that, participation in such type of social gathering was the only medium for being civilised.⁸⁸ In the nineteenth century Bengali society the Hindu women specially among the Brahma women wrote many essays on consciousness in respect of *purdah* system in different magazines. The reflections of these ideas continued in the periodicals of the twentieth century published by the Muslims. References in this respect can be cited in the first half of the twentieth century were: *Al-Eslam Patrika* (1917), *Masik Mohammadi Patrika* (1928) etc.⁸⁹

Many women were quick to seize any opportunity that came to them for acquiring knowledge and acquainting themselves with a wider world. Some women of Chinsurah wrote to the editor of the *Samachar Darpan* in 1836 about women degradation. In their words:

“If the dignity of any set of men is to consist in the degradation of women (which God be praised is not case) we would say to these tantamount lords of creation that we care very little for such men and their dignity..... Education is working its way rapidly in the families of enlightened Hindoos, and where it has already dispersed, and independence is keenly felt.”⁹⁰

On the other hand, the Young Bengal group was passionately fervent in its pleas for the betterment of the condition of women. A contributor to the

Jnananvesan in 1837 wrote that, “God having made men and women in this way would never have thought that one was to be the slave of another or that one was to be counted as inferior to the other”. From this statement it is very clear that the creator is so wise and merciful that it is not his wish that in his creation one is to be the slave of the other for her life’s duration. But gradually man’s cunning has replaced God’s wishes with his own restrictive fetters.⁹¹

In this context, Durga Charan Bandopadhyay, a follower of Brahma movement, was influenced by new ideology of civilization. The main teaching of this ideology was that, how much the society is civilised which depends on how much the women enjoys prestige in the society. He believed that, the degree of happiness in the relation between husband and wife depends upon mostly on the mental development of wife. For this reason, secretly he started to make her wife educated. Among the Bengali women Kailas Basini Debi emerged as author of a book within a decade. In the later period, Gyanadanandini Debi, Swarnalata Ghosh, Hemangini Debi got themselves educated in this way. During the decades of 1860 and 1870 many Brahma women raised different issues of criticisms in their writings against the degraded position of women in the society and confinement.⁹²

Reference to Ramasundari Dasi, one of the writers of *Bamabodhini Patrika* can be cited in this matter. She analysed the degraded status of women in the society. She came to the conclusion that, the Bengali women were degraded in rank to male and imprisoned like birds in a cage. She explained this situation as unhealthy and unsuitable (inappropriate) for living. Hence, for the sake of salvation he prayed to God.⁹³ Some observations of women writer of *Bamabodhini Patrika* may be mention here. Sarada Debi, one of the writers of the *Bamabodhini Patrika*, also showed arguments to find out the possible reason of confinement of women. According to her, the male members consider women as belonging to the animal kingdom and confined them in the room. Because, the male members thought that, otherwise the women will be unfaithful to one’s husband and spread scandal over family. She described this idea as ridiculous and gave a call for establishing justice towards women in the society.⁹⁴ Nagendrabala Mustafi, one famous writer of the then period wrote in 1895 that, the situation of the Bengali women was like ‘a bird in a cage’.⁹⁵ Rajbala Debi claimed male member responsible for the degraded status

of women in society.⁹⁶ Kamini Roy, one of the famous poetess declared that, India would never prosper properly if our women were not made free from chains of dependence of others.⁹⁷ So, it is reflected from their writings that, the women were becoming conscious gradually about their degraded position in the society.

The Evils of Child Marriage

Not only women education or seclusion or women degradation in the nineteenth century Bengal side by side, another most important fact of gender consciousness was the evils of child marriage. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to the growth of intimate conjugal love was child marriage which was the subject of frequent comment in contemporary journals. It was pointed out that, the age of the bride was not suitable for promoting the true ideal of relations between husband and wife. In many cases the husbands were such older than their wives. This resulted, apart from other things, in a gulf of difference in their mental outlook. Contemporary writings testify to it.⁹⁸

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar strongly argued that child marriage could never lead to the conjugal love. We may count his article '*Balya Bibaheer Dosh*' (the evils of child marriage), published in the very first issue of the *Sarbasubhakari Patrika* (1850) as being the first manifestation of the changes outlook. This may be treated as the first step to focus the evils of child marriage. Before that, not much social consciousness regarding the evils of this practice was noticeable. Even if there was no organized protest movement, dissatisfaction against the practice was growing. Initially, it was confined to a socially conscious minority. In the later period, a number of articles came to be written on the physical, social and other undesirable aspects of child marriage.

Being worried about the demerits of child marriage Bamasundari Debi once wrote that, the country would progress if the child marriage system was abolished. Our family and society were being humiliated regularly with the effects of child marriage system.⁹⁹ Later, one anonymous scholar Rasiklal Sen discussed the merits and demerits of child marriage system in detail in *Bharati Patrika* and commented that, the health and mind of both the husband and wife became sick and fatigued. Again the fullest development of the gland available in the physical and mental side

are related. In fact, the beauty of health and mind were lost as a result of child marriage and given birth to immature baby.¹⁰⁰ Same remark was also passed by Kailasbasini Debi in respect of bad effects of child marriage system.¹⁰¹ Satyendranath Tagore wrote sharply in the same way in *Bharati Patrika* that, child marriage was another insufferable principle. Its poisonous effect was found not only in Bengal but also all over India. He ridiculed child marriage of boys and girls and compared this marriage with the marriage of male pigeon and female pigeon.¹⁰²

Not only in the magazines of nineteenth century run by the Hindus but also in many magazines of twentieth century specially run by the Muslims criticisms against the demerits of child marriage system were discussed. For example, in the Bhadra issue in 1324 (1917) of *Al Eslam* it was written that, the main obstruction for liberation and education for women was child marriage. It was harmful, disgraceful and the like not only for female child but also for male child. So child marriage has got no positive side.¹⁰³ In the same way, several criticism and discussion against child marriage attracted our notice and highlighted the consciousness of people such as in *Moyajjin patrika* (Sraban, 1335), *Masik Mohammadi Patrika* (Baishakh, 1335), *Islam Pracharak Patrika* (Sraban-Bhadra, 1310) and others.

Polygamy

Really the nineteenth century was a golden age of social consciousness. After getting some education the women took the responsibility for spreading social consciousness. Moreover, they also began to write against the social vices like polygamy in different contemporary magazines and periodicals. Because, the educated Bengali society of nineteenth century Bengal became conscious about the immoral practice of multi marriage system. Even they started movement for abolition of this bad practice. The proof of discussion of such things was found in a meeting of *Atmiya Sabha* in 1819. Raja Rammohun Roy in his Second book titled *Sahamaran Bishaye Prabartak O Nibartaker Sambad* wrote about the problems and sufferings faced by the kulin women in respect of *Sati*. Rammohun took the initiative for growing consciousness among the sensitive people of the society. Therefore, consciousness against polygamy system slightly increased during the third decades in the nineteenth century. At that time in the magazine of Christian

missionaries raised their voice against this practice. The Young Bengal also protested against polygamy system through their writings. During fourth decades of the nineteenth century in *Vidyadarshan*, *Bengal Spectator*, *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, *Sambad Bhaskar* and in the fifth decades of this century in *Sarvasubhakari Patrika*, *Bibidhartha Sangraha*, *Masik Patrika* and so on Akshay Kumar Dutta, Krishnamoham Bandyopadhyay, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and other scholars made the society more aware against polygamy system. For example, in *Vidya Darshan Patrika* published in 1842 under the guidance of Akshay Kumar Dutta tried to create sympathy of the people of our country against polygamy and *Kulinism* for the first time. In this magazine he for the first time claimed for justification and necessity for making laws in order to stop polygamy system. The writings of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar published during the period from 1842 to 1856 made educated people conscious against polygamy system. In 1844, a long essay titled ‘The Kulin Brahmin of Bengal’ of Krishna Mohan Bandyopadhyay published in the magazine played an important role in this matter. Without any hesitation *Tattvabodhini Patrika* remarked that, a few *Varnas* of our country influenced by customary practices of *Kulinism* one person accept water from hundreds of women. Moreover, many of them considered marriage as one kind of means for earning.¹⁰⁴ In fact, due to oppression of *Kulinism* the marriage, a holy social institution finally has been transformed into a commercial one. As a result, a pathetic problem like child widow emerged.¹⁰⁵ Besides this, ‘Widow Marriage Antidote’ and the prestige of *Kulinism* – these two bad practices founded by Ballal Sen made the society full of adultery and hence increased the number of bastard and prostitute in the Calcutta city. The impure environment emerging from the room of the prostitute has been entering into the inner portion of the dwelling house of the housewives and on the other hand, removing the shame and shyness of bastard insulted the children of gentlemen born in good family.¹⁰⁶

From one writings in order to measure the degree of reactions and the level of consciousness of women Bamasundari Dasi realised that, *Kulinism*, polygamy, child marriage system and old aged marriage system made irreparable loss to the society. Hence, the spread of women education and the introduction of child widow marriage were highly essential in the interest of social welfare. Bamasundari Debi

wrote that, endless welfare could be held if the *Kulinism* were abolished. The Kulin Brahmin could marry as many as they wish. Even the octogenarian old man of the caste was not prevented from getting married. So, this kind of marriage was considered as an important social evil. Again these types of activities can be described as abortion and adultery.¹⁰⁷ Thus, it is realised from the above that, the people became conscious and sympathetic towards different kinds of adultery created due to polygamy system.

The reference of sympathy and fellow feeling towards women can be cited through the publication of magazine of *Abalabandhab*. It was in the year 1869 in Dacca that, a twenty-five year old Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay started to publish the journal *Abalabandhab* (Friend of Female) which brought him eminence and recognition as a spokesman of women's rights in society. Dwarakanath himself explained why he started publishing the monthly journal which was exclusively meant for women. He says,

“Everyone was very much familiar with the severe pains and sufferings which the womenfolk in our country had to undergo during their lifetime. While we were young, the news of murdering young ‘Kulin’ girls by poisoning often came to our knowledge. Such incidents were not uncommon. One could imagine how such barbaric acts could take place unless those who indulged in such cruel activities had lost all humane feelings. During our childhood we had turned out to be misogynists as a result of our going through the verse of Chanakya *pandit* and we derived pleasure in belittling the woman and ridiculing them. However, as the reports of torture on women and the incidents of their murder came to our knowledge, the earlier attitude towards them softened and we became rather sympathetic towards them and stopped ridiculing. We further felt affection for them. We began to consider it to be our duty if we could ameliorate at least to some extent the sufferings of women. With this objective in view, the *Abalabandhab* came in to existence.”¹⁰⁸

Though the polygamy was the problem of small number of Brahmins yet many women not belonged to Brahmin family wrote about the demerits of polygamy of Kulins. For instance, Kailashbasini Debi being Kayastha discussed in detail in the book entitled *Hindu Mahilar Heenabastha* about polygamy of Kulin and their

demerits. She described in detail about the child widow, child marriage and also how the marriage of young women was facilitated with the old man due to polygamy.¹⁰⁹ Kshiroda Mitra, Sarada Debi, Jogindra Mohini Basu and so on and so forth almost in the same way criticised polygamy and proposed for salvation from the same.¹¹⁰ The opposition made by them is expressed not only in their writings but also in their activities. For instances, in 1870, one Kulin wife named Krishnamani filed a suit in the court for food and clothing against her husband named Laxminarayan Mukhopadhyay and the court passed order in favour of wife. The court passed the judgement in this way that, Laxminarayan would pay Rs. 15 per month to Krishnamani for her food and clothing. But due to poverty Laxminarayan could not pay the said amount to her wife and hence was compelled to go to jail.¹¹¹ One Kulin wife Haimabati Debi became victorious in the same type of case in 1876.¹¹² Another Kulin wife named Lalitmohini Debi earned huge money in such a case from her husband.¹¹³ Though this type of case against husband is not significant now a day yet it was completely unthinkable in those days. Due to the spread of women education Kulin women became conscious against polygamy of Kulin. Bidhumukhi Basu of Dacca can be cited as an important example in this context. In 1870 her father arranged her marriage with a Kulin. This Kulin had 12-13 wives earlier. Bidhumukhi was slightly educated and hence refused to marry the person who was polygamous and also she fled away to Calcutta with the help of her uncle. It was there in Calcutta she was given shelter by the Brahmo leader Durgamohan Das. Hence her father's group being angry filed a suit in the court against her uncle. But Bidhumukhi Debi explained her own stand in the court and became victorious in the suit.¹¹⁴

Again many writings and movements against polygamy launched in the decades of seventies of the nineteenth century and as a result of these some good reaction was found in the society. It was noticeable in the *Hindu Hitaishini* magazine in the middle of 1871 that, five 'Kulin' Brahmins violating rules of *Kulinism* and made statement in the magazine in respect of marriage of their daughter. In the news published in 1872 it was found that, polygamy was a shame to the married Kulin members of Decca region. Kulins also told in this way that, they felt shy to call themselves as Kulin. In 1875 Rashbehari Mukhopadhyay in order to

set up a practical example allowed his daughter to get marry with a son who broke away customary Kulin practices of marriage. In 1877 he allowed his son and daughter to marry persons who belongs to separate caste. Seeing his brave step many followed the same path.¹¹⁵ In the later period, even many Muslim Magazines like *Al-Eslam* (Kartik, 1326 B.S.), *Islam Pracharak* (srabon-Bhadra, 1310) etc. criticised against the multi marriage system.¹¹⁶

Widow Remarriage

Widow Remarriage along with women education, seclusion, child marriage, polygamy etc. was an important step of social consciousness in the nineteenth century. As a result of *Kulinism* many child widows created in the society and their miserable and distressed life naturally attracted the nineteenth century conscious social groups which reflected in the various contemporary periodicals. The name of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was inextricably linked with widow remarriage. But in the primary stage two periodicals namely *The Reformer* (25th November, 1838) of Prasanna Kumar Tagore and *The Bengal Spectator* edited by Ram Gopal Ghosh published essays in support of remarriage of the Hindu widows mentioning the scriptural prescription. On 15 January 1843, in *The Bengal Spectator* it was told in support of the remarriage of widows that, if the male member could remarry after death of his wife then why the wife would not be able to get married after the death of her husband. Besides this, in this essay it was also said that, the ancient pundits prohibited remarriage of widow for certain reason led the helpless widows to face different types of hardship and occurred different bad activities in the society. Hence, remarriage of widow was necessary. Moreover, if the sons of themselves were allowed to inherit the paternal property then it was suppose to be a great deed done in this respect. This would necessarily glorify the progressive trend of the society. It was known from the published material in the *Bengal Harkara* and in the *India Gazette* on 11th March of 1845 that, Ram Chandra Vidya Bagish, the scholar of Brahma Samaj made necessary arrangement in support of remarriage of widow.¹¹⁷ After the enactment of widow remarriage act one women named Vidya Debi stated in a magazine that, she became old enough and hence did not want remarriage. But she expressed her opinion in a way that, this act would remove sorrow and sufferings of the hundreds of widows.¹¹⁸ Though there was a doubt that

this letter of Vidya Debi was written at all by any woman because very few women were educated at that time. But, one women letter writer residing at Shantipur, a well-known locality in the Nadia district, Bengal, not only pointed out the demerits of *Kulinism* but also demanded for such prescriptions so that widows could remarry. She was fully aware that the prescriptions in the scriptures in this matter were in favour of widows. Hence, he appealed to the government through letter.¹¹⁹ Being encouraged with the reference of women of Shantipur, under the caption the ‘Women of Chinsurah’, Hooghly, the second letter contained an appeal to fathers and brothers, and underlined a number of specific evils or disabilities through a series of questions and demanded salvation from the total distressed condition of women. One of these questions was: ‘If a husband can marry after the death of his wife, why should a woman be debarred from marrying after her husband’s death? Does not a woman have the identical longing for a conjugal life as a man? Can you stop the evils arising from such unnatural laws?’¹²⁰ These two letters might have been regarded as sufficient testimony for the consciousness of women in Bengal, if they were really written by women. But it is just possible that, they were really the composition of some men and sent in the name of women to evoke pity and sympathy. In any case they put very pithily the many social evils which made the life of Bengali women wretched and miserable.

How Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar tried to introduce remarriage system of widows; from which scripts he got affiliation and above all, the atrocities in the society will continue permanently if the remarriage system of widows were not introduced - all these issues have already been discussed in the 2nd chapter. But a few widows from Midnapore categorically stated their opinion regarding the above issues. It was very important to note here that, the reason for introduction of remarriage system of widows cited by these women were similar to the opinion of male member. The supporters of the remarriage system of widows wanted to protect the society more from social adultery than to improve the condition of women. Women widows residing at Midnapore in order to stop unlawful sexual intercourse like unlawful abortion in the society wanted interference of Radhakanta Deb, but from this it was not difficult for us to understand the level of consciousness of the women.¹²¹ On the other hand, Bamasundari Debi recommended for remarriage of

child widow in her writings. She described the sorrows and sufferings of child widows. She also stated that, not only the male members of the then Bengali society but also the women equally realised the sufferings of pitiable life of widows and for the sake of salvation they favoured for the introduction of remarriage system of widows. Not only Ramasunari Debi, but also many other women in the nineteenth century in their writings strongly advocated for remarriage system of widows.¹²² The arguments of Sarada Debi of Muzaffarpur were specifically referable in this context. She wrote that, if the male members were allowed to get married second time then why the widow would be deprived from such rights and opportunities. Of course, the almighty God did not prohibit any where for remarriage system of widows.¹²³ In the same way, Ramasundari Debi, Khsiroda Mitra, one anonymous lady of Barasat, Brajabala Debi¹²⁴ and others raised their arguments in favour of widow remarriage.

Conjugal Relations

Women education, various social evils and the like not only considered the matter of social consciousness in the nineteenth century. In the second half of that century conjugal relation was an important feature of gender consciousness and newly educated youths began to think about this subject which not only effected by western education but also we may follow in the contemporary periodicals and journals. From different writings of the second the half nineteenth century we notice changes in the conjugal relations. Consciousness relating to conjugal affairs began to develop in the mind of men side by side with the progress of century. Many reasons like close link with western culture and spread of education worked together behind this. As a result, the picture of conjugal life published in different writings i.e. in different journals was not only a reflection of husband-wife relation but also an index of change of mentality. The present relation between husband and wife was not happy at least in many cases – the moment this thinking got recognition an attempt to enquire different type of conjugal relation emerged proportionately at the same time. In reality, the changes in respect of relation between husband and wife came out very slowly. But the attitude regarding this relation began to change among the educated person and in this regard, a few writings of this matter may be highlighted from contemporary journals.¹²⁵

Newly educated Bengalis gradually developed the sense of the inadequacy of domestic relationship. A Brahman from Chinsura pointed out it was as early as in 1838 in a letter published in *Samachar Darpan*: “Bengali men are now receiving education and consequently their minds are being enlightened. Under the circumstances how can they get on with their unlettered wives? Can they expect from these wives the sort of company they require after a long day of physical and mental labour? Will they be able to communicate their real feelings to these women?”¹²⁶ So, it is very clear from the above mentioned quotation that the question came to the notice about the unhappy relationship with husband and wife.

Again an article on social reform in the *Bamabodhini Patrika*, wrote that: “..... The kind of pure enjoyment that is available to husband and wife in civilized countries is not present in our country. The husband does not receive enough from his wife to satisfy his expectations. Women are nearly all uneducated, and an educated person can never have a satisfying conversation with an uneducated person. Therefore, the husband, having finished his official work will go elsewhere for relaxation. For him the house is no longer a place of peace, but has become a place of discord”.¹²⁷

The Brahmo magazine *Bamabodhini Patrika* again published articles on the ideal relationship between husband and wife. A new ideology was being propagated in that *Patrika* – marriage is the union of two souls. In a society where husbands and wives seldom met, had a wide difference in mentality, a radical new concept was being put forward that the husband and wife are complimentary. It was stated in this magazine that, marriage culminates into a very holy relationship. Hence the relationship between husband and wife is not a temporary familial relationship. The relationship is a very pure one. They would perform all the duties of life hand in hand and satisfy the needs of the souls of each other.¹²⁸

In traditional Bengali conjugal relationship this concept was quite new. In the article titled ‘*Ardhangini*’ in the *Bamabodhini Patrika*, there was a discussion regarding the problem of a mental distance between husbands and wives. It stated that, “when the husband is busy determining the distance between the Sun and other constellations, the wife is busy measuring the dimensions of her pillowcases. When

the husband thinks about the stars and planets in the sky, and determines the velocity of comets, the wife is then at the kitchen, determining the reflexes and the spread of the cook.”¹²⁹ By exposing the differences in mentality between the husband and the wife these articles aimed at drawing the couple more close to each other. The new ideal of conjugal life prompted by the changed mental outlook meant that marriage was no longer the union of two families. Nor was it the mere union of two bodies at night, for the wife was no longer the mere instrument of procreation. These purposes were of course given recognition in the new scheme, but marriage was primarily projected as the beginning of a very personal relation between a woman and a man in which their mutual relationship reigned over the cobweb of other relations. Mutual interdependence and similarity in everything were viewed as means to that end. There were also many articles which highlighted in several magazines on the changing mentality about conjugal relations like *Paricharika*, *Abalabandhab*, *Bharat Mahila*, *Antahpur*, *Bagamahila*, *Sambad Prabhakar*, *Dacca Prakash* etc.

Necessity for Medical Education of Women

Besides that, by the later nineteenth century necessity for medical education were other areas of gender consciousness. It was around this time that, various periodicals, women’s magazines and newspapers became vocal in advocating the cause of medical education for women. They lamented Bengal’s backwardness in this matter and urged the Government of Bengal to allow women to pursue medical studies. For example, the *Brahmo Public Opinion*, said:

“.....if there be any one country where, more than all another, the want of lady doctors is most keenly felt, it is no doubt India. Specially, the system of *zenana* seclusion makes it nearly impossible for male doctors to be very useful in treating female patients, consequently, a very large number of proper medical attendances. In fact, we know of instances, where, with the utmost difficulty female patients could be induced to allow the doctor to feel their pulse only. Besides, there are diseases peculiar to them, which it is simply impossible for male doctors properly to diagnose or treat. The establishment of medical institution for the tuition of lady students’ is an urgent necessity in these days in India.....”¹³⁰

Again we know about the necessity for medical education of women under the title “Recruitment of female apprentice in Calcutta Medical College” in the *Bamabodhini Patrika*. The main theme of this essay was –

“Everyone with prudence will admit that as for men, medical education is equally necessary for women. There are certain types of female diseases which can only be appreciated by women and even if those are understood by men, their treatment by males cannot be as effective as by females. Its necessity is more felt in India than in other countries. How is it possible to have proper medical treatment of females of our country where we believe that it is against our religion to come out before any unknown male person who do not belong to her family? Amongst the doctors there are many who have such character that it requires to be carefully considered whether respectable ladies can at all be presented before them. Even many ladies hesitate to appear before those doctors who have carved the reputation of having good moral character and behaviour. Under such situation, it is no wonder that many Indian women prefer to face death rather than to undergo treatment under such doctors. Women in thousands thus suffer from the diseases and embrace premature death..... As the necessity of female doctors is being perceived, so does the instance of good performance of females in the field of medical education come in. The door of medical education is open to females in America and England and in those countries their number is increasing every year, and those female doctors are competing with their male counterparts not only in their countries but also outside. In this country too a few ‘bibi’ doctors have already made their graceful appearance. With a blend of religious sentiment and modesty along with education they have proved themselves quite worthy of treating the females of the *antahpur*”.¹³¹

The *Bamabodhini Patrika* of the same date further stated that – “Presently it is questioned whether the women of this country possess the requisite aptitude and competence to receive medical education. Bombay and Madras have given appropriate answers to this before the progressive Bengal could give the same..... This proves quite well that the women of this province are ready to

receive medical education and their guardians are also well set to fulfil their ambitions.”¹³²

Women and Health

On the other hand, the necessity of medical education was very much inter-related with women health. Naturally, the then women magazines started to focus on the health and hygiene of women in different articles and started to appraise the society of the need for having female doctors. In an issue of the *Antahpur*, Smt. Hemanta Kumari Chowdhurani, one of the contributors of the journals, described the health condition of Bengalee women under the title ‘*Bharatmahilar Swasthya*’ (Health of Indian Women) in this way:

“..... The majority of Indian women do not enjoy a good health. The health of the mother or the wife if is on the decline, it has a far-reaching influence on the children. It also results in a general disorder of the family life. When the wife falls ill, both she and her husband have to suffer. Sickness dampens all the other charms of life..... Riding the wave of women’s education, many are getting enlightened with education. On gauging their health we get a very dismal picture, some are with impaired vision, some are with chronic headaches or with some other ailments. We are becoming conscious about the cleanliness of the roads, but what about the state of affairs at our *antahpur* where childbirth actually occurs, and we have a very strongly bonded relationship during our entire lifespan, have we ever spared a thought! The dwellers of the *antahpur* on whom the country, society and the family is dependent for its peace and tranquility, are really in a sorry state! The country that boasts of, Laxmibai, Padmini and Karmadevi and other brave women who sided with their men folk even in battlefields is now producing women who faint at the sight of a drop of blood! They are neither physically strong, nor mentally and tears are their only possessions.”¹³³

Thus, this article is a testimony of the fact that lack of health among Bengali household women could be a major cause of disharmony both in the family and in conjugal life. In another issue of the *Antahpur*, Smt. Sarojini Devi, one of the

contributors of the journal, wrote under the title ‘*Mahilar Sasthya Sambandhe Koyekti Katha*’ (A few words about the health of women) that –

“Women in Bengal, particularly Hindus, were in a pathetic state of health. Headaches and colic pains were a regular feature and ailments of the uterus were a constant source of agony of a very large number of women. Quite a few of them deprived of being a mother. Is it what is called as the progress of modern women? Is this conducive to having healthy, gritty, hardworking and enthusiastic Bengali children for tomorrow?”¹³⁴

In 1867, the *Bamabodhini Patrika* published a series of detailed and informative articles on covering pregnancy – its symptoms, treatment, delivery and midwifery.¹³⁵ An article in the same journal in 1872 published essential information for a pregnant woman on the growth and development of the foetus. Illustrations in black, white and red showed the foetus from the time of conception through each month of pregnancy.¹³⁶

Not only that, *Bamabodhini Patrika* had published many exhaustive articles on the norms to be followed during pregnancy and the safety precautions during childbirth. There were also separate discussions on what a pregnant woman should wear, what food habits she should develop, permissible working limits and on what state of mind she should remain. It was stated that pregnant women should wear loose-fitting cloths and should have light but nutritious food. Regarding permissible work limits an example was cited stating that rich and poor women suffer during child birth, not the middle class women. Hence, sitting totally idle is not correct and overworking is also not advisable. It was stated that, a cheerful disposition and reading of holy scriptures and moral sciences was advisable.¹³⁷

In this connection, the different symptoms of pregnancy were also described. Among them nausea, salivation, lactation, enlargement of belly, growth of the foetus and changes in the uterus was vividly dealt upon.¹³⁸ From the time of conception to delivery detailed discussion was made for all the stages. Labour pain, general symptoms for delivery¹³⁹ and at each stage the role of the *dai* (midwifery) and the parturient woman were all discussed. How the oil cloth is to be placed under the abdomen of the mother, how the uterus is to be tested¹⁴⁰ – were all the subjects of

the *dai*. From the second half of the nineteenth century it was felt that all women should know about this subject so that before calling the *dai* they can take necessary precautions.

During child birth the *dais* took recourse to age-old traditions and even if complications cropped up their actions and steps were not always in line with the advancement of science in the late nineteenth century. So, in *Bamabodhini Patrika* the *dais* were instructed to carry a surgical knife, a pair of scissors, female catheter, stethoscope and a silk thread on going for a call.¹⁴¹

In that connection, though we have already mentioned about the condition of *sutikagriha* or *aturghar* in Bengal. But contemporary periodicals also highlighted more vivid and detailed description of *sutikagriha*. For example, *Mahila* describes it in this way “A typical Hindu *sutikagriha* would be nothing short of a dangerous prison. Even prisoners are entitled to fresh air, healthy food and medical treatment should they fall sick. A *sutikagriha* offers none of these benefits to a young mother. She has to deliver the baby and stay for more than a month in absolutely rotten conditions. Very often the infant dies there itself, with the mothers contracting a life-long ailment in addition. In fact, post-delivery ailments often hamper their normal family life. Age-old myths, superstitions regarding *aturghar* and general ignorance among old Hindu women are at the root of the untold misery of this young mothers.¹⁴²

The effect of such a condition generally a woman remained sheltered, immediately after birth she was supposed to take a cold bath in the tank or *ghat*. At times the effect of this, in her weak state, sent her into a raving delirium, in which case an *ojha* or exorcist, was brought in to exorcise the spirit possessing her by beating her with a torn slipper.¹⁴³

But the changing scenarios were very much different from these. Many contemporary magazines highlighted that, on superstitious grounds other family members stay away from the *aturghar*. But during this time it is the duty of other members of the household to stay close to the mother and the child and take proper care of them.¹⁴⁴ So, when due to the observances of unnecessary and superstitious rituals and customs the mother was segregated for a long period. A number of

newspapers and periodicals like *Abalabandhab*, *Dasi*, *Paricharika* etc. raised their voice against that custom. Side by side, the quackery of the untrained midwives gradually brought awareness to the enlightened section of the Bengali society and everyone admitted that some sort of education and training should have been imparted to the *dais*.

From this we get a panoramic view of the changing attitudes during the last half of the nineteenth century. That these subjects are suitable for the reading of women and that there should not be any inhibitions during the discussion of them were realized by and large among most of the people, barring a few exceptions. *Bamabodhini Patrika* has clearly stated that, during pregnancy lot of harm and mishaps of the mother are caused by superstitions and ignorance, hence the mother should be conscious of her norms during pregnancy.¹⁴⁵ The changes reflected desire on the part of educated Bengalis to derive benefit from modern scientific knowledge and a growing humanitarian concern for the welfare of the mother and the child. The new medical wisdom laid down that a mother should not remain in the *sutikagriha* for longer than one week, but it is not known how many families would have dared to defy traditional taboos on this matter. By the turn of the century, although women's health during child birth had not yet markedly improved, there was some recognition of the importance of postnatal care.

Motherhood and Child Rearing

It has been realised from the thinking of women regarding education expressed in their writings that the educated women would be able to perform the duty of motherhood in a better way along with the duty of familial activities. In reality, a greater responsibility for consciousness regarding motherhood was published so much in different writings from the second half of the nineteenth century. The reason for this was that, the newly socio-economic condition of this period inevitably started to break the traditional joint family structure. Nuclear family was created due to acceptance of new religion or acceptance of job in a distant place or for both of the reasons. The young wives of those families became mother either staying at a distance from original family i.e. at the workplace of husband or became associate of their husbands along with their small child. The new social and

religious thinking which encouraged them for new kind of living also reflected in their motherhood. English learning or the knowledge acquired regarding western life from the direct experience of foreign travel increased the level of consciousness regarding the responsibility of motherhood. Therefore, question may arise whether the mother did not perform earlier properly the responsibility for rearing child or not? Specially, a few reformers who have been discussed recognised the contribution and influence of the mother in their life. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Shibnath Shastri, Bipin Chandra Pal – all of them great personalities remembered the role of the mother in their life with deep respect. Besides this, writings on life and autobiography in the nineteenth century established great proof of contribution of mother to the life of their children. So, earlier also the mother performed properly the greater responsibility of child rearing. But these were the expectation. It may be realised when it was told in respect of main objective of spreading women education. Moreover, it was also told that, an educated mother was able to rear ideal child. In *Bambodhini Patrika* it was stated that, mother is the fone and the best teacher of a child. The character of men is mainly formed with the teachings required in the mother's lap than the teachings at school.¹⁴⁶ An attempt to create this kind of consciousness has also been found in the writings of male writers. In the decade of 1880s, one writing in this context was published in the *Balak Patrika* continuously. Here it was categorically stated that, the son becomes excellent with the excellence of mother.¹⁴⁷

So, Bengali mothers needed to be schooled to a realization of their new responsibility and importance. By the end of the century, the *bhadramahila* had fully internalized the “grave responsibility” of motherhood.¹⁴⁸ The significance of motherhood had expanded beyond being merely a home function to being a public duty.

Even though we are women and we are weak, when God has given us such great responsibility he will also give us the necessary strength. For the better or for worse, the further of society and of the nation rests on these children of ours. If they are properly educated then the nation will follow the path of progress..... Therefore, sisters, come let us join together and give of our strength to fulfil this

great vocation, and though we are weak, let mutual co-operation give us collective strength.¹⁴⁹

On the other hand, various child care manuals and in this regard numerous articles in the periodicals, especially women's journals, conveyed the specific means of building a healthy and enlightened generation. For example, breast feeding may be singled out as an issue symptomatic of the conflict between old and new advice. The advantages of modern ideas on the duration and regulation of breast feeding, and the disadvantages of traditional ones, were widely discussed. However, in the nineteenth century general opinion was solidly in favour of breast feeding by the mother alone. Women were only to resort to a wet-nurse if they were too ill to feed the child themselves. In Bengal wet-nursing was not simply a caricatured form of Anglicization, but was an established practice among the wealthy.¹⁵⁰ Even then, bottle feeding, in special bottles obtainable from "any good dispensary", was regarded as a preferable alternative.¹⁵¹ In Bengal, children were commonly breast-fed for three, four, or even five years.¹⁵² Medical opinion declared that, prolonged breast feeding was responsible for deteriorating health in mothers and children, and tried to encourage a lower weaning age. Preferably this was to be around one year, or a few months later if the infant were weak, but not beyond the age of two.¹⁵³

In the women magazines of the nineteenth century discussions were made for doing exercise of children in order to keep the child healthy and free from disease. The women had been performing the work towards their children for a long time. But, it was felt necessary to perform their work more skilfully.¹⁵⁴ In the second half of the nineteenth century different women magazines published writings in respect of scientific and modern treatments and also relating to health code. The objective of this was to educate the women in respect of doing the work of child rearing more properly and smoothly employing newly acquired knowledge. Mother always does the work of child rearing. But this consciousness in respect of child rearing was new. In this age it was also felt necessary to give attention towards mental development of their child. This type of thinking which deals with different sides of women's daily life brought about a change in the history of house-keeping management. Equal emphasis was paid both on the mind and body of the child in

respect of child rearing. It was completely new to free the child from mental disappointment with the help of bringing variety in the livelihood.¹⁵⁵

The different essays relating to child rearing tried to offer education for women. Reading all these materials it was understood that, there was a close link between the writer and the western science. It was known from a dialogue type writings of the nineteenth century composed with an objectives to offer education that, husband was telling to his wife how the mother should perform the act of bathing her child.¹⁵⁶

Besides that, *Bamabodhini Patrika* mostly had articles on childcare. In that *Patrika*, it was also published numerous articles on the divinity of motherhood and on the essential of bringing up a child. From the time of pregnancy and nursing, a mother's state of mental as well as physical health was said to influence the child. It was followed by a stream of books such as *Matrisiksa* in 1871, and *Saral Sisu Palan* in 1885.¹⁵⁷ Even a 'Mohammedan work' on the duty of parents to children was translated into Bengali.¹⁵⁸

The women's journal *Antahpur* tried to have a regular children's' page, with illustrated nursery rhymes and stories.¹⁵⁹ Writers became eloquent in echoing Victorian sentiments on the pristine state of childhood innocence: "When a child drops from heaven like a pure blossom it is untouched by the corrupt winds of the world. Then both its body and mind are as malleable as clay and can be shaped with ease".¹⁶⁰ To maintain this original state of grace, special care had to be taken to instil moral principles from an early age. The child was to be treated as a rational being, but one with a simplified understanding. Reasons for beliefs and morality had to be explained to it but in uncomplicated terms.¹⁶¹ Numerous articles stressed that the mother should make a concerted effort to take the responsibility for child rearing into her own hands. Writers disapproved of the care of children by servants, which was common practice in wealthier household, both because it was regarding as a dereliction of duty and because servants were thought to continue the old system of child rearing based on threats and superstition. Supposedly less scrupulous than mothers, servants were known to use opium to stop a child's cries and put it to sleep.¹⁶² The bogey of ghosts or spirits was commonly used as a threat to ensure

good behaviour.¹⁶³ The harm this did to children was said to be the cause of characteristic Bengali nervousness. But the new disciplinary methods stressed honesty and openness, which were seen as the achievement of reason over superstition.

The central position accorded to the child in the new idea of the family affected the conduct of the parents. They had to regulate their behaviour to make sure that they never set a bad example to the child. Moralists instructed parents not to quarrel in front of their children, to show their anger openly, or to scold of their children in front of strangers'.¹⁶⁴ Children were to be controlled not through anger but through reason. Punishment was supposed to be more effective when it was mental rather than physical, and the removal of special pleasures or privileges as a disciplinary measure was recommended.¹⁶⁵ Modern parents were not to mention "obscene conjugal matters" – in effect anything connected with sex – in the child's hearing.¹⁶⁶ At times these instructions seemed contradictory, as a mother was also expected to answer all a child's questions fully and truthfully so that it did not learn habits to deceit and mistrust.¹⁶⁷

Hence, it is easy to understand that, from the second half of the nineteenth century Bengali women gradually became conscious about their health. They achieved mental liberty of choice to discuss regarding the various problems of motherhood. It may be noted that, from 1860s the newly educated families changed their attitude to domestic order, health conscious and necessity of cleanliness.

Domestic Order, Cleanliness and Cooking Skills

Now, we may turn our attention into another aspect of consciousness. The correct locality for a house was a place where there had never been a tank; a clean cowshed beside the house should have a sloping cement floor.¹⁶⁸ In the cities it was also necessary to have, at some distance from the house, or at least away from the kitchen and dining areas, a toilet that should be cleaned daily with water and disinfected with lime.¹⁶⁹ The bed rooms needed to be airy, and the kitchen was to be at a distance from the living rooms, with a storeroom beside it.¹⁷⁰

The interiors of Bengali houses were contrasted unfavourably with English houses, where cleanliness was almost an obsession.¹⁷¹ In the interests of better health, women were advised to wash and air all bed linen, and to clean and dust twice daily, even under the bed.¹⁷² Drinking water was to be purified, either by collecting rain water, boiling well water, or putting it through a filter.¹⁷³

The new sense of order shows a preoccupation with the adage “a place for everything and everything in its place”. One writer on “Women’s Duties” complained of the inconvenience of never being able to find things in the disorder prevailing in a Bengali household. A towel might be placed over the water-pot in the morning, hung on the door at midday, left in the kitchen in the afternoon and then placed on the bed at night, leaving a dirty and wet mark. Things would be much better if the housewife told everyone to put objects back where they found them, so that they would always remain in the same place.¹⁷⁴ All items in the storeroom were to be listed and labelled for increased efficiency.

The domestic order and cleanliness were not only considerations. Cooking was another area in which the capacities of the “modern” women came under attack from the 1870s onward. Traditionally, girls learned how to cook from their mothers or from other older women. A monthly magazine named *Pak-Pranali* (1883), edited by Bipradas Mukhopadhyay highlighted about cooking and its aim was not only to train up women the culinary skills they were said to have lost through education and refinement, but also to help them to keep up with changing tastes in food, to teach them new cooking methods and to enable them to save money by preparing food at home themselves.¹⁷⁵ The journal was illustrated and recipes were clearly set out with a list of ingredients followed by the method and often gave a brief history of the dishes like Indian and foreign as well. Many women’s journals took up the duty of teaching women different ways of cooking such as *Bamabodhini Patrika*, *Mahila*, *Abalabandhab*, *Punya* etc. But *Antahpur* also had a regular cooking column from 1900, written by women contributors.¹⁷⁶ It may be said that, from the last part of the nineteenth century women felt strongly about the cooking columns in these journals. In fact, the culinary skills expected were becoming more exacting to suit different social requirements.

So, housework became part of the aesthetic experience of daily life and not merely an activity that had utilitarian value. 'New women'¹⁷⁷ belonged fundamentally to the *abhijata bhadrak* (elite middle class) as against the common working women. The 'new women' was essentially cultured and polished in her behaviour. It was education which actually defined the 'new women' and it was part of a middle-class agenda.¹⁷⁸

Self Dependence of Women

Besides that another important thing that is self dependence of women which had generated among the *Bhadrak* a heightened awareness of the oppressive restrictions imposed on women. Some perceived that this handicap was often connected with women's total dependence on male support. In an article published in the *Bamabodhini Patrika* reported that, as long as women continued to be given a separate curriculum with an elementary general knowledge, women would remain subordinated to men. Men were given professional education with specialization in one subject; why weren't women too given that kind of specialization education? They were expected to learn the basics of everything and not adept in any field so that they were not able to enter the public arena in some professional capacity.¹⁷⁹ In another article *Bamabodhini Patrika* communicates that, in Europe and America women go outside and earn money. Women could accept job. In our country the women were ridiculed if it was found that they were doing outside work in order to earn money for their family. But there is no doubt that, in course of time the practice of earning money by the women would be welcome and hence the women would be self reliant.¹⁸⁰ So, this kind of essays published in *Bamabodhini Patrika* inspired our women to be self dependent. It was for this reason Krishna Bhamini could observe minutely women self dependence after coming to foreign country.

On the other hand, a number of *bhadramahila* were beginning to face the problem of finding ways to lessen the total dependence on men that left women helpless if they fell on hard time. A plea for equal vocational training for men and women was made on the grounds of likelihood of having to cope with such an eventually.¹⁸¹ In another article in *Antahpur* suggested that, every woman should learn to weave her own cloth rather than be told by men to manufacture useless

handicrafts or embroidery to sell for a pittance. She led as an example of self-sufficiency the Assamese custom of having a loom in every house to weave all cloth for domestic use. Although a woman would not actively earn money by this means, she could considerably reduce the size of the family budget and acquire a useful practice skill.¹⁸² By 1904, Lilabati Mitra, one of the contributors of the journal, was concerned that the kinds of traditional crafts (manufacturing of fans, dolls etc. for sale at fairs, dressmaking, midwifery, medicine, pickle making, gardening and others) widows practiced to eke out a living were no longer popular with consumers. She recommended the adoption of more commercially oriented enterprises catering for new tastes, such as the manufacture of stockings. A machine could be purchased from England for 200 rupees that would produce a pair of stockings every fifteen minutes. It could produce different kind of stockings in order to cater to the reformed dress of the 'new women'. She calculated that the seller would earn twenty-five to thirty rupees per month. Other suggested occupations included typewriting, picture framing, making cardboard cartons, photography, basket weaving, appliqué work, crochet, wool work and the embroidering of mottos on cloth or card. All of these new occupations could conveniently be followed within the home, after some training from a skilled practitioner or male relative.¹⁸³

Until the turn of the century very few other Hindu *bhadramahila* would have been able to overcome traditional prejudices against female employment outside the home. In fact, in later period, this condition to some extent began to change when women became more conscious about their economic responsibility. In this respect, Begum Rokeya published many writings from 1904-1930. She gave the argument in her writings that, women liberation is limited on how much they were economically dependent on their male relatives.¹⁸⁴

Equal Rights of Male-Female

Whatever may be the degree of level of consciousness of women in respect of their role relating to economic, social or familial and equal to men – with regard to all these questions women started thinking gradually from the second half of the nineteenth century. Though most of the women thought that, separate role for male and female were fixed yet they demanded that the women should not be considered

toys in the hands of men. For example, Mankumari Basu, one contributor of the *Bamabodhini Patrika* observed that, the Bengali women had to work always according to the wishes of their husbands, as a result, the women failed to nourish their mind, manner, and religious belief freely.¹⁸⁵ Nagendrabala Debi, one of the contributors of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, pointed out argued in this matter. The almighty God did not want that the mind and hopes of women would not be formed as per wishes of men.¹⁸⁶ The more progressive women demanded that, the women should be considered equal to men on all matters. Moreover, the women should be allowed to enjoy all rights as the men enjoy.¹⁸⁷ So, in view of the above it is clear that, the educated women not only in respect of different social conventions, bad customary practices and disrespect towards themselves but also they became conscious in respect of equal rights of men and women.

Political Consciousness

But politics was not considered a suitable subject for women during the nineteenth century. The editorial in the first issue of a new journal for women started in 1875, named *Banga Mahila*, stated:

“In the journal we will make special efforts to assemble as much as possible on current events. We will not discuss political events and controversies because politics would not be interesting or intelligible to women in this country at present. But we will not be adverse to describing them insofar as they touch on social customs and behaviour”.¹⁸⁸

It was not until 1884 that *Bamabodhini Patrika* introduced articles on political subjects, with the explanation that:

“In Bengal the time to touch women about politics has not yet come. In a country where many well-educated youths are incapable of understanding politics it will be a long time before the way can be prepared for teaching politics to women. But whether our women understand politics or not, it is essential that they possess a general knowledge of the past and present state of the country”.¹⁸⁹

Though, the development of nationalist sentiment among the *bhadralok* from the late 1860s could not but have filtered through to the *antahpur*. The embarrassing incidents of racial discrimination experienced by Bengalis in their dealings with the colonial rules had such a deep impact that family life and personal relations were unavoidably affected. In this way, women had vicarious experience of racial humiliation and the resultant dissatisfaction with colonial rule. However, the *bhadramahila* were not directly involved with the workings of the colonial access to information about how it operated. They had no intellectual understanding of the detrimental effects of colonialism. In the nineteenth century, most *bhadramahila* could only respond to nationalism as a result of indirect personal experience. Not surprisingly, the combined effect of physical seclusion and lack of information on political developments meant that women's active participation in political was minimal. As early as 1871, *Bamabodhini Patrika* recorded the presence of Hindu women at a Town Hall meeting of students, but it was not clear from this account who they had been or why they had been there.¹⁹⁰ However, these are very tenuous indications of the general level of political consciousness among women. As a result of political consciousness among women, we may notice in the 5th chapter that from beginning of the twentieth century women took participate in the national movement in a wide range. Whereas in England the catalyst in the politicization of women was the issue of female suffrage, in India, it was the wider cause of nationalism. The first half of the twentieth century was especially significant for the growth of Bengali women's consciousness because the change that appeared in the life and teachings and the minds of the Bengali women due to the impact of reform movement in the nineteenth century broke away the traditional way of life in most cases. Ultimately, in the twentieth century it reached to such an extent when the women who live in the inner portion of dwelling house like men being inspired by *Swadeshi* movement directly participated in the political movement and went to jail.¹⁹¹

The development of the Bengali women consciousness during colonial period was important because it encouraged the development of self-consciousness through the traditional, institutional teaching and financial training of women on the one hand. On the other, it was also followed that, these consciousness would not demand equal level and equal prestige with men in familial, social and even political

level. Therefore, women consciousness and rights were always considered as fulfilment of patriarchal society, separately no discussion was made for complete consciousness of women. But the exception example was that, Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das participated in the freedom movement with Basanti Debi and Urmila Debi.

Yet, it is clear from the above discussion that, with the impact of European attitude and teaching Bengali society began to realise their life in a new way. A new consciousness in respect of women relation and male-female relationship developed. In the fourth decades of the nineteenth century and with the spread of women education the internal thinking and attitudes of many *pardah* women came to be known through complain resentment demands and appeal published in different magazines. In the meantime, the *Sati* system was abolished, polygamy and *Kulinism* were condemned among the members of the educated society, the protest against widow re-marriage system was almost not held and also discussion in the society in spite of these a deep interest for women education arose among all the members of the society. The members of Bengal social transformer told that, it was necessary to bring about a change in the attitude of women in order to initiate social transformation in the country. The main purposes of the social reform movement nay women liberation movement were to pay more attention to family life. There was a transformation of the social oriented family to the family oriented society. A qualitatively difference of the attitude of male members of the family towards society and also the women of our family was also observed. The male member of the family claimed that, the women should play its role as his colleague. A psychological understanding between educated male member and uneducated women cannot be established. Hence, an initiative was taken by the educated society of Bengal to spread women education and in this way, awakening of women came and women self consciousness developed. At this time women in Bengal being conscious expressly declared their own rights.

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139. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Agrahaya, 1274 (B.S). p.637.
140. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Chaitra, 1274 (B.S). p. 710.
141. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Poush, 1274 (B.S). p.676.
142. *Hindu Paribare Sutikaghar* (Room for the New-born baby of Hindu Family), in *Mahila*, 6th issue, 1311 (B.S). p.146. This paper also continues that, after the birth of a new born child the mother was confined within a room which was unhealthy in all respect. Not only for the newborn baby but of the mother herself that room was almost set up from the outer world. Even there was no ventilation of fresh air as well as other comforts and facilities required for the mother concern.
143. *Sutikaghare Prasutir Susrusa* (Treatment for the Mother of New-born Baby), an article by Nanibala Dasi in *Antahpur*, Vol.VII, No.1, May 1904.
144. *Sutikaghare Prasutir Susrusa* (Treatment for the Mother of New-born Baby), an article by Nanibala Dasi in *Antahpur*, Vol. VI, No. 5, September 1903, p.106.
145. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Aswin, 1274 (B.S), p. 597.
146. *Amader Abhab* (Our Poverty), an article in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Bhadra, 1292 (B. S).

147. *Birjanani* (Mother of the Hero), an article in *Balak Patrika*, Bhadra, 1292 (B.S); also in Tapati Bhattacharya, *op. cit.* p. 238.
148. *Janani* (Mother), an article in *Antahpur*, No. 1, Vol. 3. April, 1898.
149. *Santan-Sikhsa* (Child Education), an article by Saralabala Debi in *Antahpur* No. 4, Vol. 9, October, 1901.
150. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 8, No. 108, August, 1872.
151. *Bharati*, March, 1878.
152. *Aniyamita Stanya Dan* (Irregular Breast Feeding), an article by Hemangini Kulahbi in *Antahpur*, Vol. 8, No. 1, May, 1905.
153. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 8, No. 108, July, 1872; also in *Mahila Bandhab*, Vol. 2, No. 14, July, 1887.
154. *Sisuder Byayam* (Exercise of Children), an article in *Bamabidhini Patrika*, Agraphayan, 1274 (B. S), p. 394.
155. Sambuddha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 187.
156. *Swami O Streer Kathopokathan* (Conversation between Husband and Wife), an article in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Kartik, 1275 (B.S). pp. 129-130.
157. *Matrisiksa* (Mother Education), an article by Gangaprasad Mukhopadhyay in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.7, No.93, May 1871; also in Pulin Sanyal, *Saral Sisulalan*.
158. See Review of *Sisusantanganer Siksha Bishaye Pita-Matar Kartabya* (Responsibility of the Parents About Childrens' Education), translated by Girish Chandra Sen in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.12, May, 1876.
159. For instances *Gowala Bou* (Wife of the Milk Man) in *Antahpur*, Vol.4, No.4, May 1901. A footnote explained that, *Antahpur* aimed to provide for the entertainment and instruction of children as well. That had been done in its first year, but had not been kept up in the second and third years, and was therefore starting again.

160. *Sisusanggathan* (Child Organization), an article by Saralyamayee Dasi in *Antahpur*, Vol.1, No.2, January 1898.
161. *Garhasthya Bisaye Nara-Narir Kartabya* (Duties of the Man and Woman in Household Activities) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.6, No.3, June 1898, p.401; also in *Matar Prati Kayekti Upades* (A Few Advices to Mother) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.11, March-April, 1876, pp.150-151.
162. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 182.
163. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.5, No.3, May 1894, p.352.
164. *Matar Prati Kayekti Upades* (A Few Advices to Mother) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.11, pp.150-151; also in *Paricharika*, Vol.1, No. 6, 16th October, 1878.
165. *Sisu Binayan – Sisudiger Abadhyatadi* (Modesty of Child and Disobedience of the Children) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.3, No.2, February 1885, p. 242.
166. Saralyamayee Dasi, *Antahpur*, Vol.1, No. 2.
167. *Sisu Santaner Prati Matar Kartabya* (Mother's Duties towards Her Children) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 5, No.1, November, 1892, p.334.
168. *Grihasthalir Katha* (Dialogues of the Household Activities) in *Antahpur*, Vol.5, September-October, 1902, pp. 5-6.
169. *Narir Kartabya* (Duties of Women) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.4, No.1, May 1887, p. 268. In villages a hole in the ground with dry earth to be put on after each use, was considered sufficient.
170. *Garhasthya Darpan* (Reflections of the Family Affairs) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.10, September, 1874, p.133.
171. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.2, No.2, April 1881, p.195.
172. *Narir Kartabya* (Duties of Women) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 2, No. 3, May 1881, p.196.
173. *Hindu Narir Garhasthya Dharma* (Household Rituals of Hindu Women), an article by Kumudini Ray in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 5, No.3, December, 1894,

p.359; also in *Swasthya Raksha* (Health Care) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 2, No. 3, September, 1880, p.188.

174. *Narir Kartabya – Bas Bhaban* (Duties of Women and their Home) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.3, No. 3, February, 1881, p. 265.

175. *Pak-Pranali*, Vol.1, No.1, 1883.

176. See for instance, *Randhan – Kumud Phuler Byanjan* (Cooking of a curry with Kumud Flower), an article by Saralabala Sarkar; *Ilis Mach Pora* (Hilsa- Fish Fry), an article by Sarayubala Ghosh in *Antahpur*, Vol.3, No.4, April, 1900; and *Randhan - Chicken Pulao and Irish Stew* (Cooking of Fried Rice with Chicken and Irish Stew), an article by Kamalekamini Gupta in *Antahpur*, Vol.7, No.7, November, 1904.

177. A growing number of women in Bengal by the late nineteenth century, when the stereotype of a ‘new women’ who was disdainful of domestic skills and inept at housework was current. This was usually constructed with an idealized portrait of the woman of the past, the perfect housewife. In all those areas of the housewife’s role which came under criticism, namely , the arrangement of the house, domestic hygiene, cooking, household medicine, the management of finance, extremely complex changes were taking place, a result of the transformation in the world of the *bhadralok* rather than of any faults of character in the ‘new women’. See Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* pp.186-187.

178. Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi, *op.cit.* p. lvii.

179. *Streejati O Shilpakarja* or ‘Women and Art’ (*Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 259, No. 259, 1293 B. S. pp. 120-121), translated by Debolina Guha Thakurata in *Shaping the Discourse- Women’s Writings in Bengal Periodicals 1865-1947*, Ipshita Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi (ed.), Stree, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 2014, pp. lvii and 90-91.

180. *Stree Siksha* (Women Education), an article by Mahalanbishja in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Aswin, 1283 (B.S).

181. *Asmadeshiya Balika-Jiban* (Girls' Life of Our Country), an article by Binodini Sengupta in *Antahpur*, Vol. 3, No. 9, October, 1900.
182. *Bangamahiladiger Arthakari Silpakarja* (Money Making Art of the Women of Bangal), an article by Probodhini Ghosh in *Antahpur*, Vol.4, No. 1, February 1900.
183. *Srilokdiger Arthakari Silpasiksha* (Money Making Art Education of Women), an article by Lilavati Mitra in *Antahpur*, Vol.7, No.3, July, 1904; also in Gitashreebandana Sengupta, *Spandita Antarlok- Atmucharite Nari Pragatir Dhara*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, January, 1999, p.157.
184. See for instance, *Streejatir Abanati* (Degradation of Women) in *Rokeya Rachanabali*, pp. 29-30.
185. *Bigata Satabarshe Bharat-Ramanidiger Abastha* (Condition of Indian Women in the Last Century), an article by Mankumari Basu in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Falgun, 1301 (B.S). p. 326; see also Ghulam Murshid, *Nari Pragati: Adhunikatar Abhigate Bangaramani* (in Bengali), p. 49.
186. *Garhasthya Jibane Narir Kartabya* (Duties of Women in the Family Life), an article by Nagendrabala Mustafi in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Paush, 1310 (B.S). p. 307.
187. See for instance *Bigata Satabarshe Bharat-Ramanidiger Abastha* (Condition of Indian Women in the Last Century), an article by Mankumari Basu in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Kartik, 1298 (B.S). pp. 216-217.
188. *Banga Mahila*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1875.
189. *Amader Desher Tin Abastha* (Deplorable Condition of Our Country) in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1884, p. 237.
190. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 6, No. 92, April, 1871.
191. Sarada Ghosh, *Narichetana O Sangathan- Oupanibeshik Bangla 1829-1925* (in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, August, 2013, p. 217.

CHAPTER -IV

WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE MAKING

Nineteenth century Bengal marked as a glorious chapter in the history of India. Although the beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed a spirit of revolution in the minds of the people, we find in the latter half of the nineteenth century the ushering in of a new life among the Bengalis. The wave of this resurgence or renaissance touched almost every sphere of Bengali life. The influence of this new spirit was fully noticeable in various fields of the society – education, literature, religion, politics and the like.¹ In our national life the nineteenth century can be compared with ‘*siècle mirabilis*’ of Latin language. This period was an astounding age. Unique transformation and various changes occurred in our national life during this period.²

Gradually, the Bengali youth got acquainted with the western trend of thought due to the introduction of new educational system. They performed various works together seriously for the welfare of our country and people. They realised that, collected effort is highly effective to get desired result within a short period.³ So, many examples can be cited in this connection. The welfare of our country is not possible by any individual initiative but it can be achieved through collective effort. Many welfare activities had been successfully implemented so far with the help of collective effort of the people. A great deal of activities can be performed by the *Sabhas* and the *Samitis* incurring less expenditure and labour. European *Sabhas* and *Samitis* can be cited as vivid examples in this connection. For example, *Asiatic Society*, Kolkata; *Society for Agriculture and Horticulture*; *A Seminar for Treatment (Medical) and Physics* etc. The newly educated people must have observed the activities of all these *Sabhas* and the *Samitis*.⁴ Collective effort of the people for a particular cause seldom leaves the work unfinished emerges when the knowledge, intellect and money of many people taken together a unique force emerges. Everybody becomes beneficial with this spirit.⁵ These words which have been told about the power of the association were applicable to all the *Sabhas* and *Samities* (Society or Institution).

The nineteenth century was the period of awakening for the Bengalis. The main feature of awakening was curiosity towards own self nay society or towards the world and there after idealism emerged. The efforts of reformation mainly in the Hindu religion of nineteenth century caused tension in the community. Different communities were polarised. Different *Sabhas* and *Samitis* were formed for the propagation of ideologies of different groups. These groups published '*Sambad-Samayik Patra*' (contemporary periodicals) for the circulation of their ideologies. In the previous chapter there has already been a discussion on the role of '*Sambad-Samayik-Patra*' in respect of gender consciousness. Thus, *Sabha-Samiti* and *Sambad-Samayik Patrika* came forward with a purpose to transmit the intellectual quest initiated by the intellectuals of those days.⁶ In the colonial period the professionals or intelligentsia emphasized the importance of education as they knew that this could be considered as main agency for educational mobility. The newly educated people realised that education would uplift social prestige, wealth and power and they also realised that the female who consisted the other half of the population should not be marginalised any more. So, the *Sabha-Samitis* and the '*Sambad Samayik Patra*' run by the Hindu and the Muslim gave utmost importance to education.⁷

It is said that, in the nineteenth century Bengal there was at least a minimum relationship between *Sabha-Samitis* and contemporary periodicals. Most of the contemporary periodicals that were published throughout the nineteenth century, various *Sabha-Samitis* took the initiative to publish one-tenth of them. Therefore, it may be said that, there might be a connection between the origin and growth of contemporary Bengali periodicals and *Sabha-Samitis* or associations. The English word 'Association' is translated in Bengali as '*Sabha*, or '*Samiti*' or '*Sabha-Samiti*'. Moreover, in colloquial Bengali the word 'Association' could be understood as *Sabha-Samiti*. In the Western world, the social scientists also mentioned the *Sabha-Samiti* mainly as 'Voluntary Association'. In the nineteenth century not only in Bengal, but the whole India witnessed the growth of numerous *Sabha-Samitis* or associations. In brief, it may be said that, in the nineteenth century not only in Bengal, but throughout India for the organization of the middle-class views and enterprises of reformist activities which laid the foundation of such type of *Sabha-*

Samitis or associations. Increase of consciousness of a particular class in the society and as a result, for the reformist activity which played significant role to construct the mass opinion through the *Sabha-Samitis* and contemporary periodicals. As thought by many, *Sabha-Samiti* is said to be a feature of the modern society. Because, the societal conflicts were said to be the reason of its origin. Therefore, it may be pointed out that, the creation of the 'modern' society (Western oriented) in India founded in the nineteenth century. The basic principles of these *Sabha-Samitis* were "freedom, free self-expression and rights of union to each other".⁸ In Europe, this type of the *Sabha-Samitis* or associations originated in the renaissance period. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Britishers took the enterprise for the establishment of *Sabha-Samitis* or associations in Bengal. After that, the western educated middle-class and wealthy people of India carried this further.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century women liberation movement in Bengal started by the initiative of the pioneer personalities of renaissance. Social and cultural discrimination towards woman and to develop consciousness against oppression and to take actions the exponents of renaissance came ahead for the establishment of *Sabha* and *Samiti* and the publication of magazine. From the beginning of nineteenth century to the six decade of that century many women welfare associations were formed with their initiative.⁹ Beginning with the *Atmiya Sabha* (1815) of Raja Rammohun Roy, innumerable organizations or associations were founded in Bengal in the nineteenth century. The most important associations such as *Brahmo Samaj* (1828), *Tattvabodhini Sabha* (1839), *Bidhaba Parinay Samiti* (1842),¹⁰ *Sarbasubhakari Sabha* (1850), *Samajonnati Bidhayini Suhrid Samiti* (1853), *Bal Subhakari Sabha* (1855), *Sangat Sabha* (1861), *Brahmo Bandhu Sabha* or *Society of Theistic Friends* (1863), *Bamabodhini Sabha* (1863), *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* (1863), *Bhagalpur Mahila Samiti* (1863) etc. were concerned about women issues like *Satidaha*, widow remarriage, polygamy, female infanticide, child marriage, women education and others.¹¹ These were mostly called *sabha* and *samiti* and the objects and activities of these associations reflected the great awakening of the period, characterized by energetic enterprise, enthusiasm and wide interest in various spheres of life. Some were purely cultural and literary associations, some were concerned with social reform and other aspects of public welfare, and others

combined both cultural and welfare activities. Though the century witnessed an ideological conflict between opposite ideas and religious differences, yet these associations generally provided the meeting place of people belonging to different schools of thought for a common objective. In most cases religion and politics were kept out of these associations and this made it possible for Europeans and enlightened Indians to meet, exchange views, and work for common welfare and benefit. In the first half of the nineteenth century the emphasis was on cultural activities and academic pursuits while in the second half more stress was laid on practical work of social reform, education and other welfare activities.¹² The magazines were published at the initiation of these *Sabhas* and *Samitis* and many activities were also done to the cause of women welfare. But there were no women members in these *Samitis*. They did not feel the necessity to get opinion of the women to do women welfare activities or there was no scope of opportunities at that period.¹³

So, an important area for the setting up *Sabha-Samiti* in Bengal and social reform process unveiled during the period of Rammohan when the *Atmiya Sabha* was set up and also the protest was launched against *Sati* system. In this *Sabha-Samiti* discussions were not only held on *Shastras*, *Vedas*, Brahmo song etc. but also on the caste problem, problem of child widow, problem of polygamy system and the problem of idolatry etc.¹⁴ On the other hand, though *Sati* was allowed to manifest in any way in ancient India yet in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Bengali society many reason behind the *Sati* system was the pressure of real situation then the eternal desire of women for reaching heaven. Solution of various complex questions - widows' strict life, oppressed life, familial non-cooperation on, question of distribution of wealth, social restrictions etc. were verified in the analysis of '*Sati*'. It was impossible to determine the exact figure of the women who died in the husband's corpses voluntarily or forcefully. But this became dangerous and inhuman problem during the nineteenth century.¹⁵

No contemporary documentary source of reference was available at that time in respect of mental reaction of the Bengali women against the Hindu practice of *Sati* system who were burnt along with her deceased husband. Because, it was an unthinkable matter for the Bengali women either to protest against these social evils

i.e. the Hindu practice of *Sati* system since the life and death of the women were dependent upon the mercy of the family and society. But in spite of this, the incident indirectly helped to bring about a change in the consciousness of the Bengali women. To protest against the *Sati* system Rammohan brought some issues to our attention. These issues were so far ignored for the Bengali women and thus led to social oppression of all this lack of education among the women to our country was the main important problem. Though Rammohan was not the active profounder of women education, he emphasized the importance of women education in order to establish justification regarding the question of rights of women over paternal property or to stop the practice of *Sati* system.¹⁶ To transform the then condition of the Bengali women two items got due importance in Rammohun's description: i) The necessity of women education and ii) to give due importance of women thinking and attitude in the matter pertaining to family and real life. These two factors helped the Bengali women to break their age long identity and the discipline of existence throughout the century. In this way, the women association came into being in Bengal giving primary importance to these two features. In this connection, one may recall that, the internal currents of the human society which has long been observed by F. Engels who sought the origin of the situation in the institutions of society like family, private property and the state.¹⁷ It is, however, unknown whether the women of Bengal were at all acquainted with the material interpretation of their condition but fact remains that they took up the cause of the age long injustice and raised voices in various forms. It is likely that, this situation had convicted the victimized women of Bengal to mobilize voices through some institutions and this may be the background leading to the rise of different associations with women concern in various parts of colonial Bengal.

In this respect, we may look back the history of Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century specifically from 1830 onwards when a new era of women consciousness started through the activities of some associations. In 1829 the *Sati* custom was abolished at the initiative of Rammohan and after this, the next step was taken to develop the condition of the Hindu widows. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was very active in respect of developing the condition of the Hindu widows. Before Vidyasagar, a part of newly educated urban people was conscious regarding sorrows

and sufferings of the widows at the childhood stage. Rammohan Roy brought the attention of the members regarding the problem of child widows in the meeting of the *Atmiya Sabha*. In the reformative speech of the Derozeans the problem of child widows got due importance. Thus, in 1842 the '*Vidhaba Parinay Samiti*' was organised. Ram Chandra Vidyabagis, the first *Acharya* of *Brahmo Samaj* opined in favour of widow re-marriage. In 1850, an essay of Vidyasagar on '*Bidhaba Bibaha*' (Widow Re-marriage) was published in the '*Sarbasubhakari*' Patrika. But the social consciousness got clear recognition as and when the initiative of Vidyasagar got legal recognition of the Government in 1856. Later, Keshab Chandra Sen, the leader of Brahmo movement staged one drama on '*Bidhaba Bibaha*' (Widow Remarriage) in 1859 and there severe criticisms were launched against the assigned rules on the Hindu widows. In 1861, he emphasised the importance of establishing mental and kith and kin (internalized) relations among the members of the *Sangat Sabha*. This *Sabha* supported Brahmo marriage for the first time in 1861 and side by side, it also supported inter-caste widow marriage in 1864.¹⁸

Another initiative of the social reformer of Bengal was to stop the tendency of existing customary practices of polygamy system among the Hindu *Kulin* Brahmin family. A protest against the customary practices of *Kulinism*, polygamy system also became firm with the emergence of social reform movement in the nineteenth century Bengal. Sreerampur Mission, *Atmiya Sabha* of Rammohan Roy, the Derozeans etc. tried to form public opinion against this practices. But the initiative of Vidyasagar in this affair was so far the best effort. According to his statements, if we want to make women lives tolerant then reformation of all practices relating to the interest of women were necessary. With the introduction of widow marriage he became active at the same time to ban polygamy system. With the active effort of Vidyasagar at last in 1871 and 1873 two judgements were passed against the practice of *Kulinism*. Besides Vidyasagar, the *Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha* also played an important role to stop *Kulinism*. Since the problems of *Sati* custom and widows were not related to the people of all walks of life, its impact did not affect the thoughts and ideas of all the people. On the other hand, the practice of *Kulinism* was transformed into an incurable disease of social *Varna* system of Bengal. Though the Government did not take initiative in this matter yet a strong

resentment against this practice arose among the members of the society. Of course, women in Bengal did not participate directly to bring about social change at the primary level. But the newspaper and periodicals of that period reflected that they became conscious about this. In 1856 we came to know from the *Sambad Prabhakar* that, Rashmoni Devi submitted prayer to the *Byabasthapak Society* to stop the practices of polygamy system.¹⁹ Since the middle of the nineteenth century women though in lesser number interested to participate in the reform movement regarding the issue of women-interest.

In the nineteenth century on the one hand, Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Keshab Chandra Sen took personal initiative and on the other, the process of social reform started in many cases at the group and organisational levels. We can refer some social organisations of nineteenth century run and influenced by the male members. These organisations held debates and discussions and chalk out plans regarding women related issues along with social problems. Derozio and its Young Bengal group inspired by western thought undertook programmes of social reforms along with women development. In 1828 they established *Academic Association*. They published their statement on the topic of the necessity of women education in *Gyananyesan*, the main organ of the Young Bengal group. Then on 6th October 1839, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore established *Tattvabodhini Sabha*. In the later period of Rammohun Roy the tendencies relating to religious and social reform of the *Brahmo Samaj* which took new shape emerged through this organisation. Essays relating to women education were published regularly in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, the organ of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*. In 1852, an article on 'Manaber Sahit Bajhyabastur Sammandha Bichar' was published in this magazine. The issues like inter-caste marriage, widow marriage, women education, to stop child marriage and polygamy system, prohibition of dowry system were raised there. As compared to Rammohun Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the Brahmos took much more initiative to stop child marriage system. So, consciousness among the educated group for the development of the Bengali women emerged during third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century and it reached to higher degree at the end of that century. The effort towards women development and social reform was also observed at the enterprise of the ex-student of the Hindu college. An essay on 'Stree

Siksha ('Women Education') by Madanmohan Tarkalankar was published in the second edition of '*Sarbasubhakari Patrika*'. With reference to '*Tattvabodhini Sabha*' '*Samajonnati Bidhayini Suhrid Sabha*' was formed on 16th October 1854. This organisation came into being to serve the purpose of social reform. Kishore Chand Mitra was the main exponent of this association. The main programme of this association was to remove strict adherence of caste system, stop polygamy and child marriage system, introduce widow marriage system, to take steps for women education etc.²⁰

Society of Theistic Friends (Brahmo Bandhu Sabha) was established in Calcutta on 1st April of 1863. The purpose of this association was to conscious the members about the religious and social reform. At the same time they established '*Antahpur Stree Siksha Sabha*' (Home Education for women or *Zenana Education*) to provide women education and one organisation was set up for the Brahmo women. Holding of examination were also arranged at the end of course curriculum. But there were only twenty to twenty five members of this organisation. As a result, at the initiative of Bijoy Krishna Goswami, Umesh Chandra Dutta and Basanta Kumar Ghosh '*Bamabodhini Sabha*' was formed in order to spread '*Antapura Siksha*' (home education).²¹ The objectives of this *Sabha* was to publish books and magazine, essay competition and distribution of prizes among educated women, arrangement of education for adult women of the Bengali family and to assist for the development of women of our country. *Bamabodhini Patrika* was a monthly and widely circulated magazine for the women of Bengal. This periodical was published with the editorship of principal Umesh Chandra Dutta, the Brahmo social reformer, mainly for the development of women related issues like life history of noble women, teaching about the principle of domestic life, to discuss about tourism, history and religious advice, novel, discussion on scientific issues, study of poetry, contemporary events and news, child marriage, *Kulinism*, movement against dowry system and so on. In 1872, *Bamarachanabali* was composed compiling the women essays published in *Bamabodhini Patrika*. Many of these writers achieved reputations later.²² A library named 'Female Circulating Library' founded by Sri Sashipada Bandopadhyay, the Brahmo social reformer, at Baranagar to extend the opportunities for the study of women. Side by side, he established one school for the

Hindu widows in 1864.²³ In 1887, this school was transformed into *Hindu Bidhaba Silpashram*.

Following the examples of *Bamabodhini Sabha* or *Society of Theistic Friends* many welfare institutions gradually played important role to spread women education through '*Antahpur Siksha*'. *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* can be cited as an important example in this field. Of all the organisations which undertook the programmes to spread women education in the second half of nineteenth century, the *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* (5th April, 1863) can be specifically referred to in respect of wide circulation and stability. In the contemporary period of *Bamabodhini Sabha* this village institution introduced examination system for the girls' students of the school in order to provide incentive towards the circulation of women education. In 1864, during autumn season this *Sabha* issued notice for holding examination for the girls' students of the Hooghly and Howrah districts and from 1865 started to take examination. The girls who secured high positions in the examination were distributed prizes and scholarships as per their qualities. This *Sabha* introduced necessary syllabus required for women.²⁴ The activities of this *Sabha* was not confined only to girls' school. It also introduced *Antahpur Stree Siksha* for the education of adult women. Following *Antahpur Stree Siksha* and its related examination system of *Brahmabandhu Sabha* and *Bamabodhini Sabha*; in 1868 *Hitakari Sabha* introduced their fourth examination on the basis of requirement and previous experience of conducting examinations. The girls' students would get scholarship in the last examination if they exercise *antahpurika* syllabus of one year from *antahpur*. This has been decided in the *Sabha* in order to encourage the girls' student, recipient of scholarship in the third or last examination, for purpose of studying more. Thus, special examinations were held for the secluded women during the period from 1868 to 1939 and eighty women passed in the *antahpurika* examination in different years.²⁵ To expedite the awakening of the nation and to build the country successfully the necessity of women education is not deniable. In this context, the Education Despatch of 1854 speaks with characteristic wisdom when it recorded that by the education of women a far greater impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than the education of men.²⁶ Realising this truth the *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* played glorious role

successfully to spread women education during the end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of twentieth century in the Burdwan division and in some parts of 24 Parganas.

Establishing *Sabha-Samiti* at the initiative of male social reformer in order to spread women education, the sub-inspector of Nadia district made observations from the report of the then Director of Education in the academic year 1864-65. He comments from the report that, “In a country like this, education of girls in the zenana is highly desirable and the advantage of such institutions cannot be over-estimated. It is, therefore, within feelings of unfeigned satisfaction that I record the establishment of a zenana education club at Belladanga in the town of Krishnanagore. Fourteen pupils on an average age of seventeen years are thus receiving instructions through the agency of the association”.²⁷ In the next year Academic Report of the Director of Education informed that, nineteenth (19) organisations were engaged to implement *antahpur* women education planning. In almost all the districts of Bengal *sabha* and *samitis* were formed for the development of women. Among these *Barisal Female Improvement Association* (1871 or 1872), *Syhet Sammilan* (1877), *Madhyabangala Sammilani* (*The Central Bengal Union*), *Sreehatta Sammilani*, *Jessore-Khulna Sammilani*, *Bikrampur Hitasadhini* (organised by Dwarakanath Ganguli in 1879), *Faridpur Suhrid Sabha* (1880 or 1881), the *Paschim Dacca Hitakari Sabha*, *Taki Hitakari Sabha*, the *Sripur Hitasadhini* and many others were encouraging the women in respect of their education, art and craft, domestic principle and others.

In this way, at the impetus of male social reformer of our country the items ‘women progress’ got importance at the organisational level for the first time. Because, in the first half of the nineteenth century the development of self-consciousness among the Bengali women was not so firm that they could set up their own organisation for their existence or for their rights. Organisations relating to consciousness of women in Bengal came into being during later decades of 1860s. But a suitable environment and groundwork was created for the self-expression and thinking of the women in Bengal before arriving at organisational effort. These became the basis of thinking for the associational initiative. If the social reform of the nineteenth century is considered external indices of the development of

consciousness then the women education was undoubtedly its internal inspiration. In fact, various legal initiatives were taken to improve the conditions of women in Bengal but still then no other attempt could become so successful as women education which has a far-reaching impact. All these processes which were initiated by the male reformers were assigned reform on women. In this reform process women's active participation was not found in reality. With the influence of these reforms the thinking and consciousness developed indirectly among the Bengali women. But the women education is such an important thing that it helps to grow consciousness directly among the women. As a result, consciousness among them developed very clearly. The immediate outcome of the expansion of women education helped to develop the emergence of the educated Bengali women class. These women did not depend upon others to solve social problems or the problem of reform. They wanted to solve all these problems at their own initiative or responsibility. The women associations of the first phase of Bengal were the result of this trend.²⁸ So, there is a very sharp pivot moment and linking line between women awakening and movement. Women's consciousness about their rights developed in this period through organising the women on the one hand and writing and self-questioning on the other. But, it was very difficult to form *Sabha* and *Samiti* at the initial stage. It was not possible for the Bengali women to provide leadership openly for the formation of *Sabha* and *Samiti* because they lived under the social restriction of *pardah* and seclusion and also under the social backwardness. Hence, the progressive male members took enterprise to form the *mahila samiti* (ladies association) for the first time.²⁹

The Britishers on the one hand performed the imperialist duty in order to bring about a change in the 'backwardness' of the Bengali society with the women developmental issues associated with the process of nineteenth century social reform in Bengal. On the other hand, the Bengali urban intellectuals inspired by western education and ideology became more reform-oriented. Various changes occurred in the public life of Bengal with the joint initiative of this assemblage in which women interested issues got highest importance. As a result, Prohibition of *Sati* Act, 1829, Widow Re-marriage Act in 1856 and Brahmo Marriage Act in 1872 were passed and also women education was extended. The objectives of patriarchal society were

very much prevalent behind this women development. Hence, behind progressivism social restrictions were prevalent at every step of social reform of Bengal and women development. For example, the themes which were included for the purpose of home education of women in the second half of the nineteenth century opened the opportunities of exercise for the knowledge of spiritual analysis than the scientific exercise. It was found that, even in the nineteenth century an attempt was made through women education to make the women ideal, efficient in domestic work, to act as assistant for all the activities of husband and extension of social status nevertheless to develop the women sincerity towards social conventions. But in spite of this, the extension of education among the Bengali women helped to develop consciousness and a change noticed with this in the life of the Bengali urban women. The reflection of this could be observed in the personal behaviour of the Bengali women, dress materials, life style and the attitude towards society on all things.³⁰ Thus, one kind of new Bengali *bhadramahila*³¹ emerged in the urban society of Bengal. These Bengali *bhadramahila* came forward to give leadership towards social activities relating to women development. The attempt to self-expression and necessity of unified emergence of the Bengali women inspired to do associational activities.

In the first half of the nineteenth century in India especially in Bengal western based culture and its ethos became the criterion of signifying ‘modernity, progressiveness and supremacy’. In order to establish suitability and acceptability in respect of caste and their eligibility towards foreign ruling classes they selected transformation and reform of social life, group life and individual life. The British power as per their own requirement took active part primarily in the field of their initiation. As a result, transformations and reforms got importance in the social, cultural and civic life of Bengal. Hence, a special phase with reference to this began in respect of consciousness for women in Bengal during colonial period. Among the women consciousness and development the impact of nineteenth century Victorian culture³² and feminism was very much definite in this period. The *bhadramahila* emerged in Bengal from the middle half of the nineteenth century and a direct indication of westernized thinking is found into their family background and reform, education, behaviour, life style, formalities of the *bhadramahila*. Even, in order to

prove and maintain their modernity and nevertheless women like ‘flexibility and purity’ these *bhadramahila* were same kind of conscious and skilful. Of all the initiatives taken to prove women like characteristics, social responsibility, awareness and modernity, an attempt to form women organization and active participation of women in those organizations were the main important thing. In other words, the women organizations were an important instrument to focus newly acquired social introduction and gradually developed women consciousness. Most of the Bengali *bhadramahila* were urban Brahmo group, converted Bengali family or in some cases educated Hindu family. Therefore, the familial, social, cultural ideas and the reflections of own realisations were observed in the women organizations which were initiated by them.³³ Because, the ancient Indian cultural thought always existed parallel with Western liberalism and the idea of western oriented women life in the development of consciousness for women in colonial Bengal. Among the so called progressive exceptional Bengali women both the features were available to a lesser or greater extent. In view of the fact that, the women organization emerged in regard to women related issues, hence those ideas relating to women thinking and consciousness were indispensable features for institutional expression in respect of women development in Bengal.³⁴

On the other hand, skills, knowledge and consciousness of social concerns that had been developed through education and contact to a wider public life needed and field of operation. Neither the *bhadralok* nor Hindu society was ready to allow women the same freedoms as men, but the energies that had been generated by social change could not be ignored. The *bhadramahila* began to follow the *bhadralok* in setting up organizations among themselves for social and benevolent purposes. The movement was encouraged by male reformers, who allowed the values of spending time useful and helping to uplift the less fortunate. The women’s associations of nineteenth century Bengal managed to break new ground in their creation and interests, without challenging the parameters of acceptable female concerns. The growth of women’s associations, their changing nature and their often different aims and methods, were closely incorporated with social developments in the world of the *bhadralok*.³⁵

For the first few decades of the existence of women's associations, only Brahma women were involved. As members of a new "sect", Brahmans had cut themselves from involvement in the household and communal rituals of Hinduism. Instead of these, they celebrated their group consciousness through the ritual of congregational worship, and confirmed their usually held principles in formal discussion groups or voluntary associations. Brahma women would have experienced some of the same problems of separation from the Hindu community as their men folk, especially 1860s and 1870s. However, their customary mode of establishing social contact was through informal challenge and therefore, the enterprise for the establishment of formal women association came from men. Women may have welcomed the chance to make stronger their newly acquired identity as Brahmans that was thus presented, but this was not the primary aim of the men who established voluntary associations for women. They envisaged the broader social purpose of rising women above the state of oppression in which they were said to exist in Hindu society. Women's voluntary associations were discussion groups creating a sense of common purpose among the participants, as well as forums for moulding the consciousness of the "new women" and indicating directions for change in her position.

Formal meeting procedures followed these of men's associations, and thus furnished women with skills that were to be of use in breaking into formerly male domains such as politics and public administration. Brahma women soon became familiar with such formal procedures, thus moving into an ideal position for involvement in public affairs at a later date. In addition, women's associations, by their very existence, laid emphasis women's distinctness and separateness and introduced serious consideration of issues concerning the role and status of women. In some respects this was just a continuation of the "separate world" of the *pardah* system, but by the end of the nineteenth century, women's successful mastery over the form of the voluntary association had created among the confidence in their ability to understand and function within the public institutional structure of colonial India nay Bengal.³⁶

As a result, for the first time in India's history women began to communicate with women outside their families and local communities. There was a small group

of women who shared English as a common language. This made possible communication across language barriers. On the other hand, there were growing numbers of women literate in the vernaculars which enabled them to learn about women's issues in the new women's journals. Both groups being marginalised by more traditional society sought the companionship of women like themselves. Inspired by their male guardians to "*move with the times*" they joined the new clubs and associations formed particularly for women. These associations became the platform for the expression of "*women's opinion*". At the same time, they were a training ground for women who would later take up leadership roles in political and social institutions. Those institutions, in turn, played an important role in the building of Indian nation. Their model was undoubtedly western: the view of women and of women's civic responsibility was adopted wholesale. Nonetheless, in the Indian context these organizations developed in harmony with a view of the "new women" as a companion and helpmate to man, an ideal mother, and a credit to her country.³⁷

While male-inspired and male-guided associations for women did important work in educating women and providing them with their first experience with public work, they also imposed boundaries. In particular, male reformers regarded the household as the main focus and fundamental arena of activity for women. They envisioned households run by modernized women who had imbibed scientific ideas about hygiene and child-rearing. These men wanted their wives to take part in activities outside the home such as social work to help the unfortunate and relief work when disaster struck. Their wives could support in nation-building not through political agitation but by building institutions to improve the most evil situations arising from social customs. Women's associations were also useful institutions to achieve the aim of transforming young brides into companions and help-mates. When young women attended these meetings they were temporarily removed from the influence and dominance of the older women of the household to a place where they could follow further education, develop friendships with other educated women, work together on benevolent schemes.³⁸

The limitations that accompanied male support and guidance were exposed whenever women wanted to strike out on their own. The religious-reform and

communal associations dealt with women's problems as defined by male leaders. But these patrons would not automatically extend their support to problems identified by women on their own.³⁹ In this connection, Janaki Nair comments on the "limited operation of the 'modernization' paradigm". She writes: "The agenda of 'modernization' to which both colonialist and nationalist discourse laid claim, did not, indeed could not, include the wider transformation of Indian society".⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the steps taken by these respectable and well-educated Indian men linked improving women's status with the modernization agenda. Their campaign set in motion further attempts to establish institutions that would be supportive of a new generation of women leaders.

In fine, in the second half of the nineteenth century many of the best-educated and influential men got involved gradually with nationalist politics and the "women question" was no longer a subject on which educated Indians and British rulers could agree. As a result, these issues were not left behind as the "new women" moved forward to set up their own associations and rearrange social reform priorities.⁴¹

The women's associations, thus initiated, were a part of the nineteenth century Social Reform Programme. These, however, in the first phase were largely isolated from political context. But the characters of the women's associations, however, were fundamentally changed from the last part of the nineteenth century and above all with the beginning of the twentieth century. Finally, it came to be linked up not only with the larger movement of political emancipation, but was also, in broader perspectives guided by women leaders themselves. As the freedom movement progressed and women participated in it, they thought of organizing their own association. From the early twentieth century, women political leaders strongly attempted this task. They received an increasing response from other women, who were becoming progressively conscious of the misery of women in society. Most of these associations were bothered mainly with issues of gender.⁴² So, participation in the freedom struggle which breaking of the exterior of traditional domestic life had widened their sphere. They had started, as their realization and writings indicate, slowly to understand the reasons for their oppression and to perceive the need to

organize their own associations as a source of strength. In short, they came out with a new personality of their own.

So, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the 'women problem' had been defined in terms of upper-class and middle-class women. Confinement, lack of formal education and restriction on movement, were seen as the problems to be overcome; lectures, social associations and literature provided the method of attack.⁴³ But these were neither the problems of the lower class nor were these suitable ways to claim their attention. It was hoped though that, the women who took part in these associations would become conscious of the needs of their own class and feel confident in the world outside their homes so that they could play a part in social revitalization.

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which the status of women has varied in different cultures and times; and changes taking place in women's family role, political rights, education and employment. See *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Micropaedia, Vol. X, 15th Edition, William Benton, Publisher, 1943-1973, pp. 421 and 731; only in comparatively modern times did the women of Great Britain emerge from a complex of legal disabilities within which they had remained for long centuries. The three main landmarks of their modern emancipation were the Married Women's Property act of 1882; their admission to the parliamentary electorate by the Representation of the People Act of 1918; and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) act of 1919, which opened public functions and many professions hitherto closed to them. See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 23, Vase to Zygote, William Benton, Publisher, 1963, p. 704.

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CHAPTER-V

WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS AND THE BEGINNING OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

- (i) **First phase (1865-1896) - Search for Power and Authority from a Votive Force**
- (ii) **Second phase (1897-1943) -Search for Socio-Political Rights and Empowerment**

“We are women organizing within our unique social, economic, political context. We are part of a wider movement of women. In the diversity which creates the unity lies our strength.”¹

This is a statement which speaks about the condition of women and the spirit that led them to search for the identity in midst of the social crisis that prevailed in colonial Bengal. Women's movement and emergence of woman power has had a long tradition in India's development. In the traditional era, woman power was recognized in the '*Shakti*' cult. It was not merely a reaction against male oppression or a negative approach set up in denial of any form. It was a definite positive approach in searching power and authority from a votive force. This idea did not understand women to be subordinate or inferior in the terminology of the gender system. Women themselves were the source of limitless power. This tradition was mostly strong in Bengal, where women had always received special respect. In spite of the views and efforts of few enlightened men (Raja Rammhohun Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Henry Luies Vivian Derozio, Debendra Nath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen etc.), the general condition of women was far from satisfactory. It was not only 'gender', but class and caste also did make differences. The social process linked class, caste and gender question together, and particularly in the case of the women of the middle class - all these three combined to produce a rather unenviable picture. Constraints against the ordinary and the lowly women created a difficult life for them. Customs and habits were much rigid and stronger on these women than on those who belonged to the higher castes. Their lives became more restricted and difficult. While for the higher caste and the wealthier sections it was comparatively

easier to shake of age-old prohibitions and hold the western mode of thought, habits or manners, the same was not easy for the territorial and the ordinary.² This chapter intends to throw light on women's association about the search of their power and authority on the one hand and socio-political rights and empowerment on the other hand. The year 1865 may be taken as the turning point as to the emergence of women's associations in Bengal, while 1896 seems to have marked the end of its first phase. In this trend one may come across the beginning of another phase from 1897 down to 1943 - a period when the women of Bengal stood for socio-political rights vis-a-vis empowerment.

(i) First Phase (1865-1896) – Search for power and authority from a votive force

Under the patriarchal Indian society, a woman's place became so miserable that she began to be treated like a chattel to be gifted away by the husband. In the early part of the nineteenth century, a number of social ills like child-marriage, female infanticide, *Purdah*, sati, dowry, prohibition of widow remarriage, indignities suffered by widows etc. had started manifesting in all their ugliness. Lack of proper education among women made matters worse; the basic idea behind giving education to women was to establish on a firm footing the traditional notions of femininity. It would be interesting to refer to Rousseau here who once in his 'Emile' commented: "Thus, women's entire education should be placed in relation to men, to please men, to be useful to them, to win over their love and respect, to raise them as children, care for them as adults.....".³ So, in a male-dominated patriarchal Indian society, the type of education which was sought to be imparted to women re-emphasized their familial roles - as a daughter she was supposed to be obedient to her father; as a wife she was expected to be dutiful to her husband (even though the latter might be cruel and disloyal to her); and in her old age she was to be an addition of her son. There was almost no opportunity for women to claim their individuality and to express their view in important matters having a bearing upon their lives.⁴ It would be no overstatement to say that, the woman in Indian society was a mere shadow of man having no entity of her own.

The status of women was an issue of great concern to nineteenth century reformers in India. Later they tried to educate women and bring them into public

life. What reformers were trying was simply to raise the position of women in the society and that too, within the framework of the patriarchal norms. They never questioned the power imbalance that was structured in the man-woman relationship.⁵ In the starting phase of the nineteenth century, Bengali women existed in a terrible state of ignorance in terms of illiteracy, superstition and physical seclusion. But the goal of the reform movement, supported by them (male/men), was not to attack the prevalent patriarchal system in any way, or to challenge the power and position enjoyed by men, nor even to make women equal partners of men in the societal or economic roles outside of the family. Its intention was to develop the position of women within the patriarchal framework and to make them more capable of fulfilling their roles as mothers and wives within the family. In short, they were to be better prepared to provide the *bhadralok* social support in the colonial world and to produce 'enlightened' sons for them.⁶ That is why the paradigm of a model woman was imported from Victorian England with the 'traditional' qualities of Indian women added to it.

Thus, the nineteenth century social reformers desired to bring about some development in the condition of women, but at the same time they never raised their voice against the power and authority enjoyed by men within the patriarchal society. The male dominated household society reduced women to the level of objects of sexual satisfaction. Sex symbols and sex roles stereotyping were the means through which women were subjected within the framework of patriarchy.

In view of the fact that, the social reform movement of the nineteenth century could not rise above the constraints imposed by the patriarchal norms of the society and women were continued to be treated as mere objects on whom judgment was to be passed, an urgent need was felt for writing a new script for the past which would impart strength to the process of making India a great nation and reflect its new socio-cultural and political aspirations. Women's question had therefore to be properly dealt with in the reconstruction of historical consciousness and search for the golden age.

However, the budding awareness among women in regard to their low position in the male-dominated patriarchal society at different levels provoked them to fight or search for their rights. The Indian women's movement through association did not originate its inspiration from the West, but from its realization

that the women's trust upon male 'charity', 'benevolence' and spiritual concern could not ensure for them autonomy, rights and power. This movement gained its strength from its extended and active association with the beginning of politics and anti-colonial struggle in India. The main reason behind the Indian women's movement was to organize under a common platform those women who had been silently suffering in male-dominated patriarchal society. In order to highlight the manner in which women were being mistreated in male-dominated patriarchal society, the enlightened women started taking recourse to get associated with the publications of journals, magazines and other social platforms with the basic purpose of statue new spaces and roles for women who, like men, had a similarly important role to play in society.⁷

As noted earlier (in the chapter IV), the awareness produced by the male reformers was reflected in the world of women. As a result, women's realization about the need to organize emerged and this was reflected in the formation of women's associations. In the six decades or seven decades of the nineteenth century, men had structured women's associations on their behalf. In the starting phase women's role was confined to taking part in the organisations started by men, attending meetings and helping the men in their work. Afterward, the women began to raise questions rarely on their own, and after this some special programmes for women were in progress.⁸

Brahmika Samaj was the first Bengali women's association which established on 15 July, 1865. At first it was religious, consisting of a weekly women's service followed by a discussion of spiritual matters. Keshab Chandra Sen gave religious instructions on moral and spiritual questions, which were normally attended by fifteen or sixteen women. On 23 January 1866, the women members of this *Brahmika Samaj* attended along with men the *Maghotsab* anniversary celebration of the *Brahmo Samaj* held in the public Prayer Hall, sitting however behind a net screen. Secular activities were added soon after its initiation. Bibi Miss Pikari taught women hemming for two to three hours every Saturday, the day of the women's service. Miss Pigot, a missionary of the Church of Scotland, attended regularly in order to get to know Bengali women. She also invited them to her home. Srimati Swarnalata Debi, one of the participants, was concerned by the fact that many women were unable to attend the services. For their benefit, she summarized

Keshab's religious instructions down from memory when she got home, and sent them to the *Bamabodhini Patrika* for publication. Though, there is no articulated record of the continued existence of the group, but it seems to have kept going infrequently.⁹ It may be pointed out that, how far male reformers were ready to take action and join themselves in the social activities and to break the *purdah* system; *Brahmika Samaj* was its one trial. In 1865 the Brahma women of Barisal and Dacca also openly started taking part in prayer meetings. It was at Barisal that Manorama Debi, wife of Girischandra Majumder and mother-in-law of Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, caused a sensation by preaching publicly from the platform in a Brahma Prayer Hall. The initial shyness on the part of women had begun to wear off.¹⁰ By the initiatives of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghosh, a *Brahmika Samaj* was started in Bhagalpur at the very next year i.e. in 1866. It was less absolutely religious than its adviser and intended at social reform and educating its members to mix socially and to acquire "habits of freedom". Other *Brahmika Samajes* were created in the wake of *Brahmo Samajes* in the *moffussil*.¹¹

After *Brahmika Samaj*, in 1870, some male reformers recommended the founding of a ladies' society which would run by women for the discussion of religious and social questions. The proposal of a separate women's society was taken up on 14 April 1871 under the patronage of the *Indian Reform Association*. Thus, with the help of Keshab Chandra Sen, Miss Mary Carpenter and Miss Pigot, the *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* was formed. It intended at improving the general welfare of women, although men were included as members. Fortnightly meetings consisted of lectures, discussions and readings of works considered suitable for women. Keshab Chandra Sen was the president of the *Sabha*. Beside two English benefactors Mrs. Phear and Miss Pigot, thirty Bengali women were its member of the supervision committee named Swaranalata Ghosh (wife of Manmohan Ghosh), Brahmomayee Devi (wife of Durgamohan Das), Hemangini Devi (wife of Umesh Chandra Banerjee) and others. At its second meeting, Bijoy Krishna Goswami delivered a lecture on the spiritual advancement of women and four students of the Native Ladies' Normal School read their own compositions to the assembled gathering.¹²

At meetings of the *Bama Hitaishini Sabha*, however, it's sixteen or so members were likely to express their own opinions and to ask questions, though

apparently the questening was only possible within the limits allowed by Keshab Chandra Sen, whose objectives seem to have been one of indoctrination rather than exploration. In fact, there was an ideological conflict in the *Bama Hitaishini Sabha*. In an article in *Abalabandhab*, organ of the 'female emancipationist' group of *Brahmo Samaj* discussed the fragmentation in detail and strictly criticized the *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* for the feature of male-domination. The unknown author of the article said that what women wrote or discussed followed the commands of men and that women hardly dared to express themselves at meetings where males were present and verbal.¹³ The outcome of the criticism was that, some women founded a new group called the *Nari Hitasadhini Sabha* which was being run and controlled absolutely by women (still with the help of male relatives). Its female president had to send out notices, write reports, and read reports at meetings. Women used to discuss topics freely in the presence of male folk, they could only interfere to question decisions they powerfully disagreed with. Women then argued the point and made the final decision.¹⁴ This description of the *Nari Hitasadhini Sabha* gives an insight into the bold spirit of some issues highlighted by the Brahmo women, as well as into the deeply male-dominated character of women's organizations earlier to this. *Nari Hitasadhini Sabha* considerably differed many of the *Bama Hitaishini Sabha*. The *Nari Hitasadhini Sabha* would have been the female counterpart of the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj*. Even in the more conservative mood of the *Bama Hitaishini Sabha*, many women would have gained some knowledge with organizational procedured. In spite of that, for example, Radharani Lahiri, could perform some duties to ensure the rights of women.¹⁵ It may be said that, *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* was the first women's reformist organization of their own require and demand. On the other hand, the shift in the balance of power and authority in favour of control by women was, however, a wel-come enterprise credited to the *Nari Hitasadhini Sabha*.

Few years later (1877), to give the honour of late Miss Mary Carpenter, a western educationist, some women met at the home of Ananda Mohan Bose. It was 'remarkable' in the sense that, the whole preparation of the gathering was conducted by educated indigenous ladies. Thus, a society for the *Brahmika Unnayan Sabha* or *Improvement of Brahmika Ladies* was formed in 1879. Ramtanu Lahiri presided this society. Ladies 30 in number joined as primary members.

Weekly meetings were divided as follows: the first and third weeks were to be committed to ‘prayer and religious and moral instruction of the ladies’, the second was to be a discussion group for women only and the fourth was to be a social gathering including men, with lectures, scientific experiments, readings, music, and ‘other useful entertainments’.¹⁶ At the first women-only meeting, two ladies read papers on how women could make best use of their time in the present state of society. One result of the meeting was the selection of a “Ladies Working Committee” to visit different Brahma families at least twice a month, to present and nurse the sick, to carry out home teaching, and to donate to charity. Members were to do needle work, which would be sold for help.¹⁷ In this way, women’s role and power searched gradually with their development.

In the same year (May 1879) the *Arya Nari Samaj* was formed by the initiatives of Keshab Chandra Sen as a ‘Ladies Union’ based upon ‘national principles’. Its purpose was to carry out reform ‘in accordance with the pure manners and customs of Aryan Hindu women of ancient times’. Other items were the study of health and hygiene, science (to reveal the ‘wisdom and mercy of God’) and biographies of good women, as well as dedication in congregational devotion and daily prayer. In reality, the *Arya Nari Samaj* was careful to fit women for the position they would fill in society as good mothers, wives and sisters, navigating a middle path between the ‘outlandish habits and airs of menlong’ and the ‘superstitious old village grandmother’. At one of the early meetings it was resolved to form a small circulating library for women and to supply to charity by donating money, old clothes and furniture to the secretaries for distribution to the poor. A unique feature of the *Arya Nari Samaj* was the adaptation of four Hindu *bratas* (*Maitreyi brata*, *Savitri brata*, *Draupadi brata* and *Lilavati brata*) to new objects.¹⁸ But it is difficult to take these *bratas* seriously when their content is more closely examined. However, the *Samaj* did connect in some outside work. For example, the Metropolitan Female School was revived in 1880 and put under the charge of the *Arya Nari Samaj*. After that, four Brahma ladies had volunteered their services as teachers in the school.

The *Arya Nari Samaj* organization was the forerunner of the better known *Banga Mahila Samaj* (Bengal Ladies Association), founded on 1st August, 1879. Its design was the same as that of its unknown predecessor. It was the first women’s

independent organization. Kadambini Ganguly was an active member of the *Banga Mahila Samaj*. The association had three objectives in view:

1. Discussions of important questions of life and conduct and more useful practical work for the progress of women,
2. Endorsement of spiritual culture and
3. To bringing jointly both sexes in evening parties and social gatherings.¹⁹

On the occasions when women ran their own meeting sessions, they showed their grip of organizational dealings such as they chaired meetings, prepared reports and made resolutions. The group's foundation was drawn up in April, 1880, covering points such as the committee's right to decide on whether members needed to be Brahmos, loss of attachment for members who had fallen four months after in their payment of dues and the election of office-bearers. There were to be a president and two secretaries, one of whom would be the treasurer, elected at six-monthly intervals. Swarnaprabha Bose, wife of Ananda Mohan Bose, was first secretary and the then president of the *Banga Mahila Samaj* for many years. The *Banga Mahila Samaj* also provided some capacity for activities to single women and widows. For example, Saraswati Sen, a widow who took a personal arrogance in the *Samaj* as a sign of women's success. She comments, "It must be said that it is our great good fortune to have an organization. Like our learned menfolk, we have the right to express our opinion and work for society. Whenever I think about this I am overjoyed".²⁰ In this way, to an extent the authority and power structure reflected that of the *Banga Mahila Samaj*.

On the other hand, Christian ladies had connected the *Samaj* to co-operate in social and philanthropic works. This contact may have intended for the organization towards a fuller consciousness of the extent for women's activity in the realm of social work, a field that had been taken up by women in England. The first annual report in 1881 indicates that the activities of the *Samaj* centred on issues of ethical reform and to upgrade women solidarity other than programmes of social works on social work. In 1880, the *Banga Mahila Samaj* had published *Saral niti path*, a collection of moral teachings for children. In 1881, Parbati Basu won a prize twenty rupees for the best essay on 'Adarsha grihini' in memory of Sasipada Banerjee's late wife. Durga Mohan Das gave ten rupees for a scholarship for poor widows as a

memorial of his wife Brahmomayee Devi. Nevertheless, the purpose of the *Banga Mahila Samaj* of printing appropriate books for Bengali women perhaps made it a dominant archetype organization and a library had been established with English and Bengali books. During the year women had delivered lectures on a normal series of topics, such as social harmony, the progress of nature, the proper use of time, beauty, work and talk and determination.²¹

It may be noted that, true to form, the *Banga Mahila Samaj* and the *Arya Mahila Samaj* found each other as rivals and opponents. Because the *Arya Nari Samaj* stated itself against westernized emancipation. But the *Banga Mahila Samaj* and the *Arya Mahila Samaj* were the two most noteworthy women's organizations of the late nineteenth century. Although their membership was small, but they represented prototypes for other associations. As a result, other awakened groups formed their own women's organizations. The *Bangiya Khristiya Mahila Samaj* was one of them, established by Bengali Christian women in 1880. The society was run by women. In 1881, there were thirty-five members and three hundred women were present at the annual meeting in 1882. It published its own journal '*Khristiya Mahila*', edited by Kamini Shil.²²

From the above status, women began to identify their interests, suggest solutions and take action only after they formed their own associations. The aims were to increase friendly co-operation among *pardah* women, curiosity them the world outside their homes and organize lectures on useful subjects. But, it seems that, these simple objectives had far-reaching implications. This was accepted by some of the men who refused to allow their wives attend even one meeting. On the other hand, this new role-model for women (represented both the usual image of womanhood capable of performing her household duties capably and the modern, enlightened image skilled of assuming responsibilities outside the four walls of her home) was acknowledged by the progressive women thinkers of those times because under the new model due recognition was given to women's autonomous thinking, their scholarly capabilities and their survival as individuals in their own right.²³

In this context, by the end of the nineteenth century many women on behalf of the elite classes began to form their own associations. This marked the emergence of an elementary women's movement in India rather it can say search for power and authority from a votive force. In this connection, the role played by the Tagore

family of Jorasanko went a long way in the direction of creation of women's organizations. Credit goes to Swarnakumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore, for organizing the *Sakhi Samiti* (Ladies Association) in 1886.²⁴ It was the first organization run by women to have a clear dedication to social welfare. It had to forward among Indian women an active and progressive interest in the welfare of the country.²⁵ Its aim was to take in needy widows and unmarried girls and give them vocational training. Its preliminary aim was to send out appropriate teachers to Hindu *zenanas*. Later, it became a craft centre for widows. In 1890 the *Samiti* organized a charity *bazaar*, which was opened by its patron lady Lansdowne. Such *bazaars* were prepared by women, staffed by women and sold handi crafts made by women such as *Kantha* work, embroidery, sweetmeats, *Alpana* designs etc. Hiranmoyee Devi, daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, who personally took in many of the *samiti's* homeless girls and raised them as her own. Under her momentum, the defunct society was revived in 1906 as the *Bidhaba Silpashram*.²⁶ It may be recalled that, *Sakhi Samit* was one of the most significant women's organizations of the late nineteenth century. Through this organization, educated women were more concerned in the social activities and became self-sufficient by earning money. In a co-operative way, they took the drive for social reform and realized the significance of changing life for women. So, this association took the noteworthy role of women's power and authority which searched from a promising force.

Even though, primarily most voluntary associations were limited to Brahmo women, they sometimes prepared gathering in which educated Hindu women also took part. For instance, when Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar died (1891) they organized a meeting which was attended by three hundred women. Meeting procedures were strictly adhered to firstly; resolutions were made and then debate had to be followed. Swarnamayee De proposed that funds be collected for a memorial to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bethune College. In this regard, Saraswati Sen seconded the proposal and a committee was selected to carry this out. Dr. Kadambini Ganguly thought that, Bethune College was the most suitable place for his memorial. Jnanadanandini Debi wished-for that, a shelter for homeless women be founded in his name, but some Hindu women disagreed. After all, it was clearly a matter of pleasure to women that they could run their own meetings with male efficiency and care.²⁷ It may be followed that, the *Bharat Mahila Samiti* was

another women's association which established in 1895 by Kadambini Lahiri, a Brahmo widow and by 1904 it had ninety five members. The high ethical tone exhorted women to uphold 'purity of feeling' within the home and family and to read the newspapers, seek new forms of information etc. Their social duties were accepted in a symbol of manner. Members who were overburdened with their own home duties were requested to expend at least one hour each month doing helpful work for another family.²⁸ The association also supported a widow's home, which became a part of the Tagore family's *Mahila Silpa Samiti* i.e. *Bidhaba Silpashram* in 1906, after the *Bharat Mahila Samiti* had become a discussion group to replace the defunct *Banga Mahila Samaj*.

Not only that, there were numerous small women's association established in the *moffussil*.²⁹ For example, Sushila Debi, daughter of Annapurna Chattopadhyay of Bogura, established a *Bhagini Samaj*. Banalata Debi, daughter of Sasipada Banerjee, formed the *Sumati Samiti* in 1892 as a women's welfare group. It raised subscriptions to care for a few destitute girls and tried to build links with Hindu women in *zenanas* by initiating a connection with individual women. Banalata Debi herself received lots of letters from these women and replied personally to each one. Her elder sister Sukatara Debi by name took over as secretary after her death in 1900.³⁰

It may be pointed out that, there was a marked shift in the nature of women's associations over time. By the 1890s, all societies were run by women rather than men. Women had gained enough assurance and knowledge in procedural technique, to take over. Apart from women's enterprise, the rising lack of interest on the part of men speeded up the changeover. As men were ever more drawn into nationalist political associations and activities, their interest in social reform and the 'condition of women' issue decreased. The ideological force of the Hindu resurgence tended to deemphasize the advancement of women, identifying it with westernization. No male organizations were still concerned with this issue by the end of the century.

But in the then East Bengal (now Bangladesh) women's movement were emerged through associations and editing of journals or magazines published under the women's leadership. The most important women's welfare associations in Dhaka and others towns were: *Dhaka Antahpur Stree Siksha Sabha* (1870), *Dhaka Subhasadhini Sabha* (1870), *Dhaka Philanthropic Society* (1871), *Faridpur*

Kaulinya Pratha Sangshodhani O Kanya Bikray Nibarani Sabha (1871), *Bogura Kanyapan Nibarani Sabha* (1871), *Mymensingh Hitakari Sabha* (1872), *Dhaka Balyabibaha Nibarani Sabha* (1873) etc.³¹ It is necessary to mention here that, from the seven decades of the nineteenth century women of Calcutta came forward to establish associations and publication of periodicals, but at the same time in Dhaka and other towns they could not come ahead in the same way. The main cause was the backwardness of education. As a result, the male co-operation leadership was necessary for their activities.

The main function of the most women's associations was to act as a support group for the profit of educated women. At the same time, their consciousness of a new idea of social duty for the educated woman was growing, forwarded by the liability gained from being in control of their own organizations. While in earlier women's associations, the *bhadramahila* had been inactive recipients of instructions but from the beginning of the twentieth century they were actively involved in making their own decisions about what should be their social function.

Not only women's associations, many contemporary periodicals were also edited by women. In this regard, Mokshadayini Mukhopadhyay edited *Bangamahila* in 1870 which was published from Khidirpur, Calcutta. This was the first women's edited contemporary periodical. After this, *Abodhbandhu*, *Balaranjika*, *Anathini* (1875), *Binodini*, *Bharati* (1877), *Hindu Mahila* (1878), *Paricharika* (1878), *Mahila* (1881), *Pak-Pranali* (1883), *Garhastha* (1884), *Mahila- Bandhab* (1887), *Dasi* (1897), *Antahpur* (1897) etc. were edited by women themselves.³² The themes of these periodicals were only women oriented and through their writings they also searched their power and authority from a votive force.

It may thus be concluded that, nineteenth century women's associations and periodicals did promote a sense of group identity. The leadership given by Brahma women was taken up by Hindu women in the twentieth century. In later associations the social function was much more clearly formulated than it had earlier been. The increasing involvement of men in the political arena creates a space that educated women were able to fill, particularly as their entrance to other areas of public work was limited. From the end of the nineteenth century and with the beginning of twentieth century, women's welfare organizations began to grow up rapidly.³³

It was only in the twentieth century, when a increasing number of educated women required meaningful activity, that the *bhadramahila* began to look beyond their own immediate areas of knowledge and to examine more serious social problems. The training in public life gained through membership of voluntary associations and attachment in philanthropic activities gave them the skills required for dealing with major social issues. The lack of consciousness and separate attitude characteristic of many of the *bhadramahila* in the nineteenth century were ever more difficult to carry on in a time when women were beginning to enter the public worlds of society and political activity i.e. search for socio- political rights and empowerment.

(ii) Second phase (1897-1943) - Search for socio- political rights and empowerment

‘It is justice not charity that is wanting in the world.’

Mary Wollstonecraft

Two hundred years after Mary Wollstonecraft’s statement, the confusion between justice and charity continues to infect our response to the “plight of women” and our attempts at social reform. Rights comprise an essential element in the possibility of achieving justice; the denial of rights constitutes the violation of that possibility. The issue of ‘women’s rights’ remains located insecurely on that thin border between legitimacy and illegitimacy, depending on which women we are talking about and what rights. In her book ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Women’ first published in England in January, 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft advocated the case for women’s emancipation and equality. She challenged the structure of right and the dominance of men in no unsure terms; she confronted the insincerity of her times directly and suffered the usual accusations of corruption and political subversion. Mary Wollstonecraft withstood the conservatism of her times without compromising her beliefs.³⁴

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the most thoughtful social movement that was on to bring about a change in the women’s roles. It was believed that, when the most exploited group in the society, promote from a transform, the whole society gets a share in the profit too. It is, though, not by possibility or mistake that the beginning of women’s emancipation had started primarily in

Bengal. For here, happened many actions; and many experiments were made as well. The soil was exactly for both.³⁵ The women's movement in Bengal, as for that matter, in India till the beginning of the twentieth century was not a planned, proper and organized fact. It did not seek to represent women in the initial years in the political process in a structured or monopolistic sense of a national movement. To the extent that people expected it to behave like such a movement, or like a usual political party or pressure group, they were likely to be frustrated. Nonetheless, it has given that developed to be a socio- political movement and has generated basic socio- political outlook. It may be identified in having some features:-

(a) To move up the awareness of women by helping them to find out that much of what they thought to be exclusive personal troubles in reality arose from the general conditions affecting their sex, therefore, individual problems were only personal instances of the wider area. For instance, cases of bride-burning, dowry death or rape are no longer limited to individual harassments. They have assumed a wider social and communal context.

(b) To protect and follow the interests of women as they are in the system, which is continuing without bringing about an overall change, but if possible to modify it even in bits and parts for the healthier.

© To assist go forward a society in which women will have control, at least over their own lives and expect a better and more civilized performance from the society as such.³⁶

In the twentieth century the Indian women emerged as an expressive, educated and active competitor in the socio-political life at the country and all these has in fact happened in the last one hundred years.

Barbara Welter,³⁷ one feminist scholar, featured that, 'piety, morality, domesticity and submission' as basic character guides for women - while for men she recorded 'competition, achievement and participation' in every aspect of the society. This led to logic of relative deficiency between the two sexes. Limited opportunities generated this feeling which led some of these people to task as catalysts of alteration. At the same time, it had also worked as a command for others. The trend in India was more, however, towards organized hard work by

women and their propounder to get better their social condition and legal status than political emancipation. Women tried above all to expand their influence in the social field. Because in traditional societies, a woman's social, economic and political roles were interconnected, hence in these societies women satisfied important and socially respected roles.

Side by side, women have realized that it is crucial that their economic position improves to give them a better position. A few women's association had taken the mission upon themselves, to make the rest aware about it and struggle for it. Praiseworthy effort is being ready to make women realize the potentiality of independent income.

At the same time contemporary periodicals became conscious of this new power and women were being given more visibility. Women's magazines changed their nature - from beauty and home management, it came out as platform to deal and discuss women's work and occupation in various fields. It is also ardently believed in India that structural changes in our society cannot be brought about by women's activities either in separation or in hostility to men. Within this general Indian sociological structure, Bengali women from the very early times have shown their uniqueness, independence and strength of character.

In colonial Bengal, socio-cultural and political responses to colonialism were not distinct but were facets of the same incident, i.e. the growth of nationalism. Search for political rights was intimately connected with social rights. Women's entry into the public 'male' world of politics damaged the socially constructed fake dual identities of the 'male' area of the public and the 'female' area of the household domains. This certainly meant that alternations at many levels would follow. It made women aware of the existing gender inequalities in Indian society and generated an advocate for freedom from the grip of given belief-systems and roles which had historically operated against their welfare. Once women 'crossed the *Lakshmanrekha*' (forbidden boundary), their awareness undergo an alteration. Though all middle class women were not equally altered, nor able to reconstitute new roles for themselves, but large number of them demanded for equal socio-political rights along with men, questioned the cultural of patriarchy and inspired to

build up an organizational network of their own.³⁸ This part of the chapter demonstrates the various channels through which their socio-political rights and empowerment were both formulated and expressed.

The year 1897 deserve special mention, because- (a) A large number of wrestling and boxing clubs, literary societies and other small groups were apparently founded around the turn of the century. Actually, physical culture societies began to develop in and around Calcutta as early as 1897. For instance, *Anushilan Samiti*, the first major terrorist party in Bengal. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact date of origin of the *Anushilan Samiti*. Gopal Halder, the Indian author who has produced perhaps the best short interpretative essay on the terrorist movement, indicated that a group by the name of *Anushilan Samiti* was formed as early as 1897.³⁹ According to another Indian account, however, the *Anushilan Samiti* was founded about 1900-1901 by Satish Chandra Bose, a young student at General Assembly College in Calcutta. Subsequently, in 1902, Pramathanath Mitra, a practicing lawyer, became interested in the work of Bose and took leadership of the *Samiti*.⁴⁰ *Anushilan* was started nearly as a federation or co-ordinator of some of these *Samities*. But it is not logical to conclude that the *Anushilan Samiti* was just a physical cultural society and nothing more. It had also an intellectual side, as regular classes were held. It had even a political function though very initial and vague as yet.⁴¹ As far as the British were concerned, the *Anushilan Samiti* grew out of the organizational efforts of the brothers, Aurobindo Ghosh and Barindra Ghosh.⁴²

The other secret societies also established in Bengal towards the end of the nineteenth and in the early of the twentieth centuries, which in course of time assumed the form of revolutionary organizations, mention may be made of *Atmonnati Samiti* (Soul Developing Society), *Suhrid Samiti* and *Mukti Sangha* (an Association for Emancipation). In 1897 *Atmonnati Samiti* was founded in Calcutta. In the beginning, the main activities of the *Samiti* included education, social service and Physical exercises. Like the *Anushilan Samiti*, the *Atmonnati Samiti* only became a well- organized group after the declaration of the proposed Partition of Bengal,⁴³ specially after Bipin Ganguly and Anukul Mukhrjee took over leadership of the group in about 1902. Some members, it seems, were involved in the work of both the *Atmonnati Samiti* and the *Anushilan Samiti*.

Around 1900-1901, *Suhrid Samiti* was founded in Mymensingh. In the preliminary phase the *Samiti* was a benevolent institution.

In 1905 Hem Chandra Ghosh started in Dacca a secret society under the name of *Mukti Sangha*. He was born on 24 October 1884 and at the sensitive age of 17; Hem Chandra had a meeting with Swami Vivekananda. It electrified his whole individuality and determined the future course of his life. Swamiji's inspiring words that 'a slave nation has no religion except to acquire strength and drive out the usurper of power' had deeply moved him. Anti-British struggle became the main purpose of his life.⁴⁴ In the following year a branch of the *Sangha* was established in Calcutta. However, in the late 1920s *Mukti Sangha* came to be known *Bengal Volunteers* (B.V.) for it supplied the volunteer force organized during the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1928 under Subhas Chandra Bose.⁴⁵ Hem Chandra can well claim another unique success. It was he that initiated the process of women joining the revolutionary movement. Gandhiji's Non- Cooperation movement had already opened the doors for Indian women to come out of the kitchen and fight side by side with men in the struggle for independence. *Mukti Sangha* did exactly the same thing but in utter secrecy.⁴⁶

Accordingly, by 1905 many secret societies were found in Bengal. In the initial phase, however, all these societies could dedicate their activities to physical and moral training and social service but they were far from any definite inspection of the use of force or active struggle against the British Government. Within a short period, the changed circumstances brought them to the path of revolutionary activities. So, in Bengal, violent outbreaks first started after the Partition of Bengal in 1905. Declaration of the government decision to partition Bengal and the failure of constitutional agitation against partition created a great disappointment among the youth of Bengal and to oppose the government they resorted to violence. Though, in the beginning, these organizations were in the form of gymnasiums, but after that they belived with the object of achieving the country's freedom through armed struggle.⁴⁷ In this connection, it is necessary to mention here that, the educated Bengali women were not aloof from this contemporary socio- political circumstance and they began to join in these secret societies for the save of their motherland. For example, Sister Nivedita, Sarala Devi Ghoshal, Kumudini Mitra etc. were notable personalities.

(b) On the other hand, the revolutionary movement in Bengal based itself on the moral ideals preached by Swami Vivekananda. Great importance was placed on celibacy and celebration of *brahmacharya*. Books on *brahmacharya* were broadly read by the recruits and members of all revolutionary parties.⁴⁸ It may be noted that, the influence of Swami Vivekananda was also enveloping among members of these organizations. Through his lecture tours in the United States, Europe and India, Vivekananda had reinstilled in Hindus a pride in their own religion. He urged them to be strong, to develop themselves spiritually through Vedantism and intellectually through education.⁴⁹ In a lecture in Madras in 1897 he laid particular emphasis on physical strength and to quote him,

‘First of all, our young man must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong my young friends; that is my advice to you, you will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita’.⁵⁰

From this statement it is very clear that, every man had God within him, Vivekananda argued that it was every man’s duty to work to develop the tremendous potential power within him and help other men to the same realization. This implied social service work for physical, intellectual, spiritual and even economic upliftment of the masses of India. Social service work did become an important element among many of those inspired by Vivekananda’s teachings, including members of the youth clubs and later some of the terrorist organisations. Not only was that, his furious inspiration of self-sacrifice, genuine patriotism and fervent address for the awakening of sleeping nation tremendously swinging the whole country in that time. Newly conscious women were also did response in the same way. Though in the last part of the nineteenth century the *Purdah* obstacle was the barrier for their progress.⁵¹

In this context, another important fact was on 29th July, 1897, Swami Vivekananda wrote a letter to Sister Nivedita that - “India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, your celtic blood, make you just the women wanted.”⁵² It is true that, the dream of Swami Vivekananda’s was fruitfull through Sister Nivedita. Because, Sister Nivedita took a significant role to inspire of Bengali nay Indian women in contemporary politics.

Before going to discuss of search for socio-political rights and empowerment, it is important to look at the beginning of women participation in politics. The oppression by the European indigo or tea planters was resisted first by the poor workers, both men and women, who wanted justice. The anti-indigo demonstration with a mass procession when women sat lining the 70 miles water-edge of the river to freshen their grievances to the visiting Lt. Governor Grant. Around 1867, the nationalist spirit among the Bengalis took the form of supporting affected indigenous cottage industrial products. They began to discriminate against foreign imports. In 1867 was organized a fair by the name of *Hindu Mela* where Indian products were exhibited for sale. The creativity work from women had a separate section in this fair which was held year after year. Prizes were distributed to the best performers, many of whom were women.^{52a} Though in the previous chapter it has been (Chapter-III) highlighted about the presence of Hindu women at a Town Hall meeting as early as 1871.⁵³ In 1882, the *New Dispensation* mentioned that, some *zenana* ladies came in carriages to cast their votes in the municipal elections in Burdwan.⁵⁴ However, these are very vague indications of the general level of political participation among women.

Women were drawn into political controversy for the first time over the Ilbert Bill, which allowed Indian Judges to try cases involving English women. Representatives of the educated *bhadramahila* such as Binodini, Sulochana, Chapala, Bhabini, Manorama, Horosundari, Thakomoni and others wrote to Lord Ripon calling for the bill to be passed on the grounds that native civilians who had been through the careful of training abroad were entirely competent as judges and that Indian women were not 'ignorant and enslaved'. With some happiness, they pointed out that while many of them were educated and some even have degrees, there was not 'a single graduate' among the English ladies who protesting against the bill.⁵⁵ The Ilbert Bill agitation, however, made some nationalist politicians aware of the political potential of women. Kamini Sen led a movement in favour of the bill among students at the Bethune School and College and it was perhaps the first example of political action by Bengali girls.⁵⁶ Girls were black garland on their sleeves when Surendranath Banerjee was jailed, just as their male counterparts did. At a meeting of the Indian association in 1883, Surendranath Banerjee suggested that the service of Indian womanhood could be used "in the political elevation of the

country”.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, by 1892 some unnamed candidates for the Calcutta Municipal Elections were using ‘respectable native ladies’ to canvass votes, despite conservative disapproval.⁵⁸ Some sections of the community were opposed to the holding of political views by women. When Ramabai attacked the government for negligence in the Poona Plague Hospital in 1897, the *Bangabasi* articulated the view that “this is no reason why a woman should write so strongly against the Government”⁵⁹

No particular sense of the significance of women’s political consciousness and participation or their nationalist contributions was accounted even though women were actively involved in nationalist politics from the middle of the nineteenth century. For example, women formed organizations for social reforms in which issues related to women were addressed and women voiced their opinions in *Bambodhini*, *Bangamahila*, *Anathini*, *Abalabandhab*, *Antahpur*, *Paricharika*, *Bharati* from Tagore’s house by Swarnakumari Devi and Sarala Devi. They spread *Swadeshi* and put importance on self dependence mainly in colonial Bengal which first raised voice against women’s oppression and tortures in the later part of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰

The surfacing of women’s movement for socio-political rights and empowerment in India can be seen in the formation and growth of women’s association roughly from 1880 to 1940. The background seems to be the cumulative factors of local, provincial and national associations oriented towards improving the position of women and aiding national development. Here one may explore the background of such a new phenomenon as to who were the members to monitor such movements and the factors that prompted them to move forward the issues under consideration.

The origin of the Indian National Congress in 1885 provided a political platform to all Indians, irrespective of class, caste or sex. We find from 1900 onwards women coming to the forefront, but the women’s movement was not considered as a fundamental attack on the age old customs of our society. Most important among the path-finders were Swarna Kumari Devi, Kadambini Ganguli, Saroj Nalini Dutt, Chandramukhi Bose, Ramabai Ranade, Kamala Debi Chattopadhyay, Muthulakshmi Reddy and a few others.⁶¹ By 1889, a number of women were drawn into the annual Congress meeting. By the efforts of

Dwarakanath Ganguly, Six women delegates were present at the 1889 Congress session in Bombay. The two women from Bengal was Dwaraknath's wife Kadambini Ganguli and Swarnakumari Debi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore and wife of Janakinath Ghoshal. The attendance of both women was intimately linked with the scope of their husbands' relations with Congress politics. At the sixth session, held in Calcutta the following year, Swarnakumari Debi was the only woman delegate; she had been selected to embody the *Bengal Ladies Association (Banga Mahila Samaj)*. Her charisma was hardly noticed. Kadambini Ganguly was moved for the vote of thanks in English to the president, pherozshah Mehta.⁶² At this Calcutta session, Kadambini Ganguly was in truth, the attraction of all eyes. Annie Besant comments about Kadambini's participation in this way: "as a symbol that India's freedom would uplift India's woman hood".⁶³

It is therefore, noticeable the beginning of a new era but the duty on women's movement participants to provide first their family and then the society, pointed the opponent of the menfolk. These women were restricted to the middle and upper classes only. The group was small in range and elite in composition and the gap between the elite and the masses remained as usual. Swarna Kumari Debi tried to bring women together by organizing the *Sakhi Samiti* (1886). She also wrote many songs to stimulate people and organize them. It was in the years following 1900, that Bengali women started to participate notably in the politics and freedom movement.⁶⁴

It would not be unfair to argue that at this early stage, women who were a little bit involved with Congress affairs, such as Kadambini Ganguly or Swarnakumari Debi, were there mostly because of their husbands, rather than as representatives of any constituency in their own right. They put forward no demands and voiced no opinions; they were token representatives rather than full political participants. Most Indian women in any case, would not have been able to follow the Congress proceedings, which were conducted in English. The physical mobility, financial resources and knowledge of English required for women to be able to go to Congress sessions in different parts of India barred most middle-class women. Those who could take part formed minute elite of westernized women. Without doubt, therefore, during the early years of Congress, the representation of women remained low.

Sarala Debi Choudhurani, daughter of Swarna kumari Debi, who was to take an active part in the nationalist movement in the years to appear, composed a song urging the people of different provinces of the country to join the freedom struggle and trained a group of over fifty girls to sing this song in chorus at the Congress session on 26 December 1901.⁶⁵ Many women found Congress sessions as social occasions and public spectacles rather than as serious political gatherings, because of their limited participation. During the year 1901 in Calcutta, *purdah* women were present as observers for the first time and about two hundred women from respectable Calcutta families attended. Their presence reinforces the feeling that most *bhadramahila* were only able to attend Congress when it was in their home city and that there was most likely some social benefit to be gained from attendance at such a significant event.⁶⁶ Only about twenty of the nine hundred delegates to the 1904 session of Indian National Congress were women. At the Benaras Congress in 1905, women took the enterprise in holding their own session for the first time. In this session Sarala Debi set to tune Bankim Chandra's '*Bande Mataram*' which in future became the national anthem to be replaced by Rabindranath Tagore's '*Jana Gana Mana*' at a much later date.⁶⁷ Over six hundred women from all parts of India had assembled there. Most of the speeches were in Hindi, including those by Bengalis, although a few were in English. An article about the meeting in *Bambodhini Patrika* did not give details of the speeches, but most were on the subjects of patriotism and the duties of women or female education. The most important purpose of the meeting was the protest of female unity across India and the mobilization of women's support for the nationalist movement.⁶⁸

On 24 December, 1901 at the inauguration of a national exhibition of *Swadeshi* goods was held in Calcutta before two days of Congress session, Sarala Debi Ghoshal led the chorus with the deeply inspiring song composed by Atulprasad Sen, "*Utho go Bharatlakshi*" (Arise, Mother India).⁶⁹ The most important categories that were relevant to women were *Swadeshi* textiles; household goods such as carpets, mosquito nets, bamboo ware, brass and metal utensils, soap, perfume and ornaments and food stuffs, medicines, books, stationary. Objects of home decoration such as lithographs, photographs and frames. Women exhibited their work and many won medals or certificates of merit. One of the main aims of the organizers of the exhibition was to convince women to wear *Swadeshi* saris, in

order to revive the cloth industries that were dying out through lack of patronage in centres such as Dacca, Santipur, Murshidabad and Tripura.⁷⁰ In 1903, Sarala Debi helped to encourage the use of *Swadeshi* goods by opening the *Lakshmir Bhandar* in Cornwallis Street, Calcutta. The shop used to sell consumer goods from all parts of Bengal, to women only.⁷¹ It may be pointed that, women's political consciousness had been developed gradually before Bengal Partition. There had been a collective increase in political awareness, expressed through the pages of contemporary women's journals, such as *Bamabodhini*, *Bharati*, *Antahpur Bharatmahila*, *Janhabi* etc. The emphasis on using *Swadeshi* goods, even prior to Partition, had helped make politics directly meaningful to women as consumers.

So, a new enlargement in women's interaction at this time was that they were organizing themselves into political action. An article in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1905 noted that, male efforts to stir up female opinion were no longer needed. Women had advanced to the extent of calling their own public meetings to incite men into action and in the home they used their influence to mobilize husbands, sons and brothers. On 16 October, 1905, nearly five hundred women had attended in Calcutta to watch the laying of the foundation stone of the new Federation Hall, to protest against Partition.⁷² But, political participation of women in society depends largely on the overall political situation of a nation. In our society, there are certain factors in the situation that favour politicization of women, such as –

- (a) The anti- Partition or *Swadeshi* movement, although started as a protest against a political move, Bengali men wanted women's help in the movement in order to make stronger it.
- (b) The alteration of nationalism into religion made women's entry into politics easy. Because, the nationalist leaders finely converted the socio-economic struggle against the British into a devotion of the motherland, which was in its turn altered into a mother-goddess.⁷³

The effort to partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon led to some inventive methods of protesting in which women played an important role. *Swadeshi* and Boycott movement apart from attractive to use native in place of foreign goods resorted to programmes like *Rakhi Bandhan* in which women tied coloured thread on the wrist of men as a symbol of brotherhood and unity. Equally, women refrained from cooking in their households and consequently resorted to *Arandhan* (refusal to

cook) as mark of protest against the evil designs of the imperialist rule. Such type of programmes openly concerned a large number of women who generally remained confined to their household activities. House wives were stimulated by the courage of *Swadeshi* which had a direct manner on their daily lives. Even peasant women are scors of remote villages were inspired not to light their oven that day. Hence, during the *Swadeshi* movement the women of Bengal undertook something like an anti-imperialist women's strike.⁷⁴ In this regard, Sudha Majumdar writes in her Memories that, women came out and participated in larger numbers in the protest movement against Curzon's scheme of Bengal Partition. They earnestly took part in "Rakhi Bandhan" and "Arandhan". 16 October was declared as the anti- Partition Day. To quote Sudha Majumdar, a feminist, "My first introduction to politics was in 1905 when I was seven years old and Mother served us with 'Phalahar' (fruit meal) when it was neither a fast- day not a puja day. It was not a holy day nor did I hear of any holy purpose, so I was somewhat puzzled to notice the unusual silence in the kitchen and find that no fires were burning at all. On inquiry I learnt it was associated with the *Swadeshi* movement".⁷⁵ They rejected foreign made domestic items and helped their family members, especially their offsprings to use aboriginal goods. Organizations like *Swadeshi Bhandar*, *Swadeshi Mandali*, *Mahila Samiti*, and *Lakshmir Bhandar* were formed to encourage and propagate the idea of *Swadeshi*.⁷⁶ Swarnakumari Debi, Sarojini Bose, Kumudini Mitra, Sister Nivedita, Sarala Debi Choudhurani, Nabasashi Debi, Sushila Sen, Kamalkamini Gupta, Nirmala Sarkar, wife of Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, Subala Acharya, wife of Dr. Prankrishna Acharya, Hemangini Das, wife of Dr. Sundari Mohan Das were in the front position of the movement in Bengal.⁷⁷

All over Bengal women observed 16 October 1905, the actual day of Partition - as a day of protest. More than five hundred women of the village Jemokandi in the district of Murshidabad assembled at Acharya Ramendra Sundar Trivedi's house to listen to the patriotic composition, *Bangalakshmir Bratakatha*, read out to them by his daughter, Girija Debi and laret vowed together to use only the Indian made goods. In Dacca, Ashlata Sen, a girl of eleven, under the inspiration of her grandmother Nabashshi Debi, went from house to house persuding women to join the *Swadeshi* cause. In Barisal, Manorama Basu, a young housewife, generally known as 'Mashima' led a procession of radical women's group on the streets,

defying all traditional norms of womanly behavior. Later, at Barisal (April, 1906) two hundred women attended the Provincial Conference.⁷⁸ In Khulna, a number of women attended the meeting addressed by Kaliprasanna Kavaya-bisarad, one of the key figures in the movement, where they broke their glass bangles in a sign symbolic of the boycott of foreign goods; women came to listen to Bipin pal in Bholā and Suren Banerjee at Tangail. Meetings entirely of women in support of *Swadeshi* in Calcutta, Dacca, Barisal, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Khulna were reported in the *Sanjivani* and other local papers.⁷⁹ In the *Sanjivani* also available a report that the boycott was actively supported by Bengali women such as, Srimati Dinamani Choudhury, Zamindar of Santosh to Mymensingh, was trying to persuade her subordinates to use only country-made articles. The widow of Lakshman Chandra Aush Choudhury, the Zamindar of Mauganganj, was attempting to do the same. Srimati Ambuja Sundari Das Gupta of Jalpaiguri was effectively persuading local women not to use foreign goods.⁸⁰ The *Bambabodhini Patrika* reported, “Women like men are organizing meetings in towns as well as villages to express sorrow at the Partition of Bengal and are taking the *Swadeshi* vows. At several meetings women are coming forward to inspire men, while at home they are initiating their sons, brothers and husbands to the worship of the motherland”.⁸¹ Many women stopped wearing foreign garments even on celebratory occasions. Many took up weaving to make garments for their families. The use of hand-spun textile had become a significant national symbol long before Gandhi launched this idea.

Women’s Journals, especially *Suprabhat*, edited by Kumudini Mitra, Daughter of Lilabati and Krishna Kumar Mitra and *Antahpur*, founded by Banalata Devi, daughter of Brahmo reformer Sasipada Banerjee, gave publicity to *Swadeshi* brands, such as ‘Bengal Chemicals’, ‘New Floral Hair Oil’ and ‘Oriental Soap’, manufactured by the Oriental Soap Factory. These types of advertisements, one might note, did not utilize feminine figures or images.⁸²

The *Swadeshi* period and its outcome also witnessed the foundation of a number of women’s associations. The organizers were basically recruited from the Brahmo Community and normally tried to legitimize and popularize their activities by attractive mainly to traditional ideals. In 1905, a local *Mahila Samiti* was founded in Calcutta by Sarla Roy, daughter of Durgamohan Das of *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj*

and Sunity Devi, the eldest daughter of Keshab Chandra Sen. This association appears to have been modelled on the village *Samitis* of the *Swadeshi* era and like them, paying attention on social service and self-help. Similarly, beginning in 1913, Saroj Nalini Dutt founded a series of *Mahila Samities* in the Bengal hinterlands, as she travelled from station to station with her ICS husband Guru Saday Dutt.⁸³ Side by side, the tradition of *Hindu Mela* was revived and a major women's motion, clearly stirred by the *Swadeshi* movement, was the *Mahila Shilpa Samiti*, a women's handicraft exhibition organized from 1906 to 1908 by Hiranmoyee Devi, the daughter of the Bengali poetess Swarnakumari Devi. Some women even donated their Jewellery to the national fund such as bangles, noserings, bracelets etc. For example, Mrs. J. K. Ganguly gave her bracelet as a donation towards paying off the fine imposed on Durga Mohan Sen who had been convicted for rebellious activities. Likewise, a number of women in Barisal gave over their funds to the *Swadeshi Bandhab Samiti*.⁸⁴

It may be said that, sufficient women had been trained in the politics of female voluntary associations and philanthropic organizations to lead and organize other women in a political manner. Women formed their own *samitis* and took *Swadeshi* vows- activities not inferior to joining the volunteer movements and ones that may have had a stonger impact. In this way, women began to search their socio-political rights and empowerment. Because *Swadeshi* movement seems to have functioned as a 'catalyst' for women's politicization in Bengal and it is remarkable that, many of the Bengali women who were to later dynamically participate in Gandhian movements had gained their first political experience during the *Swadeshi* movement. One earlier women's leader has described the significance of the *Swadeshi* movement accordingly: "Women found in the movement against the Partition that they are not just housewives, but soldiers too! They retrieved their courage. These women were the *pioneers in the history of the women's movement in India*."⁸⁵

By the turn of the century, budding nationalist sentiment among the *bhadralok* meant that race, as a category, overshadowed women's possible recognition as a separate group on the basis of sex. In this circumstance, where the *bhadralok* found them as battling against a position of reliance and subordination, the *Bhadramahila* came to share their view of humidity of colonial rule. The sense

of general purpose seen in their joint campaigning against the Partition of Bengal helps explain the lack of a feminist consciousness. The struggle against a common tyrant successfully sidetracked attention from other possible conflicts within the social system.

The *bhadramahila* began to take an interest in the previously male world of nationalist politics. The method by which women had defined their identity as *bhadramahila* had concerned adversity and disagreement. As a result, they had been drawn into the set-up of institutions that constituted the 'modern' world of British India. They were literate, and had their own channels of contact with the colonial state through the function of the legal and educational systems. A few of them functioned straightly under the British administrative bureaucracy as employees. They consolidated their new individuality through societies and journals meant absolutely of women, showing a self-consciousness of themselves as a group.

On the other hand, as the movement became ever more popular and strong, the British Government responded with usual oppression, persecutions and convictions became extensive. Among the numerous cases, one deserves special mention as it highlights the rising consciousness and strength of unity what *Swadeshi* could instil among women. When Bhupendra Nath Datta, the brother of the saint-patriot Swami Vivekananda, was convicted on July 24, 1907, about 200 women offered a lecture of gratitude to his mother under the leadership of Lilavati Mitra, wife of the Brahmo leader Krishna kumar Mitra.⁸⁶ It is true that, direct involvement was not possible for woman in the *biplabi* or Extremist (revolutionary) movement that broke out during the last phase of the *Swadeshi* movement. As Aparna Basu has noted in brief: "Girls were not included in the *Samitis* or voluntary movements, the prevailing ideology was too conservative to allow women to participate on an equal basis with the men".⁸⁷ But, many women helped the *biplabis* mutely from the background. Sarala Debi Choudhurani and Sister Nivedita⁸⁸ maintained close associations with the *biplabis*. Kumudini Mitra organized a group of committed Brahmin women to supply as messengers between different revolutionaries; these women were kept under watch by the police.⁸⁹ This organization also helped in the distribution of revolutionary leaflets and literature. She preached the cause of the extremists through '*Suprabhat*', a Bengali magazine

and propagated the sect of revolution.⁹⁰ Mataji Tapaswini, a Marathi lady and the organizer of *Mahakali Pathshala* (1893), a girls' School in Calcutta, permitted her school building to become the office of a secret society- *Banga Dharma Sammilan* and a 'rendezvous for political extremists.'⁹¹ Lots of middle class families, women as mothers, sisters and sister-in-law helped the cause of revolutionary men. A number of women gave protection to absconding revolutionaries, hide or transported weapons and functioned as unofficial contact channels. Still those who were not directly or indirectly helping the *biplabis*, seem to have lent their ethical support to their cause, such as Saudamini Debi of Faridpur, Sarojini Debi, Priyabala Debi and Mrinalini Debi of Barishal, Brahmomoyee Debi and Chinmoyee Sen of Dacca etc.⁹²

It may be followed that, the women who took part in such activities gave a new phase to the freedom struggle of India and helped secure a position for that struggle in Indian history and politics. In this way, they achieved their socio-political rights and empowerment. In the very beginning, when the revolutionary organizations were yet to be shaped and before the movement was launched, Sarala Debi Ghoshal took an enterprise to set up the background and to give confidence the Bengali youth to progress along that path. To eradicate the chains of bondage, achievement of physical strength is a necessity. By this aim, as a first footstep, Sarala Debi established at her house in Calcutta a centre for physical culture (1900). There exercise was imparted to the youth is sword, boxing, gymnastics and *lathi* play.⁹³ Sarala Debi thought that, the development of health and physique of youths was a fundamental first step to the triumph of the national movement. She, thus, formed her *akhra* (a physical fitness club) and *Byayam Samiti* (gymnasium) which also provided relations with *biplabis* (revolutionaries).⁹⁴

Many Hindu nationalists used women as political symbols of national awakening. The mother-centered expression of Hindu nationalism may help to clarify how Sarala Debi gained credit as a leader of activist nationalism in its early stages. She did not endeavor to become concerned in the prescribed political activity of male relations, but used the symbolic power of local history and myth to create political consciousness which was one of the most lively and motivated proponents of Bengali nationalism.⁹⁵ On 9th October, 1902 Sarala Debi introduced *Birashtami Utsav* (Festival of Heroes) on the *ashtami* or the second day of Durga puja, with a view to inspiring the youth of Bengal with the ideals of heroism. In May, 1903, she

initiated the *Pratapaditya Utsav* in memory of Pratapaditya, the last independent Bengli Zamindar of Jessore who dared to resist the Mughals. Sarala Debi then introduced the *Udayaditya Utsav* to honor the death of Prince Udayaditya of Jessore, who at the age of nineteen died bravely fighting for the country. On these occasions, young Bengali men displayed their skill in sword play and worshipped heroic ancestors.⁹⁶ These facts were proposed to stimulate the youth to be heroic and fight for rescue the lost independent of the country. She has been described by Bipin Chandra Pal as “the mother of *Pratapaditya* to meet the necessity of a hero for Bengali”.⁹⁷

After her marriage with Rambhuj Datta Choudhuri (1905) of Lahore, She worked to spread the idea of nationalism in the Punjab, edit the Bengali journal *Bharati* and maintain her close relations with the *Suhrid Samiti* of Mymensingh. Sarala Debi infused new life into the *Suhrid Samiti* in 1905.⁹⁸

Not only that, Sarala Devi initiated certain tentative steps to systematize an emerging women’s movement. The heart of this movement was formed at Lahore in November 1910 when she launched the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* even with much opposition. As the Secretary of this association, she worked vigorously and effectively instituted branches of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* at Alahabad and Calcutta. The main purpose of this society was to bring together women of all castes and creeds on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material development in India.⁹⁹ But, the government could no longer ignore these activities and the leadership provided by Sarala Debi; therefore, she was put under observation and was told that if she objected to being watched she would have to limit her activities.

In this way, Sarala Debi emerged as an outstanding leader of the *Swadeshi* era. she started physical culture clubs, began *Swadeshi* store for women’s work, organized festivals which celebrated Bengali traditions and launched dedicated work at organizing a different women’s movement. In her later year, she came gradually under the magic charm of Gandhi and a some what extraordinary relationship developed between the two.¹⁰⁰ Sarala Debi also took an active part in the franchise movement launched by Mrs. Cousins and was active in securing voting right for Bengali women. She remained a devoted Congress worker till her death in 1945 and

actively participated in the various campaigns launched to achieve freedom from the Raj.

Women's interest in politics, once roused during the *Swadeshi* period, continued although on a lower key during the next decade, until the emergence of the Home Rule agitation under Annie Besant.¹⁰¹ She began to agitate for India's cause for liberation by founding the Home Rule League on June 7, 1916 at Madras. Though on 25 September, 1915 Annie Besant officially declared her decision to start a Home Rule League with the basic purpose of "Home Rule for India".¹⁰² Her attachment encouraged many Indian women, for example, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay and women began to stir up to a realization of their keeping out from political movement. In that sense, smoothed the way for the massive contribution that women made under Gandhi. The election of Annie Besant as President of the Indian National Congress in 1917, the first woman to occupy this post and the share of the Congress session under her leadership in Calcutta enclosed a special message for women.¹⁰³ Dr. Besant was also a warrior for women's cause and emancipation. It was under the Presidentship of Mrs. Besant that in 1917 the Congress "expressed the opinion that same tests be applied to women as to men in regard to franchise and the eligibility to all elective bodies concerned with local governments and education".¹⁰⁴ Side by side, Annie Besant's outlook to the emancipation of women was quite clear. She maintained that the progress of India depended on their liberty. In fact, Annie Besant associated women's uplift to national development by pointing out the significant and unique contributions that women could make to develop for national cause. She stressed that women's direct involvement was essential to national development. She commented: "For India's uplift then, her daughters must come out from their seclusion and take back their place in the common life".¹⁰⁵ As a result, women's search for socio-political rights and empowerment during the next phase (after Home Rule League) were turned into two directions: (a) The 'battle for the ballot': women's campaign for franchise and (b) Participation in the freedom movement.

(a) The 'Battle for the Ballot': Women's Campaign for Franchise

Opposing to earlier belief that woman encountered 'very little opposition' to their demand to vote;¹⁰⁶ it has now been well-known that the right to vote was not

granted to women without pressure from organized women. The early women's movement that was rising in the sub-continent was featured by the increase of a number of women's associations. In that connection, among the several women's associations that had emerged by the 1920s, national women's organizations, such as the *Women's Indian Association* (WIA) in 1917, the *All India Women's Conference* (AIWC) in 1927 took very important role¹⁰⁷ and Besant felt the need of organizing women under one umbrella and it was under her motivation and leadership that the first major *All India Association for Women* (WIA) was established in 1917. Annie Besant remained its President till her death in 1933. The *Women's Indian Association* (WIA) was considered as a common dais for women to air their grievances and demand their rights. One of the first activities of the WIA was the historic all-India women's deputation to meet Secretary of State, Edwin Montague in December 1917. The objectives of the deputation was to present demand the women's franchise and hence launched the 'Votes for Women' campaign on the sub-continent.¹⁰⁸ One may be noted that, the claim for franchise was an endeavor by the women of the elite classes to find a room for themselves in the recognized power structure, in that way, they attempted to strengthen the legitimate the legal political rights. Yet, there is little uncertainty that to those who uttered the demand, it represented protest against a socio-political structure which debarred women into political authority.¹⁰⁹

However, the organized political progress by women in this field was properly initiated by Sarojini Naidu, Margaret Cousins, Annie Besant, Kamala Debi Chottopadhyay, Renuka Ray, Begum Hamida Ali, Rameshwari Nehru, Dorothy Jinarajadasa, Uma Nehru, Ramabai Ranade, Rajkumar Amrit Kaur, Lady Abala Bose and others.¹¹⁰ In the political ground, the women's movement in the first stage tried to bring to the forefront the issue of female enfranchisement and eligibility for legislature (1917-1926) and in the second stage liberalization of the terms of enfranchisement enabling an increase of female representation (1927-1937 and after).¹¹¹ The movement can be traced to have developed in two different lines in its function. Firstly, it was elite representation and the second was mass mobilization, the latter hardly successful in the earlier period, but grew more and more as time passed women found in the political movements.

First Stage

The demand for votes for women was made on the view of social equality and insisted on a woman's right to join equally in the process of government.¹¹² Their main argument was that, the introduction of women would transform the vitiated political world and would be particularly encouraging to the healthy development of children. Even though, the Montague-Chelmsford scheme diverted the issue, the Southborough Franchise Committee was set up to look into it. But inadequately the response was once again negative.¹¹³ In 1919, a special delegation comprising Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Hirabai Tata and her daughter Mithan Tata (Lam) went to London to give proof before the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) of British House of Commons on the Government of India Bill in favour of women's franchise. The Joint Committee left the liability of the final decision to the future Legislative Councils of India for each province.¹¹⁴ The centre of seriousness of the women's franchise was shifted from the all-India theatre to the individual provincial field. Among the provinces, Madras took the lead in removing the sex ineligibility for legislative franchise and also in getting a woman, Dr. Mathulakshmi Reddy, as a member of the Legislative Council in 1927.¹¹⁵ She remembered that, this selection marked the beginning of her life-long attempt to "correct the balance" for women by removing social abuses and working for equality in moral values. The first success came when the JPC suggested the removal of sex qualifications. But left it to the provincial legislatures to decide how and when to do so. Madras established voting rights to women in 1920 followed by Bombay in 1921.¹¹⁶ However, for women's organizations, this was only the opening.

Prior to this, when the Thirty-Third session of the Indian National Congress met in Delhi in December 1918, Saraladebi Choudhurani offered the declaration to support the vote for women. Saraladebi told her audience that women had as much right to register their own destinies as men for this was the age of human rights, justice, freedom and self-determination. The world has outgrown certain ideas, she said, particularly the "fanciful division of intellect and emotion being the respective spheres of men and women". Going ahead of the assertions of Sarojini Naidu, Saraladebi contended that the "sphere of women" include "comradeship with men in the rough and tumble of life and to being the fellow-workers of men in politics and other spheres".¹¹⁷ These meetings were followed by gatherings all over India - of

provincial and district Congress conferences and of women's associations - to articulate support for women's franchise.

In Bengal, Leela Roy (Nag) formed *Deepali Sangha* and the founder editor of *Jayashree*, having joined the women's movement in 1920 with the campaign for women's suffrage, had begun to feel that women's status would not modify much if not they joined the struggle against colonial supremacy as the British were not concerned in legislating for women's equality.¹¹⁸ The chief women's organization to fight for the franchise was the *Bangiya Nari Samaj* (Bengali Women's Association) in 1921 instructed by Kumudini Bose, Lady Abala Basu, Kamini Roy, Mrinalini Sen and Joytirmoyee Ganguly. The president of the *Sabha* was Kamini Roy.¹¹⁹ The members of the *Samiti* attempted to organize support for their cause from the elite male scholar and political leaders, such as Surendramohan Basu, Ramananda Chatterjee, Surendranath Banerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal and others. But, the resolution to allow women to vote was defeated in the Bengal Legislative Council in 1921.¹²⁰ In spite of their dissatisfaction, women continued their struggle. They organized protest meetings and continued to lobby for their cause. The *Bangiya Nari Samaj* also associated itself to the Madras based *Women's Indian Association* in order to learn from the latter's organizing skill. At the same time, it determined on gaining the right for women to vote in the Calcutta Municipal election, which succeeded in doing in 1923.¹²¹ This victory became as courageous, because a woman's delegation led by Kamini Roy and two Muslim Women, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein and Begum Sultan Muwajidzada, met the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, to request his support for their cause. Positive response also came from a number of small organized *Mahila Samities* (Women's Associations) in the district towns of Dacca, Mymensingh and Chittangong. In 1925 the Bengal Legislature permitted a limited female suffrage and in 1926 Bengali women used this right for the first time. It symbolized for them recognized entry into the previously restricted male public world of Political decision making.¹²²

Second Stage

The demand to widen voting rights to more women entered a new stage during the visit of the Simon Commission in India. The Simon Commission, appointed in 1927, was the first step towards the formulation of a new India Act. The India Act passed in 1935 increased representation but not to the level estimated

by organized women. The method of delivering this second franchise declaration showing both the limits of collaboration with the British and the troubles innate in attaching women's rights to the nationalist movement. Although, the Simon Commission was largely boycotted, the Dowager Rani of Mandi led a deputation comprising Mrs. Ahmen Shah and Mrs. Chitamber with others. While pointing out the small number of enfranchised women, the delegation viewed against the application of the same criteria for men and women voters. It recommended that, voting rights should be given to property owners and literate women and definite participation should be guaranteed through reserved seats.¹²³

When the Simon Commission was first declared, the WIA, then the only national women's organization committed to women's franchise. After that, the *All-India Women's Conference* (AIWC) determined to form a franchise sub-committee and by the 1930s concluded that political liberation was the first step towards releasing women from their "shackles".¹²⁴ The AIWC joined the movement of demanding votes for women keenly in 1931 when a new constitution for India was being discussed in the British Parliament. It well thought-out a meeting of women representatives at Bombay in combination with Margaret Cousins and Mathulakshmi Reddy from the WIA, Mrs. Hamid Ali and Rani Rajwade from the AIWC and Tarabai Premchand from the *National Council of Women in India* (NCWI, established in 1925). Under the chairmanship of Sarojini Naidu, it issued a joint memorandum to be submitted to the Franchise Committee of the Second Round Table Conference in support of universal adult suffrage. They asked for or they raised their voices to the claim for "equality and no privileges" and "a fair field and no favour".¹²⁵ Consequently, a joint front was presented.

After the close of the Second Round Table Conference (1932), a White Paper recommending increased franchise for women was presented to both Houses of Parliament. A Franchise Committee was constituted with Lord Lothian as Chairman. During its tour of India in 1932, the Lothian Committee met very small number of women but received a memorandum from the All- Indian Women's Organizations. But, in their concluding report the Lothian Committee rejected adult franchise because of the country's size, large population and high rate of illiteracy. They granted more women should be enfranchised, to make easy social reform, and suggested increasing the ratio of female to male voters from 1:20 to 1:5.¹²⁶

On the other hand, the communal Award of 1932 granted reserved seats to Muslims and extended them to the depressed classes. The AIWC had stood for Hindu-Muslim unity and was intensely anxious that the Communal Award in danger to divide Hindu and Muslim women. After huge debate, the three national women's organizations formed a joint memorandum reiterating their claim for adult franchise and objecting to various schemes of separate electorates and reservation of seats.¹²⁷

In the annual session in 1933, the AIWC demanded the right to franchise and equal status for women in the future constitution of India and certified the statements made by their elected representatives in London. During the next session of AIWC, the Linlithgow Committee decided to examine witnesses from Indian women's organizations. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Mathulakshmi Reddy, and Begum Hamid Ali spoke for the AIWC, WIA and NCWI. Mrs Sushma Sen and Mrs. L. Mukherjee spoke on behalf of the *Calcutta Mahila Samiti*. All these women personalities insisted on the significance of raising the number of enfranchised women. The Linlithgow Committee stated that, "India cannot reach the position to which it aspires in the world until its women play their due part as educated citizens".¹²⁸ Lastly, the committee accepted of a number of different programmes to raise the number of women voters: wives could vote in some provinces, literate women in others and the wives of military officers in still others. The Act also introduced unique electorates for women. The new Government of India Act of 1935, once again, did not recognize universal adult franchise, fixed the ratio of voters at 1:5, however, there were few women who regarded this as an important success. Although universal adult suffrage was established by the Constitution of Independent India, there was still need to guarantee the dynamic input of women. It is true that, voting rights for women are assured but even today, the representation of women in political decision making system is negligible. Indeed, without women's political empowerment and active political involvement in decision making processes, women's life-situations cannot be changed.

It may thus be pointed out that, by 1920s, witnessed the appearance of a promising women's movement on the Indian sub-continent and a few development of the base of the women's movement could be prominent. The women's associations from the local or provincial levels were also extending to become national in character. For example, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* founded by

Sarala Devi Choudhurani in 1910, the *Women's Indian Association* by Annie Besant in 1917, the *National Council of women in India* in 1925 were among the first few, followed by others.¹²⁹ But who benefited from the continuation of these women's associations? The answer is the huge numbers of middle-class women who gained knowledge in functioning with organizational structures. They educated directly the dynamics of the political world and educated them, in part, from other women. So, on the one hand, women searched their political rights i.e. the battle for ballot and on the other, they began to search their social rights i.e. property rights, women's rights to divorce, equal rights of guardianship over their children etc.

Women Search for social rights and Empowerment

As organized women gained familiarity in the public field, they became more conscious of their needy position. When they wanted legislative change, they became aware of their subject condition. They were disqualified from new representative structures since they did not own property or were not married to men with property. Their learning, knowledge with social work, campaigning for the franchise and participation with the struggle for independence gave them a sense of an assignment and self-assurance in their abilities. To be deprived of the same civil rights as men because of gender seemed unjust. Not only that, they realized that without these rights they would come across it difficult to secure improvement actions in the future.¹³⁰ The *Women's Indian Association* and *All- India Women's Conference* were the two leading bodies which wanted to bring women collectively at an all-India level in order to go forward their position through education, social reform and political activity; they were the only two women's associations with branches and offices spread all over the country. These non-political associations were mainly concerned in women's rights, particularly in promoting educational opportunities for women and humanizing their status through social and legal reform. Even if, these associations were open to women only, but they did not confine themselves only to women's issues.¹³¹ In this connection, we may recall Raja Rammohun Roy, the champion of women's rights, had taken essential steps in the early nineteenth century to progress the conditions of widows by asking for birthright and property rights for them. After him, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar succeeded in legalizing widow re-marriage in 1856. The condition of widows,

mainly the child widows, had involved the notice to many reformers. Like, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati had started her *Sharda Sadan* for educating and training mainly widows. Ramabai Ranade's *Seva Sadan* also served the same purpose. Maharshi Karve started a widow's home in Poona. All this was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹³²

The AIWC first took up the issue at Lucknow in 1928. It was resolved that 'industrial homes for needy women and widows be opened everywhere; that schools be attached to these homes to enable these women to obtain primary education, that a social fund be started by every constituent conference and that the government be approached to help this fund'.¹³³ Though, in Bengal, Hiranmoyee Debi, daughter of Swarna Kumari Debi took the impetus and established *Bidhaba Shilpashram* for widows in 1906.¹³⁴ But 1929-1930, the AIWC committee on social reforms had arranged a scheme of work and incorporated in its plan eradication of imposed seclusion of women, equal rights of inheritance and obstacle of imposed widowhood.¹³⁵ Reform of the legal condition of women had been the key issue for women's associations exactly from the beginning. The child marriage debate shed new light on women's legal status which they now apparent as a serious problem. Out of this, grew demands for women's rights to divorce and inherit and control of property. The Special Marriage Act of 1872 had made provision for facilitating divorce apart from several other provisions about marriage and to bring down of the condition of women. Several attempts were made to integrate them in the personal law of Hindus, but always a proposal was made it was shelved in the face of rigid opposition from conservative Hindus. In this regard, Bhupendranath Basu introduced a Bill making provision for divorce in Hindu marriage. The Hindu conservative view was that, a Hindu marriage was everlasting.¹³⁶

In 1928, Hari Singh Gour introduced in the Imperial Legislative Assembly the Hindu Marriages Dissolution Bill. The Bill was measured at a meeting of the AIWC in Delhi in February 1928. There was great opposition to the Bill.¹³⁷ But in Bengal, Mrs. Renuka Ray,¹³⁸ a feminist leader, gave a burning speech disapproving the existing system demanding equal rights for men and women in marital life. Her declaration, urging support for Sir Hari Sing Gour's Divorce Bill, was passed by all women. Renuka Ray hereafter had remained at the frontline and had been vocal in propagating equal rights for women.

At the Calcutta Congress session of 1930s, Sarala Debi concluded what was positively the most powerful feminist speech with a list of women's demands. Thus, Women's ten 'Fundamental Rights' incorporated, such as equal inheritance, equal right to guardianship, no sex discrimination, fair wages, punishment for sex related crimes, closing of brothels, compulsory primary education, adult education, female teachers in co-educational institutions and adult franchise.¹³⁹

During the 1930s, women's associations formed committees on legal status, undertook studies of laws, talked with lawyers, published pamphlets on the position of women and encouraged legislative that helped to improve women's status.¹⁴⁰ In the 1930 session, the AIWC set on its programme the movement for equal rights for women in the issue of inheritance and control of property.¹⁴¹ At the fifth session in 1931, the conference placed on record its opinion that, there should be complete equality between the sexes in the matter of inheritance and control of property. It extended support to the committees appointed in Mysore and Baroda for investigating the Hindu law of inheritance with a vision to making it fairer for women.¹⁴² The 1933 session of the AIWC discussed and debated the question of divorce with much sincerity.¹⁴³

The AIWC continued to hold out for wide-ranging rather than piecemeal legislation as questions of monogamy; divorce and right of inheritance were all interrelated. The conference appointed a special committee for the social disabilities of women. During 1934, a serious movement was conducted to educate women and make them take an interest in their rights. In this way, the 24th November, 1934 was declared Legal Disabilities Day.¹⁴⁴ Because:-

(i) In 1934, the AIWC, dissatisfied with the Sarda Act (later known as the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 1929) and the proposed India Act asked the government to appoint an all-India commission to judge the legal disabilities of women. The issues they specified for study were inheritance, marriage and the guardianship of children.¹⁴⁵

(ii) In Bengal, the members of *Deepali Sangha*, founded by Leela Roy, extended their support to the Sarda Bill, some advocated women's right to demand divorce and some others called for the modification of the *Dayabhaga* School of law¹⁴⁶ prevalent in Bengal, which deprived girls of any share in paternal property, leaving rights of inheritance to male children alone.¹⁴⁷ These were far-reaching claims, viewed from the early twentieth-

century perspective. After that, the *Deepali Sangha* was possibly the most feminist political association among middle class women of the time and was exclusively committed to the double task of arousing women's political and social rights. Their definitive goal was new law. Though, a resolution was passed conferring equal rights of guardianship over their children on the mother as on the father and stating that 'a widow should have preferential rights of guardianship over them'.¹⁴⁸ But in 1934, the request came from ideas enclosed in a pamphlet titled- *Legal Disabilities of Indian Women: A Plea for a Commission of Enquiry*, authored by Renuka Ray, a Bengali feminist women leader and legal Secretary of the AIWC.¹⁴⁹ Renuka Ray argued in favour of new laws for all women, apart from of community. She wrote that, the social position of Indian women was "one of the most inequitable in the world today". Social transform would both improve the suffering of individual women and allow India to join the modern and progressive states of the world. Renuka Ray wanted new personal family law that would make women independent and fully ready to take part in public life. The *AIWC* said boldly: "we want no sex war"; they were demanding equality to allow women to play a role in the dealings of the country, not equality of the 'Western variety'.¹⁵⁰ This association had branches all over India. The Bengal branch had generations of capable leaders like Sarala Ray, Renuka Ray, Phulrenu Guha and Ashoka Gupta¹⁵¹ and others.

Along with the actions introduced between 1937 and 1938 were the Hindu Woman's Right to Property Bill, an improvement to the Child Marriage Restraint Act, a bill to allow inter-caste marriage, the Hindu Woman's Right to Divorce Act, the Muslim Personal Law Bill, the Prevention of Polygamy Bill and the Muslim Women's Right to Divorce Bill. In the provincial legislatures anti-dowry bills, marriage laws and bills to allow women to inherit were introduced. The new legislatures formed after the elections of 1937 built-in a number of progressive men who recognized women's role to nationalist movement and were conscious of women's issues.¹⁵²

Once these bills were discussed it became clear that male reformers and the women's associations had different concepts of women's legal needs. In these circumstances, the government decided to appoint a committee of distinguished lawyers to study Hindu law and make recommendations but the war and political turbulence caused them to delay until 1941. In January, 1941, Sir B. N. Rau was

appointed to chair the committee and asked to look carefully at the various bills on the Hindu woman's right to property. When the women's associations protested, the committee received directions to examine all questions of women's property rights. But the appeal to add a woman to the committee was overlooked.¹⁵³ Congress women in the Central Legislative Assembly, Mrs. Renuka Ray and Mrs. Radhabai Subbarayan, spoke in favour of the committee's work. When the Rau Committee's report was released in 1941, the AIWC sent copies to its branches with directions to hold meetings and create helpful recommendations.¹⁵⁴ In May 1942 the government published two bills framed by Sir Rau on succession and distributed them for opinions. They were referred to the Legislature, considered, modified and again distributed. Thus, accordingly, two bills emerged in 1943: one on marriage and another on succession. All over the entire process women who were concerned with the issue of women's rights remained caring.¹⁵⁵ In 1943, in relation with the Hindu Law of Inheritance Amendment Bill referred to the Select Committee, the following suggestion was made with regard to widows: under the Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act, 1937, as amended by the 1938 Act, the widows of pre-deceased – (i) Son, (ii) Son's Son and (iii) Son's Son's Son were allowed to succeed all together with the sons and widow of the prepositus. These widows were denied this right under the Bill consideration. The AIWC suggested that, the existing rights should not be reduced by the new Bill.¹⁵

In January of 1944, a committee was appointed to create a code of Hindu law. They were to begin work in February and set up a draft code by August of the same year. The Rau Committee was resuscitated with the addition of three new members including one woman, Mrs. Tarabai Premchand, a long-time member of the *Bhagini Samaj* and officer of the NCWI. At the beginning the committee said it proposed to speak mainly with lawyers but would make special efforts to interview women and representatives of orthodox Hinduism. In Bengal, where they met only women who opposed legal reform, they concluded that women favouring reform had been prohibited from meeting them. Women who opposed reform were ignored as parroting the views of their husbands.¹⁵⁷ To highlight women's emotion in favour of reform, the committee scattered women's views liberally all over the report. This formed the notion that Indian women were well knowledgeable about legal changes

and sympathetic of them. The report was published in 1946, but not re-introduced for kindness until the Constituent Assembly had become the Dominion Parliament.

By their effort to gain civil rights for women- the vote and legal changes in particular – these women became petitioners to the British rulers. The rights they hunted could not be approved by their menfolk. Nor could British women, only recently enfranchised and insufficiently represented in parliament, grant them rights.

Knowledge of struggle taught women that, the battle for rights would not be easy. Time and again they were forced to work for and accept whatever small amount of justice they could get. The franchise compromise and the Rau Committee's report did not sufficiently reflect the views of organized women. These women, honestly, strove to achieve what they regarded as unbiased and fit for Indian society. But women's goals were not most important in this turbulent political environment. The members of the women's associations gained less than they had hoped for. Ever more, they began to define themselves as a minority community with exclusive problems that could not be addressed through political channels alone. Yet, it may be said that, women achieved some socio-political rights vis-à-vis empowerment by organizing of their legitimate claims through movements.

(b) Participation in the Freedom Movement

At the same time with the women's fight for their socio-political rights, they also determined to drive out the British from Indian soil. There were remarkable changes in the Indian political setting in 1910-1920. As a reaction to the passing of the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919) and strengthened by the increase of the Khilafat movement, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Non-Cooperation movement properly in 1920. The special Congress session in Calcutta gave its support to the projected demonstration.¹⁵⁸

Bengali Women's Participation in the Non- Cooperation Movement

Huge number of women from different social strata took part in the Non-Cooperation movement. Gandhiji was active in bringing women even from the rural backdrop to the forefront of the movement. His ideology of non-violence and '*Satyagraha*' was appropriate for the spirit of women and did not conflict with their social and household tasks. Women took active part in boycotting foreign goods,

picketing in schools, colleges and courts, organizing processions, spinning wheels ('*Charka*') and selling '*Khaddar*'¹⁵⁹ (homespun cloth). In regard to the women's participation in Bengal in the Non-Cooperation movement of Gandhi, Bharati Ray refers to three different characters which are as follows:

(i) The recognition of the freedom struggle with *deshpuja* and the prayer of *Shakti* continued, making women's entry into politics smooth

(ii) As Gandhi's views were not informed by a feminist standpoint, they infused self-confidence into women. His statement that women were ethically better suitable than men for the non-violent struggle removed the dishonor of their inferiority vis-à-vis men. Gandhi's 'stature was high'. So, when women came out in the political field, they encountered no opposition from their family members who knew that 'they were protected'.

(iii) During the period under survey, Bengal created political captains of national physique like Chitta Ranjan Das and Bipin Chandra pal and politicized women with leadership abilities, such as Basanti Debi and Hemaprava Majumdar. These women leaders had contact to the general body of women and helped to promote women's political and social awareness and rights.¹⁶⁰

In Bengal, the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat understanding during 1921-22 attained "possibly the point of greatest strength and unity in the entire history of the national movement in Bengal".¹⁶¹ During the early student upsurge in early 1921, as Renuka Ray recalls, many girls left their schools and colleges among whom Renuka (then Mukherjee) and her friend Lalita Ray of the Diocesan College were probably the first.¹⁶² Sarala Debi Choudhurani, freely wore a *Khadi* sari, arranged and addressed numerous meetings all over the province, organized *Swadeshi* centres and everywhere required to inculcate nationalist feelings.¹⁶³ At a personal level, Sarala Debi not only sacrificed most of her Jewellery for the nationalist cause but also donated the Padmavati Gold Medal of the Calcutta University of which she had been the first receiver. In Bengal, the most imperative women leaders were Basanti Debi, Urmila Debi, and Miss Suniti Debi (wife, sister and niece of C. R. Das), Jyotirmoyee Ganguly and Hemaprabha Majumdar. The Das women along with some others regularly accompanied the 'Desbandhu' on his tours of the province, addressed various women's meetings, asking them to take up the *Charka*, boycott foreign goods and make donations to the Tilak *Swaraj* Fund. Urmila Debi, who due

to her ill health could not move very widely, established the *Nari Karma Mandir* (Temple for Women's Work) in 1921 to popularize the *Swadeshi* movement and spread the idea of *Swaraj*. After its closure, Hemaprabha Majumdar, who had primarily assisted Urmila Debi, founded the *Mahila Karmi Sansad* (Forum of Women Workers) in 1922 with a vision to imparting vocational training to women as well as imbuing them with the spirit of nationalism.¹⁶⁴ In Calcutta, while she leading a women's march, was injured in a disagreement with the police. When Sarojini Naidu became the Congress President (1926), Hemaprabha proved to be most esteemed partner. These two women along with Kamaladebi Chattopadhyay became the crucial points of contact between the leaders of the freedom struggle and those of the women's movement. Another spirited female leader at that time was Jyotirmoyee Ganguly. She resigned from her teaching job in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to join the Non-Cooperation movement. To her belongs the praise of having initiated the first women's volunteer organization during the Calcutta Congress of 1920. The entry of women in Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement like Sarojini Naidu, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly and Hemaprabha Majumdar and others into dynamic politics was described by Laxmi Menon, a unchained fighter, 'not only a great asset to the Congress but also a real inspiration to the hesitant womanhood of India'.¹⁶⁵

In order to motivate larger public participation and attract more volunteers for the Congress, it was in Calcutta that for the first time women were terrified openly into the movement.¹⁶⁶ Actions took an even more impressive turn when C. R. Das, the most significant Congress leader in eastern India, determined Congress volunteers should sell *Khaddar* on the streets of Calcutta to experiment the government's ban on political demonstrations. The first batch of volunteers, including C.R. Das's son, was arrested. On 7 December, 1921, a group of women, led by Basanti Debi, Urmila Debi and Suniti Debi went to hawk *Khaddar* and were arrested and locked up in jail. Though they were released before midnight on the same day, but the impact of their action was immediate and massive. To quote Urmila Debi: "We also had set an example to the rest of the women; our arrest had produced the desired effect".¹⁶⁷ The impression caused by the arrest of these ladies can be realized by the following existing account: "A scene was witnessed in Bara Bazar, where the arrest took place, such as comes but once in the lifetime of a nation. Marwaris joined, Muslims joined, Bhatias joined, Sikhs poured in, coolies,

mill hands, school boys, all rushed to the scene. Some wept, some cried, some ran aimlessly, the wild multitude watched and watched and then long after melted away with brewing thoughts such as brew only on the eve of a revolution". Far from being frightened, the women of the Das family from the very next day i.e. 8 December, 1921 "resumed picketing cloth shops and selling *Khaddar*, joined by numerous other lady volunteers, specially Sikh ladies; Calcutta students came out in hundreds, joined the prohibited volunteer corps and marched out with *Khaddar* on, seeking imprisonment 170 were arrested during the day".¹⁶⁸ Enquiry about the Calcutta events Gandhi instantly accepted the probable of women's participation in picketing. As a result, on 15 December, 1921, the Mahatma issued a special plead through *young India* wherein he asked women in other parts of the sub-continent to follow the instance set by Calcutta women.¹⁶⁹ Although it was not only men who were exaggerated. There were 6000 ladies at the All-India Ladies Conference in Ahmedabad where Bi Amma, the mother of Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, spoke from the Congress Pandal on 30 December, 1921. In her flaming presidential address at this conference, Bi Amma stressed upon the requirement for promoting productive (*Charka-Khadi*) activity and Hindu-Muslim harmony. She requested Indian women to intimately support themselves with the nationalist cause demanding that "a nation consists of men and women and whatever duties devolve on men, those are the duties from which women are not exempt".¹⁷⁰ At the end of the meeting, a resolution was passed calling upon the women of India to enroll themselves as volunteers in respect to the Congress command.

As soon as very ordinary, low class women, even prostitutes came ahead to join the Congress movement. In Barishal of East Bengal, 250 'fallen sisters' decided to join the Congress and contribute from their earnings to the Tilak Congress Fund and participated in the Congress work. Manada Devi Mukhopadhyay tells in *Sikshita Patitar Atamcharit* ("Autobiography of an Educated Fallen Woman", 1929) how she and other prostitutes joined in collecting funds for Congress in 1922 and in 1924, participated in C. R. Das's *Satyagraha* against the lascivious and dishonest Mahant of Tarakeswar Temple.¹⁷¹ For the period of C. R. Das's imprisonment, Basanti Debi became the president of the Bengal Provincial Congress in 1921-22 and presided over its session in 1922 in Chittangong. Hence, a Bengali woman, perhaps for the first time, came to occupy an outstanding position in the political leadership of the

country. She was very much aware of the fact that unless the women at the grassroots level were involved, the national movement would not succeed. Her anxiety for the grassroots level participation becomes evident from the presidential speech of hers: "If we have to get back to the simple and best life of India of old days, we have also to revive the dormant villagesWe have to reconstruct our villages, to build up our village institutions under the conditions of modern life, but according to the genius of our national life".¹⁷² Her speech was reported to be even more successful than that of Bipin Chandra Pal. The presence of women at the conference was notable. 'Was it due', the press speculated, 'to a lady being the President, or to the political awakening of Bengali women?'¹⁷³

The devotion and enthusiasm of these women created anxious the colonial government. In a report, Clarke, the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, noted a few names of frontline women agitators such as Basanti Debi, Urmila Debi and Suniti Debi, Hemaphabha Majumdar, Sunitibala Mitra, Uma Debi and Sati Debi of the *Nari Karma Mandir*, Bagala Som, Mohini Dasgupta, Binapani Debi and Pratima Debi and so on. He observed that, the female volunteers were mostly Brahmos. They came out into the streets every day and were joined by male volunteers and other enthusiasts on the way, 'the ladies singing and the male followers exhorting shopkeepers to give up dealing in foreign cloth and stock *Swadeshi* goods'. Basanti Debi was at the head of a large crowd in Mirazapur Steet, Calcutta. Hemaprabha Majumdar addressed an immense meeting at College Square, Binodini Debi and Jagat Mohini Debi arranged a meeting in Hazra Park. The Police Commissioner's suspicious comment was that the men in Bengal were taking 'shelter behind the skirts' of women and that 'the Civil Disobedience campaign as it exists in Calcutta is being conducted by women'.¹⁷⁴

In addition to Calcutta, women were mobilized even in *mofussil* towns. In Midnapur, under the leadership of Birendranath Sasmal, many women came to be associated with nationalist activity and played a major role in the boycott of the Union Board.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, in Dacca, Ashalata Sen spread the constructive programme through the *Shilpashram* started in her own house and later even organized the *Gandaria Mahila Samiti* in 1924 with the aim of "spreading the spirit of nationalism and the message of Gandhi among the local women".¹⁷⁶ Women who would not earlier appear before their male relatives now came out on the streets to

join processions. A large number of women were arrested in 1922. In short, women all over Bengal like Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Malda, Rangpur, Bogura, Mymensingha etc. districts were sought to be mobilized especially for the growth and expansion of the *Charkha-Khadi* campaign.

It may be followed that, women's participation in the first Non-Cooperation movement was not on a mass scale and was mainly limited to those whose husbands, fathers, brothers or sons had already joined the struggle and were in jail. Even though, there can be no denying that Bengali nay Indian women had made important contributions both to the Khilafat cause and to the Non-Cooperation movement initiated by Gandhi. A Government of India publication observed that, ".....the growing interest displayed by upper and middle class women in political and social questions, their increasing prominence on the platform and in the pressmust be taken as the dawn of a new era and the fact that the number of women who take part in public life is still very small affords no reason for questioning its significance".¹⁷⁷ Margaret Cousins also pointed out that, the Non-Cooperation movement gave a big advance to the awakening of Indian women for search their socio-political rights and empowerment and that "women's ardent desire for the freedom of their country has given them such personal freedom that they are now welcomed into the open street as volunteers, as pickets, as politicians.....They do not naturally move towards fighting for their own freedom, but through throwing themselves into a 'cause' they achieve their own liberationThe Indian National movement cannot progress without the aid of women; the liberation of women will be aided by their devotion to the national movement".¹⁷⁸

Bengali Women's Participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement

Gandhi returned to politics in 1928 and launched a Civil Disobedience movement that brought large numbers of women into public life. At midnight on 31 December 1929 the Congress Session at Lahore ended with the resolution on *Purna Swaraj* (Complete Independence) moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and collectively accepted by all present. So, another phase of confrontation had begun. Gandhi began the march from his Sabarmati Ashram to the Dandi Sea coast on 12 March 1930 and the call for a nationwide violation of the Salt Act. The call for Salt *Satyagraha* was issued on 6 April, 1930. The first crucial direction came thus in April. One of the

most important ladies in his group was Sarojini Naidu.¹⁷⁹ It is true that, Women's contribution in the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-1932 differed qualitatively and quantitatively from the early 1920s and won them a place in history.¹⁸⁰ But the ground work for their marvelous response to Gandhi's call had been laid in the period between 1925 and 1930. It was during this period those women's organizations and networks were formed, enabling them to efficiently take action to Gandhi's call.¹⁸¹ In the Civil Disobedience era women started rising in a big way as speakers, marchers, picketers etc. In fact, women's active involvement with the ongoing freedom struggle had started from the very first day of the beginning of the Salt *Satyagraha*. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay recalls: "I still have before me the fantastic scene of Chowpatty Sands in Bombay, the first day, April 6, 1930, when the Salt Law was broken..... Here was an unacceptable law being broken with purposeful deliberation throughout the country by men, women and children.....Above all, the revolt had now entered every home, nestled down in the very hearth. Women, like men, were getting the first taste of liberation; for throwing off the shackles of fear marks the birth of freedom".¹⁸²

This was the situation when the Bengali women too joined the all-India struggle for freedom. It was now a popular song in Bengal which the girls sang with unsurpassable care and affection extolling the virtues of *charkha*, which can be translated roughly somehow like this in English:

"The *charkha* is my husband
 The *charkha* is my son
 The *charkha* is my wealth
 Like the tide elephant."¹⁸³

So, Bengali women came ahead at this time but their demonstrations were smaller and their activities more radical than those of Bombay women. Calcutta women made and sold salt, picketed cloth and liquor shops, preached the value of *Khaddar* and took processions into the streets.¹⁸⁴ In Bengal, the associations through which women took part in the Civil Disobedience movement were *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* (1929), *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* (1928) and *Ladies Picketing Board*. *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* which was established in 1928 was the first formal organization which started mobilizing women for taking part in political activities. At the directions of Subhas Chandra Bose, Latika Ghosh, an Oxford educated teacher

founded this association, which worked in close coordination with the Congress. While basically, the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti's* ideological outline was radical-oriented, but in order to mobilize women, it emphasized the innate religious character of Indian women. Latika Ghosh tried to awaken the women's awareness through writing articles. She told her readers that, they were the embodiment of the supreme *Shakti* and tried to introduce in them Divine Love for their motherland. She wrote: "Every one of you must be like a spark which will burn down all selfishness, all petty dreams – purified by fire, only the bright, golden love of the motherland will remain".¹⁸⁵

The women of Calcutta formed the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* (NSS) in 1929 in response to the Congress call for women to be ready to serve the nation. Urmila Debi, one of the first women arrested for political activity, was named president, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly Vice-president, Santi Das and Bimal Protiva Debi Joint secretaries. This group had a core of fifteen to twenty women who were willing to picket and risk arrest. They were all Bengali women belonging to the three highest castes: Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas. They were educated, from professional families and had all experimental some form of *Purdah*. They chose white *Khaddar* saris as their uniform.¹⁸⁶ An extremely important member of the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* was the secretary Santi Das. She in addition her M. A. at Calcutta University, was a teacher and opened a school named *Deepali Siksha Mandir* in their home with the help of her mother and sister. She recruited her students and Calcutta Corporation teachers to *Nari Satyagraha Samiti*. When twenty two ladies of the *Calcutta Nari-Satyagraha Samiti* were arrested in July 1930 the shopkeepers of Burrabazar instantly closed their shops because they feared that the crowd would become aggressive. A few days' later four ladies remained sitting on some bales of foreign cloth deterring the coolies from moving the bales. All those picketing were considered 'respectable women' and there was a large crowd of people who watched over them and protected them from the police. This crowd was ready to mistreat even the police if they dared to do anything to the ladies. In effect this, the police left the women alone and lathi-charged the crowd who were standing nearby. As the police ordinances were severely applied, smaller number women remained only as demonstrators and more women became active revolutionaries.¹⁸⁷

A report by the Government of Bengal described its repercussions in mid-April, 1930: 'The situation in Calcutta is threatening. Police are openly, filthily, abused, hustled and threatened in social boycott'.¹⁸⁸ In Calcutta, lady volunteers from *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* and *Satyagrahi Sevika Dal* sent volunteers in groups and batches to break the law and organize processions. In 1930, women took out their own procession in Calcutta and also led them and addressed meetings. Jyotirmoyee Ganguly held a meeting at the village near Tamluk in disobedience of a prohibitory order. A ten years old boy, beaten and senseless, was lying in her leg. She was in government service from which she had resigned and took an active part in the Civil Disobedience movement. Nistarini Debi also addressed a meeting at Calcutta. Indumati Goenka headed the *Satyagrahis* in Bengal who were sent to jail.¹⁸⁹

Not only Calcutta women were aroused by the advocate to contribute in Civil Disobedience movement which spread too much in the province. Amongst the districts of Bengal, where the movement made great headway were Midnapore and Dacca. During the Salt *Satyagraha*, women in the Contai Sub-division of the Midnapore were most active and played a prominent role. They were advancing in a group and were stopped at the mouth of a small bridge on the river Matla. The women were obstinate and refused to go back and in colloquial Bengali they raised the slogan "*Jotoi Maro, amra pichaboni*"¹⁹⁰ (you may beat us, but we shall not go back) so much so, that the village there bears the name of "*Pichabani*" even today, in honour of these brave women. Satyabala Debi and Matangini Hazra of later day fame, this time served the country's cause by going to prison.

The women of Dacca under the leadership of Sarama Gupta and Ashalata Sen, those of Bankura under the leadership of Surama and Sushma Palit as well as those of Comilla under the guidance of Hemaprabha Majumdar of Non-Cooperation fame, took up the work of Civil Disobedience movement and emulated their Calcutta sisters in carrying out its different items to their logical end. Some of the women went so far as to give up government service. Labanyalata Chanda, shocked with the police *zulum*, left her job in government educational service and joined the movement. The women of North Bengal also joined in this *Satyagraha*.¹⁹¹ Nelie Sen Gupta, wife of Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, who was the helpmate of her husband in all political movements, did not remain inactive. She presided over the

plenary session of the Indian National Congress, in April 1933, declared illegal by the government and was sent to prison. Moreover, it is remarkable that, by now the active participation was not limited to only a few leading women but had percolated to the masses of Bangali women and many village women also endured their share of sacrifice and suffering and without doubt strengthened the Congress movement.¹⁹²

The role of the women of Balurghat, Dinajpur district in this expanded war of freedom is highly significant. The *Balurghat Mahila Samiti* was established in 1327 B. S. (1920). So, the facts to prove that, the foundation of the *Balurghat Mahila Samiti* was much earlier than that of the *All-India Women's Conference* which was formed in 1927.¹⁹³ Therefore, the establishment of a women association in *muffasil* town like Balurghat might have resulted from the changing social ideologies widening the social space for women at that point of time. The *Mahila Samiti* of Balurghat took an active part under the leadership of Prabha Chatterjee, Bela Chatterjee and the wife of Gopal Chatterjee who was a local lawyer. Prabha Chatterjee was one of the founder organizers of the *Mahila Samiti*. The *Samiti* volunteers of Balurghat picketed in front of the wine shops and cloth stores in the haats (markets) which created great impression in the locality. The women leaders of the *Samiti* extended their sincere support in the programme of boycott of foreign goods, taking to *Charka* and total involvement in the Civil Disobedience movement pursued by the National Congress. The spirits among the lady volunteers of Balurghat remained high all over the period. Police oppression continued during the period. The Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri issued an order on 6 January 1932, by which political meetings were forbidden without the former allow of the government. So, the District Congress Committee was declared illegal.

The Congress people of Balurghat observed 26th January 1932 as Independence Day. A big procession attended by a number of women was organized. The women playing the crucial role in the programmes of the Congress were Prabha Chatterjee, Rajlakshmi Debi, Matangini Dasgupta, Jnanadasundari Debi, Bimalabala Sengupta and others. The police ordered the convoy to scatter, but they denied and police arrested many of them. Sufferings of the women of the families concerned, knew no bound at the violence perpetrated by the police force of the Raj. Such heroic role of women through out the country perhaps induced

Jawaharlal Nehru to make the statement – “a remarkable thing happened, our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle Here were these women, women of the upper or middle classes, leading sheltered lives in their homes, peasant women, working class women, rich women, poor women, pouring out in their tens of thousands in defiance of government order and police *lathi*. It was not only that display of courage and daring, but what was even more surprising was the organizational power they showed.”¹⁹⁴

Another factor may be pointed out that, the Salt *Satyagraha* was rather short-term. Gandhiji’s historic Dandi March later immortalized by a touching sculpture made by one of India’s greatest sculptor, Debiprasad Roy Choudhury, slackened off by early May and in the second week of June, 1930, it had to be given up since the arrival of the monsoon made work impossible. Added to that, the no-tax campaigning was a grassroots demand, developed through local enterprise.

However, huge numbers of village women in Bengal were activated through this form of fighting. At Arambagh, Hoogly district they impeded tax collection efforts in large groups. At Bankura, as many as two hundred and fifty women lay down on the road and banned the exit of food by without the traffic. As conflict and suppression reached new heights in Minapore, women became increasingly important as fully politicized and active members of the movement. In June, a number of men and women were rigorously injured during a case of police beating at Keshpur Thana, Midnapore.

The first woman martyr from the district which created Matangini Hazra in 1942 was Urmilabala Paria, a young woman from the Mahisya peasant caste. At Contai where penalizing police were posted in disturbed areas to force tax payments, there were common detentions and whipping of women from families that had refused payment. There were police raids on 500 villages in four months, and men and women of whole hamlets fled to nearby forests to avoid payment, as well as to escape police cruelty.¹⁹⁵

In the meantime the failure of the British Government to accept the demands of the Congress for self-government led the leaders to go further and demand complete independence or ‘*Purna Swaraj*’ which was done at the Lahore Congress of 1929. 26 January was declared to be observed as Independence Day, the Congress members were instructed to boycott the legislatures and Gandhiji launched the Civil

Disobedience movement. Gandhiji was arrested on the charge of breaking the law in April 1930. His arrest was the delightful signal for the campaign to begin in right earnest. Women in large numbers joined the movement and they demanded that henceforth “no conference, no Congress or Commission should be held without their presence and asked that they be included in all marches and demonstrations”.¹⁹⁶ In this respect, Padmini Sen Gupta records in her book titled *Pioneer Women of India* that “in Bengal, women demonstrators were even caned on their bare backs, but the spirit remained indomitable.” At Allahabad, Swarup Rani, Motilal’s wife, became insensible and fell on the street, when *lathi*-charged leading a demonstration. Smt. Mathulakshmi Reddy resigned her seat in the Madras Legislative Council and Hansa Mehta following goes with. Sarojini Naidu was arrested in May 1930 and in a message to her comrades said- “Whatever happens never budge an inch from the place you have taken but keep to non-violence strictly.”¹⁹⁷

In Bengal, women were everywhere and participating in all movements. In Sylhet, by the initiative of Congress, *Shreehatta Mahila Sangha* formed in 1930 and its leaders was Jobeda Khatun Choudhury and Saralabala Deb. Thousand of women were broke the 44 regulation and joined in the Salt *Satyagraha* of Sylhet and near about sixty women went to jail.¹⁹⁸ Not only that, Sarajubala Sen of Bhola, Indumati Guhathakurata, Prafulla Kumari Basu of Barisal, Sushila Mitra of Noakhali, Snehashila Choudhuri of Khulna, Surama Mukhopadhyay of Burdwan, Bishnupriya Debi of Sirajganj, Sarajubala Sen of Bikrampur, Usha Guha of Mymensingh etc. were took active part in their native place through organizing and awakening the women society.¹⁹⁹ A police report stated thus – “organized attempts to hoist the national flag on Government buildings were made, though hardly were successful. An increasing share of the work was taken up by the women”.²⁰⁰ Almost immediately *Mahila Rashtriya Sangh* was declared unlawful. The President Smt. Urmila Debi, with members of the *Nari Satyagraha Committee*, like Hemprabha Debi, Ashoklata Das and others also arrested.

In May 1931, a Picketing was started by the women of Bengal to boycott and picket in group effort with Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The work of this Board was to propagate against the use of foreign goods; to popularize home industries and to help develop cottage industries; specially those of spinning and weaving *Khadi*; to arrange processions and meetings; to propagate and emphasis the

importance of liberty and equality of nations; the need for removal of untouchability; to enlist members of the Congress, who would follow the commands of the National Congress stipulating that the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee work in close collaboration with the National Congress.²⁰¹

The Congress women's organization divided its work in the following sections: (a) Boycott and picketing section, (b) *Swadeshi prachar* section or publicity section, (c) *Prabhat-pheri* section and (d) Constructive workers section.

There were also women who were given the liability to engage themselves in holding meetings, taking out processions and in general to lead the others and stimulate their awareness for the cause.

The above plan of action was wide-ranging and the women of Bengal did a lot of work in various parts of Bengal, to take forward Congress ideas and programmes. Conferences and meetings of the ladies were everyday occurrences in Bengal. In a conference at Comilla which was presided over by Urmila Debi the following resolutions were passed, vis-à-vis: (i) The formation of *Mahila Samities*, (ii) Boycott of foreign goods, (iii) Establishing Hindu-Muslim unity, (iv) The removal of untouchability and *pardah*, (v) Demanding open trail of detenus in jails, (vi) Urging the ladies to support the Congress cause.²⁰²

In 1934, the Civil Disobedience movement that had started with the Salt *Satyagraha* came to closing stages. In fact, this movement was a turning point in the emergence of Indian women from their traditional seclusion. In the past, the role of women was limited only to those from elite classes, who were highly educated. But now, women from all classes and categories came ahead in large numbers in different parts of the country with greatest patriotic enthusiasm and fervour. Women marched in processions, organized picketing of shops selling foreign cloth and liquor, addressed public meetings, and played a much more leading role. It is more creditable in that sense, they fixed to their task even with all sorts of violence perpetrated against them by the British authorities and the contribution of women was no less than that of men.

So, women's involvement in agitational politics must be viewed as first, in terms of what it meant for the supporter of independence movement and second, how these events formed the women's movement.

The involvement of women in the freedom movement also twisted the movement for women's rights. Mainly, it legitimized their claim to a place in the governance of India. Saraladebi Choudhurani posed the question in this way: "How can we attain rights?" and answer was: "By the strength of our agitation. We must force menfolk to concede to our demands and at the same time carry on propaganda among ourselves".²⁰³

A noteworthy aspect of the Civil Disobedience period was that in various provinces and districts of the country, women became the 'dictators' to run the Congress movement and the remarkable directorial skills shown by them was a big surprise. As a whole, it went a long way in bringing a drastic change in the self-perception of many women. Moreover, it also contributed a great compact to the women's better status in Indian society. It gave them a new sense of authority, self-confidence and a new self outlook that is broadly may say as women empowerment.

Bengali Women in the Revolutionary Activities

Not only in the nationalist movement led primarily by Gandhiji, have women of Bengal mostly come out to take part in the non-violent movements. Secret revolutionary associations first started during the Partition of Bengal in 1905, extended their actions as freedom movement gradually spread all over the country.

In view of this, it becomes necessary to highlight the women revolutionary activities of Bengal. Since the beginning of the revolutionary movement in Bengal till its end (1905-1934), women of Bengal took part in the preliminary work. In this context, they helped in the formation of revolutionary organizations, propagated revolutionary ideas through literature, provided food and shelter to the absconding revolutionaries, often carried secret coded messages, hid and smuggled weapons and other explosives, provided financial assistance, were engaged in preparing explosives for manufacturing bombs and finally, did the organizational work, recruited and trained young women for revolutionary action.²⁰⁴

This group felt that only a free India could pave the way towards women's freedom and so joined the ranks of the freedom fighters. In this connection, the Bengali lady who had the merit of being the first woman political prisoner was Nanibala Debi, born at Bally near Howrah, daughter of Suryakanta Banerjee and

Giribala Debi was married at the age of eleven and came back to her parent's home after becoming a widow at the age of sixteen.

During the First World War, Jatin Mukherjee, popularly known as "Bagha Jatin" (Tiger) was organizing armed uprising and finally faced the British military at Baleswar in Orissa. Nanibala's nephew Amarendu Nath Chatterjee also joined the terrorist group and it was from him that she got the encouragement and bravery. She used to take care of these young men when they had to go into hiding to flee the fury of the British police. There is a loving event which is said about Nanibala. One of the revolutionaries Ram Chandra Majumdar was in prison from one of the hideouts but he was incapable to tell his compatriots where he had left the firearms concealed when he was captured. Nanibala went to meet Ram Chandra in Jail, to become his wife in disguise and so as to bring information secretly for patriots. She was sent to Peshawar to escape the cruelty of the British power when she was living in a rented house at Rishra, where many of the revolutionaries also came to take shelter infrequently. But Nanibala could not run away for long and finally, was under arrest at Peshawar (1917) and brought to Benaras jail; from there she was brought to the Presidency jail in Calcutta and imprisoned under regulation-III. She was the first lady state prisoner in Bengal.²⁰⁵ But the iron grills of the jail could not strength Nanibala to submission to the cruelties and heartless behavior of the police. She almost immediately heard that there was another Bengali lady, Dukaribala, who had been arrested from Siuri for keeping firearms and she was being kept on the same jail. As Third Division prisoner, Dukaribala was being forced to do physically difficult tasks. Nanibala went on hunger strike and refused the jail food. After 21 days the Jailer came to ask her to break her fast which she granted to do, only if a Brahmin lady could be found to her cooking. When asked, Nanibala requested for Dukaribala to be brought to her and thus saved Dukaribala from further suffering.²⁰⁶

Attachment of Dukaribala in armed uprising towards the end of 1916 also reads like a tale book journey. She was born in 1887 in the village Jhaopara in Birbhum district and was married to Phani Bhushan Chakraborty of the same village. Dukaribala's nephew Nibaran Ghatak was in the revolutionary group and had to allow disclosing to her aunt about their activities having lost a wage. In one of the raids, the police got seize of seven Mauser pistols from Dukaribala's room and since she would not tell them from where she got them or how and she was sent

to jail on 12 March, 1917. She left her two month old child at home and smilingly went to jail; she was convicted, found blameworthy and given two years rigorous custody.²⁰⁷

In the later phase of the revolutionary movement (1929-1933), many women recruited to different revolutionary associations played a very significant role in maintaining contact with the absconding revolutionaries and passing on and collecting secret information from them. In this connection mention may be made of Mira Dattagupta and Uma Sen of *Bengal Volunteers*, Pramila Das and Arati Rakshit of Chittagong Revolutionary Party, Pratibha Bhadra, Parul Mukherjee, Nirmala and Nirupama Kahali of *Anushilan Samiti*, Helena Gun of *Sri Sangha* and Kalyani Das of the *Jugantar* group of Calcutta and others.²⁰⁸ In 1932, when Dinesh Majumdar became an absconder, Kalyani Das used to collect from him the essential directions mandatory for the working of their revolutionary organization and pass on to him secret information.²⁰⁹ Similarly, Mira Dattagupta of *Bengal Volunteers* played a significant role as connection between the absconding revolutionaries of *Bengal Volunteers* group during the period 1931-1933.²¹⁰ There were a lot of women who took part in the revolutionary activities and served different terms of imprisonment. To name only a few who went to Jail were Kamala Chatterjee, Shobharani Dutta, Jyotikana Datta, Banalata Das etc. and Shantisudha Ghosh of Barisal was arrested while trying to encash an artificial cheque of twenty-seven thousand rupees at Grindlays Bank, Calcutta. The money was required to carry on revolutionary activities.²¹¹

However, Hemprova Debi, wife of Basanta Kumar Majumdar and Bimal Prativa Debi had begun their political careers under the guidance of Urmila Debi, when the latter started the '*Nari Karma Mandir*' in 1921. Bimal Prativa Debi came from a wealthy family but the family constraints could not discourage her. In 1927, she became the President of the Bengal branch of the '*Bharat Nawajawan Sabha*' whose President was Bhagat Singh. Therefore, she came under the influence of active revolutionary politics. When in 1930, Santi Kabir (Das), wife of Humayun Kabir organized the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti*; Bimal Prativa became one of the joint secretaries. She led a demonstration on 22 June, 1930, at the death anniversary of Deshbandhu, was arrested and given six months' rigorous imprisonment. She was arrested again in 1931, along with Dhiren Choudhury, Kalipada Roy and others as

suspects of Maniktola dacoity and bomb case. She was imprisoned for over six years and was kept at different Jails at Siuri and Hijli. Bimal Prativa also left the Congress after Tripuri. During the Second World War, she was in prison for the entire period from 1941-45, supposed as being one of the main assistant of Subhas Chandra Bose.²¹²

It is difficult to make a correct approximate of the number of women who were actively concerned in terrorist movements, but a modest guess puts the numbers at 3000.²¹³ These girls were recruited from sports clubs and gymnasiums usually. The age group was normally between 16 to 30.²¹⁴ A wonderful chapter of Bengali's uprising is to be found in records of the Chittagong Armoury Raid accounts. It was not only that, the girls participated actively in the movement; elderly women helped the fugitives in every way. The universal aunt, Smt. Khiroda Sundari (Khirodeprabha Biswas of Chittagong), used to give protection to them. Kshiroda Sundari was born in a village near Mymensingh. She became a widow with one child at the early age of about 30. Surendra Mohan Ghosh, an active revolutionary brought her into the '*Jugantar*' party. In 1916 Surendra Mohan was wanted by the police after the murder of Police Superintendent Basanta Chatterjee at Calcutta. The revolutionaries had to always shift houses and move from village to village when running away from the police.

Kshiroda Sundari was continuously with them and kept them her home as their mother. Though this daring lady had never taken a front line part in any movement, it was her reassurance and care which had safely kept those revolutionaries for years. After the movement was covered up her house was razed to the ground by the police for giving shelter to Surya Sen, the leader of Chittagong Uprising and she was given a heavy jail sentence.²¹⁵

When two women Nanibala Debi and Dukaribala Debi from middle-class Hindu family of rural Bengal, were imprisoned in 1917 and suffering for acting as a smart negotiator for the revolutionaries and for hiding arms, it became very important for both the older and the younger generation of male revolutionaries in prison to discuss women's political roles. The older generation was more traditional while the younger favoured accepting women in the groups. Though within four-five years of such contestations, respectable Bengali women came out on the streets, in front of the police during the Non-Cooperation movement in 1922, but it was not

until Leela Nag (later Roy) joined *Shree Sangha* in 1926 that they were properly accepted in any revolutionary terrorist party in Bengal.²¹⁶

On the other hand, although the Non-Cooperation movement was suddenly called off by Gandhi after the Chauri Chaura incident, women's political interests in Bengal did not fall down. Bengal had been drawn to armed revolutionary dogma, Gandhi's political influence even though. Whereas in the *Swadeshi* era women could provide only indirect help to the revolutionaries, but from the 1920s they came out more openly in support of the movement and women students began to grow their own organizational network.

Deepali Sangha: Having come into a revolutionary party through associational politics of women, Leela gave priority to raising women's political consciousness and public skills early in life. Highly conscious and verbal of women's subservience in society, she held that for women to contribute fully in the freedom struggle, they must first be educated, be ready to earn their own bread, be physically fit and become more politically sensitive. When many girls of her age plunged into the Non-Cooperation movement in response to Gandhi's call, Leela Nag and some of her friends at Bethune College determined after much discussion amongst themselves that they required completing their studies and achieving a certain level of political maturity before joining the national movement.²¹⁷ Returning to Dacca after graduation, she went on to do her post-graduation from the newly established University there and wrested the right to study in an institution that was not yet co-educational. Trying to link the gap between the middle-class women's world of domesticity and the chaotic world of 'high politics', she formed a women's organization in Dacca called *Deepali Sangha* (translated variously as 'Lamp for Enlightenment', 'Association of the Enlightend' or 'Torchbearers Association') in 1923 with twelve friends to raise the social awareness of women.²¹⁸

A year before, in 1922, as a post-graduate student, she had formed the *Dacca Mahila Committee* to increase funds for flood relief in North Bengal under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. A large number of meetings were organized in this connection. It was then that she realized the miserable lack of social awareness and the subordination of women while interacting with different sections of the public and this 'painful revelation' had a important impact on her later work.²¹⁹

Possibly *Deepali Sangha*'s most significant activity was working to develop the social and economic position of women in Bengal, especially through education. *Deepali Sangha*, through its ten to twenty branches in Dacca, operated a number of free basic schools and high schools for Dacca girls, namely *Nari Siksha Mandir*, *Siksha Bhavan* and *Siksha Niketan*. At the same time, *Deepali Sangha* also ran 12 primary schools. In addition, it led emphasis adult education and arts and craft training. Midday and evening classes were held to prepare women to pass the high school matriculation examination and to prepare them to earn their own living. To promote education among the economically backward girls the *Sangha* instituted many scholarships and free studentships. Activities of the *Deepali Sangha* steadily spread to Calcutta where the organization was very active among women students at Calcutta University and Bethune College.²²⁰

As Leela Nag did not think that men and women's intellectual capabilities were different, in the schools run by *Deepali Sangha* women were prepared to become 'future workers' of the nation – which meant both social as well as political work. Apart from imparting a general wakefulness of existing affairs, women workers were trained in skills of debate and public speaking, in convening meetings, conducting campaigns and other related skills as it was not easy for girls to acquire these skills in the way they were socialized since childhood. *Deepali Sangha* also laid equal stress on physical training so that women could attain self-confidence for a public life involving a lot of mobility. Pulin Das, the well-known old *Anushilan* activist, was engaged to give instruction in *lathi* and dagger play and judo. In trying to raise women's political consciousness, Leela Nag organized lectures and discussions, opened libraries for them and held meetings so that women could express their views and exchange notes. When Rabindranath Tagore visited Dacca in February 1926, Leela Nag had organized a felicitation for him on behalf of the *Sangha*. He addressing in a meeting in front of thousand women on 8 February, 1926, the poet commented- "I have never seen such a huge gathering of women in the whole of Asia".²²¹

In 1924, Miss Nag began an annual women's arts and crafts exhibition in Dacca to encourage women in their home handi crafts. This exhibition was organized absolutely by women and sold arts and crafts goods made only by women. To support her in these exhibitions, she called on the *Social Service League* and Anil

Roy, her former classmate at Dacca University and her future husband. Hence, the *Social Service League* and the *Deepali Sangha* being drawn into the revolutionary *Shree Sangha*. *Deepali Sangha* quickly emerged as a spirit for political activities by the women of Dacca and Eastern Bengal. This became the first terrorist group to include both male and female membership. Close working with *Shree Sangha* and the leadership of Anil Roy and Leela Nag instilled revolutionary political ideas in the minds of *Deepali Sangha*. Units were opened in all the centres of *Deepali Sangha* for the physical training of women. They were taught drill, parade, *bratachari*, sword fighting and *lathi-wielding*.²²²

Once Leela Roy joined the *Shree Sangha* in 1926, she set an excellent example in becoming the first woman to enter the core group of a revolutionary party. These groups were manly cultural spaces with the sexuality of all its warriors pledged to the nation. Here was a fundamentally new aspect in the terrorist movement, for earlier terrorist organizations in Bengal had required prohibiting their members from having girl friends or marrying and indeed they did not allow women in the organizations themselves.²²³ It is remarkable that, the participation of women in the terrorist movement in the mid-1920s foreshadowed the great role women would play in the Civil Disobedience movement of the early 1930s.

Leela Nag's *Deepali Sangha* had earned fairly a status in Dacca for educating and empowering women in the first three years of its existence. Primarily, it may have been a calculated choice on the part of the 'political' *Shree Sangha* to collaborator itself with the leader of a 'social' organization like *Deepali Sangha* and enlarge the support base for its secretly action.²²⁴ Leela Nag still was also active in the non-violent political work. Both Anil Roy and Leela Nag took active part in the Calcutta Congress in 1928 under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. Leela Nag formed *Mahila Satyagraha Samiti* in Calcutta in 1930-31.²²⁵

In April 1930, following the Chittagoan Armoury Raid, when the police started rounding up all political suspects in Bengal, Anil Roy was arrested and Leela Roy, who had the frontage of *Deepali Sangha* to make her look non-suspect till then – took charge of *Shree Sangha*. This was the period that, she led both *Deepali Sangha* and *Shree Sangha*. *Jayashree* was launched during this time as the organ of *Deepali Sangha* in April 1931 to 'inspire the spirit of patriotism and a fearless desire to serve the country among the women of Bengali', received the blessings of

Rabindranath Tagore.²²⁶ Like the head of *Shree Sangha*, Leela Nag, in association with the other underground revolutionaries, tried to organize the women for revolutionary action. On the one hand, planning were being held for the function of the formulas of making bombs, on the other side, attempts were being made on a large scale to collect fire arms from Calcutta. But she realized that, such types of activities were not possible from home or from girls' hostels. So, Leela Nag organized *Chhatri Sangha* among the boarders of Eden Residential School, Dacca and opened 'Chhatri Bhavan' at Gorabagan, Calcutta, a boarding house for girl students. This provided a base for underground activities by women.²²⁷ But, such activities could not be continued for long. On 14 December 1931, when the District Magistrate of Comilla was murdered by two teenaged girls (Shanti and Suniti) the government started arresting those women suspected to be involved in revolutionary activity. On 20 December 1931, Leela Nag and Renu Sen were arrested in Dacca and were kept confined as detenues.²²⁸

Chhatri Sangha: One of the student body at the political level was the *Chhatri Sangha* (Female Students Organization) of Calcutta, which was started in 1928 with Surama Mitra as President and Kalyni Das (Bhattacharya) as Secretary. Bina Das, Kalpana Datta (Joshi) and Kamala Dasgupta, all chief actors in the armed movement of the 1930s, were members of this association. The method of self-defense (mainly by means of the indigenous style of fighting with sticks and daggers) was taught to the members. Dinesh Majumdar, a devoted *biplabi* leader, was the instructor. It was not a secret association and membership could be enlarged. Student members tried to instigate other female students into the movement. Reasonably, a few girls from the Brahma Girls' School, Victoria Institution, Bethune School and College were enrolled into this association. A hostel was started by Kalyani Bhattacharya's mother to provide lodging to some of the members of the *Chharti Sangha*.²²⁹ The *Chhatri Sangha* organized study classes, athletic centres, swimming clubs, cooperative stores, libraries and a youth hostel. Because these girls were already familiar to public life and Congress looked to the *Chhatri Sangha* for recruits. As making arrangement for their physical fitness, the association also helped to generate political consciousness among the girls.

When Gandhiji called for Civil Disobedience in 1930s, Kalyani led the *Chhatri Sangha* members in a demonstration outside Bethune College. When Nehru

was arrested, these young women demanded the college be closed. Mrs. Das, the principal, ignored their demands so they went on strike.²³⁰ Kalyani summoned the police but they only ordered the young women to scatter. Later, at Presidency College, the police decided to teach these young women a lesson. Female students who threw themselves in front of their male colleagues during a police charge were put in prison vans, taken to distant periphery and discarded. The long walk home was meant to cool their weakness for demonstrations but private motor cars and taxis followed the police vans and brought the abducted girls back to Calcutta.²³¹ The group of *Chhatri Sangha* also took a leading role in editing and publishing another monthly for women magazine *Mandira*.²³²

Therefore, *Chhatri Sangha*, although not a front association like *Deepali Sangha*, became a feeder organization for the revolutionary movement. But the *Deepali Sangha* and the *Chhatri Sangha* were intimately connected. They were the forerunners of many other female student organizations which were formed later. The historical significance of these student bodies lies in the formation of a female youth power league as similarity with their male counterparts. They trained a body of self-sufficient, strong-minded young women who keenly fought for the cause of nation and initiated other women into this. In total, by the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s Bengali women or at least a good section of them, had become political actors.

Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (MRS): The *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* (National Organization of Women), begun in 1928, was the first formal association to mobilize women for political work. Subhas Chandra Bose, an exceptionally popular leader, had approached Latika Ghosh, after she fruitfully organized a women's demonstration against the Simon Commission (1927-28) and asked her to take the responsibility of forming the new association which worked in close coordination with the Congress. Prabhabati Bose, Subhas Chandra's mother, was the President, his sister-in-law, elder brother Sarat Chandra's wife Bibhabati, Vice-president, Latika Ghosh was the Secretary and Arubala Sengupta, the Assistant Secretary of the *Sangha*.²³³ In the 1928 Calcutta Congress Session, young women participated as volunteer workers for the first time in Congress history. Subhas Bose decided to have uniformed women volunteers under the leadership of Latika Ghosh, referred to as "Colonel Latika", niece of Aurobind Ghosh, roughly 300 hundred girls students

from Bethune College and Victoria Institution and the Calcutta Corporation teachers joined the Congress volunteers, participated in the military drill and worked side by side with their male counterparts, many of whom were terrorists.²³⁴ Among the volunteers were the two Das sisters, Bina and Kalyani in uniforms of green and red bordered Saris. The *Forward*, a popular organ of that time commented that “As the ladies clad in their saris marched past to the sound of the bugle and the beating of the drum, there could be traced not a touch of all the frailties that are so commonly attributed to them. No faltering, no hesitancy, no softness associated in popular minds with the womanhood of Bengal but chivalry written on every face and manifest in every movement”.²³⁵

The *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha*, sought to achieve both *Swaraj* and progress of women’s status, as they careful these two goals as undividable. In fact, Subhas Chandra Bose had always sought the women of India to take active part in freedom struggle. To recruit the membership of the association Latika wanted the names of expected members from male Congress leaders. Because family sanction and support for women’s activities was important for the success of this endeavor, Latika wanted to recruit women whose fathers, brothers or husbands were already involved with Congress or the revolutionary movement. Through a network of “*Shakti Mandirs*” women were to be trained about the need for independence. But at the same time, the *Mandirs* would teach literacy, mother craft, first aid and self-defense. Latika and other women drawn in building women’s political organizations acknowledged the women upto then had been practically isolated from the interaction of the country. In this way, they concluded that, unless ordinary women began to see themselves within the bigger context of the nation they would be unwilling to make the personal sacrifice that political movements demanded. One of the most impressive acts by Bengali women occurred well in advance of the Civil Disobedience movement.²³⁶

Though Bengal police kept a close watch on the activities of these girls, the Government was hesitant to bring them under defensive arrest without lodging some exact charge against them.²³⁷ This unwillingness finished rapidly in the early 1930s when women began to take active parts in both the Civil Disobedience movement and the radical movement.

The majority of the women who became mixed up with revolutionary groups at this time were students. Radical ideals have a natural plea to the young but these young women had very little physical self-sufficiency and were socialized to perform humbly. It is important to note that, revolutionary activities were hardly ever their first political experience. Most of them joined secret societies after they had worked with women's associations and with Congress. One of such women revolutionary organization was *Tripura District Women Students Organization*.

Tripura District Women Students Organization: In Comilla, Prafullanalini Brahma, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Choudhury, recruited to the *Jugantar* group of the district, played a very crucial role in strengthening the women wing of the *Jugantar* group there. After that, to increase the women's wing of the *Jugantar* group of Comilla, *Tripura District Women Students Organization* was formed with Prafullanalini as President and Shanti Ghosh as Secretary and they took the enterprise in recruiting more girls to the association. Clubs were shaped in different localities to teach physical training to the girls including sword and *lathi* play. At first, the male members of the *Jugantar* group used to instruct training to the women in those clubs. But within a short period that task was taken up by Shanti, Suniti and Prafullanalini to whom they considered appropriate for revolutionary work, were next recruited to the party. Therefore, they recruited a number of girls to the *Jugantar* group of Comilla. A few among them were Urmila Guha, Nilima Nandi, Banalata Sarkar, Shanti Sen, Usha Chakraborty, Jahanara Chowdhury, Manorama Sen etc.²³⁸

Not only that, many women in some cases, primarily attracted to Gandhi, joined the revolutionaries because they beg earnestly for action or was applied by police violence. For example, Kamala Das Gupta wanted to join Gandhi's ashram in 1929 but he told her she must first get her parents' consent. Her parents would not allow her to go. By her description, she became disheartened and in this frame of mind read Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's novel '*Pather Dabi*' ('The Right of the Way').²³⁹ Fascinated by his world of romance and heroism, Kamala Dasgupta spoke to her *lathi*²⁴⁰ fighting trainer, Dinesh Majumdar, who was a member of the revolutionary group *Jugantar*. She met his senior coworker and was given books to read. At last, Kamala found what she had been desire for, a way to sacrifice herself for India and joined in the *Jugantar*.²⁴¹

The revolutionary organizations came into being in 1930s and were particularly active in Bengal, with Calcutta, Dacca, Comilla and Chittagong being the storm centres.²⁴² In the context of Bengal, it is also outstanding that, revolutionary activities started once again almost at the same time with the movement of Civil Disobedience and here too a number of Bengali women performed noteworthy feats. Although there was a distinct tradition of women's association with revolutionary activities in Bengal since the *Swadeshi* movement period, a sharp move on seems to occur from 1931 onwards.²⁴³ Kamala Das Gupta attempted to murder Charles Teggart, the Police Commissioner of Calcutta. . Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Choudhury, two schoolgirls from Comilla, shot Magistrate Stevens to death on December 14, 1931. They went in on the prayer to hand him over a petition, when he was handing it back to them; they shot him at point of blank range. They were under arrest and convicted to moving for life. After two months of Shanti-Suniti's action another woman came forward to shoot the Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson, at the convocation of Calcutta University (6 February, 1932). She was Bina Das, a graduate of Diocessan college of Calcutta, present at the convocation to collect her B. A. degree. Bina's case was the only instances of one woman group against British supremacy in Bengal but failed. On September 2, 1932, Pritilata Waddedar, a Chittagong school teacher, was appointed leader of a group of seven to attack the Pahartali European Club. Priti committed suicide by taking potassium cyanide after the effort failed. In the Pahartali European Club Raid, Kalpana Dutta (nee Joshi) was to go with Priti. But just seven Days before the raid (17 September, 1932), she was arrested by the police while going to meet Sury Sen to discuss the plan of action and sentenced to life custody. Finally, Ujjwala Majumdar of Dacca was arrested for making an attempt to assassinate the then Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson at Labong race course in Darjeeling on May 9, 1934.²⁴⁴

The involvement of women in the revolutionary movement, both from at the back and in the front rank, is an occurrence that deserves special mention. The middle-class Bengali women, from adolescent school girls to middle aged housewives, came ahead to take part in the armed struggle to achieve India's freedom from British rule. But the *modus operandi* of the non-Gandhian women was very much different from that of Gandhian women. Women in the revolutionary

mould were full of extreme dislike for the British. They were highly touching and impetuous and by high caliber of their regular association with revolutionaries and their literature, they came to believe that individual acts of heroism and not building up of a mass movement - were more strong instruments for fighting the British imperialism.

Following 1934, the revolutionary movement in Bengal was outgoing tide. More or less all its leaders and most workers were either dead or in imprisonment.²⁴⁵ In this chaotic environment, it was difficult to make interest in women's rights. In a minute as Congress had likely rewards for their faithful service during the First World War, women activities expected their male colleagues to twist their concentration to women's issues. Once it became noticeable that, Bengal Congress was not particularly interested in these topics, women leaders called for a meeting to form of separate women's Congress. In the first week of May 1931, Santi Das wrote letters to women members of District Congresses asking each to elect ten delegates. These women organized meetings, elected their delegates and held discussions about social reform issues.²⁴⁶

In this connection, Saraladebi explained why they needed a separate Congress for women. Women were treated, from their earliest Childhood, as separate and inferior. As girls they were deprived of sweets while their brothers ate their full; as adults they were exploited by men for their own purposes. Women's needs, feelings and point of view had never been identical to men's but men had shown no attention in sympathetic women. Now was the time to speak openly about their position and join the world-wide women's movement.²⁴⁷ Though Saraladebi recognized men's role in bringing women into the freedom movement, but she doubted they actually cared about humanizing the lives of women. Women were content with flowery speeches but not appointed to sub-committees and councils. In short, women's experiences with politics she said Congress that "assigned to women the position of law-breakers only and not law-makers". Women must demand equal behavior and equal rank. United they would make an impact on Congress leaders and maybe even Jawaharlal Nehru would be moved to give the same notice to "Teeming womenfolk" he accorded the "teeming masses". Saraladebi asked why Congress had never influenced of an anti-brothel campaign, since prostitution was as dangerous to women as alcoholism was to men. She concluded

what was positively the most powerful feminist speech of the 1930s with a call for legal, economic, social and educational equality. She spoke to an audience more conservative than herself and in their final session they reiterated the natural demands, discarded resolutions favouring birth control and equal behavior for women and decided not to for a separate women's Congress.²⁴⁸

However, Sarala Debi's suggestion for a separate Congress for women did not get favour with the majority of women present at the conference. An important Bengali magazine like *Probasi*, described her presidential speech for showing 'a lack of sympathy towards men'.²⁴⁹ Another magazine *Jayashree*, taking a somewhat different stand, commented in its editorial that it was 'disappointing' to hear 'women complaining about men's injustice towards them' as that 'would not ensure women's emancipation..... Complaints against men might actually turn into opposition between women and men and could result in a kind of conflict that is neither desirable nor necessary at present'.²⁵⁰

Lastly, in 1938, when the founder-editor of *Jayashree* (Leela Roy) was released from jail and had started writing again, the Congress president, Subhas Chandra Bose, set up a 'National Planning Committee', together with a 'Women's Sub-committee' of which Leela Roy was elected member. This was the period in which *Jayashree* carried articles like 'Women's Place in National Planning' by Prabha Dutta, member of the *Deepali Sangha* which outlined the details of the proposals of the Women's Sub-committee.²⁵¹ It was during this time that, the editor of *Jayashree*, with the full support of Subhas Chandra Bose, wished-for that a women's forum called *Congress Mahila Sangha* be formed, which would represent together all the women political workers of Bengal irrespective of their party affiliations. We have seen that, since the time Leela Roy established *Deepali Sangha*, she had been trying to teach certain political skills on women which were difficult for them to obtain otherwise. To encourage a discussion and networking, a meeting was organized by the *Congress Mahila Sangha* in December 1938 among isolated women workers in Calcutta, thus given that a larger dais from which they could join the freedom struggle.²⁵² Not like Sarala Debi's *Bengal Women's Congress*, the *Congress Mahila Sangha* prepared a tactical alliance with the Congress for empowering women political workers. The *Sangha* did not forefront women's complaints against their male colleagues nor did it indicate at any proposal

of making clash of interest a part of the program. As a result, the Congress leadership had no difficulty in favoring the formation of this *Sangha*.²⁵³

In this respect, Sucheta Mazumdar Kripalini (1908-74), was born in Ambala where her father, Dr. S. N. Mazumdar, was a medical officer in the Punjab Medical Service. She was a long time follower of Gandhi and married another Gandhian, Acharya Kripalini in 1936. They moved to Allahabad in 1939 where Sucheta began working in the Congress office. In 1940, she was chosen to organize a women's department of the Indian National Congress.²⁵⁴

The women's department was excited with finding the best ways to use "women's genius and peculiar gifts for the revolutionary purposes of achieving independence and then making a contribution in national life".²⁵⁵ The women's department files stating about their aims and commented that women's first duty was to the nation: "Only thus can they progress and bring about their emancipation from the age-long slavery to habit and custom".²⁵⁶ This file made it clear that, service to the nation was the only way to win rights. The responsibilities of the department were to study the disabilities of Indian women, enlist women to Congress, harmonize and conduct the activities of Congress women and keep contact with other women's associations. The women's department wanted to raise the political awareness of woman and identify Congress with social change that benefited women.²⁵⁷ Obviously, this new department anticipated to appoint the functions of the national women's organizations and place women under the control of the Indian National Congress.

Bengali Women's Participation in the Quit India Movement

The visit of Sir Stafford Cripps (1942) to India, as a substitute of creating an understanding between the Indians and the British Government through the message of benevolent government minimizing bitterness may be taken a new phase of the colonial rule in India. But the failure of the Cripps Mission and the more reverses suffered by the British army in the World War-II made Gandhi very worried. He feared that India might go the way of Malaya and Burma if the British did not leave. On 14 July, 1942, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution at Wardha, calling for the instant departure of British rule from India. On August 8, 1942, the All India Congress Committee met in Bombay and passed a resolution calling for

British leaving from India. Gandhiji's message, "Do or Die" became a maxim for the millions, which brought about mass arousing among the Indians. Even the government employees started supporting those who were fighting for the country's freedom. But Gandhiji and all other leaders were arrested on 9 August, 1942 and the country was on fire. The movement soon widen to other places.²⁵⁸

Thousands of women and girl students took dynamic part in the Quit India movement of 1942. Instantly after the passing of the 'Quit India' resolution women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur, Rameswari Nahru, Meera Behn and others were taken into custody. Sucheta Kripalini, wife of Acharya Kripalini and Aruna Asaf Ali (Ganguli), Bengal daughter and wife of U. P Barrister Asaf Ali had to go underground.²⁵⁹ Aruna Asaf Ali took the guide and led the mass revolt in the 1942 uprising along with Achyut Patwardhan and few others²⁶⁰. Women as well, played a major role in the Quit India movement in different parts of the country, mostly for the lack of male leaders, who were arrested in the first round. Apart from taking out processions and holding demonstrations, women also prepared training camps in which "they were given training in civic duties and first aid, educated on democracy and Indian Constitution. Training in *lathi* and drill was also imparted in the camps".²⁶¹ The women also prepared Political Prisoner's Relief Fund and collected a huge amount of money. Some women went underground and aimed at the movement from there.

It is thus, during the Quit India movement of 1942 that in Bengal many women started rising as local leaders, specially, to organize resistance after large scale arrests. Quite a few apparently were entrusted with the charge of keeping local organizations floating in times of crises. To stress their vital coordinating role these female chiefs were termed as 'dictators'. In this context, the women of Midnapore district played a noteworthy part in this movement. The Tamluk sub-division had organized itself against any possible repression, be it English or Japanese invasion. They raised a defense force of volunteers which consisted of both men and women. Numerous camps were opened to give training who joined the ranks. Side by side, a *Khadi* centre was also organized where four thousand spinners were working. Among the 'national governments' which were established in some areas was the '*Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar*', the free government of Midnapore, formed at Tamluk, Bengal under the leadership of Satish Chandra Samanta, the expert Congress leader

on 17th December, 1942. It had its own army known as *Bidyut Bahini* and the women's wing *Bhagini Sena*. This national government which functioned within the limits laid down by the Congress Committee kept on performance till 31 August, 1944. Sabitri Dey led the '*Bhagini Sena*' efficiently before she was also caught and imprisoned. Rashimoni Debi refused to accept police repressions and wrote a song "*police ele maro Jhanta*" (beat the police with broom-sticks) which became well-liked among the women. She also was caught and imprisoned.²⁶²

The women of Tamluk arranged a number of processions and in one of these seven women were arrested and each of them given two years imprisonment. Matangini Hazra, a woman of seventy-three and child bride of Trilochan Hazra, had led one such procession with the purpose of capturing the Thana. The police started inflicting blows on her hands, but she never loosened her grasp and made sure that the flag which she was holding did not go down. At the Thana, she urged the officials to give up their jobs and join the national movement. But, sorry to say, a bullet was fired at her and proved to be mortal.²⁶³ With Matangini Hazra, Sashibala Debi became martyr during the movement. Matangini was so influenced by Gandhiji and people lovingly called her '*Gandhi-buri*' (Buri means an old woman) or 'the old Gandhi-Lady'.

After that, on 9 January, 1943, six hundred soldiers encircled three villages of Masuria, Dalmasuria and Chandipur in Mahishadal Thana of Midnapore. Apart from plundering these villages, the soldiers resorted to offensive behavior and illegally beaten as many as forty-six women on a single day. In order to defend their honour and self-respect, the women formed an organization called *Bhagini Seva Sangha*. Some of the women united to this organization kept weapons like '*bantis*' and '*das*' with them so as to protect themselves from illegal attack. Two women were prosecuted under the Arms Act for drawing out daggers in self-defence. There was however, no protection and security.²⁶⁴

On the other hand, many women in Calcutta involved in the August revolt and went to jail. Side by side, *maffossil* women of Dinajpur, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Mymensingh, Dacca, Barisal etc. districts also took active part in this movement.²⁶⁵

However, many facts are lacking to make a complete evaluation yet, it is clear that, large numbers of women deserted their tyrannical shelter and joined the movement for the independence of the sub-continent. In this respect, Manikuntala

Sen, a woman organizer, comments that: “The mass participation by women in India’s independence movement was larger than in any country’s liberation movement in the world.....”²⁶⁶ Though, Bengali women have been equally prominent in many other apolitical movements through their associations.

Bengali Women in the Apolitical Association

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the number of social reform associations for women grew rapidly. Gandhi urged women to ‘come out’ and join the struggle, continuously insisting that constructive work likely spinning, wearing *Khadi*, teaching and ‘serving’ – were as essential as attending meetings. Equally, the apolitical organizations were concerned with ‘uplift’ which had implications for women’s socio-political rights and empowerment. If the activities of women in this period are to be viewed as a ‘movement for rights and empowerment’, we need to ask questions about the kind of movement it was, the problems it sought to solve and who became involved. In the following pages, we will look at three apolitical associations: (a) *Sarojnalini Nari Mangal Samiti* of Saroj Nalini Dutt, (b) *Anjumane Khawatine Islam* of Begum Rokeya and (c) *Nari Siksha Samiti* of Lady Abala Bose. Through the efforts of these three women, it is necessary to highlight about women’s new roles and responsibilities, encouraged them to join organizations and mobilized them for activity. However, it is possible to generalize about the movement itself, in terms of its constituency, the problems it identified and the solutions offered.

Sarojnalini Nari Mangal Samiti: Sarojnalini Dutt, a woman who made her impact primarily in the province of Bengal, was the founder of the women’s association movement in that province. She was born on 9th October, 1887 in Hoogly district, the fourth daughter of Brajendranath De, a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service. In fact, Saroj Nalini’s family held sophisticated ideas about the role of women. Although her mother, Nagendra Nandini Debi spent her early married life in seclusion under the guidance of her mother in-law. Saroj Nalini was educated at home and she did not achieve any certificate from any University. Saroj Nalini was taught to play tennis, ride horseback and participate in other outdoor sports. It was in these early years that she learned to observe traditional customs and behave in a way which would not insult less westernized Bengalis.²⁶⁷ Trailokya Mohini Debi, her grand-mother, moulded her character in another way. Influenced

by her ideas Sarojnalini was attracted to various social reforms. She mixed with the European friends of her father. As she went to England at the age of six she did not get any opportunity to complete her primary education. From her very early age she went through different religious sects. The ethics emanating from different religious doctrines of eastern and western world left a permanent mark upon her life.²⁶⁸

Married to Guru Saday Dutta in 1906, Saroj Nalini becomes his associate in work and play. At the time of their marriage, Guru Saday was a sub-divisional officer in Kishergunge and future postings took him to other small towns in the *moffussil*. Saroj Nalini accompanied him on his tours of the district. She was able to take the best of custom and merge it with the principles of the progressive.²⁶⁹ All these principles were reflected in her future activities. The most significant among them was the well-being of women.

Saroj Nalini's village experiences affected her extremely. She felt that, there were three areas where major changes were needed: education, social service and unity. In her father's home she had knowledgeable a life style that permitted women great freedom. But in the rural areas of Bengal she found that, many women were uneducated, secluded and isolated. Concerned by their troubles, she decided to take the enterprise in forming some kind of society where women could meet with each other and share ideas and problems. Because women were the pillars of overall development of the society. To apply this idea she established *Mahila Samiti* (Association of Females) in different parts of Bengal nay India. This implimentation came true in 1913 when the first *Mahila Samiti* was set up in Pabna district (now in Bangladesh). From Pabna she moved to Birbhum (1916), Sultanpur (1917), Rampurhat (1918), Bankura (1921) and Darjeeling (1924), starting a women's association in each town.

The aims of these *Samiti* were to develop friendly teamwork among *purdah* women, curiosity them in the world outside their homes and arranged lectures on practical subjects. However, these in fact simple objectives had far-reaching implications. This was recognized by some of the men who refused to allow their wives to attend even one meeting. In addition to given that new social contacts, these early women's societies served two general purposes: they provided a platform for women's demands and a place for adult education. The education accessible was related to the role of woman as a nurturer and highlighted on food and nutrition,

child care, hygiene and embroidery. In many cases, the women were also timid to utter demands but there are examples of women using these *Mahila Samitis* to request the services of a female doctor and to set up schools for girls.²⁷⁰ Saroj Nalini also attempted to promote patriotism and a concern for later issues. Preparations were made to deliver lectures on health and financial supervision of their family. At the same time training facilities relating to village crafts were made available to the widow to make them self-dependent.

In 1916 Saroj Nalini founded a branch of *Mahila Samiti* in Birbhum. This *Samiti* took a very positive step to encourage Home Science among the female members of the family. The members of this *Samiti* used to examine the students and rewarded the successful candidates. They donated money to the local hospitals for the treatment of the patients. It also managed to secure funds for the improvement of the injured soldiers engaged in battle fields. The members gathered once in a week and sewed clothes for the injured soldiers of Mesopotamia.²⁷¹

Saroj Nalini also established two other branches of this *Samiti* in Sultanpur and Rampurhat in 1917 and 1918 respectively. In 1921 she formed another wing in Bankura. To train the women in mid-wifery she built a maternity house. She donated money to the local hospital and school. Her determined passion beset the women of Pabna and Khulna. They agreed to come out from seclusion and attend their husbands in broad day light. All these activities attracted the attention of many people at home and abroad. In 1924, she was also formed another wing of the *Samiti* in Darjeeling. Many women from Bengali, Bhutia, Nepali and English attended to the *Samiti*. Arrangement were made in this *Samiti* regarding child care, child welfare, women health etc.²⁷² The members were given lectures about India and its great patriots, introduced to Tagore's songs and during World War-I, encouraged to manufacture items of clothing and tooth-brushes for the volunteers. In 1918, the British Emperor conferred M.B.E (member of the British Emperor) title upon her while the Red Cross Society gave a certificate during the First World War exalting her social work for a noble cause.²⁷³

Later than Saroj Nalini's untimely death on 19th January 1925, her husband and admirers founded the *Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association for Women's Work in Bengal* on 8th February, 1925. This association continued and extended her work, establishing further *Samities* and arranging for classes in handicrafts and

midwifery, baby clinics and schools to teach domestic science. A number of other associations were being formed at this time, but they were in general urban-based. However, Saroj Nalini's concern had been with women outside the major towns and cities: 'There can be no real improvements in the country unless we can educate and widen the ideas of women in the *moffussil* towns and villages.'²⁷⁴ In the next chapter will be highlight about the relations with central *Mahila Samiti* to other wings of *Mahila Samiti* which were set up in different districts of Bengal and other states as well.

The most important point is that, who were the people she recruited for the *Mahila Samitis*? In the beginning, her efforts were directed entirely towards women who would have been measured 'middle class'. Their husbands held positions in the government, were professionals or landowners. Labouring women and the wives of craftsmen were not invited. This should not be seen as affectedness so much caste and class narrowness. Though, it was hoped that the women who took part in these organizations would become conscious of the needs of their society and feel self-assured in the world outside their homes so that they could play a part in social revival. In this way, they searched their rights and became empowered.

Anjumane Khawatine Islam: Rokeya Khatun, a social reformer and pioneer feminist writer of Bengal, was born in 1880 in a Muslim Zamindar family of Pairabond in the district of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh). Her father Zahiruddin Abu Ali Hyder Saber was an orthodox man. In 1896 when she was only sixteen years old, was married to Syed Shakhawat Hossain, a deputy magistrate of Bhagalpur in Bihar and she became Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. But in 1909 her husband passed away and Begum Rokeya she became a widow just at the age of twenty nine. Only a few months after the death of her husband, on 1st October, 1909 she started a school – Sakhawat Memorial Girl's School at Bhagalpur, Bihar. But she had to leave the place of her husband in hatred when her step-daughter and son-in-law began to torture her for the property left by Sakhawat Hossain. At last, she came to Calcutta and within a few months; on 16th March, 1911 she started the same school in a small house in Oliullah Lane, Calcutta with eleven students only. The school was shifted to 86-A Lower Circular Road, Calcutta in 1915.²⁷⁵ This was a turning point in Rokeya's life.

In fact, the last decades of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century were mostly significant for Muslims of Bengal because of changes in their socio- economic, educational as well as political structures, especially in the districts of lower Bengal, which basically distorted the character of that community. The growth of a middle class, with its roots in the countryside, although a delayed occurrence, was active in that community's experience with 'modernization' and increased participation in the nationalist struggle. This 'awakening' played a vital role in stimulating the community and in redefining its political identity.²⁷⁶

In this respect, Rokeya has been a symbol of the educational aspirations of Bengali Muslim women since the early twentieth century. In 1916, Rokeya founded an association of Muslim women *Anjumane Khawatine Islam* or *Calcutta Mohammedan Ladies Association*. The aims and objectives of this association were to provide free education to poor Muslim girls', to arrange for their marriage and to bring about a sense of self- consciousness among Muslim women.²⁷⁷ *The Mussalman*, one of the Muslim Magazine remarks about the function of *Anjumane Khawatine Islam* that, "Its objects are to promote unity, social intercourse and friendly feeling among Mohammedan ladies resident in Calcutta, by providing them with a common meeting ground, to better the condition of Moslem women in general by eradicating pernicious social customs and by diffusing proper and useful knowledge, and to establish and conduct an industrial school for poor and needy Mohamedan women with a view to qualify them to earn their own livelihood."²⁷⁸ Annual conference of *Anjumane Khawatine Islam* was held in every year. About the activities of *Anjumane*, Usha Chakraborty wrote in her research states that, "The Muslim community under the patronage of Rokeya Begum founded in a society called by the name *Anjumane Khawatin* in Calcutta in 1916 for the upliftment of Bengali girls. Cottage industry training was given by it along with literary instruction. Women used to attend there mostly from bustees."²⁷⁹

Though, *Anjumane Khawatin* was a social reform organization but gradually did movements for social, educational and political rights of women. Even government recognized this *Samiti* and their views. The Government of India Act, 1935, a committee was appointed under the leadership of Sir Lory Hemand, Governor of Bihar-Orissa and this *Samiti* met him for women's rights. By the efforts of this *Samiti*, some sits were preserved for women in the Bengal Legislative

Council. In 1936, an International Women's Conference was held in Calcutta and the members of *Anjumane* participated in this conference and showed their activities.²⁸⁰ It may be said that, *Anjuman Khawatine Islam* was a most significant women's association of early twentieth century through which Bengali Muslim women searched their socio-political rights and empowerment. In fact, our whole nation is grateful to Begum Rokeya for her noble struggle for the improvement of Indian society.

Nari Siksha Samiti: Lady Abala Bose, wife of Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, the world famous scientist, born in 1865. Lady Abala Bose was a social worker in the true spirit of the word. She could see that, without the emancipation of women a vast country like India could never achieve the goal of bringing up healthy children for a healthy nation. She believed that, such emancipation could be made possible only through reinstating self-respect among them. Self-respect needs some pillars to support it and those pillars are education, self-sufficiency and economic freedom.²⁸¹

In that connection, there were earnest efforts towards social reforms by renowned social reformers which brought about some changes on the lawful frontage. But there was a lack of organized platforms to fight terrible illiteracy among women and the disgraceful difficulty of the young destitute women, most of whom were economically handicapped, widows or orphans.

With the purpose of making poor and destitute women of Bengal self-sufficient by imparting education and training to them, Lady Abala Bose founded *Nari Siksha Samiti* in 1919 with the help of her renowned husband. In her noble cause she got support from the most distinguished personality Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, the then Mayor of Calcutta, gifted a piece of Corporation land for setting up the project. She was very much inspired by the great social reformers like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar for the cause of women emancipation and equally was she influenced by the ideals of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore who ever spoke about the dignity of women. On this question, she was also impressed by the thoughts and ideas of Sister Nivedita who contributed a lot for the self-dignity of Indian women.²⁸²

Lady Abala Bose was a pioneer in stretching out her helping hand to the utmost corners in rural areas. The first three girls' schools were founded in Calcutta itself in 1919, the Muralidhar Girls' School was most important among these. But from 1921 her activities through the *Nari Siksha Samiti* were extended towards the

villages. For the upliftment of the tribal girls, a centre was founded by her at Jhargram with the help of Raja Virendra Malladev Bahadur of Jhargram, Midnapore. After that, she established eight primary schools in the villages of Hoogly and Howrah districts. In 1924, fourteen primary school established in Dacca, Faridpur, and Pabna. In this way, fifty nine primary schools were founded before independence. Lady Abala Bose materialized her strong assurance of women emancipation into action and that she did silently, selflessly and without hesitation. Abala Bose in fact established almost 200 other schools in various villages of Bengal.²⁸³

Side by side, in 1925, Lady Abala Bose founded *Vidyasagar Bani Bhawan* as second branch organization of *Nari Siksha Samiti* to materialize her principles. She had very correctly assessed the miserable condition of the young widows of Bengal which was getting poorer with the break-up of the joint family system. She therefore, conceived the idea of recruiting teachers from among those women for running primary schools. They were trained at *Vidyasagar Bani Bhawan* for this purpose. Later, the work of *Vidyasagar Bani Bhawan*, set up in 1922 at Jhargram to teach occupational training to middle-class widows of Bengal. Later than that, as the scenario changed and the practice of child marriage was on the decline, her venture twisted towards educating and rehabilitating displaced and economically distressed young girls and women. Most of the centres started working and were developed during the pre-independence era. Besides that, *Nari Samavyay Bhandar* or *Women's Co-operative Store* founded by her in Calcutta to help the distressed women.²⁸⁴

Still after independence, Lady Abala Bose's mission of spreading education and income-generating training to women of the under advantaged sections of the society has been taken up by many sincere social workers and voluntary organizations and has become an essential part of Governmental policy. But Lady Abala Bose has been and will continue to be regarded as a pioneer and path-finder of welfare projects for women in need, particularly the young and economically depressed widows. It may be said that, in this way, the women of Bengal searched their socio- political rights and became empowered.

So, one may noted that, the instant outcome of the work of women like Saroj Nalini Dutt, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain or Lady Abala Bose was to bring a number of women into social and political organizations. While a number of women

followed the apolitical lead of women like Saroj Nalini and others, there were many women who joined both political as well as social organizations. In that connection, we may mention here two women's associations, such as *The Girl Students' Association* and *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti*.

The Girl Students' Association: In the decades of 1920s and 1930s, politically conscious female students of middle class origin, however, handful in number, became energetic in various armed revolutionary organizations of Bengal that we already discussed, such as Preetilata Waddedar, Kalpana Dutta, Ujjwala Majumdar, Bina Das, Kamala Chatterjee, Santi Ghosh, Suniti Choudhury etc. Such revolutionary activities had no plan to build up a women movement or any gender conscious mass organization at that period.

There was parallel political current at that period. Endeavour for building organized working class movement in Bengal during the decades of 1930s gathered drive by the untiring efforts of Santoshkumari Debi, Probbabati Dasgupta, Sakina Begum, Sudha Ray, Dr. Maitrayee Basu, Bimalprativa Debi and others and became the cause of bother for the colonial administration. Although most of the leaders belonged to the liberals and philanthropists, some of them were inspired by the socialist and even Marxist political thought. However, the trade union leaders not only came from the educated and wealthy families, they emerged from the working class as well.²⁸⁵ In this respect, the name of Dukhmat Didi of Alambazar mill area of 24 Parganas can be taken into account.

On the other hand, the notice ought to shortly been drawn to the female students who helped in deceitful the ground-work for an independent mass-organization of women. In 1938, a broad movement for the release of political prisoners created excitement throughout British-ruled India. The cause of the revolutionaries under arrest in the remote Andamon islands figured outstandingly in this movement and students were in the forefront of the demonstration. Furthermore, a strikingly huge number of female students were present at the mass rallies held. Some activists then lodged the idea of forming a female students' association.²⁸⁶

As a result, a female students board was set up within the students association that existed already and this board prepared to start conference which was held two years after (in 1940) in the town of Lucknow and 'this was the first ever all-India meet of women's students'.²⁸⁷ It inspired many to join and

membership reached the 50 thousand mark in 1941. In Bengal, the *Girl Students' Association* (GSA) came into being in 1939; the Communists got a chance to introduce their politics ideologically among the young girls of various educational institutions in Bengal. They became organized in the *All Bengal Girl Students' Association* that set up branches in the Calcutta Colleges as well as in the district colleges.²⁸⁸ *The Girl Students' Association* also succeeded in organizing the women activists from different political parties and revolutionary groups of that period. Among the leaders of *Girl Students' Association*, the names of Kanak Dasgupta (Mukherjee), Kalyani Mukherjee (Kumarmangalam), Santi Sarkar, Priti Lahiri (Banerjee) of the Communist Party; Gita Banerjee (Mukherjee) of the Labour Party; Anima Banerjee of the Congress Socialist Party and Shova Majumdar (Ganguly) of Royist Group were remarkable.²⁸⁹

It was a broad arousing among female students in Bengal. This awakening had a special significance; it seems – for Bengali women in general. In forming a separate association for female students challenged the unfair tradition which disqualified women from social life and politics. The intention of the association became to fight prejudices against women's rights. Clearly, many female students were ready to face family opponent and social bane in order to achieve justice for women. Thousands were ready for a battle uphill. As a matter of fact, this socio-economic and political arousing received massive esteem and admiration from good number of women activists even outside the communist circle. Under these circumstances, the *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* (MARS), this was known as '*Women Self-Defence League*' at the national level, ultimately came into existence as an important and the biggest mass-organization of women outstandingly subjugated by the leftists of Bengal.

Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti: The *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* (MARS) emerged out of a misery of the time of World War-II. It would not be any overstatement to say that, MARS was absolutely different from parallel other women's organizations of that time in its nature, objectives and operation as well as in its outlook, approach and actions. Many eminent leftist women leaders like Manikuntala Sen, Kanak Mukherjee and Renu Chakraborty unhesitatingly pointed out that, *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* in Bengal or '*Women's Self-Defence League*' at the national level had entirely changed the idea of previously existing women's

organizations in colonial India. It was nothing but a search for new identity, which was resulting from a powerful feeling for the toiling masses. A deep rooted patriotism along with class-consciousness was definitely a vital factor of such a new awakening among the Indian women of that time.²⁹⁰ They determined not to form a separate women's party but constant to work for a new civil code that would be familiar with women's rights.

This changed view of the leftist women pressure group like MARS involved many non-political or even anti-communist women towards the socio-political activities and programmes undertaken by the *Mahila Atma- Raksha Samiti* all over the decade of the 1940s. Outstanding personalities like Indira Debi Chowdurani, Nelie Sengupta, Aryabala Debi, Rani Mahalanabish, Ela Reid, Provabati Debi, Saraswati Debi, Manjushree Debi, Jyotirmoyee Ganguli, Bimal Prativa Debi along with Manorama Basu (Masima), the popular lady from Brishal district, maintained close relation with the communist led women's movement of that time without any hesitation.²⁹¹ Their anxiety was teaching women how to defend themselves in the incident of a Japanese invasion. After 1941 this association grew as Communist women, newly released from prison, joined its ranks. Renu Chakraborty wrote about public reaction to the boldness of her and her colleagues: 'They thought us to be a peculiar type of women, going all over the area from house to house, shamelessly talking to everybody..... Many (women) became members of our area *Samities*. Others shooed us away. Menfolk made sarcastic remarks and asked their wives to stay away from us'.²⁹²

As a result, within a year of creation of the preparatory organization, the Calcutta Committee of the *Calcutta Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (Calcutta Women's Self-Defence League)* was formed in an open conference held on April 13, 1942 at the University Institute Hall, Calcutta. A commanding executive body was set up with Ela Reid, an eminent social- worker, the grand-daughter of the first Indian Barrister Manmohan Ghosh and wife of Alec Reid, then editor of *The Statesman*, as the convener and Jyotirmoyee Ganguli, Sakina Begum, Phulrenu Guha, Nazimunnesa Ahmed and so many others including Manikuntala Sen, Renu Chakraborty and Kanak Mukherjee as members. After that, in the course of 7th -8th May, 1943 a conference in Overtun Hall, Calcutta, *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (Nikhil Banga Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti)* was shaped. In addition

to calling for the release of Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, MARS taught women about the harms of Fascism and instructed them in self-protection.²⁹³

During the Second World War, the efforts to mobilize urban women politically, irrespective of age, religion, economic or social status, gained impetus under the enterprise of MARS. This associational endeavour established high admirers and drew special concentration during the famine of 1943-44.²⁹⁴ In that time, Bengal had to undergo the most during the August revolt and even more due to natural disaster. An artificial (man-made) famine stalked the country and people died like flies. Those who could flee came away to Calcutta and were dying like livestock on the streets of this city. It was to set up food kitchens that the *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* was shaped during this time. It brought a new gesture of women's contribution in national dealings and a new enthusiasm. In this context, Sadhona Guha (Sen) had composed a song at this time –“*Bhuke hai Bangal*” which was harmonic at all street corners by young men and women, to collect money, rice and clothes for the food crisis people. The women were either giving their blood or their sympathy and assist, wherever and whenever what was being required.²⁹⁵ As Renu Chakraborty Says, “Humanitarian work and political work became one and indivisible.”²⁹⁶

Women members of MARS were noticeable both as sufferers and activists. Hungry women begged for food in civic places and door to door in the fringes. They flocked to the red-light districts, doubling the number of women in Calcutta's brothels.²⁹⁷ Middle-class women came ahead to supply relief and women in *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* organized and led demonstrations calling on the government to take action. On March 17, 1943, a convoy of 5000 women from Calcutta and its fringes marched to the Legislative Assembly protesting against growing prices, the opening of more control shops and demanding food. Famine marches by women also followed in Bankura, Pabna, Madaripur (Faridpur district), Badarganj, Dinajpur and Chittangong.²⁹⁸ MARS members were important in all these demonstrations and there is no hesitation to say that they gave inspiration to local women. In Midnapore 200 women went to the rice mill for demanding lower prices. They stood their position when threatened with police action and were finally permitted to buy rice at their demanding price.²⁹⁹

The organizational fame of the MARS, however, was not achieved only by the relief work, which was carried out among the famine-stricken people of rural Bengal; but was also earned by the day to day actions of MARS among the women in the outline of mass-literacy and health-awareness programmes; efforts to secure equal rights, earnings and self-respect for the women in general and women belonging to the working class in particular. In reality, MARS established its contact with almost each section of the women. On the one hand, it established the *Nari Seva Sangha* (Women Service Association) in late 1944 with the help of the women coming from wealthy or privileged sections of the society, on the other, its relief work among the food suffering rural people as well as among the urban poor was very momentous in becoming well-liked and well accepted the masses.³⁰⁰ Thus, the Bengal Women's 'Food Committee' came into being out of this effort. In Barishal, Manorama Basu established *Nari Jnana Bhaban* with the same purpose. MARS also fought to prohibit polygamy and to give (Hindu) women the right to divorce and inherit paternal property.³⁰¹

In 1944, the MARS had 390 units in 26 districts; in Calcutta it had 13 units, some of which were in the bustees (slums) engaged by the urban poor. Once, the second annual meeting (1944) was held at Barishal in East Bengal, the MARS had 43000 members; 51 delegates, elected by chief members, attended the meeting. 'Ghare Baire' (Home and Abroad); the organ of MARS become very well-liked among the urban educated middle-class readers of Bengal.³⁰² Manikuntala Sen, Renu Chakraborty, Kanak Mukherjee and others played dynamic role in organizing and functioning this association. Ela Reid was the first secretary. In the districts, the following members took charge at different places: Kalyani Dasgupta –Jalpaiguri, Rina Sen and Juiphul Ray - Barishal, Priti Lahiri –Howrah, Maya Sanyal- Pabna, Bina Sen and Rani Mitra- Dinajpur, Reba Roy- Rangpur, Prativa Ganguly- Hoogly, Biva Konar – Burdwan and Bhanu Debi- Khulna. They were energetically working for the uplift and well-being of women as well as struggle for their honour and safety. At that time, Najimunnessa Ahmed formed an association named *Muslim Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti*, which worked side by side with them.³⁰³ Shahajadi Begum, Sabeda Khatun were present in 1944 Dinajpur conference of *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti*.³⁰⁴ Not only that, Sufia Kamal, one of the regular *Saogat* writers, was an associate of the Communist led *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* in Burdwan and had

taken part in protest rallies against Fascism and growing prices. Anowara Khatun, a young doctor, went out to treat the injured in the riot-affected areas of Calcutta.³⁰⁵ Manikuntala Sen, Renu Chakraborty, Maya Lahiri, Ela Mitra, Manorama Basu, Kamala Chatterjee, Bela Lahiri, Biva Sen, Pankajini Chakraborty, Ashoka Gupta etc. were took vital role in the anti-communal riot of 1946 in Calcutta and neighboring areas.³⁰⁶ The important development which one may notice at this time was that, the resistance and organization had reached the mass base. It was no longer limited among the top few and the guidance was gradually being taken over by the middle class educated women; even if they still were mostly urban in nature.

The involvement of the most important personalities of MARS in the peasant struggles prepared by the *Krishak Sabha* during this period has to be mentioned in this context. Tebhaga movement of Bengal (1946-47) bears indication to the vital role played by the *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* in spreading economic and political awareness among the peasant women and challenging social and economic fairness. In truth, women's contribution in the Tebhaga peasant struggle had a profound and extensive impact on the upcoming role of women in the field of political affairs. The arousing of the rural women provided a new course of action to the rural life. Furthermore, it opened a new scope for women empowerment which was concealed for many ages. It also clearly indicated that, the expression of the radical enthusiasm of the most exploited section of the society occurs at the utmost rapidity formerly they initiate to participating in the struggle. At that point of time, their disagreement towards all kinds of uncertainty and compromising tendencies remains the strongest. Throughout the Indian national movement, initiated from the *Swadeshi* movement (1905) down to the Quit India movement (1942) and after, the contribution of women belonging to the upper strata of the Bengali society was praiseworthy but unfortunately the lower sections of the same society were hardly found to have responded and participated in the programme under consideration.³⁰⁷ It is, however, remarkable that, in the spirit of the socio-political situation there was a new wave which brought the lower section women to the forefront and the situation evolved they could not remain as silent spectators. This can nicely been cited in an article titled- 'The Role of Women in the Tebhaga Movement of North Bengal (1946-47)',³⁰⁸ that lower class women of North Bengal specially scheduled caste and tribal women demands critical evaluation of the practice of social forces. Because peasant

women on one hand had a genuine hatred to the existing Indian society and in their sensitive mind they cultivated a sense of protest against the evils whereby their dignity as women was severely wounded and on the other, they faced immense opposition and torture from the government.

Therefore, hundreds of peasant women were motivated to think not only in class (economic) lines but also in terms of gender equality. That was the success of organized left- dominated women movement (MARS) of that moment. Essentially, it was only in the Tebhaga peasant rebellion that the women's association or the innovative working women's association began to develop among the peasant women and increase quickly in the Tebhage dominated areas of Bengal.

It may thus be said that, these above mentioned women's associations can assert double meaning in women history –

- (a) They signified the shift of direction of women's movements from male to female. Issues and questions were raised from women's angles moderately than those of men. Similarly, they provided a stage for women and generated a confidence that the liability of regenerating women belonged to women themselves. This conception is the origin of bonding among women and of the materialization of search for power and authority from a votive force.
- (b) Women political activists, however, not sufficient knowledgeable with conscious socio-political rights, were closely connected with women's associations, in that way establishing a relation between the national struggle and women's movement. Women leaders of national status were capably assisted by ordinary women workers in different districts. Women's experiences in the political campaigns from the *Swadeshi* movement had given them 'a taste of agitational politics' and self-assurance to win their own cause i. e. empowerment.

It is true that, the indication for women's upliftment came primarily from men. This put an indirect boundary to the aspirations of women. On behalf of more responsive women, however, contribution in the freedom movement intended a protracted fight against two different badges of servility i.e. patriarchy and colonialism. Even though the first struggle remained mostly unconvincing, a determined initiative was made in the period under review. Active participation in

the association helped to convey about an extraordinary move in women's perspectives towards life, their world-view, self-image and ambitions. More than it refashioned women's individuality. Striding along a path which had habitually been an entirely male sphere, the path of politics, instilled in their united personality an aspect of grit and strength of mind which ultimately won grudging esteem from their male counterparts.

Notes and References

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5. 'The Women's Movement in India: Traditional Symbols and New Roles', an article by Geraldine H. Forbes in *Social Movements in India- Studies in peasant, Backward Classes, Sectarian, Tribal and Women's Movements*, M.S.A. Rao (ed.), , Manohar, New Delhi, First published 1979, Reprinted 2004, p. 365.
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7. Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* pp. 37-39.
8. Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, (Translated and with an introduction by Wandana Sonalkar), *We Also Made History- Women in the Ambedkarite Movement*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2008, p. 135.
9. Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984, p. 273; see also Ghulam Murshid, *Nari Pragati- Adhunikatar Abhighate Bamgaramani* (in Bengali), Naya

Udyog, Kolkata, First Edition- January 2001, p. 70; Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *Ami Nari- Tinsho Bacharer (18-20 Shatak) Bangali Narir Itihas*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, First Published 2001, Third Printed 2007, p. 62. On 14 February 1866 they assembled in the house of Dr. Robson where they were shown magic lantern slides and given a talk on how air is purified and many other themes also. On 24 December 1866, the women members invited Miss Mary Carpenter to their *Samaj* and gave her a welcome address and on that very evening they attended an evening party at the residence of Dr. Suryakumar (Goodeve) Chakraborty in honour of Miss Mary Carpenter along with men. On the next day Miss Carpenter invited the ladies of the *Brahmika Samaj* to a tea-party on the occasion of Christ's birthday when she read to them some portions from the Bible. Uhsa Chakraborty, *Condition of Bengali Women Around The 2nd Half of The 19th Century*, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 42 and 98-99.

10. Uhsa Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 100; see also 'Women's Emancipation in 19th-Century Bengal', an article by Dr. Manju Chattopadhyay in *Women in Indian Life and Society*, Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee (ed.), Punthi Pustak and Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1996, p. 155.

11. The Brahma youths of Bhagalpur in Bihar were inspired by Ramtanu Lahiri had started a movement for the emancipation and education of women and at the beginning of 1863 organized the *Bhagalpur Mahila Samiti*, as the first women's *Sabha* in Bengal and Bihar. See Kali Kinkar Datta, *A Social History of Modern India*, The Macmillan Company of India Limited, New Delhi, 1975, p. 167; also in Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p.273.

12. Kali Kinkar Datta, *op.cit.* p.176; see also Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 274; Ghulam Murshid, *op. cit.* pp. 21-22.

13. *Nari Samaj O Bratabidhi* in *Abalabandhab*, No. 1, June 1879, p. 8.

14. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p.276; see also Sarada Ghosh, *Narichetana O Sangathan- Auponibeshik Bangla 1829-1925*,(in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, August, 2013, pp. 74-75.

15. Meredith Borthwick, *Loc. cit.*

16. *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 7th August, 1879.
17. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 277; also in Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 75.
18. The four bratas of the *Arya Nari Samaj* were the *Maitreyi brata* for those who wanted to cultivate religious fellowship with their husbands; the *Savitri brata* for self-sacrificing devotion to the husband; the *Draupadi brata* for household duties and the *Lilavati brata* for those searching knowledge. Beside these, The *Victoria brata* was to teach women how to love and help servants and the *Nightingale brata* was for offering relief to suffering humanity. See in details Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* pp. 282-283; also in Sarada Ghosh, *op.cit.* pp.76-77.
19. Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 101; see also Mousumi Bandyopadhyay, *Kadambini Ganguly-The Archetypal Woman of Nineteenth Century Bengal*, The Women Press, Delhi, 2011, pp. 238-239.
20. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* pp. 278-279; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* 77.
21. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* pp. 279-281; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 77-78.
22. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 285; see also Ghulam Murshid, *op.cit.* pp. 72-73; Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 78-79.
23. Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 47.
24. Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 37. In 1882 Swarnakumari Debi founded a *Theosophical Society* in Calcutta for women; it could not run long for want of enough women members with theosophical ideas and closed down in 1886. She next started *Sakhi Samiti* in the same year. A Hindu Lady Zaminder, Swarnamoyee Debi, donated Rs. 1,025 to this *Society*. See Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 102.
25. Rajan Mahan, *Women in Indian National Congress (1921-1931)*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1999, p.41; also in Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 128.
26. Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *op.cit.* pp. 62-63; Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 86f; Ghulam Murshid *op. cit.* p. 73.

27. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol.4, No.5, September 1891, p. 320.
28. *Mahiladiger Sabha Samiti* (Association of Women), an article by Amritalal Gupta in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 8, No. 1, December 1904- January 1905, pp. 496-497.
29. *Mahila Samiti* (Women Association) in *Antahpur*, Vol. 4, No. 12, December 1901.
30. 'Special Supplement' in *Anatahpur*, Vol. 3, No. 13, December, 1900.
31. There were also other women's associations such as *Mymensingh Antahpur Stree Siksha Sabha* (1877), *Faridpur Suhrid Sabha* (1880), *Gaila Chhatra Sammilani Sabha* (Barishal, 1881), *Dhaka Musalman Suhrid Sammilani* (1883), *Tripura Hitaishini Sabha* (Kumilla, 1896), *Syhlet Union* (1896) etc. Beside these, *Tripura Stree Siksha Samiti*, *Bakharganj Hitaishini Sabha*, *Syhlet Sammilan Samaj* etc. were most important. Side by side, many periodicals were most significant such as *Shubhosadhini* (Dhaka, 1871), *Mahapap Balyabibaha* (Dhaka, 1873), *Balaranjika* (Barishal, 1873) etc. See Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *op. cit.* pp. 63-64.
32. 'Women's Emancipation in 19th-Century Bengal', an article by Dr. Manju Chattopadhyay in *Women in Indian Life and Society*, Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee (ed.), Punthi Pustak and Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1996, p. 157; see also Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajijul Hoque, *op. cit.* p. 63.
33. The most notable of these were the Hiranmayee Debi's *Bidhaba Silpasharam*, 1906; *the Bharat Stree Mahamandal*, 1910; *Saroj Nalini Mahila Samities* from 1913 on; *the Nari Siksha Samiti*, 1919; *the Bengal Women's Educational League*, 1927. The culmination of all these efforts was the foundation of the *All- India Women's Conference* in 1927. See Lotika Ghose, *Social and Educational Movements in Bethune School*, pp. 155-165.
34. 'Rights and the Women's Movement', an article by Shireen Huq in *Infinite Variety- Women in Society and Literature*, Firdous Azim, Niaz Zaman (ed.), University Press Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 1994, p. 15.

35. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 16.
36. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 19.
37. Barbara Welter, *The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860*, American Quarterly, Summer 1966, pp. 151-171.
38. Bharati Ray, *op.cit.* pp. 177-178.
39. 'Revolutionary Terrorism', an article by Gopal Haldar in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, Atulchandra Gupta (ed.), National Council of Education, Bengal, Jadavpur, Calcutta, First published December, 1958, Revised and enlarged edition-May, 1977, p. 236; see also Arun Chandra Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, Orient Longman, Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, New Delhi, First published 2nd October, 1971, pp. 83-84; David M. Laushey, *Bengal Terrorism & The Marxist Left- Aspects of Regional Nationalism in India, 1905-1942*, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay Calcutta, 1975, p. 4; Dhananjoy Roy, *Uttarbanga- Unish O Bish Satak* (in Bengali), Deep Prakashan, Kolkata, January, 2002, p. 161.
40. Jiban Tara Haldar, *Banglar Prashiddho Anushilan Samitir Shankhipta Itishas* (in Bengali), Jiban Tara Haldar, Calcutta, 1950, pp. 1-5; see also David M. Laushey, *Loc. cit.*
41. Arun Chandra Guha, *op. cit.* p. 84.
42. David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* p. 4.
43. David. M. Laushey, *Loc. cit.*
44. I. Mallikarjuna Sharma (Edited and annotated), *Remembering Our Revolutionaries*, Marxist Study Forum, Hyderabad, First Edition December, 1994, p.189.
45. Tirtha Mandal, *The Women Revolutionaries of Bengal 1905-1939*, Minerva, Calcutta, 1991, p. 12.
46. I. Mallikarjuna Sharma (Edited and annotated), *op.cit.* p. 191.
47. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* pp. 9f.

48. Arun Chandra Guha, *op. cit.* p. 473.
49. Kamala Dasgupta, *Swadhinata Sangramee Banglar Nari* (in Bengali), Jayashri Prakashan, Kolkata, First pub. Aswin 1370 (B.S), Second edition- Anshar 1396 (B. S). p. 8.
50. Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. III, Advaita Asram, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Calcutta, 1953, p. 242.
51. Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* p. 9.
52. ‘Manabatabadi Vivekanander Bhabnay Nari’ (in Bengali), an article by Ichhimuddin Sarkar, in *Sudakshina*, Vivekananda O Dwijendralal Roy Sankha, 1420 (B.S), 24th year, 2013 A. D. D. L. No. 48/90, Kolkata, p. 193.
- 52a. Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 105.
53. *Bamabodhini patrika*, Vol.6, No.92, April, 1871.
54. *New Dispensation*, 21 May, 1882.
55. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 338; see also Mousumi Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 236.
56. Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 106; see also Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata* (in Bengali), Dey’s Publishing, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, First Dey’s Edition – January 2007, pp. 28 and 216. This is an excellent autobiography but deals only with her life before her marriage.
57. Usha Chakraborty, *Loc.cit.* See also Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 339.
58. *Pratihar*, 5 February, 1892 in Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal, 20 February 1892; also in Mousumi Bandhyopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 237.
59. *Bangabasi*, 18 September 1897 in Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal, 25 September 1877; also in Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 339; Mousumi Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 237.

60. 'Society and Politicization of Women', an article by Nabanita Datta in *The Study of Social History – Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. I, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, June, 2013, p. 200.
61. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 30.
62. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Jatiya Andolane Banga Nari* (in Bengal), Viswabharati Granthalay, Calcutta, Bhadra 1361 (B.S), p. 4; see also Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 107; Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* pp. 341-342; 'Women's Emancipation in 19th-Century Bengal', an article by Dr. Manju Chattopadhyay in *Women in Indian Life and Society*, Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee (ed.), Punthi Pustak and Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1996, p. 157; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 122; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 41; Mousumi Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.* pp. 240-241.
63. Annie Besant, *How India Wrought for Freedom*, Madras, 1915, p. 116.
64. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 30.
65. Usha Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 107; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 40-41; 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance – As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar(ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First edition 2002, Reprinted-2007, p. 158.
66. Meredith Borthwick, *op.cit.* p. 343.
67. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 33; 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance – As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First edition 2002, Reprints-2007, p. 158.
68. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 42.
69. 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance – As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First edition 2002, Reprints-2007, p. 158.

70. *Jatiya Shilpa O Bharat Mahila Samaj* (National Art and Society of Indian Women), in *Antahpur*, Vol.4, No.12, December, 1901.
71. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata* (in Bengali), p. 152; see also Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 6; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 34.
72. *Swadesh- Pujar Bangamahila*, in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, Vol. 8, No. 2, November, 1905, p. 507.
73. ‘The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 182-183.
74. Manmohan Kaur, *Role of Women in Freedom Movement (1857-1947)*, Sterling Publishers, Delhi, 1968, pp. 99-97. Facts for this section have been drawn; amongst others from the book by Kamala Dasgupta, *Swadhinata Sangramae Banglar Nari* (in Bengali), Jayashri Prakashan, Kolkata, First Pub. 1370 (B.S). Second edition-1396 (B.S).
75. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 28.
76. ‘Women’s Role in Indian Politics: An Overview’, an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women in India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 265.
77. P. N. Chopra, *Women in Indian Freedom Struggle*, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi, 1975, p. 7; see also Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 8.
78. *Sanjivani*, 19 April 1906; also in *Sandhya*, 18 and 23 April 1906, Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal, Calcutta, see also Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 7; Uhsa Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 108; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 27.
79. Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, New Edition, Permanent Black, New Delhi, Third impression 2014, pp. 289-290.
80. *Sanjivani*, 24 and 31 August and 28 September, 1905.

81. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 186.
82. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 187.
83. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 50.
84. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.*, p. 46. In 1906 another *Mahila Silpa Samiti* in Calcutta started under the patronage of Maharani of Mayurbhanj. Its object was to train upper and middle class women, especially Hindu widows in cottage industries and thus enable them to earn in their own homes. It started an industrial training school in Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, in the same year, and by 31 March had 25 students on its roll. Silk weaving, lace work, hosiery work, embroidery were taught there along with some literary instruction. There were separate sections for Hindu and Muslim women. The Government helped with Rs. 304 per month, the public subscribed Rs. 1415. See Uhsa Chakraborty, *op.cit.* pp. 60-61.
85. This is the view point of Manikuntala Sen, personal interview, October-November, 1984. Manikuntala was one of the leading persons of the largest mass-organization of Bengali women in the forties, the *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti*. She is also the author of an important autobiography, *Se Diner Katha* (Memories of those Days), Nabapatra Prakashan, Clacutta, 1982.
86. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 13; see also Uhsa Chakraborty, *op.cit.* p. 109; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* 46.
87. 'The Role of Women in the Indian Struggle for Freedom', an article by Aparna Basu in *Indian Women: From Purdah to Modernity*, B. R. Nanda (ed.), Vikas, Delhi, 1976, p. 18.
88. Sister Nivedita was not a Bengali by birth, but an Irish woman. She came under the influence of Swami Vivekananda and dedicated herself to the service of India, especially in the field of education.

89. Manmohan Kaur, *op. cit.* pp. 91-93.
90. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 30.
91. *Mahakali Pathshala*, Home Political Confidential Proceedings, File No. 111 (1-3), Calcutta.
92. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 3; see also Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p 188; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* pp. 46-47.
93. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 51.
94. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 184.
95. Meredith Borthwick, *op. cit.* p. 340.
96. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata* (in Bengali), pp. 128-143 and 153; see also Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p 5; 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance – As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First edition 2002, Reprinted- 2007, pp. 159-160.
97. *Modern Review*, June, 1953, p. 469; see also I. Malkikarjuna Sharma, *op. cit.* p. 68.
98. I. Mallikarjuna Sharma, *op. cit.* pp. 68-69; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 34.
99. *Modern Review*, October 1911, p. 344; also in Jogesh Chandra Bagal *op. cit.* p.16; 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945)', an article by Bharati Ray in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance – As I remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First edition 2002, Reprinted-2007, p. 163.
100. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 50.
101. Annie Besant, daughter of William Page Wood, was born on October 1, 1847 and was married early to Frank Besant, a Clergyman, which however was soon

broken. Her mother was an Irish, Emily Morris and Annie inherited her fiery spirit from her. After her marriage had ended, she came under the influence of Charles Bradlaugh, who was sympathetic to the cause of India's freedom and Annie Besant joined as the co-editor of Bradlaugh's paper 'National Reformer'. Sometimes later, she joined in the '*Theosophical Society*' of Madame Blavatsky. It was with the work of this Society that Annie Besant was sent to India in 1893. She remained closely involved with the Society's work all through her life, was elected president of the Society in 1907 and remained so till her death in 1933. Mrs. Besant began her crusade for education, with the declared ideal that it was to be "an education founded on Indian ideals and enriched but not dominated by thought and culture of the West". In 1897 she started working for the Hindu College at Benaras. In 1906 Mrs. Besant organized within the *Theosophical Society* two organizations; the 'Sons of India' and the 'Daughters of India' who were to work for the social reforms as the end of the *Theosophical Society* was basically educational and philosophical in character. Mrs. Besant joined the Congress in 1914 and "brought new ideas, new talents, new resources and although a new method of organisation and a new outlook into the field of Congress". See Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 22-24; also in Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* pp. 59-60.

102. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p.61.

103. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 184. p. 190.

104. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 24.

105. *The Besant Spirit*, Vol. 4, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, p. 115.

106. See for instance 'Our Own Times', an article by Hannah Sen in *Women of India*, Tara Ali Baig (ed.), Publications Division, Delhi, 1958, p. 35.

107. Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India- Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, First South Asian edition 1998, Second Reprint 2000, p. 73; see also Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 240.

108. Neera Desai & Maithreyi Krishnaraj, *Women and Society in India*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, First Published 1987, Second Revised Edition 1990, p. 272; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.*, p.74; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 41; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 67.

109. Vina Mazumdar (ed.), *Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of Women in India*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979, p. ix. Vina Mazumdar also argues that some women might have exercised considerable power through informal channels and their hold on some men, but there was no opportunity of wielding power by 'women as a group'.

110. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 191; see also Anowar Hossain, *Swadhinta Sangrame Banglar Muslim Nari (1873-1947)*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, May 2006, p. 172.

111. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 29 and 41.

112. 'Votes for Women: The Demand for Women's Franchise in India 1917-1937', an article by Geraldine H. Forbes in *Symbols of Power: Studies on the Political Status of Women in India*, Vina Mazumdar (ed.), Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1979, p.14.

113. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *Women's Struggle- A History of the All India Women's Conference (1927-2002)*, Monohar, New Delhi, First Published 1990, Second edition- 2003, p. 70; See also 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 191; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

114. Aprna Basu, Bharati Ray, *Loc.cit.* See also Vina Majumdar, *op. cit.* pp. 4-8; 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 192.

115. Mathulakshmi Reddy, *My Experiences As a Legislator*, Current Thought Press, Madras, 1930; see also 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History – Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 192; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 103.
116. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p. 70.
117. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 94.
118. Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *Identities and Histories- Women's Writing and Politics in Bengal*, Stree, Kolkata, 2010, p. 105.
119. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 192; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 228.
120. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, Vol. IV, 5th September, 1921.
121. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings*, Vol. XI, 29 January, 1923.
122. 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 193; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p.101; Anwar Hossain, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-174.
123. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 70-71; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 106.
124. *Annual Report*, AIWC, Seventh Session, 1930, p.30.
125. 'Reservations of Seats for Women' in *The Hindu*, November 17, 1931, p. 5; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 107; Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p. 71, Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
126. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* pp. 108-109; see also Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* pp.71-72.

127. 'Women and the Communal Decision' in *Indian Ladies Magazine*, 5th September-October, 1932, p. 510; also in *Stri Dharma*, Magazine of WIA, No. 16, September, 1933, p. 549; Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p.72.
128. 'Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform', Session 1933-1934, Vol. 1, Report 1934, *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. VI, 1933-1934; see also Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p.72; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* pp.111-112; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 47.
129. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 41; see also Rajan Mahan *op. cit.* p. 248.
130. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* pp. 112-113.
131. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p-240.
132. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p. 104.
133. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1928, p. 116.
134. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 46.
135. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1929-30, pp. 29-31.
136. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p. 60.
137. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 60-61.
138. Mrs. Renuka Ray, the then President of the Women's Co-ordinating Council of West Bengal, which has brought together many women's organizations of the city, giving them a united voice and programme. See Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 62-63.
139. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 64.
140. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1931, pp. 66.
141. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1930, p. 43.
142. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1931, pp. 104-105.
143. Malatibai Abhyankar moved a resolution stating that "this Conference strongly protests against the existing discrimination in Hindu law against the rights of women; it demands that existing laws should be so amended as to make them just and equitable and that an all-India non-official commission be appointed to consider

the removal of social disabilities of women as regards inheritance and marriage". See *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1933, p. 116.

144. *Annual Report*, AIWC, p. 45.

145. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1932, pp. 70-71; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 113.

146. The *Dayabhaga* of Jimutvahana deals authoritatively with many points of the law of ownership, partition and inheritance, that had long continued to agitate the minds of the *Smriti* writers. Dealing with the concept of ownership, Jimutvahana ranges himself on the side of the school that held *svatva* (ownership) to be exclusively indicated by the *Sastras*, and not based upon popular recognition. This view represents the dogmatic standpoint that the *Sastras* do not merely summarise modes of acquiring ownership known to popular usage, but that popular usage on the contrary follows *Sastras* rules laying down conditions for the acquisition of ownership. In the second place, ownership, according to Jimutvahana, implies absolute competence of the owner to dispose of his property at his will. Jimutvahana defines *Stridhana* in a strictly technical sense to mean that which a woman is entitled to give, sell or enjoy independently of her husband. Jimutvahana fixes his rule of succession to a woman's *Stridhana*, and declares that such property devolves equally upon the sons and the unmarried daughter. See *History and Culture of the Indian People- The Struggle for Empire*, Vol. V, 5th Edition, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 2001, pp. 286 and 290.

147. *Jayasree*, Vol. 1, Nos. 4, 7 and 12, 1931.

148. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1930, pp. 44 and 63.

149. 'Legal Disabilities of Indian Women', an article by Renuka Ray, Reprinted from *Modern Review*, November, 1935.

150. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1935.

151. Phulrenu Guha, Freedom fighter, an ex-member of Parliament is one of the authors of the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, New Delhi, 1974. Ashoka Gupta, also a freedom fighter, was the former president of the AIWC. See 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929', an

article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 209.

152. ‘*The Hindu Woman’s Right to Property Act, 1937*’, Government of India, File no. 28/25/38, Home Department, Judicial 1938.

153. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1942, pp. 36-37.

154. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1942 pp. 37-39.

155. *Annual Report*, AIWC, 1944.

156. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p. 105.

157. ‘Report of the Hindu Law Committee’ in *B. N. Rau Papers*, File No. 11, Nehru Museum and Memorial Library, New Delhi, pp. 7-9.

158. ‘The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women* , Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 193.

159. ‘Women’s Role in Indian Politics: An Overview’, an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 265.

160. ‘The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 193-194; see also Anup Taneja, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Kamala Dasgupta, *Swadhinata Sangrame Banglar Nari* gives good biographical sketches of Basanti Debi and Hemaprabha Majumdar.

161. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan, Delhi, 1983, p. 218.

162. Renuka Ray, *My Reminiscences: Social Development during Gandhian Era and After*, Allied publishes, Delhi, 1982, pp. 16, 28-30; see also Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

163. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 49; see also Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149.

164. Jogsh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* 21; see also Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* pp. 54-56; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* pp. 163-164.

165. 'Women and the National Movement', an article by Lakshmi Menon in *Indian Women*, Devaki Jain (ed.), Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1975, p. 24.

166. Subhas Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-34*, Thacker, Spink & Co., Calcutta, 1948, p. 96.

167. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p.21; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 126; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 50 and 56; Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* pp. 83-84; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 109; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 164; 'Basanti Debi Chittaranjan Das (1880-1974)', an article by Phulrenu Guha in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First edition 2002, Reprinted- 2007; p. 156.

168. *Indian Annual Register* 1922, Vol. 1, Calcutta, p. 242 and p. 45. Even Subhas Bose, who had reservations about involving women, testifies that after the arrest of the ladies "there was wild excitement. In utter indignation young and old, rich and poor began to pour in as volunteersThe authorities were alarmed and they converted the city into an armed camp. But our battle was half won". See Subhas Bose. *op. cit.* pp. 96-97; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 50 and 56; Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 126-127; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* pp. 164-165. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 1st January, 1923, reported "The arrest of Basanti Debi had an electric effect on the people. Immediately more than a thousand young men offered themselves for arrest Her arrest in fact had stirred up the whole of Bengal".

169. 'Women's Part' in *Young India*, 15 December, 1921. Gandhi opined: "I had haped that in the initial stages, at any rate, women would be spared the honour of going to jail But the Bengal Government in their impartial zeal to make no distinction even of sex, have conferred the honour upon three women of CalcuttaI hope that the women all over India will take up the challenge and organize themselves I would suggest to the women of Indiato follow their noble example".

170. 'Purdah Polilics: The Role of Muslim Women in Indian Nationalism, 1911-1924', an article by Gail Minault in *Separate Worlds*, Hannah Papanek and Gail

Minault (ed.), Chanakya Publications, Delhi, 1982, pp. 245-261; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 56; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 165.

171. 'The Fallen and Non-Cooperation', an article by Sandip Bandhyopadhyay in *Manushi*, No 53, July-August, 1989, pp. 18-21. The author notes controversy surrounding the authorship of this book. Some argue Manada Devi was a real person, others believe this was the work of a male author; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 57.

172. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1922, Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal, Calcutta; see also in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 22.

173. *Dainik Basumati*, 24 April, 1922, Report on the Native Newspapers of Bengal, Calcutta.

174. 'Note on Feminine Agitators', an article by R. Clarke, CIE, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, 12 January & 18 January, 1922, Government of Bengal, Home Political File No. 48, Serial Nos. 1-8, 1922, Calcutta.

175. Niranjana Ghosh, *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement in Bengal: Midnapur, Bankura and Purulia Districts*, Tramralipti Prakashan, Midnapur, 1988, pp. 42-59; also in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 22; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* P. 164.

176. Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* p. 101; see also Shukla Ghoshal (Compiled and Edited), *Bange Nari Nirjatan O Narir Utthan* (in Bengali), Ananda Publishers Private Limited, April 2011, p. 144; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 164. 'The members of the *Samiti* used to carry on their shoulders bundles of *Khadi* to quite long distances and spread from house to house the message of Gandhiji along with the sale of *Khadi*'. See Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 85.

177. L. F. Rushbrook Williams, *India in 1922*, Calcutta, p. 222.

178. Margaret E. Cousins, *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, Ganesh and Co., Madras, 1922, pp. 8 and 59-60.

179. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 31; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 71.

180. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 129.

181. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 57.

182. Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, *Indian Women's Battle for freedom*, Abhinav, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 106-107.
183. 'Women's Contribution to Freedom Movement in Bengal', an article by Smt. Krishna Samaddar in *Women in Indian Life and Society*, Dr. Amitabha Mukherjee (ed.), Punthi Pustak and Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1996, p. 221.
184. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 135.
185. *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha*, an article by Latika Bose in *Banglar Katha*, Ashwin, 1928 (1335 B.S), p. 5; see also *Banglar Katha*, Jaistha, 1929 (1335 B.S), p. 7; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* pp. 143-144.
186. Manmohan Kaur, *op. cit.* p. 188; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 137; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 63; 'Women's Role in Indian Politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 266; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 144.
187. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 33-34; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 63; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* -137.
188. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 72; see also 'Women's Role in Indian Politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 266.
189. *The Modern Review*, May 1930, p. 658; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 141; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 144.
190. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 34-35; see also Chitra Chosh, *op. cit.* p. 71.
191. *The Modern Review*, July 1953, p. 57; also in Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Loc. cit.*
192. Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* pp. 285-286.
193. 'Touching the Fringe of History: A Few Women of Dinajpur and their Struggle in the Colonial and Postcolonial Bengal', an article by Anita Bagchi in *Changing Faces of Indian Women*, Anita Bagchi and Sanjay K. Roy (ed.), Levant Books, Kolkata, 2009, pp. 120-121.

194. Cited in 'Touching the Fringe of History: A Few Women of Dinajpur and their Struggle in the Colonial and Postcolonial Bengal', an article by Anita Bagchi in *Changing Faces of Indian Women*, Anita Bagchi and Sanjay K. Roy (ed.), Levant Books, Kolkata, 2009, pp. 121-122.
195. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 72.
196. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 73.
197. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 22, 1930.
198. Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 91.
199. Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 87.
200. *Annual Report of Police Administration*, 1932, p. 11.
201. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 74; see also Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 284.
202. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 74-75.
203. Tamil Nad Women's Conference, Erode, in *Stri Dharma*, Vol.14, No. 12, October, 1931, p. 563.
204. Tirtha Mandal, *op.cit.* p.51.
205. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* pp. 53 and 59; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 36.
206. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 36-37.
207. See Green List of the Bengal Revolutionaries, Dukaribala Devi, Bengal Government Press, Calcutta, 1930, p. 131; also in Report on Police Administration in Bengal Presidency for the year 1916, *Bengal Administration Report*, 1916-17, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1918, p. 16; Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17. Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* pp. 42-43; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 37.
208. Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* pp. 91, 156, 271, 274; see also Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 60.
209. Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* p. 91.
210. Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* p. 271; see also Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 60.
211. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 75-76.

212. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 79.
213. David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* p.; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 58.
214. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 27; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 58.
215. Interview with Kshirodaprabha Biswas on 11.10.87; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 58-59; Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 27.
216. Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *Identities and Histories- Women's Writing and Politics in Bengal*, Stree, Kolkata, 2010, p. 105.
217. Preeti Chattopadhyay, Leela Roy's classmate at Bethune College, remembered those times when the rhetoric of Non- Cooperation sparked off endless discussions among them about students' role in politics. See *Jayashree*, Ashwin, 1999.
218. Dipankar Mohanta, *Leela Roy O Banglar Nari Jagaran* (in Bengali), Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, Falgun, 1405 (February, 1999), p. 30; see also David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* p. 43; I. Malkikarjuna Sharma, *op. cit.* p. 192; Tirtha Mondal, *op. cit.* p. 67; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 59; Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* pp. 101-102; 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)', an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), p. 314.
219. 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)', an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), *Loc. cit.* See also Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 102.
220. David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* p. 43; see also Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 26-27; 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)', an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), *Loc. cit.* Dipankar Mohanta, *op. cit.* pp. 32-33.
221. Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* pp. 102-103; see also Dipankar Mohanta, *op. cit.* pp 38-39 and 42.
222. David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* p. 43; see also 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)', an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), pp. 314-315; Dipankar Mohanta, *op. cit.* pp. 38-39.

223. As we know, Leela Roy's formal entry into the group was made possible through Anil Roy, who belonged to the younger generation of revolutionaries in Bengal that was not opposed to women's entry in secret societies. Women's rights and their emergence in the public sphere were subjects hotly debated among imprisoned Bengali revolutionaries in 1917 -1918. The context for such debates can be traced to a set of seemingly unconnected developments in the second decade of the twentieth century. See Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* pp. 103-14; also in David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* pp. 43-44.

224. Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 105.

225. 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)', an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), p. 315.

226. *Jayashree*, Baisakh, 1931 (1338 B.S); also in Ajay Roy (ed.) *Leela Nag Satabarsher Shraddhanjali* (in Bengali), Dhaka Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 2003, pp. 156-157.

227. 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)', an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), p. 316.

228. David M. Laushey, *op. cit.* p. 81; see also Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 68; 'Leela Roy (1900-1970)' an article by Shila Sen in *Women Pioneers in Indian Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamala Mankekar (ed.), *Loc. cit.*

229. Tirtha Monal, *op. cit.* p. 68; see also Kamala Dasgupta, *op. cit.* pp. 36-44; 'The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929' an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 200-201; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 138; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 45.

230. Kalyani Das Bhattacharjee, *A Short Life Sketch of Kalyani Bhattacharjee*, unpublished; also in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, April 17, 1930, p. 6; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 145; Tirtha Mandal, *Loc. cit.*

231. Kalyani Das Bhattacharjee, *op.cit.* see also *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, July 17, 1930 p. 3; July 19, 1930, p. 3; July 23, 1930, p. 3; Thirtha Mandal, *Loc. cit.*
232. Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 107.
233. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 27; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* pp. 135-136; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 61; ‘The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 199; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* pp. 143-144; Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 107; Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women In The Indian National Movement – Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p. 56.
234. Chabi Roy, *Banglai Nari Andolan* (The Feminist Movement in Bengal), National Book Agency, Calcutta, [1947?], pp. 97-98; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 60; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 136. Latika Bose, following her divorce Latika resumed use of her maiden name Ghosh and she preferred to be known as Latika Ghosh. ‘*Mahila Rashtriya Sangha*’, *Banglar Katha*, Ashwin, 1928 (1335 B. S), p. 5; *Banglar Katha*, Jaistha, 1929 (1335 B. S), p. 7.
235. ‘Rally of Lady Volunteers’ in *Forward*, December 2, 1928, p. 7; also in ‘The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 197- 198; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 62.
236. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 61-62.
237. Chabi Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 101-102.
238. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 37-38; see also Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 70.
239. *Pather Dabi*, unpublished serially between 1923 and 1926, was the first popular novel in Bengali on revolutionary activities.
240. A *lathi* is a Staff, often tipped with metal, used as a weapon.
241. Interview with Kamala Das Gupta, Calcutta, July 12, 1973.

242. Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 168.
243. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p. 77; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 140; Rajan Mahan, *op. cit.* p. 286; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 145.
244. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 37-39; see also Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* pp. 77-107; I. Mallikarjuna Sharma, *op. cit.* p. 74-80; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 60; Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* pp.138-141; Rajan Mahan *op. cit.* p. 286; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* pp. 144-145 & 168-169; 'Women's Role in Indian Politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 267.
245. Tirtha Mandal, *op. cit.* p.103.
246. 'Future of Indian Womanhood' in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, April 29, 1931, p. 6.
247. 'Women's Congress' in *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 3, 1931, p. 7.
248. 'Bengal Women's Conference' in *The Hindu*, May 3, 1931, p. 9; Geraldine Forbs, *op. cit.* pp. 142-143.
249. *Bibidha Prasanga* (Various Issues) in *Probasi*, Jaistha, 1931(1338 B. S).
250. *Jayashree*', Jaistha, 1931(1338, B. S).
251. *Jayashree*, Agrahayan, 1939 (1346 B.S); Since Leela Roy was the convener of the Women's Sub- committee of the National Planning Committee in Bengal, a booklet of a opinion poll was circulated and despatched to various parts of the province from the *Jayashree* office to enquire into the position of women in society, with an appeal that answers to these be sent to the addressee by 22 October, 1939. At the end of Prabha Dutta's essay cited in this chapter, there was an editorial note that *Jayashree* was planning to publish a few of the many responses to the opinion poll received so far, to facilitate a dialogue on the issues raised. But unfortunately, with the changing course of politics and of the periodical 1940 onwards, these responses never got published. Prabha Dutta discusses the nature of questions framed by the Sub-committee which could be broadly related women's social, economic and legal rights.
252. *Jayashree*, Magh, 1939 (1345 B. S).

253. With the split in the Bengal Congress in 1939, the *Sangha* became defunct. See Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* pp. 121-122.
254. 'Sucheta Kripalini' in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. II, pp. 364-365.
255. 'The Aims of the Women's Department of the All India Congress Committee', *AICC*, File no. WD - 7, p. 1.
256. 'The Aims of the Women's Department of the All India Congress Committee', *AICC*, *Loc. cit.*
257. 'Scheme of the Work of the Women's Department', *AICC*, File no WD- 2, p.1.
258. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 81; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* pp. 204-205; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 185 -189.
259. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 44; 'Women's Role in Indian Politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 266.
260. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 81.
261. *The Hindustan Standard*, 27 July, 1942.
262. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 83; see also 'Women's Role in Indian Politics: An Overview', an article by Arunabha Ghosh in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 267; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 206; Manoranjan Bhaumick, *History, Culture And Antiquities Of Tamralipta*, Punthi Pustak, Kolkata, 2001, pp. 199f.
263. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* 43-44; see also 'Women' Contribution to Freedom Movement in Bengal', an article by Smt. Krishna Samaddar in *Women in Indian Life and Society*, Dr. Amitabha Ghosh (ed.), Punthi Pustak and Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1996, p. 223; Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 82; Anup Taneja, *Loc. cit.*; Arunabha Ghosh, *Loc. cit.*
264. Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 207; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 82.
265. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* p. 45; see also in details Kamala Dasgupta, *Swadhinata Sangrame Banglar Nari*.

266. This is the view point of Manikuntala Sen, personal interview, October-November, 1984.
267. Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 267.
268. ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy Bhusan Roy in *The Study of Social History –Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, p. 135.
269. Guru Saday Dutt, *A Women of India: Being the Life of Saroj Nalini*, Mysore, 1941, p. 75.
270. ‘The Women’s Movement in India: Traditional Symbols and New Roles’, an article by Geraldine H. Forbes in *Social Movements in India- Studies In Peasant, Backward Classes, Sectarian, Tribal And Women’s Movements*, M. S. A. Rao (ed.), Manohar, New Delhi, First published 1979, Reprinted 2004, p. 368.
271. ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy Bhusan Roy in *The Study of Social History –Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, p. 136.
272. Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 273-275.
273. Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp. 271; see also ‘Saroj Nalini’s Nari Mangal Samity and its various activities’, an article by Binoy Bhusan Roy in *The Study of Social History –Recent Trends*, Ratna Ghosh (ed.), Vol. II, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, March, 2015, p. 137.
274. ‘Saroj Nalini Dutt Women’s Welfare Organizations in Bengal’, in *Modern Review*, March 1925, reprinted in *Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association for Women’s Work in Bengal*, Report for 1925.
275. ‘Rokeya (1880-1932)’, an article by Miratun Nahar in *Women Pioneers in India’s Renaissance – As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, Reprinted- 2007 (First Edition- 2002), pp. 76-77; see also Shaheen Akhtar and Moushumi Bhowmik (ed.), *Women in Concert- An Anthology of Bengali Muslim Women’s Writings 1904-1938*, Translated from the Bengali by Stree, Kolkata, 2008, p. 2; Anjashi Sarkar, *Voicing Contentious Silences-*

Other Narratives on History and Society, Abhijeet Publications, New Delhi, 2015, pp. 53-54.

276. 'The Changing World of Bengali Muslim Women: The 'Dreams' and Efforts of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain' an article by Sonia N. Amin in *Understanding the Bengal Muslims- Interpretative Essays*, Rafiuddin Ahmed (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p. 139.

277. 'Rokeya (1880-1932)', an article by Miratun Nahar in *Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance – As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, Reprinted- 2007 (First Edition- 2002), p. 80; see also Gitashreebandana Sengupta- *Spandita Antarlok- Atmacharite Nari Progatir Dhara* (in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, January, 1999, p. 242.

278. *The Mussalman*, Vol. XII, No. 28, June 14, 1918, p. 7.

279. Usha Chakraborty, *Condition of Bengali Women Around the 2nd Half of the 19th Century*, published by the Author, Calcutta, 1963, p. 62.

280. Anwar Hossain, *Swadhinata Sangrame Banglar Muslim Nari (1873 -1947)*, Pragatishil Prakashak, Kolkata, May, 2006, pp. 157-158.

281. 'Lady Abala Bose (1865 -1951)', an article by Phulrenu Guha in *Women Pioneers In India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First Edition 2002, Reprinted- 2007, p. 121.

282. *Dainik Statesman* (in Bengali), Sunday in 'Bichitra', 9th August, 2015, p. 3; also cited in Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 230; Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 34.

283. *Dainik Statesman*, *Loc. cit.*; also cited in Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 321; 'Lady Abala Bose (1865 -1951)', an article by Phulrenu Guha in *Women Pioneers In India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First Edition 2002, Reprinted- 2007, p. 122.

284. 'Lady Abala Bose (1865 -1951)', an article by Phulrenu Guha in *Women Pioneers In India's Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First Edition 2002, Reprinted- 2007, p. 122; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 232; Sharmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* pp. 34-35.

285. 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, pp. 144-145.
286. This account of the role of female students is partly based on the book by Renu Chakraborty, *Communists in the Indian Women's Movement 1940-1950*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1980, p. 7; see also Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *Nari Mukti Andolan O Amra* (in Bengali), National Book Agency, Kolkata, March. 1993, p. 22.
287. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p. 10. The female section was formed under the All-Indian Students' Federation (AISF) which was connected with the Communist Party of India; see also Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 23.
288. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 86; see also Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolan* (in Bengal), University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2002, p. 109.
289. Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *op. cit.* p. 22; see also 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 146.
290. 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 147.
291. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p. 21, see also Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 113; 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, pp. 147-148.
292. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p. 18.
293. Kanak Mukhopadhyay, *Nari Mukti Andolan O Amra* (in Bengali), National Book Agency, Kolkata March 1993, pp. 30 and 45; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p 210.
294. 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 148.
295. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *op. cit.* pp. 45-46; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 86.
296. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p. 23.

297. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p. 20.
298. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* 34-35; see also Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 114; 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 149.
299. Renu Chakraborty, *op. cit.* p. 39.
300. 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 149; see in details Manikuntala Sen, *Janajagarane Narijagarane* (in Bengali), Manikuntala Sen Satabarshiki Committee, Theema, Kolkata, 2010, pp. 110-113.
301. See www.Banglapedia.org: *Mahila Atmaraksa Samiti*, p. 3.
302. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 86; see also 'Left-Wing Women Movement in Colonial Bengal: Quest For A New Identity', an article by Susanta Das in *Women In India- Problems Potentialities and Power*, Arunabha Ghosh (ed.), Mitram, Kolkata, May, 2010, p. 150.
303. Cited in Manikuntala Sen, *op. cit.* pp. 124-125; see also Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 84.
304. Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 114.
305. Sarmistha Dutta Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 89.
306. Maleka Begum, *op. cit.* p. 117; see also Maleka Begum, Saiyad Ajjul Hoque, *op. cit.* p. 112.
307. 'The Indian Women's Movement: A Struggle for Women's Rights for National Liberation', an article by Geraldine Forbes in *The Extended Family: Women and Political Participation in India and Pakistan*, Gail Minault (ed.), London, 1981, pp. 49-82.
308. 'The Role of Women in the Tebhaga Movement of North Bengal (1946-47)', an article by I. Sarkar in *Women in Changing Society*, I. Sarkar (ed.), Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 107 and 109.

CHAPTER-VI

WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS OF BENGAL AND ITS INTERACTION WITH OTHER SISTER ASSOCIATIONS OF INDIA

It is a fact that, women associations were encouraged by men and women in Bengal joined voluntary associations after getting education.¹ As a result, there was a growing need among educated women for a platform where they could meet each other for discussion and engage in some form of useful philanthropic work and through which they could keep up contact with the exterior world.² Women began to define their wellbeing, suggest solutions and take action only after they established their own associations. Women's associations, called by various titles, sprang up all over India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The majority was geographically limited but they shared the target of bringing women together to talk about women's issues.³ We come across *Bambodhini Sabha* started in 1863. *Brahmika Samaj* was formed in 1865. *Bambodhini* had several women members who conducted sewing classes. *Bama Hitaishini Sabha* was founded in 1871 which initiated dialogues of child rearing, suitable education for women etc. But it was dominated by men, so women got no chance for leadership. Women felt hemmed in during the 70's of the nineteenth century. But women sought to free themselves from men's control. So, it is encouraging to note that, *Bangiya Mahila Samaj* was established entirely by women for women in 1879 which did social work amongst its new members. After the split of *Bama Hitaishini*, *Arya Nari Samaj* was formed in 1879.⁴ The activities of these women's associations did not confine within the boundary of colonial Bengal. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India. It is likely that, the plan and programmes of the associations beyond Bengal were different in view of their objectives and aims but it is suffices to say that most of these associations in general had their aims to focus women issues in different perspectives. Before going to the details about the interaction and inter-connection one may come across three types of women associations in all India level. These were- (a)

Personality Based Associations, (b) National Movement Oriented Associations and (c) All-India Based Associations.

(a) Personality Based Associations

By the end of the nineteenth century, women mostly from reformist families emerged who formed their own associations. In this connection, the Tagore family of Jorasanko of Bengal played a pioneering role. Swarnakumari Devi, sister of poet Rabindranath Tagore, an author in her own right and a novelist of distinction, organized the *Sakhi Samiti* (Ladies Association) in 1886 to promote among Indian women an active and progressive concentration in the welfare of the country.⁵ It was later changed into a craft centre for widows. Under the leadership of Hiranmoyee Devi, daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, organized a *Mahila Shilpa Samiti*, a women's handcraft.⁶ This *Samiti* taught feminine arts and crafts for self dependence and economic freedom.⁷ On the other hand, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, wife of Justice M. G. Ranade, remarkable woman from Poona (Pune in modern form), founded the *Arya Mahila Samaj* in 1882 and went on to set up a series of women's associations in various towns of Bombay Presidency. She also started *Sharda Sadan* in 1892 with the intention of providing employment and education to women, young widows in particular. Ramabai Ranade established the *Seva Sadan* in 1909 in Pune. The year 1908 saw the beginning of a *Gujrati Stree Mandal* in Ahmedabad and branches of *Mahila Seva Samaj* were founded in Mysore in 1913 and in Poona in 1916. Women's associations took starting place in Madras also. In North India, Rameshwari Nehru organized *Prayag Mahila Samit* in Allahabad in 1909 and edited early women's magazine *Stree Darpan* in Hindi. The *Prayag Mahila Samiti* expressed issues which were concerned with women's 'enlightenment', social reforms, women's education and women's political participation, though the participation of these meetings remained limited to elite women.⁸ It may be said that, the aims and objectives of the above mentioned associations in general had their purpose to focus women issues in different perspectives. In that sense, these associations had a common interaction with each other.

Initially, these associations were confined to a locality or a city. After the first decade of the twentieth century, national and provincial women's associations were started by women who had acquired experience in local women's associations. For instance, the credit for starting the first all India women's association, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* (the Large Circle of Indian Women) in 1910 must go to Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, the brilliant daughter of Swarnakumari Devi, long before the formation of the *Women's Indian Association* (WIA) and the *All India Women's Conference* (AIWC).⁹

The center was formed in Lahore in November 1910 at a personal meeting of women. Sarala Devi was appointed the General Secretary "with power to take all necessary steps for the establishment of the Society on a permanent footing". It was decided to hold the opening meeting in Allahabad in December 1910 when many from different parts of India were expected to assemble there for the Congress session.¹⁰ The most important feature of the inaugural session of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was that it was presided over by Her Highness the Begum Sahiba of Janjira, a Muslim woman, and was graced by the presence of Her Highness the Nawab Begum of Bhopal, the only ruling princes of India and a Muslim woman as well.¹¹ The main function of the association was, of course, the advancement of women. To quote her: "The object of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* is the creation of an organization by means of which women of every race, creed, class and party in India may be brought together on the basis of their common interest in the moral and material progress of women in India; and in and through which organization they may work in association and in a spirit of mutual helpfulness for the progress of humanity through that of her sex."¹²

In order to reach this goal, a plan of action was drawn up and attempted to establish interaction and inter-connection between women intellectuals and activities. It was resolute that –(1) Branches would be set up in all important cities of India, (2) In view of a very small number of girls going to school on account of early marriage and still- persisting *Purdah*, a system of home education for married girls would be evolved, (3) Literary committees would be formed for the promotion of indigenous literature, (4)

Centres would be set up to help destitute women in productive work and sell their handiwork, (5) Help would be extended to women to have greater access to medical knowledge and medical care and (6) Relationship with other sister associations would be developed.¹³ Hence, in its credit of women's issues, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* intended to open branches in all parts of India to endorse female education. It developed branches in Lahore, Allahabad, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Bombay, Madras, Prayag, Lucknow, Kashi, Midnapur and Calcutta, Bankipur and other places.¹⁴

The first branch of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was established in Calcutta, followed by branches in the Punjab and the United provinces, Membership was open to any woman of any creed on the payment of an entrance fee of one rupee and the annual subscription was also fixed at one rupee. Noticeably, the first drive of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was on education. About three thousand women were taught at home. The branch office at Allahabad decided to encourage *Zenana* education by sending teachers to each and every house, by opening classes at different localities, and by framing a syllabus and holding examinations at different places. In Lahore, free primary classes were opened for educating women three times a week. The Bengal branch did commendable work under Krishnabhabini Das, wife of Professor Debendranath Das and Poet Priyambada Devi. When Sarala Devi came back to Calcutta after her husband's death in 1923, she took up the work herself. As the number of girls going to school gradually increased, Sarala Devi decided to start a recognized educational institution. On 1st June 1930, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* founded the *Sikshasadan* (a house for education) at Bhabanipur, Calcutta.¹⁵

Not only education, the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* also endeavoured to promote women's wellbeing at other levels. For instance, *Nari Nirvaha Bhandar* or the Women's Mart was founded to provide amenities for the sale of women's handicraft production. The profits of the sale went to destitute women workers. The work of translating the *Mahabharata* in easily understandable, simple Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi was also undertaken.¹⁶ Side by side, she established this organization as all India level

and had also polished it to form as universal association. For this reason, she tried to follow the construction, working system and experiences of European women's associations. *Young Women's Christian Association* was most important among them.¹⁷

There might be a common question as to the future courses of action of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*! Indeed, not any amazing changes in women's condition could be achieved by it. Nor could it set the test of era, having survived for a few years. There was no attempt to evolve any link with any grassroots association. The programme of action suited its middle class members. Yet, by the values of the time, it was a great and momentous attempt. It marked the beginning of women's movement in India under women's leadership and here lay its historical importance - in its distinction from men-led women's associations of the nineteenth century. To her credit, Sarala Devi did not consider of a limited organization of one community only. In a speech expressing similar sentiments as her uncle Rabindranath Tagore, she said that, her association would include women of all creeds, "Indo-Aryan, Indo-Semitic, Indo-Mongolian and Anglo-Indian" and would implement a liberal view towards all religions. Most importantly, the association designed at a pan-Indian unity of women. To quote her: "To join the parts, to bring the several fragments together into one moral unity, to deepen the sense of sisterhood and common humanity of the women of all the races and parts of India is one of the main features of the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*".¹⁸ After 1910, the number of social associations for women grew quickly, called by various names – *Mahila Samitis*, Women's Clubs, Ladies Societies etc. and they emerged in the cities, towns and villages of British India and the native states.¹⁹ In this respect, we can mention here the name of Saroj Nalini Dutta, the founder of the *Mahila Samiti* movement in Bengal. Though we already discussed in the previous chapter (i.e. V) that Saroj Nalini formed the first *Mahila Samiti* in Pabna in 1913 and then Birbhum (1916), Sultanpur (1917), Rampurhat (1918), Bankura (1921), Darjeeling (1924), starting a women's association in each town.²⁰ But she wanted to establish a *Kendriya Nari Mangal Samiti* in Clacutta for interaction and inter-connection with other sister associations.²¹ After her premature death on 19th January 1925, her husband Guru Saday Dutta and followers founded the *Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association*. Three

weeks later of her death a remembrance assembly was held on 8th February when her husband affirmed to donate 5000 rupees to the *Central Mahila Samiti* in order to continue her memory and to take charge of other wings of *Mahila Samiti* established in different districts of Bengal. From that fund emerged *Saroj Nahini Dutt Memorial Association for Women* on 23rd February, 1925.²²

The aims and objectives of the association were directed towards promoting women's interests not only in terms of adult education and the training of women in some useful crafts and skills, but also hygiene, maternity and child care. It ran a small school of nursing which circulated diplomas to students on their end of the course after two years.²³ *Bangalakshmi*, the monthly journal of the association, edited by Kumudini Bose for the first two years and then Hemlata Tagore, provides valuable records for writing women's history of the period. It pleaded with women in the districts as well as in the villages 'to wake up', form women's associations to strengthen woman power and take up paid jobs outside the home, if necessary, instead of starving within it.²⁴ The most important aspect of this journal was reporting the activities of its branches which were organized in several parts of the country. For instance, it reported that, the branches in Manikganj (near Dacca) and Kurseong (in Darjeeling district) were training women in self-employment schemes. The *Samiti* in Mulghar was doing also excellently. Upto this point, women rarely met other women from the same area. Now they were meeting regularly, discussing and transmitting ideas, in spite of the opposition of orthodox sections.²⁵

At the very beginning the *Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association* started their activities taking on seven or eight branches. Within one year the number of the *Samities* which were incorporated in the central committees became fifty. Gradually, in the second year it became hundred and in the third and fourth year number became one hundred and fifty eight and two hundred and fifty respectively.²⁶ Upto on March, 1940, about four hundred branch associations were established in the different parts of India under *Saroj Nalini Dutt Nari Mangal Samiti*.²⁷ The responsibilities and activities of the central committee were as follows:

- (a) The central committee was to campaign for establishing new centres and to control and harmonize the activities different branches of the *Mahila Samiti*.
- (b) To send trained teachers to train the female members to different art and crafts.
- (c) To publish a monthly journal named *Bangalakshmi* and deliver speech for arousing consciousness among the female and also to assess their development.
- (d) The liability of supervising these associations developed upon the female members constituting the committee.
- (e) The main endeavor was to train the women folk so that they can perform social work and be able organizer.
- (f) The President, the Secretary and other members of the working committee would be associated with the activities of the association and they should be elected from the female members.
- (g) The subordinate *Samities* which were connected parts of the central body would pay subscription amounting to three rupees.
- (h) All female members irrespective of caste, creed, religion and habitation would be eligible for membership etc.²⁸

The Central *Mahila Samiti* administered their social service through different sister branches. This activity improved social relationship, encouraged cooperative activity and the recommend for social service. Some instances of their activities may be cited here. The members of the *Mahila Samitis* of Khulna, Hoogly, Barishal and Jessore took care of the ill and donated clothes and other necessaries to the children. They also kept strict observation on the midwives of the patients. They often visited the patients to provide the mental support, offered financial help to the flood stricken people and poor people for arranging the marriage ceremonies of their daughters. Another example was in a Muslim locality of Maldah town many houses were burnt. Then the Hindu

members of the *Samiti* immediately provided protection to the homeless Muslims and looked after their children with proper care.²⁹

Beside that, these *Samities* took proper care of Muslim women for rearing communal harmony. The Central Committee received economic support from both the Hindus and the Muslims. The president of the *Madaripur Mahila Samiti* was a Muslim woman. Daughter of Nawab Bahadur Saiyad Nawab Ali Chaudhury was elected the president of *Tangail Mahila Samiti*.³⁰ Both male and female members of the Muslim community were actively associated with in the Hooghly, Natore, Madaripur, Kalna and other *Mahila Samities*. All these associations contributed a lot to the development of cottage industry, garden, adult education, drama and girl's school.³¹

Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti formed an art school for imparting general education, art and craft to the adult women. Women whether they were married, unmarried and widows aging above sixteen were chosen for training; particularly widows coming from poor families were preferred. Even students who were guardian less were also allowed to get admission. An exhibition was held in Calcutta where exhibits made by the trainees of the sister branches were displayed. In this way, many widow and poor women became self-dependable.³²

The members of the *Mahila Samiti* were very much aware about the condition of the public health. They delivered lectures on health, primary nursing etc. Exhibitions were also arranged for exhibiting the health condition of the babies. Maternity homes were set up along with the local health centres. The maternity centre founded by the *Mahila Samiti* of Bankura was named after Saroj Nalini Debi. Midwifery training was started by some *Samitis* for giving proper training to the midwives. These *Samitis* received help from the District Board.³³

Other branches were established in Kurigram (Rangpur district), Sreerampur, Bankra, Margram, Dasora, Tala, Nimta, Jalalpur, Brahmarandhriya, Barasat and so on. The main goals of these *Samities* were spread of education. In this context, the Calcutta *Bhabanipur Rajbala Mahila Samiti* was not lagging behind. It organized the art and craft training and teaching for adult women.³⁴ Another branch of the *Samiti* was formed at Bowbazar, Calcutta for spreading female education. The *Samiti* established a

Zenana School and another girls' school in that area. Umashashi Devi, the president of that *Samiti*, made it possible by her constant endeavor and missionary enthusiasm.³⁵ It is fact that, *Saroj Nalini Dutt Nari Mangal Samiti* did continuous interaction with other district branch associations of Bengal. Basically, Indian women were related in the central committee. Beside Bengal, this *Samiti* was spread in Assam, Bihar, Orissa and United Provinces. The *Basanta Kumari Widow-Ashram* was formed in Puri (Orissa) for teaching general education in Bengali, English, Mathematics, Geography, History, Sewing and Tailoring, embroidery and drawing, carpet and *Satranchi* weaving etc. The *Ariar Mahila Samiti* in Purnea (Bihar) formed a Sunday school for adult women. Another branch in Shitalai opened a school for woman. The school scheduled to start its function at 2'O clock. Smt. Sudhanshubala, the president of the *Samiti*, taught at least twelve students under her guardianship. Not only that, Junior *Maharani* of Tribankur was sending a request letter to the *Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti* to establish a similar association in her state. The Government of Assam was declared to give compensation to the Association for establishing an association in their state. Though the *Association* was centralized in Bengal, but women of different parts of India could join in the conference of the *Samiti*. Not only Indian, European women were also interested in these *samities* and joined in the several sister associations. Smt. Holingbery gave her voluntary labour in *Barishal Samiti*. In 1927, *Maharani Sunity Devi* of Cooch Behar was the president of the *Saroj Nalini Mahila Samiti* of London. By her initiative there was interaction and inter-connection of activities and economic cooperation between the *Phininghum Mahila Samiti* of England and *Kanthi Mahila Samiti*.³⁶

In this way, *Saroj Nalini Nari Mangal Samiti* opened a new field in the self-identity of native ladies and through which they matured their self-consciousness. Obviously, women began to renovate their role in the family, society and even theoretical level and many new characteristics were adding in their activities. As a social activist, *Saroj Nalini* was mainly concerned with constructive programme. It wanted to total emancipation of women. A universal advocate for women education was generated. So, the credit must go to these *Mahila Samities*. Not only urban based

women, but also village women and at the same time women from grass root level were linked with the activities of these *Samities* and communal harmony was arisen through these associations.

In the field of social reform, another notable personality was Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. In 1916, Rokeya founded an association of Muslim women named '*Anjumane Khawatine Islam*'. The programmes of this association were directed to popularise free education among the poor Muslim girls and at the same time to arrange their marriage afterwards. Add to this was to reawaken them about education and social reality. Nurunnesa Khatun, Samsunnahar Mahmud³⁷ and others were connected with this association. It is necessary to mention here that, when '*Anjumane Khawatine Islam*' was established in Bengal by Begum Rokeya, at the same time many Muslim women organizations were set up in North and South India. In fact, from the beginning of the twentieth century there was trend of liberal attitude began to start about women role and slackness of *Purdah* system among Muslim community. In 1905 '*Muslim Ladies Conference*' was founded by Attiya Begum in Aligarh. In Lahore, '*Anjumane Khawatine Islam*' was established by Begum Mohammad Shafi in 1907. She was presided the '*Muslim Ladies Conference*' in 1909. Begum of Bhopal also connected with '*Muslim Educational Conference*' and she did help for the establishment of girls' school in Aligarh. In 1914, she arranged a Muslim women conference in Aligarh and this conference was held after one year as '*All India Muslim Ladies Conference*'.³⁸

So, it may be said that, from the beginning of the twentieth century Muslim women began to participate in the conferences, associations and they exchanged their views with others such as, strictness of *purdah* system, spread of women education, polygamy, and women centric various problems etc. In 1919, *Anjumane- Khawatine- Deccan* and *Lucknow Women's Organization* were established and Begum Habibullah, Begum Owasim, Begum Aijaj Rasul, Lady Owajir Hossain and others were associated with these associations. They tried to unite Muslim women against *purdah* system. *Anjumane Khawatine Islam* of Bengal arranged '*All India Muslim Ladies Conference* in Calcutta under the guidance of Begum Rokeya and many Muslim women participated in this conference from different parts of India.³⁹ It is very clear that, the

main purpose of these association were to uplift of Muslim women and they had interaction with other sister associations of India.

(b) National Movement Oriented Associations

It is a fact that, being inspired by national feelings and patriotism, Indian women since the beginning of the twentieth century, became gradually active in organized-politics first in Bengal and later across the country. In this respect, the growth of nationalist feeling among the *bhadralok* from the late 1860s could not but have filtered through to the *antahpur*.⁴⁰ By the end of the nineteenth century Indian National Congress was established in 1885 and ten women attended the fourth session of the Congress at Bombay in 1889. Among them was Swarna Kumari Devi, sister of Rabindranath Tagore and Kadambini Ganguli, a graduate of Calcutta University and the first woman doctor came from Bengal. Among the other women present were Pandita Ramabai, Mrs. Shevantibai Trimbak, Mrs. Shantabai Nikambe, Mrs. Kashibai Kanitkar and Miss. Manekjee Cursetjee all of whom developed into renowned educationists and social reformers. There were Hindu, Brahmo, Parsi and Christian women representatives. Pandita Ramabai came on behalf of the *Arya Mahila Samaj*, Poona and Swarna Kumari Devi had been selected to personify the *Bengal Ladies Association (Banga Mahila Samaj)*.⁴¹ Here it may be noted that, it was the beginning of women interaction with Bengal and other parts of India.

During the Bengal Partition in 1905 and *Swadeshi* era, the consciousness of the anti- colonial struggle was reflected in the world of women. Realization of the need to organize emerged and this was reflected in the creation of women's associations. In the last part of the nineteenth century only one or two women, like Swarna Kumari Devi of Calcutta and Pandita Ramabai of Poona, had initiated women's associations. But in the twentieth century, as the freedom movement developed and women participated in it.⁴² Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Daughter of Swarna Kumari Devi, married to an Arya Samajist, Rambhoj Dutt Choudhury, was active both in Bengal and Punjab in organizing women's associations. She was one of the outstanding personalities of this period. Sarala Devi formed the link between Punjab and Bengal revolutionaries. Sarala Devi's sensitive years were spent in western India with her uncle, Satyendranath

Tagore, where she witnessed the recovery of Ganapati festival, Shivaji coronation festival and the organization of the society of physical and military training by Damodar and Balkrishna Chapekar, who were Chitpavan Brahmins. She became so inspired that she sought to launch similar activities in Bengal to restart the heroic spirit among the people. She established a centre for physical culture at her home in Calcutta and recommended to the Congress to organize an exhibition of physical feats. In the year 1902 she organized the celebration of *Birastami Brata* and in 1903 *Pratapaditya Brata* modelled on the lines of '*Shivaji Ustav*' of young Marathas who followed *Tilak*. Just as the Marathas celebrated the Puja of Bhavani, symbolic deity of Shivaji, so Sarala Devi celebrated the Kali Puja, symbolic goddess of *Patapaditya*.⁴³

On the other hand, '*Lakshmir Bhandar*' formed by Sarala Devi for popularizing *Swadeshi* goods. Many Bengali women not only rejected foreign made household items, but also helped their family members, especially offsprings to use indigenous goods. Side by side, associations like *Swadeshi Bhandar*, *Swadeshi Mandali*, *Mahila Samiti* etc. were formed to promote and propagate the idea of *Swadeshi*. The most important Bengali leaders in the movement were Sarojini Bose, Kumudini Mitra, Swarna Kumari Devi, Sister Nivedita, Sarala Devi Choudhurani, Nabasashi Devi, Sushila Sen, Kamalkamini Gupta, Hiranmoyee Debi etc. while Mrs. A. V. Joshi, Mrs. Ketkar and others were active in spreading the spirit of *Swadeshi* in other parts of India.⁴⁴ On 29 December 1906, women called a meeting in the premises of Bethune College and School with the Maharani of Barada as president. She was impressed by the work of the Bengali women in the *Swadeshi* movement and she frankly stated that: 'I know how the ladies of Bengali have helped and supported the *Swadeshi* movement which is now spreading fast over Northern India and the Punjab, over Gujrat and the Deccan, over Madras, Mysore and Travancore, everywhere over this continent.'⁴⁵ It is perhaps right to conclude that, though the *Swadeshi* struggle originated in Bengal, it ultimately assumed popularity in a number of provinces, spreading especially in the Punjab, Maharashtra and Madras. Undoubtedly, Bengali women were the first to get revolutionized and accordingly the *Swadeshi* spirit gradually spread among women of the other regions too, mainly in the Punjab. As Punjabi women stepped into the political

arena, they were encouraged by the stirring words of Sushila Devi of Sialkot who delivered a series of lectures in which she attacked the government and exhorted women to rise to the juncture offered by *Swadeshi*. Another important lady who joined the political bandwagon was Har Devi, the wife of a Lahore Barrister Roshan Lal who was himself a notable social reformer and edited a Hindi magazine, *Bharat Bhagini*. During this period, Har Devi not only organized various meetings but also collected funds for assisting nationalist workers who were under experiment.⁴⁶

Female workers of the *Arya Samaj* also emerge to have contributed notably towards arousing a national spirit among women in the Punjab. Among these, Smt. Purani, a well-known *Arya Samaj* worker at Hissar, toured different districts of the Punjab advocating the cause of *Swadeshi*. Speaking to women at Hissar, she not only criticized caste restrictions, but also exhorted women to “bring up their sons not with a view to joining government service, but to an independent participation in trade, especially the manufacture and sale of *Swadeshi*”.⁴⁷

In the month of November 1908, a mass meeting of women, called by the name of *Mahila Maha Samiti*, was held in Calcutta where ladies from different provinces came to discuss the duties of women for the national cause. In 1908 when Gandhiji started a fresh movement in South Africa to justify the rights of the Indian settlers there, the Bengali women organized a system for collection of money called the *Mayer Kauta* (‘Mother’s Box’) under the aegis of *Bharati Patrika* to help his cause. Dr. Kadambini Ganguli worked as a president in the *Transvaal Indian Association* in Calcutta to help Gandhiji in his South African movement with monetary support.⁴⁸

Therefore, the *Swadeshi* movement marked a most significant step promote in the cause of involving Indian women particularly in Bengal in the nation’s mission for freedom. As Bipan Chandra comments: “A remarkable aspect of the *Swadeshi* agitation was the active participation of women in the movement. The traditionally home-centred women of the urban middle classes joined processions and picketing. From then on they were to take an active part in the nationalist movement”.⁴⁹ While in the early phase of the Congress movement women’s involvement was firmly limited, during the *Swadeshi* movement, as a large programme of activity was evolved, women began to play an

active role. In this way, women associations of Bengal and its interaction with other sister associations of India began to expand.

After Bengal Partition, the 1920s were a turning point for women's contribution in the Congress led nationalist movement in India. The Khilafat- Non Cooperation movement initiated the boycott of government institutions, legislatures and law enforcing bodies. Nationwide strikes, hartals, *Satyagrahas* and breaking of government laws were organized.⁵⁰ As an outcome of the Congress-Khilafat alliance, the constant exhortations of nationalist leaders seeking to build up Hindu-Muslim solidarity and the special Gandhian message and programme for women, increasingly huge numbers of Muslim women began to connect themselves with the national endeavour.⁵¹ In fact, the Central Khilafat Committee started a separate women's Branch in 1921 to encourage greater involvement of Muslim women. Gail Minault, the pre-eminent scholar of Muslim women's role in Indian nationalism, has pointed out how religious theme and anti-British feelings were skillfully utilized to publicize the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements among Muslim women during this period. Again she proceeds to conclude that, Muslim women in due course became "a powerful opinion group within the Khilafat movement, supporting it morally with their firm religious faith and financially with their ornaments".⁵² The Central Khilafat Committee organized women's meetings all over the country during the Khilafat and *Tilak Swaraj Fund* raising campaigns. These meetings were addressed by Bi Amma (Ali matriarch), Begum Muhammad Ali (wife of Muhammad Ali) and Begum Hazrat Mohani among others. These women of important Muslim nationalists of the period, normally in combination with well-known Congress women leaders such as Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi Choudhurani, Basanti Das and others helped to broaden and popularize the Khilafat-Congress programme in different regions through stirring personal examples and by organizing and addressing a large number of women's meetings throughout the sub-continent. For instance, some among them, most remarkably Begum Muhammad Ali, began to adopt *Khadi* clothes in spite of the heaviness and ensuing uneasiness of wearing the *burqa*. Others, like Yusuf Sobhani's wife in Bombay, not only plied the *Charka* themselves but were also intimately concerned with spreading the spinning

movement in their region and almost without exception, they all made noteworthy individual donations besides mobilizing offerings from the ordinary womenfolk to increase the collections of the Khilafat and Tilak *Swaraj* Fund rising campaigns.⁵³

During Non-Cooperation movement the most important women leaders in Bengal were Basanti Devi and Urmila Devi, wife and sister of Chitta Ranjan Das, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly and Hemprabha Majumdar. The women from Das family along with some others not only frequently accompanied Deshbandhu Chitta Ranjan Das on his tours of the province, but also addressed numerous women's meetings asking women to take up the *Charka*, boycott foreign goods and make donations to the Tilak *Swaraj* Fund. Urmila Devi organized the *Nari Karma Mandir* (Temple for women's work) in 1921 to popularize the *Swadeshi* movement and spread the gospel of *Swaraj* among women. After that, Hemprabha Majumdar formed the *Mahila Karmi Sansad* (Form of Women Workers) in 1922 with a view to imparting vocational training to women as well as imbuing them with the spirit of nationalism. Side by side, Hemprabha proved to be a most valued colleague when Sarojini Naidu became the Congress President.⁵⁴ Sarojini Naidu and Hemprabha Majumdar along with Kamaladevi Chottopadhyaya became the focal points of contact between the leaders of the freedom struggle and those of the women's movement. Another most significant women leader of the time was Jyotirmoyee Ganguly.

In that time Bengali women in *mofussil* towns took also vital role like Midnapur the Union Board boycott was successful due to women's co-operation. Ashalata Sen spread the constructive programme in Dacca through the *Shilpashram* started in her own house and later she organized the *Gandaria Mahila Samiti* (1924) with the aim of "spreading the spirit of nationalism and the message of Gandhi among the local women." Not only a few leaders, but masses of women from villages of different districts in Bengal struck at the Raj. Women who would not earlier become visible ahead of their male relatives now came out on the streets to join processions. As a result, large numbers of women were detained in 1922. Side by side, women all over Bengal were sought to be mobilized, especially for the growth and expansion of the *Charka-Khadi* campaign.⁵⁵

It was in Calcutta that for the first time women were thrown openly into the movement in order to motivate greater public participation and attract more volunteers for the Congress. The most shocking and interesting incident was on 7 December, 1921, a group of women, led by Basanti Das, Urmila Devi and Suniti Devi went out to hawk *Khaddar* and were arrested and locked up in jail. As a result, the Calcutta events became an instance and learning to other women of the sub-continent and Gandhiji immediately recognized the value of having women from picket lines. Gandhiji wrote in *Young India*⁵⁶ on 15 December, 1921, and urged women from other parts of the country to follow the brave example of Bengali women. The arrest of respectable women was viewed as an appropriate tactic to shame men into joining the protests. Less expected and certainly not an intended outcome, was the way these arrests affected other women. It may be said that, the incident and activities of Bengali women was an inspiration of the other sister associations of India. For example, at the All India Ladies Conference in Ahmadabad (December 1921), Bi Amma urged women to enroll as Congress volunteers and if their menfolk were arrested, to join the picket lines and keep “the flag flying”.⁵⁷ More importantly, at the Congress session in Ahmadabad, women not only functioned as volunteers for the first time but also the percentage of women delegates at this session was higher than at any earlier Congress.⁵⁸ Even in this final phase, entailing bigger danger, women in various parts of the country played a spirited role in promoting *Khaddar* and picketing activity.

Inspired by such associational activity, women also began to get involve themselves with the picketing movement and the hawking of *Khadi* in various cities of the country. In many parts of the ‘land of the five rivers’ – Punjab women participated enthusiastically in activities connected with the Non-Cooperation movement. Even if their numbers were somewhat limited, women had not only started attending public meetings but also begun to walk in nationalist processions. For example, when women started participating in the processions organized by the District Congress Committee of Lahore, Lado Rani Zutshi⁵⁹ had to commit a group of volunteers to walk following the women. Women in the Punjab also participated actively in extending the *Swadeshi* programme. The foremost role in propagating the *Charka-Khadi* significance and

organizing productive activities among the Punjab women was played by Sarala Devi Choudhurani. In the Non-Cooperation era, she arranged and addressed numerous meetings all over the province, organized *Swadeshi* centres and in all places wanted to inculcate nationalist feelings among Punjabi women. With the help of her associates from the *Bharat Stree Mahamandal*, Sarala Devi hunted to activate the women by apprising them of their rights and duties in the nationalist movement and by exhorting them to implement *Swadeshi*.⁶⁰ Although Lahore was her headquarter, Sarala Devi travelled comprehensively in many parts of northern India enlisting support for *Charka* and *Khadi*. Not only Sarala Devi, outstanding roles in organizing women's nationalist activities in the Punjab were played by Radha Devi, Parvati Devi⁶¹ and of course, Lado Rani Zutshi. In this way, the efforts made by Sarala Devi and other women of distinction in Punjab went a long way in obligating the Punjabi women collectively at the touching level. This can be gauged from the information that "When Gandhi visited Jullunder in early 1921, the welcome address presented to him was printed on a piece of *Khadi* supplied by the aged mother of a prominent lawyer of the city, Nazimuddin Shah".⁶² Likewise, women in Lahore, led by the principal of the Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jullunder had commenced picketing from mid-January, 1922, while Sarala Devi was writing to Gandhi in this way that: "I have to go immediately to the city to arrange to send 40 ladies in 20 groups under two volunteers each to sell *Khadi* in 20 lanes."⁶³

Gandhiji was receiving similar reports from Madras while at Allahabad; Kamala Nehru had organized a big meeting against the magistrate's order on 26 January, 1921.⁶⁴ Swarup Rani Nehru, Kamala Nehru, Begum Abdul Quadir, Chandravati, Uma Nehru etc. were leading women leaders of Uttar Pradesh⁶⁵ Vijay Lakshmi Pandit recalls the deep impact which Gandhi made upon her and many other women during his first stay at Anand Bhavan in November 1920. She tells us that, after the meeting many women made offerings of cash and jewellery, she herself gifted away her gold bangles and her only lament was that she could not give more. Of course, Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru had become deeply engrossed in the Non-Cooperation cause. No doubt, the Nehru women, especially Swarup Rani and Kamala Nehru, made their first timid mark in political activity charming primarily in the spread of *Swadeshi* in Allahabad. The

Nehru household underwent radical changes as earlier luxuries gave way to substantial simplicity and the acceptance of *Khadi* dresses.⁶⁶ In U.P, Lucknow also emerged as a most important centre of *Khadi* work where a committee was formed, under the presidency of Lady Abdul Quadir, to carry on the *Swadeshi* work among women.⁶⁷ It was in Meerut that Parvati Devi, an ardent Congress worker, was arrested for her 'inflammatory speeches' and later was locked up at Agra.⁶⁸ In reality, it was perhaps an expression of the spirit which had been aroused in India's womanhood.

Women in Bombay were also actively took part in the Non-Cooperation movement. Through a large number of women's meetings, energetic spinning activity, various *Khadi* exhibitions and involvement in public processions and demonstrations, the women of Bombay played a notable role in propagating and popularizing the nationalist message. Some well-known women who played chief roles in Bombay during this period included among many others, Avantikabai Gokhale,⁶⁹ Perin Captain and Goshibehn Captain,⁷⁰ women from the Tyabji family, Manekabai Bahadurji⁷¹ and above all, Sarojini Naidu.⁷² These distinguished women were closely associated with some of the established women's associations of Bombay of those times like *Bhagini Samaj*, the *Gujrati Hindu Stree Mandal* and *Hind Mahila Samaj*. Some other women's associations which came into being in 1921 in Bombay were *Shri Sarada Samaj* of Dadar, the *Ladies Khilafat Committee* and the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*.⁷³ In Bombay, the District Congress Committee (DCC) carried out Congress propaganda along with District Volunteer Boards (DVBs). Women while simultaneously members of the DCC and DVBs also formed their own political associations such as the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*, an independent women's association under the presidency of Sarojini Naidu and vice-presidency of Goshibehn Naoroji (Captain) and Avantikabai Gokhale.⁷⁴ Members of the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* were to become members of the Bombay Congress Committee and at the same time collected money for the Tilak *Swaraj* Fund and over and above had to assist in mobilizing women for the spinning movement.

It is important to need special mention here that, as a president of the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* and Indian National Congress Sarojini Naidu visited many provinces of the country and spread the activities of the Bombay women and nationalist feelings during

Non- Cooperation movement. For example, Sarojini Naidu came to Dinajpur district of Bengal in 1926. Her powerful oratorical speeches inspired all section of people specially the women of the region. Thus, by and large, the district of Dinajpur came to occupy a vital position in Bengal politics during national movement.⁷⁵

So, it may be asserted that, from the first phase to till the final phase of the Non-Cooperation movement, women from different provinces of the sub-continent made a significant involvement to the increase and progress of the Congress led nationalist movement. In this respect, Bengali women took the role of inspiration for other sister associations of the sub-continent. More importantly, there were similarities of objectives and activities with Bengali women's associations and had a close dealings to other sister associations of India.

After Non-Cooperation, the Civil Disobedience era occupies a very considerable place in the history of women's role in the national movement because it was during the period 1930-34 that women started emerging in a big way as speakers, marchers, picketers, civil resisters and indeed many even became Congress 'dictators' in various districts and provinces of the sub-continent. At the time when the *Satyagraha* movement was commenced, Gandhiji, in an open letter addressed to the women of India, asked them to contribute to the national movement through participation in the boycott of foreign cloth and intoxicants. This would in turn promote the manufacture of hand-made cloth. Gandhi believed that, this could be achieved if women started devoting "every available minute to the spinning of yarn".⁷⁶ He further said that, in order to restrain the Civil Disobedience movement, the British power might go to any degree like inflicting bodily injuries etc. Gandhiji's advice therefore was that, women should keep on moving ahead in their selected path with extreme willpower and be ready for all eventualities. He said: "To suffer such insult and injury would be their pride. Such suffering, it comes to them will hasten the end."⁷⁷ In fact, women's dynamic relationship with the on going freedom struggle had started from the very first day of the initiation of the Salt *Satyagraha*.⁷⁸ Gandhi began the Civil Disobedience movement in March of 1930 with his 240 miles march from Ahmadabad to Dandi to make salt in defiance of the British domination. Mahatma Gandhi was constructing a new model for

Indian woman that rewrote tameness and self-suffering as strength. Gujrati women living in Bombay responded to this message by forming an association to plan and direct efforts to close shops selling foreign cloth.⁷⁹ April 6, 1930, the anniversary of the Amritsar massacre, was preferred for the official breaking of the Salt Law. A front line of seven people, including two women, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Avantikabai Gokhale, were the first step into the beach, light fires and boil sea water. Kamaladevi remembered that day: “this was their (women’s) first appearance in any modern militant political campaign and I could hardly suppress my excitement at the enormity of the occasion and my own good fortune to be amongst the first It seemed such a stupendous moment in my life, in the life of the women of my country.”⁸⁰

It is necessary to note that, the root of Gandhiji’s Dandi March and Salt *Satyagraha* or Civil Disobedience movement was Gujrat and Bombay. In this regard, Gujrati and Bombay women’s associations at first took the leading role in the movement and after that Bengali woman’s associations along with women’s associations of other provinces were inspired in the movement and took vital role. However, shortly after the Women’s Conference at Dandi, the Gujrati women, under the motivation of Gandhi, made their intentions very clear. They sought to be keenly linked with the national movement and made determined efforts to engage as many Gujrati women as likely in the picketing activities and to organize the sale of illegal imports salt all over Gujrat. As a matter fact, after Gandhi’s arrest in May 1930, the most outstanding event of the Salt *Satyagraha* occurred at Dharsana. It was on May 15, 1930 that Sarojini Naidu led the raid on the Dharsana Salt Works,⁸¹ and here too, she led the *Satyagrahis* in their Salt- making mission which symbolized the Indian strength of mind to achieve *Poorna Swaraj*. Though she and her comrades were arrested, they were released the same day, enabling Sarojini to lead another batch of 2500 raiders on the same salt works on May 21, 1930. This was the instance for one of the most amazing demonstrations of the strength of non-violence generated by Gandhian movement as the volunteers remained entirely quiet in spite of the harsh provocation and terrible violence inflicted on them by the police.

The Dharsana incident, in a sense, set the tone for women's vigorous participation with the Civil Disobedience movement in Gujrat which was powerful not only in cities like Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot etc. but also spread rapidly to many villages in the province and others states. Among the most important women leaders in the province apart from Kasturba Gandhi were Mithubehn Petit, Sharadabehn Mehta, Hansa Mehta, Mridula Sarabhai, Anasuyabehn, Indumati Seth, Manibehn Patel and many others from Gandhi's *Ashram* at Sabarmati.⁸² Mridula Sarabhai Played an important role in popularizing the boycott of foreign cloth in Ahmedabad, where a *Videsh Kapda Bhishkar Samiti* (Association for the Boycott of Foreign Cloth) was formed in 1930-31 whose president was Saraladevi Sarabhai and secretary was Mridula Sarabhai. "This *Samiti* organized almost daily processions in which women wearing saffron coloured *Khadi* sarees with volunteers' badges pinned on, singing patriotic songs, marched through the streets of Ahmedabad. They collected foreign cloth and made bonfires of them. They also distributed cyclostyled sheets throughout the city".⁸³

The *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* of Gujrat started a serious campaign to make the notion of *Swadeshi* well-liked. Volunteers paid personal visits to various homes with the intention of securing signatures for their solid assurance to *Swadeshi*. A picketing association was formed in Ahmedabad.⁸⁴ Indeed, throughout Gujarat, women were in high state of mind, selling the illegal imports salt collected from Dandi and Dharsana, and singing in chorus, "we have broken the Salt Law which will wreck the British Empire".⁸⁵ They also raise slogans like "Holy Salt", "Gandhi Salt" and "Salt that will free India, come and buy".⁸⁶

In this connection, Bombay was another focal centre of women's growing dynamism during the Salt *Satyagraha* and the Civil Disobedience movement. When a most important attack on the Wadala Salt Fields in the precincts of Bombay was intended, it was once again a woman leader Kamaladevi Chottopadhyay who was entrusted with the mission of planning and leading the raid. Kamaladevi recalls that she had "visualized a mass raid embracing a large part of the city's two million population. I was sure that no force, not even machine-guns could stop this raid."⁸⁷ However, on the eve of this attack, she was under arrest and it was her little seven years old son who not

only represented her but also proudly held the placard. Among the other well-known women leaders, who had played noteworthy roles in Bombay were Sarojini Naidu, Lilavati Munshi, Hansa Mehta, the Captain Sisters Perinbehn and Goshibehn, Jaishri Raiji, Avantikabai Gokhale, Jankidevi Bajaj and several others connected with the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*.⁸⁸

Rashtriya Stree Sabha also took the leading role in Bombay and women responded actively to the Civil Disobedience campaign, women volunteers picketed toddy shops, asking the owners to close and the buyers to leave, while many women sold salt and carried on a rigorous house- to-house campaign advocating *Swadeshi*. Most of this work was organized by the *Desh Sevika Sangha* which was a volunteer unit of the famous *Rastriya Stree Sabha* which had been founded during the Non-Cooperation movement. Each *Desh Sevika* took a vow that, she would spin and wear *Khadi*. The *Desh Sevikas* organized a number of demonstrations that set up large reporting in the press and encouraged women of the entire India. Geraldine Forbes reported his book that, processions of one to two thousand women, accompanied by their children, were not unusual at this time. Even bigger numbers came to listen to speeches about *Swadeshi* and freedom. The biggest crowd celebrated Gandhi's birthday and the release from jail of three of the most significant women leaders: Lilavati Munshi, Perin Captain and Mrs. Lukanji. A mile- long sequence of women, led by *Desh Sevikas* dressed in orange sarees and carrying placards, numbered more than 5000. Crowds of 10,000 assembled at both ends of this procession. These numbers could not be matched in other parts of India, but patriotic women in all places emulated the courage.⁸⁹ The courage which connected with women's involvement in the movement was communal synchronization, Gandhi's unquestionable leadership, devotion to Congress and the identification of *Swaraj* with female emancipation.

Hansa Mehta⁹⁰ and others established the *Desh Sevika Sangha* which made significant contributions by way of organizing picketing in various parts of Bombay. This work was carried out by highly dedicated *Desh Sevikas*, who were dressed in saffron (*Kesariya*) sarees and white blouses. In the true Gandhian spirit, they wore only *Khadi* clothes and spent most of the time in spinning the *Charka*. The picketing

activities of the *Desh Sevikas* were so successful and exciting that many foreign cloth merchants gave an undertaking not to trade foreign cloth till such time the country's honour and pride were restored. Seeing the dedicated commitment of *Desh Sevikas* for the sake of the nation, the government felt inhibited to declare the *Sangha* a prohibited association.⁹¹ It is true that, both, during the 1930 movement and later during the second phase of Civil Disobedience, a considerable number of women emerged in the quickly passing chain of command as war 'dictators' of the 'Bombay Provincial Congress Committee' etc.⁹² It would perhaps be no overstatement to submit that, women's associations in other provinces were inspired by and encouraged to follow the remarkable models set up by women of Bombay.

In this context, women of Bengal came forward and took part in the Civil Disobedience movement. But their demonstrations were smaller and their activities were more radical and revolutionary than those of women of Bombay or Gujrat or in other regions. Women of Calcutta made and sold salt, picketed cloth and liquor shops, preached the value of *Khaddar* and took processions into the streets. Calcutta was also the heart of revolutionary struggle and women's colleges became centres for recruiting new members. In district towns and villages women joined processions, wore *Khaddar* and hid feeling revolutionaries⁹³ In Bengal, *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (MRS)*, *Nari Styagraha Samiti* and *Ladies Picketing Board* were the main three women's associations through which they took part in the Civil Disobedience movement.⁹⁴ *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* (National Association of Women), the first organization to mobilize women openly for political work, was begun in 1928, founded by Lotika Ghosh and guided by Subhas Chandra Bose.⁹⁵ It may be noted that, the *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* in Bengal and *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* in Bombay had shared similar goals. They wanted to achieve both *Swaraj* and improvement in women's status, as they considered these two goals as inseparable and interdependent. As long as women's lives were not improved the nation could never be free and until the nation was not free women's conditions would not improve. The first step to *Swaraj* was the education of women to their double oppression as colonial subjects and inferior sex.⁹⁶ In that sense,

there was an interaction with *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* of Bengal and *Rashtriya Stree Sabha* of Bombay.

However, one of the most impressive roles by Bengali women occurred well in advance of the Civil Disobedience movement. In 1928, Subhas Bose decided to have uniformed women volunteers march with men in the procession to inaugurate the annual Congress meetings in Calcutta. He made Latika Ghosh a 'colonel' and placed in charge of recruiting and leading the girls. Their 'uniforms' consisted of dark green saris with red borders worn over white blouses – the colours of the Congress flag. During this Congress session women were noticeable everywhere. They managed the tea-stalls and helped with local preparations. They helped to arrange the *All-India Women's Social Conference* in juxtaposition with the regular Congress session. In fact, the 1928 session of Congress set priority for the participation of Bengali women in political programmes and activities. In reaction to the Congress call in 1929 to women who were ready to serve, a number of Calcutta women formed the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti*. This *Samiti* had a core of fifteen to twenty women who were willing to picket and risk arrest like, Urmila Devi, Jyotirmoyee Ganguli, Santi Das, Bimal Protibha Devi etc. They chose white *Khaddar* saris as their picketing uniform.⁹⁷ It may be said that, Bengali women and other provinces women like Gujrat or Bombay were a uniform to take part in picketing or other activities relating with Civil Disobedience movement which means there was a interlinking and similarities between women associations of Bengal and other sister associations of India.

At the same time the Ladies Picketing Board was divided into different sections for the sake of convenience and efficiency. During 1930 ladies took out their own procession in Calcutta and also led them and addressed meetings.⁹⁸ Jyotirmoyee Ganguli addressed a meeting at Narghat near Tamluk in defiance of a prohibitory order. Nistarini Devi held on one such a meeting at Calcutta. Indumati Goenka guided the *Satyagrahis* in Bengal who were sent to jail. There are many accounts of their bravery.⁹⁹ In July 1930, twenty two ladies of the Calcutta *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* were arrested and immediately the shopkeepers of Burrabazar closed their shops because they feared that the crowd would turn violent.¹⁰⁰ In Calcutta, to break the Salt Law, Lady Volunteers

from *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* and *Satyagrahi Sevika Dal* sent volunteers in groups and batches. It may be mentioned that, the *Desh Sevika Sangha* (National Women's Volunteer Association) established in various regions around 1930, had as its plan the achievement of self rule. It determined on prohibition foreign cloth, abolition of the drinking of spirits and producing hand spun *Khadi*. As a result, the *Desh Sevika Sangha* was forbidden by the British Government for having taken active part in the Civil Disobedience movement.¹⁰¹ Therefore, *Satyagrahi Sevika Dal* of Bengal and *Desh Sevika Sangha* of Bombay were the same aims and objectives which became associated with freedom movement. In this way, there was inter-connection with each other.

In many districts of rural Bengal like, Midnapur, 24-Parganas, Khulna, Bakhergunge, Noakhali, Chittagong, Dacca, Comilla, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur etc. women responded to the call to break the Salt Laws. As soon as the news of Gandhi's Dandi March began to extend, villagers of Bhangar and Matla in the Midnapore began to openly manufacture salt. During the *Salt Satyagraha*, women in the Contai Sub-division of Midnapore district were most active and played a front line part.¹⁰² Sarma Gupta and Ashalata Sen took the leading role at Dacca, Surama and Sushama Palit at Bankura, Hemprabha Majumdar at Comilla, who took up the work of Civil Disobedience movement and emulated their Calcutta sisters in carrying out its different items to their logical end.¹⁰³ A *Picketing Board* was started by the women of Bengal in May 1931 to boycott and picket in association with Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The effort of this Board was to propagate against the use of foreign goods, to popularize home industries, to help develop cottage industries specially those of spinning and weaving *Khadi*; to arrange processions and meetings etc. For instance, Nellie Sen Gupta, wife of Deshpriya Jatindra Mohan Sen Gupta, was arrested in April 1933 when she presided over the plenary session of the Indian National Congress and declared illegal by the government.¹⁰⁴ More interesting is that, in Bengal, women were all over and every phases participating in the Civil Disobedience movement. Many village women too endured their share of sacrifice and suffering and nodoubt strengthened the Congress movement. Almost immediately *Mahila Rashtriya Sangha* was declared

illegal. The president Smt. Urmil Devi with members of the *Nari Satyagraha Samiti* like, Hempradha Devi, Ashoklata Das and others were also arrested.

Women's political demonstrations in Madras were more passive than in Bengal or Bombay. Although women organized picketing and marching in procession. There was the formation of the *Women's Swadeshi League* (1928) under the guidance of Shrimati S. Anbujammal, widow sister of S. S. Iyengar and Krishnabai Rau who organized the *Desh Sevika Sangha* (Women Serving the Country). Their activities were to sell *Khaddar*, join *prabhat Pheris* and picketing, preach the true value of *Swadesi*, organize *Swadeshi* exhibitions etc. Among the other outstanding women leaders were Rukmani Lakshmi pathy, Durgabai Deshmukh, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Margaret Cousins etc. Women of *Desh Sevika Sangha* dressed in orange saris and blouses.¹⁰⁵ So, it may be noted that, the basic aims and objectives of Madras women's associations during the Civil Disobedience movement were similarities with Bengal women's associations.

In the neighboring Orissa region too, the two important centres of Salt *Satyagraha* were Inchudi¹⁰⁶ in the Balasore district and Kujanga¹⁰⁷ in the Cuttack district. On 20 April 1930, the first batch of women *Satyagrahis* was led by Rama Devi and Malati Chowdhury, who went to Inchudi and openly manufactured salt there. Hundreds of women along with Sarladevi, Savitridevi and others blowing conches followed them in a long march in which volunteers from Gujrat and Bengal also participated.¹⁰⁸ As a result of the constant efforts made by the women leaders in Orissa who did house to house campaigning to motivate women to break Salt Laws, even uneducated women from the lower strata were drawn to gather and came in large numbers.¹⁰⁹ It is also remarkable that, while some ladies joined the movement with the consent and support of their families, others seem to have come of their own desire, such as Haramoni Devi, Adharamoni Devi, Sushila Devi, Mohini Devi, Nishamani Devi, Kadambini Devi and the like.¹¹⁰ So, it may be said that, the main features of women activities relating to the Civil Disobedience movement of Orissa more or less had the echoes from the voices of women of Bengal and those of Bombay or Gujrat and in that sense there was a dealings and inter-relationship with each other.

It may be assumed that, the activities of women's associations did not confine within the boundaries of colonial Bengal or Bombay or Madras. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India. In this respect, during the Civil Disobedience era the prominent women of Punjab were Lado Rani Zutshi, the wife of Motilal Nehru's nephew and three of her daughters, Manmohini Sehgal, Shyama and Janak led the movement in Lahore. Lado Rani Zutshi addressing a meeting outside Mori Gate in Lahore and urged to Punjabi women to imitate the instance set by their sisters in Bombay or Bengal claiming that "the arrests of women shows the weakness of the government."¹¹¹ In 1929, as a student at Government college (for men), Manmohini Devi chaired the student reception committee welcoming Subhas Chandra Bose to preside over the Second All Punjab Student Conference. The environment was already exciting with patriotic zeal when the announcement of Civil Disobedience gave many young people a meeting point. On the other hand, speaking to students Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru recommended they go to the banks of the Ravi river and symbolically 'make salt' and then concentrate on picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops, processions, *Phabhat Pheris* etc. activities in defiance of insensitive government laws to the opposing.¹¹²

Subhadra Joshi, daughter of an Inspector General of police and her elder sister Kaushalya also intensely participated in the late 1930s movement. Subhadra was connected with the Student' organization which was affiliated to the Communist movement. Along with her secret attachment with the Students' organization, she continued to participate in Congress meetings. At Lahore, she along with her friend brought a photostating machine from *Khadi bhandar* and learnt cyclostyling. They xeroxed the underground revolutionary papers and distributed them among various sections of society.¹¹³

In this context, it is also worth mentioning that, the other dimension of political activity in Bengal was the revolutionary activities. The revolutionary movement started roughly at the same time of Civil Disobedience movement and the majority women who got connected with revolutionary groups were students and joined secret parties after they had worked with the women's associations and Congress. The associations like,

Jugantar, *Deepali Sangha* (1923) of Leela Nag, *Chhatri Sangha* (Association for Female Students, 1928) and so on arranged study classes, swimming centres, libraries, cooperative stores, youth hostels.¹¹⁴ Although there was a distinct tradition of women's association with revolutionary activity in Bengal since the *Swadeshi* movement and from 1931 onwards women crowded into the dynamic roles and actions in quick succession. For instances, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury, two teenaged school girls, assassinated the District Magistrate of Comilla (14 December, 1931), Bina Das fired on the Bengal Governor Anderson at a Calcutta University Convocation function (6 February, 1932), Preetilata Waddedar led the attack on the Chittagong European Club (24 September, 1932), Kalpana Dutta jumped bail and disappeared under ground with Surya Sen's group of absconders (28 December, 1932), Ujjwala Mazumdar attempted to murder the Governor of Bengal at Leborg Race Course in Darjeeling (May, 1934)¹¹⁵ In brief, it would seem no overstatement that, from the Civil Disobedience movement, Bengali women were actively associated with all form of political action in the province and the women terrorists were no longer the mother or sister sheltering the escapee but full fledged comrade-in arms, revolutionizing all precedents and norms for political action. The women of Bengal, compared to other provinces, revolutionary struggle for freedom was more constant and strong and continued till 1934. In this struggle, women of Bengal played a vital role from the beginning to the end. The nature of involvement on the part of Bengali women was more varied than their counterparts in other provinces. Likewise Bengal, Delhi and Punjab also reported most of the revolutionary activities.

It is a fact that, most of the women, who took part in the national movement, were inspired by Gandhi, yet there were a few to whom Gandhi's ideology of non-violence was not satisfactory. The revolutionary associations came into being in 1930s and were particularly active in Bengal. But many women of other provinces like Delhi or Punjab were inspired by the activities of Bengali women. Among the revolutionary women from Delhi, the name of Durgadevi Vohra, wife of Bhagwati Charan Vohra stands out notably. She was part of the Young India movement of the 1930s. Her husband was a close associate of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev. Durgadevi also

worked in association with them and played a very important role in rescuing Bhagat Singh by taking him away from Lahore to Calcutta after Saunder's killing.¹¹⁶

Sushila Devi (Sushila Mohan) was a radical worker in Punjab, cut her finger and placed mark of blood as *tilak* on the foreheads of the revolutionaries, like Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt on 9 April 1929. Because of her connection with Bhagat Singh to whom she sent letters, *rakhi* and food, she was under arrest and locked up. She was declared a fugitive in the Delhi and Lahore Conspiracy Cases and served a number of Jail terms.¹¹⁷

So, it may be submitted that, whether Bombay or Gujrat, there were many similarities of women's associational activities with Bengal women's associations regarding Civil Disobedience movement and Delhi or Lahore for revolutionary activities. It is likely that, the plan and programmes of the women's associations beyond Bengal were different in view of their aims and objectives. But the basic features of the movement, Girls students' activities and involvement (in Bengal *Chhatri Sangha*), few revolutionary activities, dress code etc. were similarities with Bengal women associations. In that sense, it may be pointed out that, there were inter-connection and interaction with Bengal women associations and other sister associations of India.

After that, *Congress Mahila Sangha* was established in 1938 and gradually branch associations of *Congress Mahila Sangha* were formed in many provinces. The main aim of this *Sangha* was to organize women for the movement of national liberation. Though the *Congress Mahila Sangha* was also active in women education, equal rights of women and so on. The prominent leaders of *Bengal Congress Mahila Sangha* were Mohini Debi, Neili Sengupta, Labanya Prabha Debi, Joytirmoyee Ganguli, Basanti Debi, Ashalata Sen, Urmila Debi, Labanya Chanda, Latika Ghosh and others.¹¹⁸ Therefore, there was a close link and dealings about the activities and goals of the branch associations of the *Congress Mahila Sangha*.

The last and largest national movement was Gandhiji's Quit India on 8th August 1942. Congress passed the 'Quit India' resolution held at Wardha on 14 July 1942 and after that he gave a call to Britain to leave India and go. The Quit India resolution spoke directly to women "as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom" and involved them to the

movement.¹¹⁹ But, on 9th August 1942 Gandhiji and all other leaders were arrested and the whole country was like a fire. The news of Gandhiji's arrest led to *hartals* in Bombay, Ahmadabad and Poona. By 11th August, the movement assumed aggressive proportions, with people taking out processions, holding meetings and demonstrations. Industrial labour went on a strike in Ahmadabad, Bombay, Kanpur, Indore, Bangalore and Mysore.¹²⁰

The movement soon spread to other places as well "where peasants rebelled against landowners and the agents of British authority".¹²¹ A number of places, people declared independence and took charge of the police stations. Flags were hoisted on secretariat buildings, courts and other government offices. The government machinery was in complete shambles in different districts in Bihar, Central Provinces, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Assam, Orissa and parts of Bengal. In order to bring the situation under control, the government enacted "The Penalties Enhancement Ordinance, Collective Fine Ordinance, the Special Court Ordinance, the Whipping Ordinance".¹²²

Large scale of women and girl students played a significant part in the Quit India movement in different parts of the country, mostly in the absence of male leaders. Women participated in the initial strikes and demonstrations in cities, processions and also organized Political Prisoner's Relief Fund and collected a large amount of money. Some were among the radical students who organized peasant movements and when protest was covered up, joined the secret underground and directed the movement from there. Instantly after the passing of the Quit India resolution women leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur, Rameswari Nehru, Meera Behn and others were arrested. Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kriplalini had to go underground.

It may be known that, Usha Mehta was born on 24 March, 1920 at Satara district, Surat, witness to the imperative resolution of the Quit India movement. To make this decision a success, she wanted to do something different and more difficult than simple picketing of foreign cloth and liquor shops. It was from 9th August 1942, when most of the important leaders were in jail that Usha started making preparations for setting up a radio in the name of "Voice of Freedom".¹²⁴ A transmitter was

necessary for the success of the project. Usha Mehta and her brother Babubhai Khakar were the pioneers of this project. It started broadcasting on 14 August 1942. "This is the Congress Radio calling 42.84 metres from somewhere in India".¹²⁵ The main intend of Usha was to broadcast news and give talks in Hindustani. Credit goes to this broadcasting station for being the first one to relay the news of Chittagong bomb raid, Jamshedpur strike and the violence committed in Ashti Chimur. The speeches were principally meant to highlight the Congress stand both from the national and international points of view. In regard to the Quit India movement, the following remarks were relayed: "So far we were conducting a movement, but now, we are conducting a revolution. In a revolution, there is victory or defeat. This revolution is not of one party or community, but of the whole of India, we hope you will not rest content till the British Empire is burnt to ashes".¹²⁶

It is very easy to understand that, this radio news received a large setback when the government came to know of it and raided the place on the night of 12 November 1942. Babubhai and Usha were arrested in the Radio Conspiracy Case. Usha was finally sentenced to four years imprisonment. In connection of Radio Case, a secret letter from home department, Bombay, to Sir Richard Tottenham, Additional Secretary to the Government of India, forwarded a report by the Commissioner of Police, Bombay. The report enclosed a note on Miss Usha Mehta who made a number of the records used in the broadcast and also operated the transmitter. The report referred to her as "an ardent Congress woman".¹²⁷

It is true that, by and large, the activities of these women gave inspiration to the other women of the sub-continent. Not only that, when the movement extend to the countryside, huge numbers of peasant women joined in protesting against taxes, land tenure and landholder's rights. In this connection, at the end of September 1942, peasants attacked police stations and destroyed telegraph lines in four sub-divisions of Midnapur district, Bengal. The British responded with suppressive measures and a new round of violence began. On 29 September, the people of Tamluk sub-division, Midnapur marched on the town with the target of capturing the court and the police station under the leadership of Matangini Hazara. She was a seventy three years old

widow and born of a scheduled caste family in the Hogla village of Midnapur. She was stepped onward, lifted the Congress flag, gave her public speech and refused to stop when challenged. She was shot first in the hand holding the flag and than in the head which proved to be terminal.¹²⁸

In Bengal, the people of Midnapur district also played an outstanding role in the movement of 1942. Among the 'National Governments' which were formed in some areas was the '*Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar*' on 17 December, 1942, at Tamluk of Midnapur district in Bengal. This national government had its own army called '*Bidyut Bahini*' and the women's wing '*Bhagini Sena*' (Sisters' Corps). Sabitri Dey, Rashimoni Debi led the *Bhagini Sena* to resist police repression.¹²⁹ As a result, on 9th January 1943, six hundred soldiers surrounded many villages in Mohishadal Thana of Midnapur such as Masuria, Dalmasuria and Chandipur. They not only plundering these villages but also resorted to offensive behavior and immorally beaten as many as forty six women on a single day. In this circumstance, to protect their honour and self-respect, the women of the region formed an organization called *Bhagini Seva Sangha*. Some of the women affiliated to this organization kept weapons with them so as to protect themselves from criminal attack. For this reason, two women were prosecuted under the Arms Act for drawing out daggers in self-defence.¹³⁰ Not only that, they also refused to pay taxes. Side by side, many women of other district of Bengal took part in this movement and played also significant role.

The activities of Bengali women and their associations were also internalized the women of other states of the sub-continent. It is likely that, the method and programmes of the associations beyond Bengal were different in view of their aims and objectives. In this respect, the *Mahila Charka Samiti* in Patna, Bihar was actively associated with the Quit India Movement. On 9th August 1942, members of this *Samiti* took out a big procession. After passing through the entire town, the procession finally stopped at Congress Maidan where a meeting was held in which Bhagwati Devi, Rampyari Devi and Sundari Devi made powerful speeches exhorting the government servants to resign and the lawyers to leave their practices.¹³¹ In the Manbhum district of Purulia, a number of women were arrested. The police raided the *Shilpa Ashram* in

Purulia and took into custody Lavanya Prabha Ghosh and her daughter Kamla Ghosh.¹³² Among the many women who took part in the movement in Bihar were Sarala Devi, Usha Rani Mukherji, Saroj Das, Prabhawati Devi, Girija Devi, Surti Devi, Kumari A. R. Das, Saraswati Devi, Jamvati Devi and others.

Gandhi had wanted the Quit India movement to be greatly different from the traditional *Satyagraha*. He sought this movement to be imbued with the spirit of “Do or Die” wherein there should be open defiance of law and refusal to pay taxes. In Orissa, under the leadership of Malati Choudhury¹³³ and S.N. Dwivedi,¹³⁴ a large number of women enthusiastically involved themselves with the Quit India movement and their activities were more or less similar with Bengali women. At Malati’s directions, railway lines were tampered with telephone lines were disconnected which was to help the Congress workers to complete their mission without any obstacles.¹³⁵ At the same time, there were strikes, protest meetings and open defiance of law. People even went to the level of looting banks and government treasury. Therefore, within a few days, the situation reached serious proportions, with political prisoners inside the jail violating the jail regulations and undermining the authority of the jailor.¹³⁶

As a result, the Government was obligatory to declare the AICC Working Committee and other such bodies within the province as unlawful. On 16 August 1942, at Bari, Mangala Devi made an extremely large effort to “free the Congress *ashram* which had been attacked and taken over by the police”.¹³⁷ She was detained along with other women workers when she was trying to burn the seized property and uniform belonging to the police. The other women who arrested by the police were Rama Devi, Malati Choudhury, Priyambada Devi, Godavari Devi and some other Congress workers. In places like Jagatsingpur, Tirtol and Balikunda, the situation was somewhat serious with people becoming violent and setting on fire some government institutions like post offices, police barracks etc. In order to check this violence, police announced imposition of many fines on people. It is true that, the contributions made by Oriya women were all the more praiseworthy, mainly in view of that all the important male leaders at that time were behind the bars.

So, one may notice that, the nature and mode of activities of Bengali women and other states of women in the national movements were almost similar with the other parts of India. The activities of these women's associations did not confine within their boundary. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India.

(c) All India Based Associations

Course-plotting of the many streams of the women's movement into one, and developing a network of women's associations of different affiliations working in separation all over Bengal nay India that after World War-I, many all India based associations were created, such as the *Women's Indian Associations* (WIA), the *National Council of Women in India* (NCWI) and the *All-India Women's Conference* (AIWC). These were spread groups of women in different parts of India doing something or other to bring a few women together, more on the basis of caste or religion. Bringing them all together for a common purpose with a feeling of nationality, of the sisterhood of women as women, ignoring the troublesome forces that kept them isolated which was a marvelous task.¹³⁸

In this respect, after *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* (1910) of Sarala Devi Choudhurani, the establishment of the *Women's Indian Association* (WIA) in 1917 was the first attempt to organize women on all India bases. The founding members of the organization were Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins, a British feminist and theosophist, Dorothy Jinaragadasa, an Irish feminist, married to singalese theosophist C. Jinarajadasa and others. Annie Besant felt the necessity of organizing women under one umbrella and the *Women's Indian Association* was thus established with active support from Margaret Cousins and Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, the first women legislator of India in 1924. The WIA had the following aims:

- (i) To make women conscious of their liability as daughters of India.
- (ii) To help them understand that the future of India lies in their hands, for as wives and mothers they have the duty of training, guiding and forming the nature of the future rulers of India.

- (iii) To form women's associations for the purpose of self-development and education and for the definite service of others.¹³⁹

The *Women's Indian Association* grew very quickly. Within the first year of its existence thirty-three branches were formed and within five years, forty-three branches, twenty centres and 2,300 members were included from all over India. Every branch accepted the main goals of the association but remained autonomous. This made it possible to activate the branches to express women's opinion.¹⁴⁰ It may be said that, the branches of WIA did play a key role not only in effecting the regeneration of India but also to interact with Bengal and other sister associations of India

The women who formed this association decided to entitle it the *Women's Indian Association* because membership was open to both Indians and Europeans. Even with this association's obvious connection with and dependence on the *Theosophical Society*, it defined itself as an association that integrated and represented women of all races, cultures and religions. Each branch was mainly work in four areas: religion, education, philanthropy and politics. The association defined women as religious "by nature" and inspired non-sectarian religious activity. But the most imperative work was educational and the branches were motivated to set up adult classes for literacy, sewing, and first aid. The philanthropy works were involved feeding the poor, setting up shelters for widows and providing relief for disaster victims. The WIA had been politically active from the beginning when they sent a delegation to meet with Secretary of State Edwin Montague in December 1917 to request the franchise for women.¹⁴¹ and thus started the 'Votes for Women' campaign on the sub-continent.

In this way, the 'Votes for Women Deputation' included Sarojini Naidu as the chief representative and fourteen other women leaders drawn from different parts of the sub-continent who had been 'prominently associated' with women's causes, particularly the spread of female education. They were lady Abala Bose, Mrs. Mazharul Haque, Mrs. Nehru, Mrs Chandrasekhar Aiyar, Mrs. Lazarus, Mrs. Herabai Tata, Dr. (Miss) Joshi (later Rani Rajwade), Mrs. Sanjiva Rao, Miss. Gokhale, Annie Besant, Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Mrs. Margaret Cousins¹⁴² and others. In fact, the activities of the association appear to have been a courageous step on the part of leading Indian women

and especially mark a distinct advance in the suffrage movement of the sub-continent. It is necessary to highlight that, these women belonged to a number of women's associations such as *Seva Sadan*, the *Gujrati Hindu Stree Mandal*, the *Indian Women's University*¹⁴³ and of course, the *Women's Indian Association*. It is noteworthy in this connection that, the WIA was a national level association and it took the very important role to communicate and interact with women associations of Bengal and other sister associations of India.

The next all-India based women's association was the *National Council of Women in India* (NCWI). It had utilized the networks developed doing war work to link their various clubs and associations into a new council by the women of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras.¹⁴⁴ In 1925 the NCWI was established as a national branch of the International Council of women. When it was first organized the National Council had three life patrons - the Dowager Begum Saheb of Bhopal, Maharani Saheb of Baroda and Mehribai Tata, wife of Sir Dorab Tata. Maharani Saheb of Baroda was the president and other women who held important positions on the executive committee included lady Dorab Tata, Miss Cornelia Sorabji, India's first lady barrister; Mrs. Tarabai Premchand, the wife of a wealthy banker; Mrs. Shaffi Tyabji, a member of one of Bombay's leading Muslim families and Maharani Sucharu Devi of Mourbhanj, a daughter of Keshub Chandra Sen. Standing Sectional Committees were formed to contract with art, labour, legislation and the press. The committee on legislation to progress women's condition was the most significant.¹⁴⁵ It may be noted that, these women were all from wealthier family and of its elitist character, the Council failed to grow and become a very important national association. In addition to that, the Council was politically and socially traditionalist. Because of the relationship with the British and the wealth and the status of the important members. At the same time, the *National Council of Women in India* remained detached from the struggle for freedom. As late as 1928 the *Bengal Council* of the NCWI passed a decision asking for a female experimentation officer for Calcutta and then suggested the appointee be a British woman. They argued that having an Indian woman do this type of work was too "progressive" and should be avoided for some time.¹⁴⁶ It may be pointed out that, the

NCWI though a national level association but its relation with Bengal branch was very close.

Earlier to these, in 1927, *All India Women's Conference* (AIWC) was established with its branches across the country under the enterprise of Margaret Cousins, a standing Irish lady and other women belonging to the WIA. In June 1926, Mr. E. F. Oaten, the Director Public Instruction (DPI), Bethune College, Calcutta, requested women to choose what kind of education was appropriate for Indian girls and then tell the government "with one voice what they want, and keep on telling us till they get it". A respond to his challenge was published in *Stri Dharma*, journal of WIA and this ultimately led to tactics for a Conference.¹⁴⁷ The first *All India Women's Conference* on Educational Reform was held at Poona from 5th to 8th January 1927. It was a momentous episode. It brought together women from various parts of India irrespective of region, religion, caste and creed under the guidance of Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Lakshmi Menon, Renuka Ray, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Hansa Mehta, Vijaylaxmi Pandit and others. The AIWC used to sketch the various socio-economic programmes and other actions to be undertaken by roughly 500 branches all over India in the fields of education, social legislation and social reform.¹⁴⁸ The Conference began a new era in the development of women's education in India and laid the foundation of the AIWC which hereafter met annually and became an organizer among associations fighting for women's rights and equality. The AIWC was hardly fostering philanthropist views and more or less common patriotism among a handful section of the elite and upper class women.

The Conference appointed a standing committee to carry on the work declared at its first session. Maharani Chimnabai Gaekwad of Baroda was elected president, the Rani Saheb of Sangli, Lady Abala Bose and Sarojini Naidu, vice-presidents, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay its first secretary and treasurer. The Committee members were drawn from all communities and from all parts of India, thus reflecting the truly all-India character of the association. The historic conference ended with a vote of thanks by Sarojini Naidu who, in her unique style said, 'One thing is unchangeable throughout the world, the indivisibility of womanhood; frontiers, wars, races, many

things make for division, but womanhood combines - the queen and the peasant are one'.¹⁴⁹ It may be said that, the *All India Women's Conference* was a platform which created a close linkage with other sister associations of India.

In this respect, as a consequence of the Conference, educational leagues were formed in various provinces such as Bengal, Gujrat, Hyderabad (Deccan), Indore and many new constituencies. Women in Bengal took a significant step by establishing the *Bengal Educational League* on February, 1927 through a conference held in Calcutta.¹⁵⁰ In 1930, schools had been opened in Nagpur, Jaipur, Lucknow and Burdwan (West Bengal) by the AIWC. In Balasore (Orissa) and Ranchi (Bihar) hostels for girls were under construction. As a result, Abala Bose, wife of the renowned scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose and sister of Sarala Roy founded the Brahmo Girls' School in Calcutta. Calcutta had two adult education centres and Balasore and Hyderabad one each. Following the 1927 session, members of the AIWC set about implementing all their proposals in right earnest. During 1930-31, they managed to open numerous girls' schools, a school for the blind and special schools for Muslim girls in Bihar, Ajmer and Assam. More schools for girls were projected at Patna and Lucknow. A hostel for working women was already running in Calcutta and a special boarding house for Adi Karnataka girls had been formed in Mysore. Four centres for adult education were founded in Bombay and one at Baroda, where training for adult women was being imparted by means of lamp slides and cinema shows. The East Bengal constituency had resolute to build a special fund for the education of women and children who could not attend school. It had an enrollment of 50 women and children. In Calcutta, the Gokhale Memorial Girls' High School was opened mainly due to the efforts of Sarala Ray, president of the AIWC in 1931-32. Sarala Ray and Kadambini Ganguly were the first two women to be allowed to sit for the matriculation examination of Calcutta University. Sarala Ray was an outstanding educationist. Named after the great nationalist leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, this school aimed at national integration. Hindi was taught in the primary classes where Bengali was the medium. Sanskrit was compulsory in the senior school where the medium of instruction was English. The institution laid great emphasis on sports, music, dramatic, apart from providing an

excellent academic syllabus. Teachers were preferred from all parts of India and English was taught by English women. As an educationist Sarala Ray encouraged the conference in Madras.¹⁵¹ In this way, there was a close interaction and inter-connection with all branch associations of AIWC and as a result, a relation developed among themselves.

We have already been stated in the 5th chapter regarding the women's struggle for rights to vote and in this respect, the AIWC and the Bengal branch played very significant role. But in the connection of philanthropist activities, the provincial branches took on new life during the war years. While World War-II was being fought, a larger disaster in the form of famine was taking its toll in West Bengal in 1943. The AIWC played a crucial role by organizing timely and wide-ranging relief work in the affected areas. The 1943 famine was, in Jawaharlal Nehru's words: 'the biggest and most devastating famine in India during the past 170 years of British dominion, comparable to those terrible famines which occurred from 1766 to 1770 in Bengal and Bihar as an early result of the establishment of British rule'.¹⁵²

However, the AIWC founded relief centres in Calcutta, Bhola, Rajbari, Bankura, Tamaluk, Comilla and Mymensing districts in Bengal and relief committees of the AIWC were set-up to collect funds from all over India through door to door campaigns and by organizing concerts, fetes and donations. They also supplied food grains directly to Calcutta from the provinces and Vijayalakshmi Pandit, after touring the province, devised a plan for children's homes. A health clinic along with a kitchen and milk centre was ably organized by Usha Haldar in Bankura. Commending the tremendous work of the relief committee set-up by the Calcutta branch of the AIWC, Sarojini Naidu reiterated the need for 'active and united cooperation especially of all woman and women's organizations.....in the grim drama of a struggle between death and life'.¹⁵³ So, it is very clear to say that, there was a dealings and interaction with Bengal branch associations of AIWC and other sister branch associations of India.

Not only that, the AIWC played an imperative role in the deletion of communal tensions in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar in 1946. Women from branches and sub-branches volunteered to work in the riot affected areas.¹⁵⁴ Side by side, other areas of

activities of AIWC were health and family planning, untouchability, uplift of widows etc. which created a great connection with Bengal branch association and other branch associations of the sub-continent.

Till now there was an attempt to highlight the all-India based associations and its relation with women associations of Bengal and other branch associations of India. There existed some women association which were being organized at first in Bengal and then took the shape as an all-India based association. In this connection, mention may be made *All India Girl Students' Association (AIGSSA) and Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti (MARS)*. *The All Bengal Girl Students' Association (ABGSA)* came into being in 1939 by the girl students of various colleges and university in Bengal and set up branches in the Calcutta colleges as well as in the district colleges. *The Girl Students' Association (GSA)* became very popular and provided a large platform for the political activities of left-minded and educated young women of not only in Bengal but also in other parts of the country like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madras and Bombay.¹⁵⁵

The first *All India Girl Students'* conference was held at Lucknow on 1940. Sarojini Naidu became the chief guest and Renu Roy, niece of the famous Bengal Congress leader Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy and became a Communist member of Indian parliament later, was elected as its president. It is important to note that, the *Girl Students' Association* conference not only discussed the common academic matters in its agenda; but the question of gender equality, position of women in the male dominated society, the status of women before law and other issues relating to marital affairs etc. were also taken up for discussion.¹⁵⁶ Most of the leaders of the GSA were Gita Banerjee (Mukherjee), Kanak Dasgupta (Mukherjee), Shanti Sarkar (Basu), Anima Banerjee (Chakrabarty), Kalyani Mukherjee, Preeti Lahiri and others. There were many Muslim women who were motivated by this left-wing movement. Among them Layla Samad of Jalpaiguri, wife of Abdus Samad, Maksuda Begum of Burdwan, wife of Monsur Habibullah, Rabeya Khatun, wife of Sayad Shahedullah and Najimunnesa Ahmed of Calcutta, daughter of Kutubuddin Ahmed were notable.¹⁵⁷ However, the members of the GSA were intensely involved with activities like relief work and the anti-Fascist cultural movement during the World War-II.

The GSA volunteers were also part of the post-War popular upsurge against the British imperialism. They participated in the 'INA- Prisoners' Release Movement (November, 1945), 'Post and Telegraph Workers' Strike' (July, 1946) and expressed unity with the RIN strike or Naval Revolt (February, 1946) etc. It is said that, some girl students belonging to the wealthy class of urban areas, also took part vigorously under the placard of the Communists, in the *Tebhaga* Movement of the six million sharecroppers of Bengal and the Telengana Peasants' Struggle in Andhra region on the eve of freedom. The branch associations of GSA were also formed in Bombay, Punjab and other region. Nargis Batliwala of Bombay, Perin Varuchar of Punjab were most well-known leader¹⁵⁸ In this way, GSA became a leading association to form a new kind of political consciousness and communication among the young and educated women across the Bengal on the basis of Marxist ideology.

Like *All Bengal Girl Students' Association*, the *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (Bengal Women's Self-Defense League) of 1943 was also organized at first in Bengal. But the branches and activities of *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* did not confine within the boundary of colonial Bengal. It crossed its periphery of activities and touched other sister associations that developed in various parts of India. The main goals and activities of the *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (MARS) were save the country, self-defense of women, release of Gandhi and other nationalist leaders, famine relief work and so on.¹⁵⁹ Within May 1943, MARS had almost 25,000 members in Bengal alone and was able to spread its branches in all district towns and even remote rural areas of the province such as Howrah, Hoogly, Midnapur, Bankura, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Dinajpur, Pabna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Khulna, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Noakhali, Syhlet and other region.¹⁶⁰

The branches of *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* or *Women's Self-Defence League* were established in the same style in other parts of India like Patna, Lucknow, Kanpur, Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Malabar, Andhra region, Assam and so on. For example, *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* of Surma valley, Assam, *Kerala Mahila Sangam*, *Punjab Women's Self-Defence League* etc.¹⁶¹ Not only that, the *Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* took the prominent role to bring together fourteen different women's associations of

Bengal for relief work during the famine and to take protective measures against epidemics. They were *Congress Mahila Sangha*, *Muslim Women's Self-Defence League*, *Christian Mahila Sangathan* (YWCA), Bengal branches of AIWC, *Brahmo Samaj Relief Mission*, *Nari Seva Sangha* and others. The Bengal Women's 'Food Committee' came into being out of this effort.¹⁶² It may be said that, women from different groups and religious faiths were incorporated for save the country and self-defense. In this way, the *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* took the very vital role to interact and inter-connection with other sister associations of Bengal nay India.

So, women's responses and involvement in associations assumed truly sub-continental dimensions and witnessed deeply moving and extraordinary scenes in verily every nook and corner of the country. Though the foremost roles were played by women of the middle and upper classes, women from almost every section of the contemporary society had been mobilized into action in their own humble ways. Significantly, participation and interaction of different women's associations which coming out into the public arena gradually transformed the self-perception of many women activised during this era. It gave them a new sense of command, a new self-view and from this point on, a self-identity.

Notes and References

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3. Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India- Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, First South Asian Edition 1998, Second Reprint- 2000, p. 70.
4. Nargis Sattar, *op.cit.* p. 46.
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2003, p. 18; see also Rajan Mahan, *Women in Indian National Congress (1921-1931)*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1999, p. 41.

6. Manas Chakrabarty, Vidyawati Agarwala, *Women & Politics in India*, The Associated Publishers, Ambala Cantt., India, 2006, p. 35.

7. Sarada Ghosh, *Narichetana O Sangathan – Oupanibeshik Bangla 1829-1925* (in Bengali), Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, August 2013, pp. 86-87; see also Nargis Sattar, *op. cit.* p. 46.

8. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* pp. 18-19; see also Anup Taneja, *Gandhi, Women and the National Movement, 1920-47*, Har-Anand Publications PVT LTD, 2005, p. 37; Manas Chakrabarty, Vidyawati Agarwala, *op. cit.* pp. 35-36.

9. Aparna Basu, Bharati Ray, *op. cit.* p.19; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 244. Sarala Devi Choudhurani was regarded as the first feminist of modern Bengal as well as the first woman political leader in modern times. It was the first organization runs by women to be clearly committed to augmenting woman power. At the opening session, Sarala Devi announced that the first requisite was an awakening at the individual level.

At the very outset, I, a woman, must assume that I am the presiding deity of my house and that I exist. Subsequently, we women must assume that we are the reigning queens of our societies and families and that we exist We must, to start with, look after our personal development and we shall then gradually be in a position to contribute to the social advancement of our Country and the world outside. See *Bharati*, Vol. 34, No. 12, 1910-11.

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11. Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 245.
12. 'A Women's Movement', an article by Sarala Devi in *Modern Review*, October, 1911, p. 348.
13. Sarala Devi Choudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p. 179; see also 'The Bharat Stree Mahamandal' in *Modern Review*, September 1912, p. 312; Sarada Ghosh, *op.cit.* pp. 246-247.
14. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, *Loc. cit.* also in Gerldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 70; Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 248.
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18. 'Sarala Devi Chaudhurani', an article by Jogesh Chandra Bagal in *Sahitya Sadhak Charitamala*, No. 99, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta, 1964, p. 24.
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Delhi, First published-1979, Reprinted-2004, p. 368; see also Sarada Ghosh, *op. cit.* p. 272.

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22. G. S. Dutta, *A Woman of India; Being the life of Saroj Nalini*, Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 113. This book is a biography of Saroj Nalini by her husband.

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59. She was the wife of Pandit Ladli Prasad Zutshi, leading lawyer of Lahore who was the son of Motilal Nehru's sister. Lado Rani's interest in politics had begun during the Martial Law in Punjab in 1919 and from then on, she had become an active Congress worker in Lahore. See Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 148.
60. 'A Women's Movement', an article by Sarala Devi Choudhurani in *Modern Review*, October 1911, pp. 344-350; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 98-99.
61. Radha Devi was the wife of the doyen of Punjabi Congressmen, Lala Lajpat Rai. Parvati Devi, a teacher in Amritsar, was an ardent Congress worker who was finally arrested in Meerut in December 1922 for her 'inflammatory speeches'; she was

sentenced to two years imprisonment, till then the severe penalty imposed on any woman in the sub-continent. For details see Manmohan Kaur, *op.cit.* Sterling, Delhi, 1985, pp. 142 and 154; see also Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 99.

62. *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Vol. XIX, p. 455; also in Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 149-150; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p.100.

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66. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness: A Personal Memoir*, Orient, Delhi, 1981, pp. 67-68.

67. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 13.01.1922.

68. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17.12.1922. She was given two years imprisonment, 'The highest sentence so far awarded to any lady'. See Usha Bala, *Indian Women Freedom Fighters*, Manohar, Delhi, 1986, p. 131.

69. Avantikabai Gokhale was married to a Bombay engineer, Baban Gokhale. She was born in 1882.

70. Perin Captain and Goshibehn Captain, grand-daughters of Dadabhai Naoroji, Perin Captain was born in 1888. She was married to D.S. Captain, a reputed lawyer. From 1920 she began to wear *Khadi* clothes and play an active part in popularizing the *Swadeshi* cause in association with her sisters, Goshibehn Captain and Khurshed Naoroji; also a founder member of the *Rastriya Stree Sabha*.

71. Manekabai Bahadurji was the daughter of Dr. Atmaram Sagun. Under the inspiration of Gandhi, She had learned to spin personally and tried to propagate the concept of spinning through the *Sevasadan*.

72. Sarojini Naidu was among the most devoted disciples of Gandhi who became the President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and also of the *Rashtriya Stree Sabha*. She also became the President of the Indian National Congress in 1926.

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74. Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, *Women in the Indian National Movement- Unseen Faces and Unheard Voices, 1930-42*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, 2006, p.54.
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76. *Young India*, 10 April, 1930.
77. *Young India*, *Loc. cit.*
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79. 'Speech at Gujarati Women's Conference, Dandi', *CWMMG*, Vol. XLIII, pp. 251-252.
80. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Inner Recesses Outer Spaces: Memoirs*, Navrang, New Delhi, 1986, pp. 152-153.
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84. Aparna Basu, *Loc.cit.*
85. *The Tribune*, 9 April 1930 and 13 April 1930; an insightful elaboration of these themes is available in 'Gujarati Women's Response to Gandhi 1920-1942', an article by Aparna Basu in *Samya Shakti*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1984, pp. 6-20.
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87. 'The Struggle for Freedom', an article by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in *Women of India*, Tara Ali Baig (ed.), Publications Division, Delhi, 1958, p. 21; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p.275; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p.134.
88. Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p.277; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p.133.

89. Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 135; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 276; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 137. Lilavati Munshi, like her husband K.M. Munshi, was a leading writer in Gujrati. Both played an important role in the national movement. They were also known for their social reform activities.
90. Hansa Mehta was an educationist and social reformer who was the first woman to be elected to the Bombay Legislative Council in 1931. She was also a member of the Constituent Assembly, 1946.
91. Horace Alexander, *Gandhi Through Western Eyes*, Bombay, 1969, p.64; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 276-277; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 136-137.
92. Gail Pearson, *Women in Public Life in Bombay City with Special Reference to the Civil Disobedience Movement*, an unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, JNU, Delhi, 1979, p. 281.
93. Geraldine Forbes, *op. cit.* p. 135.
94. Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 284; see also Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* p. 143.
95. Chitra Ghosh, *op.cit.* p. 61; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.*; p.135; ‘Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905-1929’, an article by Bharati Ray in *From the Seams of History –Essays on Indian Women*, Bharati Ray (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 199; Anup Taneja, *op.cit.* pp. 143-144; Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert, *op.cit.* p. 56.
96. Chitra Ghosh, *Loc. cit.*; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* p. 136; Suruchi Thapar Bjorkert, *Loc.cit.*
97. Chitra Ghosh, *op. cit.* pp 62-63; see also Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp.136-137; Anup Taneja, *op. cit.* p. 144.
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116. Durgadevi was a teacher in the Lahore Girls School and she had started taking part in radical actions at a time when her son was hardly three years old. After her husband's death in a bomb blast in 1929, she got even more strongly involved in radical activities. She worked in the defence committee for Bhagat Singh's case. When the police issued warrants against her name after the prowling of the bomb factory in a house at Lahore, she came to Delhi in a *burqa*. In Bombay, she along with Sukhdev and Prithvi Singh shot at two Englishmen at Hamilton Road. She also helped the revolutionaries through delivery of bombs, money and pistols which she carried from one place to another. In 1932, she was imprisoned for nine months and for three years, she was kept confined within the boundaries of Lahore. See *The Hindustan Times*, 15 August 1972; also in Anup Taneja, *op.cit.*, pp. 169-170.

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131. K. K. Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, Vol. III, Govt. of Bihar, Patna, 1957, p. 32.
132. K. K. Datta, *op.cit.* p. 50.
133. Malati Choudhury participated at the historic session of the Congress held at Bombay on 8th August 1942.
134. Surendra Nath Dwivedi, a staunch follower of Gandhi, was also a top- ranking Congress leader of that time. On Gandhi’s arrest, he and Malati Choudhury came back to Orissa with the following message of Gandhi: “Our country is independent from today. Follow the peaceful method. Praise the Government, you yourself becomes a leader. This is the last struggle. In it there is no compromise”. See S. N. Dwivedi, *August Biplab* (August Revolution) Cuttack, p. 13.
135. *Home Political Department*, File No. 3/31/42, 1942.
136. V. Rajendra Raju, *Role of Women in India’s Freedom Struggle*, New Delhi, 1994, p.81.
137. See *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. XXI, Nos. 1 & 2, Anup Taneja (ed.), ICHR and Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1997, p. 90.
138. ‘Annie Besant (1847-1933)’, an article by Lakshmi N. Menon in *Women Pioneers in India’s Renaissance- As I Remember Her*, Sushila Nayar & Kamla Mankekar (ed.), National Book Trust, New Delhi, First pub. 2002, p.29.
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141. *WIA, Quinquennial Report, 1917-1922*; also in Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.* pp. 73-74; Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* pp. 210-211.
142. 'A Ladies Deputation to Mr. Montague' in *New India*, 25 October, 1917, p. 5. This list however, differs from that included in the selection of Mrs. Margaret Cousins private papers published as 'Mrs. Cousins and Her Work in India' in *Women's Indian Association*, Madras, 1956, no pagination. Her list also includes Mrs. Saralabai Naik, Mrs. Srirangamme, Begum Hasrat Mohani, Mrs. Dalvi, Lady Sadasiva and Mrs. Guruswami Chetty; see also Rajan Mahan, *op.cit.* p. 211.
143. A Federation of University Women later called the *Indian Federation of University Women's Association* was formed in Calcutta on 24 July, 1920. Mrs. Prativa Chaudhuri, a daughter of the Tagore family, was its first President. Organized groups of educated women soon began to function in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The object of this association was to stimulate public life. The Federation was affiliated to the International Federation in 1921 and since then has spread to many other cities of India. Its field of work is however, restricted primarily to advancement of education. Chitra Ghosh, *Enlightenment Promotes Understanding*, Calcutta, Diamond Jubilee of IFUWA, November, 1981.
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CHAPTER-VII

WOMEN OF BENGAL IN THE ERA OF SELF IDENTITY

It is true that, over a period of time, patriarchy's iron grip and *Shastric* restriction over the lives of women seem to have somewhat slackened, even though men's superior position as bread winners and decision makers have also taken basis in public, family and personal matters in the process of new developments. These changes also created certain obstacles to Bengali women's achievement of rights and freedom even after the social reform movements. In spite of these probabilities, women of modern India fought for their rights and self-sufficiency as free individuals by breaking the barriers of social orthodoxies and superstitions, which is evident in their participation in anti-colonial movements and in many contemporary social and political movements through various women's associations for gender justice and equal rights.

In the beginning women were fairly unconscious about the hotly-debated women question. But despite of being rooted in the male-defined outline of social reform, the winds of change had started blowing; and the mid-nineteenth century movements for rescuing them from the world of superstition, ignorance and illiteracy reached a new chapter in the twentieth century. Even with the barriers, women had made some improvement in coming out of the personal attachment of home and family. But the changes have not taken place all on a sudden; rather it was a long and ongoing journey towards instituting the norms of good manners, equity and justice in the sphere of gender relations and for defining the position of women in Bengali society.¹

In nineteenth century Bengal the separation among the female household world and the male public world was undoubtedly defined in spatial as well as ideological terms. The familial world of women and the family was actually delineated by the limitations of the *antahpur*. In compare, the entirely male public world was spatially unrestricted and apprehensive with broad matters, including the family. In this chapter, "era of self identity" covers the involvement of women in activities or issues outside the traditional sphere of the domestic world particularly in the areas of employment, political participation, rights and others.

From the second half of the nineteenth century the number of women took a significant part in economic activity outside the domestic world, particularly among the *bhadralok* class, started to increase. It is almost not possible to find out as to why the number of women were engaged in economic activities grew accurately at that period. It is likely that, both the spread of female education and social change resulting from growing economic pressure on the families encouraged women to allow salaried jobs in the last decade of that century.² This changing attitude of the society called for a new role and a new identity of Bengali women in the wider perspective beyond their traditional identity as a daughter, wife and mother within the four walls of the house. The provision of education for women and the continuous development of the upper limits of female education also raised women's own expectation for something more than marriage.³ The admission of women to university degrees did not necessarily sidetrack them from the traditionally expected role of wife and mother, rather it gave them a chance to think that their lives should be changed from those of their mothers and grand-mothers and they should give others the benefit of their improvement through various forms of public services.

Initially, the *bhadramahila* were brought into contact with the economic world of wage labour based on formal deal. The phenomenon of independent earning power began to affect the lives of women by giving them a greater sense of individuality. It also extended the boundaries of their experience by bringing them into contact with the realities of the male world of colonial administration as it was experienced by the *bhadralok*.⁴

The increase in employment among the *bhadramahila* paralleled the growth in public institutions catering for women, basically in the fields of health and education. In order that, more women could take advantage of the new services obtainable, it was necessary to have females provide those services. While the limits of the separate world of *purdah* were widening, female officials were required to act as mediators between it and the expanded world of males.

From the Calcutta census of 1901⁵, it was reported that, 725 women registered themselves as employed in what could be termed "professional"

occupations. These included the categories of principals, professors and teachers (587), administrative and inspecting officials (6), qualified medical practitioners (124), photographers (4), and authors, editors and journalists (4). Some were engaged in part-time, semiformal or temporary job engagements and would not have been registered as employed. Nor do the statistics give any information on the religious, caste or marital background of professional working women. One can only guess from other available evidence that most would have been single or widowed Christian and Brahmo women.

It is said that, teaching was considered to be one of the most suitable professions for women, and it employed the biggest number of *bhadramahila*. In the earliest days of female education the services of male teachers were used, but that was supposed as a hindrance to its wider social recognition, and the increase of female education created a pressing demand for women teachers. Some of the first generations of educated women determined to extend the benefits of their knowledge to others by taking up teaching as an occupation, at least for some time.

The first recorded example of a *bhadramahila* taking up teaching was that of Bamasundari Debi of Pabna. From 1860s, many educated women slowly took the teaching as their profession namely, Monarama Mazumdar, the first woman preacher in the *Brahmo Samaj*, Radhamani Debi, ex-student of the Dacca Female Normal School, Srimati Krishnakamini Debi, educated at the Native Ladies Normal School, Chandramukhi Basu, a Bengali Christian and the first woman M. A. from Calcutta University, Radharani Lahiri, one of the outstanding graduates and so on. It is important to mention here that, Radharani Lahiri was one of the few Bengali *bhadramahila* not to marry but to follow a career. These women were appointed in the teaching profession on a monthly salary. Not only that, some women were ready to endeavour far afield in search of good teaching posts. For instance, in 1890 Miss Sarat Chakraborty at Amritsar, Kamini Basu, sister of Chandramukhi Basu at Dehra Dun, in 1891 Aghorkamini Ray at Lucknow, in 1893 Kumudini Khastagir at Mysore and so on.⁶ They assumed in a women's right to earn their living. But it is a fact that, until the turn of the century very few Bengali *bhadramahila* would have been able to overcome traditional prejudices against female employment outside the home.

Medicine was, without doubt, one of the most essential professions where employment possibilities for educated women were improved because of the popularity of the *purdah* system. In cases of serious illnesses of women, there had been uncertainty in admitting a male *vaidya* or doctor to the *zenana*. Even if they were admitted, the indirect mode of treatment used by male doctors in case of serious illnesses yielded no positive results. The *purdah* system, with its codes of female modesty in speech, dress and behaviour was presented as creating ridiculous if not impossible conditions of practice for male doctors, hindering the medical look of the colonial female body.⁷ In this situation, the need for women doctors was not uniformly accepted. But in 1884, the Countess of Dufferin's Fund materialized to grant scholarship for doctors, nurses, and midwives and set up *purdah* hospitals for Indian women. Architects of the Fund claimed that, Indian women sought western medicine but the 'oriental view of women', shared by Hindus and Muslims and disallowed treatment by males. For that reason, only women practitioners were acceptable. In this field, Kadambini Ganguly, wife of Dwarakanath Ganguly, passed the L. M. S. (Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery) successfully to become the first woman doctor in 1886, although she got plucked by one subject in her first attempt. In eastern India, Miss Bidhumukhi Bose and Miss Virginia Mary Mitter became first women graduates from Calcutta Medical College in 1889. By 1895, thirty-four women had graduated from Calcutta Medical College.⁸ Jamini Sen,⁹ niece of Kamini Roy and Haimabati Sen¹⁰ were also prominent Lady doctors of Bengal in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It is necessary to mention that, Jamini Sen never married, but dedicated all her energies to her career. Even many less famous lady doctors took up practices in the *mofussils*. For instances, in 1901, Dr. Bidyulata Mallik at Rampur Boalia, in 1902, Dr. Pramilabala Debi at Malda and others.¹¹ But until the turn of the nineteenth century, the number of Bengali women coming forward to study medicine was still small. It may be said that, women who became doctors were rewarded for their efforts by the possibility of earning a considerable self-sufficient livelihood and they began to set up their self identity.

It was in this context that, schemes to train women as 'Hospital Assistants' (HA) surfaced. 'Hospital Assistants' held the Vernacular Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery (VLMS), awarded after a three year course in western medicine. The

Campbell Medical School opened its doors to women in 1887. The standard of entry was lower than for the Calcutta Medical College. The graduates of Campbell Medical School found jobs in newly created hospitals and dispensaries.¹²

Where medicine was a prestigious profession, for the lower ranks of the *bhadramahila* on the margins of society, such as widows, midwifery was a more feasible career. Educational requirements were less exacting, the training period was shorter and employment was easily obtainable. Midwifery courses were opened at Calcutta Medical College in 1870.¹³ By 1880 there were about half a dozen trained midwives practicing in Calcutta. Their success was attracting others from the *moffusil* and development of the trained programme was suggested because of the growing supply of employees. *Brahmo Public Opinion* reported that, many “Hindoo widows of respectable families were prepared to take up midwifery.”¹⁴ Brahmos inspired *bhadramahila* who had to earn their living to train as midwives. Government employers often felt that it was more useful and economical to employ midwives as an alternative of doctors.

Writing was also another important profession of educated *bhadramahila*. Krishnkamini Dasi wrote a first book of poem – *Chittabilasini* as early as 1856. It was printed and sold openly in the market. Bamasundari Debi of Pabna district and Harakumari Debi of Kalighat, Calcutta, wrote Bengali books in 1861. Kailashbasini Debi started her writer’s career from 1863 and wrote several books which sold well in the book-market. Many other women followed suit and some helped to maintain themselves with this new mode of earning. There were about 26 women journalists writing in 25 weekly or monthly journals during the period from 1870 to 1910, some of them earning well.¹⁵

Not only that, many occupations gained a few of adherents from among the Bengali *bhadramahila* such as, governess and companion,¹⁶ lawyers, clerical, typewriting, photography¹⁷ drawing and painting,¹⁸ acting¹⁹ and so on. It may be said that, their entry into employment and outside the four walls involved gradually a more pointed endeavour to break into the public sphere – to claim for themselves a new trained professional identity. Here lay the main contests and tensions for a

generation of women, whom we could today designate as the first of our ‘moderns’: ‘moderns’ both in the sense of era they developed and the self identity they wanted.

So, the increase of female employment in Bengal was a complex and ongoing development. The *purdah* system proved both a benefit and a connect to the educated *bhadramahila*. Because, it restricted the scope of occupations they could enter and repressed their freedom of movement, but its very continuation provided some of them with the chance to act as mediators with the outside world. Men were excluded from this role, so women had an open field in which they could rise to the highest positions. It is said that, from the second half of the nineteenth century to end of that century, most employed *bhadramahila* were occupied in providing services to the separate female world of *purdah*.

It may be noted that, economic need was not the main reason in searching employment for the majority educated *bhadramahila*. Generally, the highly educated women and those who were most likely to find professional employment by and large came from economically affluent elite classes. They wanted employment in order to gain work skill, to put their knowledge to a socially constructive purpose and for own happiness. Yet, the era of self identity also began to open up opportunities for *bhadramahila* who required working for their living. It is true that, in this stage only a small number of women were employed, the example of their employment set trends for the future. The need for mediators between the *antahpur* and the ever-encroaching outside the four walls was recognized, as was the pattern of salaried financial independence for women.²⁰

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Bengali *bhadramahila* began to take an interest in the until then male world of nationalist politics. The Partition of Bengal (1905) witnessed women in growing numbers participating in the movement. Even though there was no broad mass awakening, the *Swadeshi* movement positively had an impact on Indian womanhood. After that, Gandhiji who succeeded in mobilizing women in huge numbers and attractive them to fight for the country’s freedom. In many provinces and districts, women became ‘dictators’ to run the Congress movement. All this went a long way in transforming the self-perception of women and “gave them a new sense of power, a new self-view.”²¹

As women emerged, they established several associations to voice protest socially constructed barriers. However, women's associations in the nineteenth century were mainly organized by men. The associations under male leadership also contributed towards educating women and giving them the first experience in public work as Geraldine Forbes affirm positively, but they also had limitations beyond which women's participation was not looked-for.²² In the meantime, women's lives were affected by anti-imperialist wave that was gradually rolling onwards in India. A section of women within Bengali society began to consider the need for building up their own network to focus on women's degraded condition due to confinement in the household activities. In this way, the process once initiated began progressing. The first generation of women emphasized on their lives and conditions. The second generation thought of organizing their own platform from where the needs of women were to be expressed. They were keen to extend beyond the imposing boundaries, dreaming of their hopes and aspirations beyond the familial space. Their lives and new roles began to get modified and accepted.

Women's continuous struggle against abuses and social exclusion yielded some results in the succeeding years. The list of the untiring crusaders who worked in different fields for women's empowerment is countless and includes Jyotirmoyee Debi, Basanti Debi, Swarnakumari Debi, Sarala Debi Choudhurani, Ashalata Sen, Prabhabati Debi in Bengal and Pandita Ramabai, Ramabai Ranade, Sarojini Naidu and so on. All of them were tireless crusaders of women's rights and by and large were the products of the reform movements. Besides, many also shared a vision of independent India and had been involved in the freedom struggle to the nation building process.

To protect their own interests and identity, women formed powerful associations and demanded political rights for themselves from British Government. In 1917, WIA, a representative body under the leadership of Smt. Sarojini Naidu demanded franchise for women on the basis of equality with men. But the Reform Act of 1921 gave franchise for the election of State Governments only to those housewives who were educated and financially prosperous. This limited franchise was also an aspect of political identity. In 1925, Sarojini Naidu became President of Indian National Congress and provided leadership to the women liberating

movement. Not before 1926 did women get the right to entry into the Legislative Councils in the provinces of British India. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first Vice-President of the Madras Legislature. In 1931, they got right of candidature in elections with certain conditions of eligibility.²³

The Government of India Act, 1935 extended the range of women's enfranchisement. The reasons for not giving franchise to all the women were pointed out by Government as backwardness of women, unfavourable conditions and lack of united opinion of women associations on this issue. Nonetheless, franchise for women meant their recognition and responsibility in taking decisions regarding national life. It also meant that, they are not inferior to men and if they get liberty and opportunity, they can take and properly handle the challenging jobs and responsibilities of positions like ministers, governors' ambassadors etc.²⁴ Women, however, had something to clear about when the results of 1937 elections were declared. Eight women were elected from general constituencies and forty-two from the reserved constituencies. Six women became ministers when the provincial cabinets were formed. Vijaylakshmi Pandit became Minister for Local Self-Government and Public Health in UP, Anusuyabai Kale, Deputy Speaker in the Central Provinces, Sippi Milani, Deputy Speaker in Sind Assembly, Hansa Mehta and Begum Shah Nawaz took office as Parliamentary Secretaries in Bombay and Punjab respectively. Renuka Ray and Mrs. Radhabai Subbarayan became the Minister of Rehabilitation in Bengal and a member of the Round Table Conference during 1931-32 respectively.²⁵ This success deeply inspired women's associations and they recommended the nomination of women to commissions, boards and councils. They believed that, women were better placed to understand the problems faced by women and children.

It may be said that, women understood importance of their life, examined their capabilities, realized their duty of struggling themselves to uphold their interests, made associations more powerful and forwarded their demands. Now they had to achieve rights equal to men in every field of life which they received in 1947 with political right at central level. As a result, political equality of women was fulfilled after independence, when Constitution directed the nation to implement the principles of equality and the state to follow the policy of respecting the prestige of a

person and declared the basic rights of women regarding political and legal equality. In the new Constitution this was a big step for women's emancipation which recognized and established their self-identity. On these bases, it was obvious to get equal opportunities without any discrimination of sex and in other areas also. From this women got the right of influencing the parliament not only for their own interests but they could also get changed of formed policies connected with political, economic and cultural fields, affecting the whole country.²⁶

But, what is the reality and impact of equal political rights received after independence? A plethora of legislation in recent years, amendments to several laws and judicial decisions are there in the Constitution but means to develop the conditions and status of women. Unfortunately, however, most women, whether rich or poor do not understand or have access to laws that govern them. Total lack of consciousness and legal illiteracy has kept in the dark about their rights. Legal literacy should be taken up as a full-fledged programme, if women are to benefit from the laws made for their protection.

On the other hand, women had gained the right to vote, even if initially it was women from elite families who benefited in this regard. However, even after the right to vote became a reality for all women, their representation in political and decision making bodies has remained low in all these years after independence. The quest for greater political participation of women is, therefore, still relevant.

The Indian Constitution guarantees to all women the fundamental right to equality. The Constitution is strongly grounded in the principles of liberty, fraternity, equality and justice and contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women's right to equality and non-discrimination are defined as justifiable fundamental rights and there is enough room for affirmative action programmes. Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State, the right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women, equal pay for equal work for both men and women, provision for just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief, and renouncing practices offensive to the dignity of women are all provided for in the Indian Constitution. The political rights of women are recognized without any

discrimination and they can participate in decision making at all levels equality with men. Constitutional equality has been supplemented by legal equality with the passage of a number of Acts through which the traditional inequalities inherent in marriage, divorce and property rights are sought to be eliminated. However, in spite of these constitutional and legal provisions, women have not obtained adequate and proportionate visibility in the legislative and other policy determining offices. The number of women engaged in politics and playing politically active roles is far from adequate. The average percentage of women in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 10%.²⁷

It may be noted that, there is definitely a need for women to achieve a more effective role in decision-making, particularly in view of the obstacles in realizing or implementing the democratic and constitutional assurances of equal citizenship and rights. Citizenship participation and representation are correlated. Lack of ability to belong and exercise choice implies a lack of full membership in the system. For true equality to become a reality for women, the sharing of power on equal terms with men is essential. Surprisingly, various policies have a direct impact on them. There is still a great gap between constitutional guarantees and felt consequences on women's lives.

It may be argued that, like enfranchisement, participation in legislative bodies may not in itself be enough for women's political empowerment or to remedy the problems of discrimination faced by women. Equality with equity is a goal not easily achieved only by high representation in legislatures and others public bodies, but has to be buttressed by strong women's movement. As a result, the women's movement continued to focus on traditional practices, beliefs and institutions as the source of domination. It also discussed violence against women, the institutional framework for the maintenance of gender differences and the impact of economic situation on the day-to-day lives of women. The intention was to break the silence: the interpretation of the various categories of humiliation, violence, tortures and individual and mass attack to which women were subjected.²⁸ While it is necessary that by considering them only the means of achieving one big target of equality in every field, social system should be changed through their implementation. For women identity not reservation but motivation and more education is required.

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CHAPTER-VIII

CONCLUSION

The present dissertation is an attempt to examine some women issues of colonial Bengal through associations (1865-1943) which has been dealt with six chapters excluding introduction and conclusion. In this dissertation not only highlighted the background, origin, growth and changing attitude of Bengali women associations but also has been enquired the contemporary social, political and cultural circumstances of colonial Bengal and in this light, here has an attempt chronologically to focus the historical evolution of women associations. Because the making of women associations in colonial Bengal was not a suddenly occurred incident, it was an effect of long process. In brief, it may be said that, the establishment of women association was a matured form of human consciousness or gender consciousness.

In the early nineteenth century, women enjoyed a very low status in Bengali society. Customs such as *Sati*, child marriage, infanticide, polygamy and others were broadly prevalent. A woman's place was strictly within the family and she was ruled over by her husband, elders and in-laws with an iron hand. Denied education, vocation and social, economic and political rights, she was wholly confined to the four walls of the house. There was limited scope for self-expression apart from cooking and sewing and in well-to-do families. Women from the middle and upper classes faced greater social constraints upon their personal freedom. However, the process of their modernization was so strong that they seemed reconciled to this state of affairs and silently accepted their 'fate'.

The first man to speak out publicly against the injustice perpetrated on women in the name of tradition and religion vis-a-vis *Shastras* was Raja Rammohun Roy who, in 1818, wrote a tract condemning *Sati*. He also attacked *Kulin* polygamy and spoke in favour of the property rights of women. Rammohun Roy was deeply concerned about the deteriorate state of Indian society and held the miserable condition of women as one of the main causes responsible for this. Taking the lead from Raja Rammohun Roy, social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda and others in the

nineteenth century embarked upon the task of improving the condition of women, particularly those from the urban, upper caste families' by started belonging to the middle strata of society. Their usually mediocre status, imposed seclusion, early marriage and lack of education were facts well-documented by reformers all over the country and they started resorting to legislation of tackle them. Rammohun Roy's mobilization of Hindu reformist opinion against *Sati* created an atmosphere that made it possible for Lord William Bentinck to pass a law banning it in 1829. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar took up the cause of widows which led to the passing of the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. The issue of child marriage was taken up by a number of reformers. The Indian Penal Code of 1861 had a clause that declared sexual intercourse with a girl less than 10 years as constituting rape. Despite the storm of protest, the Age of Consent (from 10 years to 12) of Marriage Act as proposed by Behramji Malabari, a Parsi reformer of Bombay, was passed in 1891.

Education was measured the most important means of improving the status of women. Christian missionaries were pioneer in the field and they set-up several schools. After that, Hindus, especially Brahma Samaj and later Muslim social reformers also followed suit, partly driven by the need to resist convertization. In this way, efforts by social reformers regarding 'women question' during nineteenth century Bengal, for raising the status of Bengali women, influenced the women of upper castes and among them consciousness towards the interests of women, got created.

The introduction and growth of western education was perhaps the most important single factor for gender consciousness. The landmark in the history of the growth of western education are the foundation of Asiatic Society in Calcutta (1774), Calcutta Madrasa (1781), Sanskrit College at Benaras (1802), Fort William College (1800), Hindu College (1817) and so on. Hence, it has been discussed the growth of western education in Bengal where it first spread among the middle class people and the newly educated youths largely moulded their every sphere of life and thought.

On the other hand, the second half of the nineteenth century is important in Bengal, for it saw the appearance of women's writings for the first time reflecting

their responses to the changing social scenario. Periodicals like *Masik Patrika* (1854), *Bamabodhini Patrika* (1865), *Abalabandhab Patrika* (1869) and the like had an impact on women's consciousness. Most of these early women writers stressed on the need for education among women. Some even did not hesitate to accuse the males for their painful conditions. Not only that, they also became conscious about their conjugal relation, health, motherhood, child rearing etc. As education blossomed, many middle-class women used it to participate and became visible in the public-realm, such as publishing in magazines and journals, attending meetings, political demonstrations and singing songs at literary and political functions. Even when cast in a reformist mould and accepting some of the structures of male reformers, women's journal's created endless opportunities for women to argue for a voice of their own in family and educational life. Letters and essays written by women in various women's magazines stressed their right to feel and allowed a space for solidarity in a change and tentative way.

However, nineteenth century Bengal saw the rise of elites who took advantage of opportunities presented by British rule to acquire education, land and jobs in government service and the professions. These elites tended to be high caste Hindus who formed associations concerned with cultural, social, economic and political issues. The most important aspect of associational politics was a variety of social reform activities undertaken by the elites. Many of these activities focused on women such as providing education, propagandizing against child marriage and for widow remarriage and starting associations for women. These activities were motivated by a desire to impress the British with the progressive thinking of the Bengali elites and to link the gap between English-educated men and their female relatives.

There was a legacy of male direction as the earliest women's associations were started by men. The concept of balancing sex roles deeply surrounded in Bengali culture was reflected in the goals of the early women's associations – to enable women to serve their families and community in a helpful manner as women. The popularity of Hindu revivalism led women leaders to utilize traditional ideals of Indian womanhood to justify women's demands and not to directly attack the Hindu

religion. Since the early women's associations were very small in size and elite in composition.

It has been highlighted that, women's associations in the nineteenth century were mostly organized by men. But from the six and seven decades of the nineteenth century perception of the need to organize emerged and this was reflected in the creation of women's associations under the leadership of women. As a result, they signified the transfer of leadership of women's movement from men to women. In the first phase (1865-1896) of the women associations sought their power and authority from a votive force i.e. from the patriarchal barriers. After 1880, under the female leadership, many associations were established which started their work from arranging of debates on education and establishing institutions for the protection of destitute women, along with other sections; and later on, achieved their objects of opening these institutions in the society to provide facilities to them. But none of these associations challenged various rigid customs, more so, the patrilineal structure under the social system. In fact, they wanted that the roles of wife and mother should be performed more efficiently by women. But in the second phase (1897-1943) they began to strike on the issues on socio-political rights and empowerment. In fact, reforms and nationalism did signal new opportunity for women, however, limited they proved to be. But, there was a growing consciousness of women's roles and rights and their increasing communication in the national-political field.

It has been discussed that, from the beginning of the twentieth century *Swadeshi* movement and later the freedom movement had considerable impact on the 'women question' in the nineteenth century. The goals and activities of organized women were transformed completely by political compulsions. For long women belonging to upper and middle strata of Bengali society concentrated on the needs like education, rights of women and social reform; but now the movement against foreign control over the country roped in women from all walks of life. This political connection undermined the 'artificial division of the "male" world of the public and "female" world of the domestic sphere'. The freedom movement was, thus, intended to change the self-image of women, inspire them with self-confidence and give them courage to challenge gender inequalities. Quite a number of women

began to dream of a new role for them, to not only challenge the establishment patriarchal norms but also to redefine their position in society through various means of women associations.

Another important factor which deals with that, the nineteenth century reform movements had limited their efforts to improving the position of women within the traditional family structure. The turn of the century, however, saw gradually women participating voluntarily in social welfare activities outside their homes, particularly in the cause of women's education, welfare of the weaker sections in society and relief to distressed persons. A still smaller group participated in the revolutionary movement. As a result, the early twentieth century saw the birth of various types of women's associations and the beginnings of the demand for political rights of women.

Side by side, women activities became critical about the imperialist effort to utilize the 'women question' to justify their rule. Woven into the national issue, women realized that, political freedom was an absolute requirement to transform the old mindset. Thus, women's world was gradually widening and when Gandhi appeared on the scene, the women's movement had already crystallized and proliferated to include several hundreds. The first spark was noticed in the *Swadeshi* movement and a decade later, Subhas Bose's appeal had a boosting effect on it. The ground was ready for Gandhi to mobilize this force towards achieving the Indian women's dream for political as well as social and economic liberation.

The women's movement under Gandhi's leadership took a new turn in the sense that it includes women of all shades and colours, both rural and urban women, who stepped out of their homes into the domain of power and politics. The movement spread its wings beyond the elite, urban educated class as Gandhi emphasized on the feminine quality of service, self-sacrifice, modesty as distinct from the male ego and self-centredness. He advocated the transfer of this feminine paradigm to the masculine realm of public and political sphere, which had fantastic appeal to Indian women. Thus, Gandhi's effort to break the traditional stereotype about women by involving them in the country's struggle for freedom was crowned with success.

Both in the provinces and districts, participation of women in the Salt *Satyagraha*, Civil Disobedience movement and Quit India movement revealed their great organizational capacity. Stepped in self-confidence these courageous and outstanding women personalities were about to conduct in a new era of promises and aspirations. The Non-Cooperation movement saw many women students taking part in it. Violating all demarcations as well as the accepted norms of womanly conduct these fearless and dedicated band of women, like the male students, built up the female youth force. The *Deepali Sangha*, *Chhatri Sangha* (1928) or the Female Students' Organizations had activities like Bina Das, Kalpana Dutta, Kamala Dasgupta and so on. It has also been highlighted that, there was a definite link between the political participation of women and gender consciousness and also it definitely progressed towards their socio-political rights and empowerment.

An important landmark in the history of women's participation in politics was their campaign for women's franchise. Under the guidance of the *Women's Indian Association* (1917), a delegation of fourteen women from different parts of the country met the Secretary of States for India, Edwin Montague to demand equal franchise for women and later the *All India Women's Conference* (1927) this movement gathered strength. This was indeed an epoch-making demand from Indian women and an important advancement of the suffrage movement in the country where the enlightened sections of Bengali women constituted a vital part through associations. It reflected their growing consciousness of rights, dignity, self-esteem and empowerment.

As a result, a close interaction and link was soon established between the women associations of Bengal and other sister associations of India. In this respect, from the first decade of the twentieth century women formed their own associations. In 1910, *Bharat Stree Mahamandal* was founded by Sarala Debi Choudhurani, *Women's Indian Association* (1917), *All India Women's Conference* (1927) and so on. Springing up in different corners of the country they provided a common unifying factor to discuss women's issues. These had branches all over the country to organize women on an all-India basis and expressed matters, such as education, inhibiting social institutions, legal disabilities and political empowerment and the like. It may thus be clear that, women leaders of these associations established ideals

for other women, especially for those who were keen to take part in outside activities. First characteristics of these associations were that, although it wanted equality between the men and women but still it was not against the men. Secondly, in these associations the interests of women and country both were considered as interrelated with each other. However, the basic limitation of these women's associations was that they were urban-based middle class associations. Women of rural India were yet to come into the picture. Nevertheless, these associations showed strong evidences of women's potential to organize and provide leadership to movements, which had previously been the preserve of men.

The period of colonial rule and the freedom struggle marked the beginnings of a political consciousness among women. The different stream within the anti-imperialist struggle posited different, even contentious images of identities for women. But they all shared a concern for women and so a consensus emerged at the time of the making of the new India, which postulated freedom, justice, dignity, equality and self-identity for women as a stated goal within the Constitution.

Finally, the history of the Bengali women's movement has, from the start, been intertwined with these socio-political developments. Any gaps that may exist from the subject of numerous studies by future generation, whose scholarship might be, open several new dimensions of old as well as forgotten struggles by our outstanding women over the centuries. The tendency of women's associations or individuals who believe in gender equality to be associated with movements for social change within their respective country is today a well-established historical fact. But the realization that is creeping in, even among those who have shied away from it earlier, is that sisterhood cannot be based on just biological premises. It has to be based on an ideological commitment to certain basic human values and notions derived from struggles for social progress of oppressed sections through history.

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APPENDIX - A
A Few Photographs of Male Social Reformers



Raja Rammohun Roy



Henry Louis Vivian Derozio



Keshab Chandra Sen

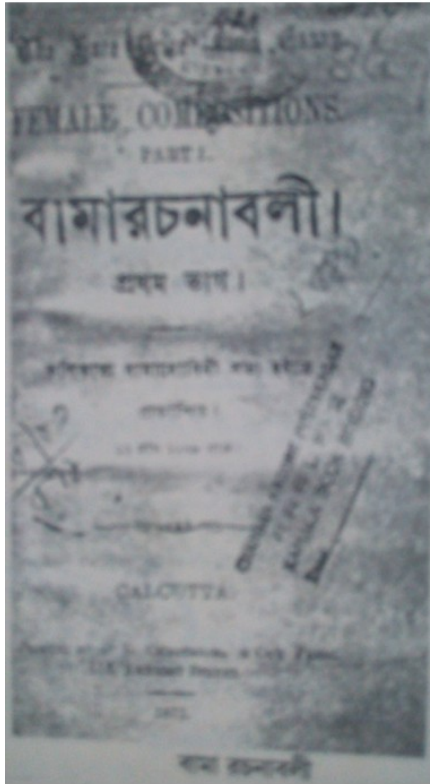


Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar



Behramji Malabari

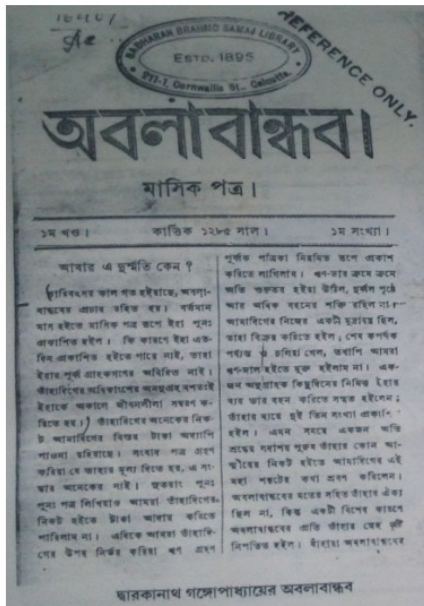
APPENDIX - B
A Few Photographs of the Contemporary Women's Periodicals



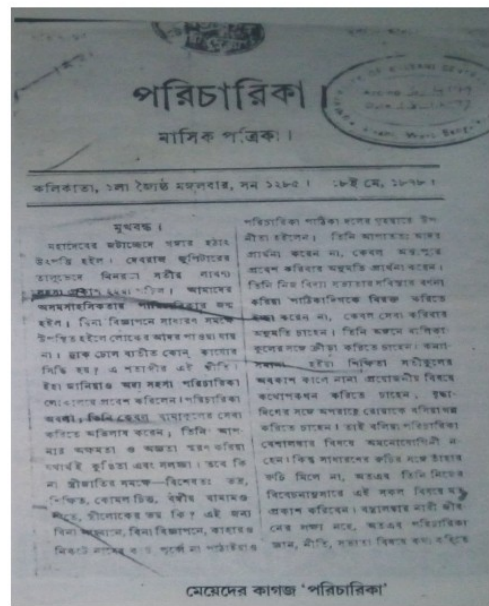
Female Compositions



Bamabodhini Patrika



Abalabandhab Patrika



Paricharika Patrika

Source : Swapan Basu, *Sambad-Samayik Patre Unish Sataker Bangali Samaj*, Vol. II, Kolkata, 2003.

স্বর্গীয় বিদ্যাসাগরের স্মরণার্থ মহিলা সভা ।

গত ৮ই আগষ্ট শনিবার বেলা ২১।০ ঘটিকার সময় বেথুন কলেজ গৃহে পরলোকগত পূজাপাদ মহাত্মা ঐশ্বরচন্দ্র বিদ্যাসাগর মহাশয়ের স্মরণার্থে মহিলাগণের একটি সমিতি আহূত হয়। উহাতে প্রায় তিন শত রমণী সমবেত হইয়াছিলেন। যদিও এই সভাটি ব্রাহ্ম-মহিলাদিগের উদ্যোগ ও যত্নে সংঘটিত হইয়াছিল, তথাপি বহুসংখ্যক হিন্দু-মহিলা আগ্রহ সহকারে ইহাতে যোগ দিয়াছিলেন এবং কতিপয় খৃষ্টীয় মহিলাও উপস্থিত ছিলেন।

কুমারী চন্দ্রমুখী বহুর প্রস্তাবে এবং সর্ব সম্মতিক্রমে কুমারী কামিনী সেন সভাপতি মনোনীত হন এবং তিনি এই কয়েকটি কথা বলিয়া সভার কার্য আরম্ভ করেন :—

আমাদের দেশের গৌরব, পণ্ডিত ঐশ্বরচন্দ্র বিদ্যাসাগর মহাশয়ের বিয়োগে আমাদের দেশে যে স্থান শূন্য হইয়াছে

তাঁহা কখনও পূর্ণ হইবার নহে। তাঁহার গুণের কথা আমাদের দেশে, আশালব্ধবিনিতা সকলেই অবগত আছেন, উপস্থিত মহিলাগণের মধ্যে অনেকে হয় ত সাক্ষাৎভাবে তাঁহার সহিত পরিচিত ছিলেন। তাঁহার ঋষিত্বাচারিত্র, অলোকসামান্য মনীষা, গভীর শাস্ত্রজ্ঞান, তাঁহার অশ্রুতপূর্ব পরদুঃখকাতরতা, তাঁহার আশ্চর্য্য দানশীলতা, তাঁহার স্থিরপ্রতিজ্ঞা এবং তাঁহার নির্ভীকতা—আজ কত গুণের কথা বলিব ? একাপরে এত গুণের সমবায় বস্তমান সময়ে আর দেখা যায় না। তাঁহার বিয়োগে বঙ্গসমাজ—সমগ্র ভারতবর্ষ এক পেকাবে নয়—বহু প্রকারে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত। সমগ্র দেশ তাঁহার নিকট ঋণী, কিন্তু দ্বাশিক্ষাপ্রচারে সাহায্য করিয়া, বালবিদ্যাদিগের পুনঃসংস্থার বিধি প্রণয়ন করিয়া, বাল্যবিবাহ, বর্হবিবাহ প্রভৃতি কদা-

বিদ্যাসাগরের মৃত্যুতে শোকপ্রকাশ করছেন বাঙালি মেয়েরা

Bamabodhini Patrika-Women of Bengal Celebrating the Condolence after the Death of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar

Source : Swapan Basu, *Samakale Vidyasagar*, Kolkata, January 1993, p. 162.

APPENDIX - C

Photographs of the Women Social Reformers and Freedom Fighters



Swarnakumari Devi



Hiranmoyee Devi



Kadambini Ganguli



Banalata Devi



Mohini Sen



Jnanadanandini Devi



Prasannamoyee Devi



Jamini Sen



Brahmamoyee Devi



Mokshadayini Mukhopadhyay



Sarala Devi Choudhurani
(Ghoshal)



Sister Nivedita



Manorama Basu



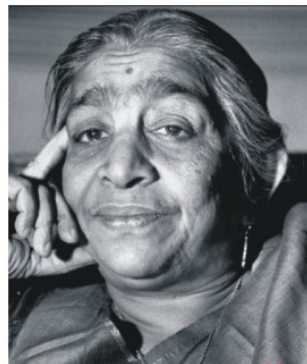
Kamini Sen Roy



Chandramukhi Basu



Saroj Nalini Dutt



Sarojini Naidu



Annie Besant



Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay



Ramabai Ranade



Mathulakshmi Reddy



Margaret Cousin



Nellie Sengupta



Abala Bose



Begum Rokeya
Sakhawat Hossain



Jyotirmoyee Ganguly



Hemprava Majumdar



Basanti Devi



Urmila Devi



Leela Nag (Roy)



Ashalata Sen



Latika Ghosh



Nanibala Devi



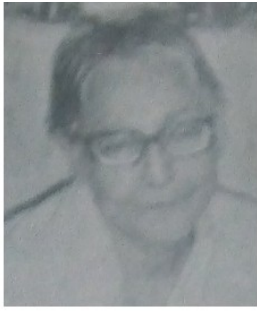
Dukaribala Devi



Bimalpratibha Devi



Kalyani Das (Bhattacharya)



Bina Das (Bhowmik)



Preetilata Waddedar



Shanti Ghosh (Das)



Shanti Das (Kabir)



Kamala Dasgupta



Kalpana Dutta (Joshi)



Indusudha Ghosh



Ujjawala Majumdar



Renuka Roy



Martyr Matangini Hazra



Aruna Asaf Ali

APPENDIX - D
Photographs of the Women's Associations and their Activities



Keshab Chandra Sen in the Arya Nari Samaj



Bengal Provincial (Pradeshik) Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti : Sarojini Naidu seen in the Centre



Distribution of Food and Cloth by Janaraksha Samiti



Famine Stricken Women “Gherao” Assembly under the Leadership of Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti

Source : *India's Struggle for Freedom*, Department of Information & Cultural Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal, 1987, p. 192

APPENDIX - E

Photographs of the Women Volunteers and Satyagrahis



Women Volunteers Corps of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation Movement



Some Girl Satyagrahis of Bethune College



Sarojini Naidu : Leader of the Dharsana Salt Godown

Source : *India's Struggle for Freedom*, Department of Information & Cultural Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal, 1987, pp. 112, 133-134.

APPENDIX-F
LIST OF THE WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS OF COLONIAL BENGAL

Women associations with direct involvement of women

- Bamabodhini Sabha* (1863), Calcutta.
- Bhagalpur Mahila Samiti* (1863), Bihar.
- Brahmika Samaj* (15 July, 1865), Calcutta, Barisal and Dacca.
- Brahmika Samaj* (1866), Bhagalpur, Bihar.
- Dhaka Antahpur Stree Siksha Sabha* (1870).
- Dhaka Subhasadhini Sabha* (1870).
- Dhaka Philanthropic Society* (1871).
- Faridpur Kaulinya Pratha Sangshodhani O Kanya Bikray Nibarani Sabha* (1871).
- Bogura Kanyapan Nibarani Sabha* (1871).
- Bama Hitaishini Sabha* (14 April 1871), Calcutta.
- Nari Hitasadhini Sabha* (1871), Calcutta.
- Barisal Female Improvement Association* (1871 or 1872).
- Mymensingh Hitakari Sabha* (1872).
- Dhaka Balyabibaha Nibarani Sabha* (1873).
- Mymensingh Hitakari Sabha* (1877).
- Mymensingh Antahpur Stree Siksha Sabha* (1877).
- Syhlet Sammilan* (1877).
- Brahmika Unnayan Sabha or Improvement of Brahmika Ladies* (1879), Calcutta.
- Arya Nari Samaj* (May 1879), Calcutta.
- Banga Mahila Samaj or Bengal Ladies Association* (1st August, 1879), Calcutta.
- Bikrampur Hitasadhini* (1879).
- Bangiya Khristiya Mahila Samaj* (1880), Calcutta.
- Faridpur Suhrid Sabha* (1880 or 1881).

Gaila Chhatra Sammilani Sabha (1881), Barishal.

Theosophical Society (1882), Calcutta.

Dhaka Musalman Suhrid Sammilani (1883).

Sakhi Samiti or Ladies Association (1886), Calcutta.

Hindu Bidhaba Silpashram (1887), Calcutta.

Sumati Samiti (1892), Dacca.

Mahakali Pathshala (1893), Calcutta.

Bharat Mahila Samiti (1895), Calcutta.

Hindu Bibaheer Byai Sankhep Samiti (1895).

Tripura Hitaishini Sabha (1896), Comilla.

Syhet Union (1896).

Mahila Samiti (1905), Calcutta.

Mahila Silpa Samiti or Bidhaba Silpashram (1906), Calcutta.

Mahila Maha Samiti (November 1908), Calcutta.

Bharat Stree Mahamandal or the Large Circle of Indian Women (November 1910), Lahore.

Pabna Mahila Samiti (1913).

Anjumane Khawatine Islam or Calcutta Mohammedan Ladies Association (1916), Calcutta.

Birbhum Mahila Samiti (1916).

Sultanpur Mahila Samiti (1917).

Women's Indian Association or WIA (1917).

Rampurhat Mahila Samiti (1918).

Nari Siksha Samiti (1919), Calcutta.

Nari Samavyay Bhandar or Women's Co-operative Store, Calcutta

Balurghat Mahila Samiti (1920), Dinajpur.

Indian Women's University or Indian Federation of University Women's Association (24 July, 1920), Calcutta.

Bangiya Nari Samaj or Bengali Women's Association (1921), Calcutta.

Nari Karma Mandir or Temple for Women's Work (1921), Calcutta.

Bankura Mahila Samiti (1921).

Mahila Karmi Sansad or Forum of Women Workers (1922), Calcutta.

Dacca Mahila Committee (1922).

Deepali Sangha (1923), Dacca.

Gandaria Mahila Samiti (1924), Dacca.

Darjeeling Mahila Samiti (1924).

Bangiya Musalman Mahila Samiti (1925).

Saroj Nalini Dutt Memorial Association for Women's Work in Bengal or Saroj Nalini Dutt Nari Mangal Samiti (8th February, 1925), Calcutta.

Madaripur Mahila Samiti.

Tangail Mahila Samiti.

Bhabanipur Rajbala Mahila Samiti, Calcutta.

National Council of Women in India or NCWI (1925), Bombay.

All India Women's Conference or AIWC (1927).

Bengal Women's Educational League (1927), Calcutta.

Kanthi Mahila Samiti, (1927).

Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (1928), Calcutta.

Chhatri Sangha or Female Students Organization (1928), Calcutta.

Nari Satyagraha Samiti (1929), Calcutta.

Deepali Siksha Mandir (1930), Calcutta.

Satyagrahi Sevika Dal (1930), Calcutta.

Shreehatta Mahila Sangha (1930), Syhlet.

Mahila Satyagraha Samiti (1930-31) Calcutta.

Ladies Picketing Board (May 1931), Calcutta.

Chhatri Sangha (1931), Dacca.

Tripura District Women Students Organization, Comilla.

Bengal Women's Congress (May 1931), Calcutta.

Bengal Congress Mahila Sangha, (1938), Calcutta.

Girl Students' Association or *All Bengal Girl Students' Association* (1939), Calcutta.

Bhagini Sena (1942), Midnapore.

Calcutta Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti or *Calcutta Women's Self-Defence League* (April 13, 1942), Calcutta.

Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti or *Nikhil Banga Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti* (7th -8th May, 1943), Calcutta.

Bhagini Seva Sangha (1943), Midnapore.

Nari Seva Sangha or *Women Service Association* (1944), Calcutta.

Nari Jnana Bhaban (1944), Barishal.

Muslim Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti or *Muslim Women's Self-Defence League* (1944), Calcutta.

Women associations without date and year are mention below

Barishal Stree Unnati Bidhayak Sangha.

Bhagini Samaj, Bogura.

Sarba Nari Samaj.

Syhlet Sammilan Samaj.

Tripura Stree Siksha Samiti.

Bakharganj Hitaishini Sabha.

Mymensingh Sammilan.

Madhyabangala Sammilani (The Central Bengal Union).

Sreehatta Sammilani.

Jessore-Khulna Sammilani.

The Paschim Dacca Hitakari Sabha.

Taki Hitakari Sabha.

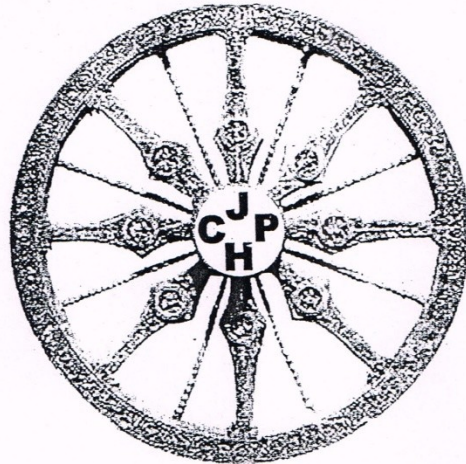
Sripur Hitasadhini.

ISSN: 2395-7379

Journal of People's History and Culture

International Interdisciplinary Journal

Bi-annual: June-December



December 2015

Volume 1 Number 2

Journal of People's History and Culture

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Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha and Its Role for Progress of Women Education of Colonial Bengal

Supriya Biswas

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After the establishment of British rule in India nay Bengal some Bengali intelligentsia especially in the nineteenth century introduced with Western education and thoughts. They were inspired in a collective way for benevolent activities of their countrymen. As a result many educational, cultural and literary based associations emerged in the first half of the nineteenth century for social reform in Bengal such as 'Academic Association'(1828), 'Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge'(12th March,1838) of Henry Vivian Derozio, 'Tattvabodhini Sabha'(21st October,1839) of Debendra Nath Tagore, 'Vernacular Translation Society'(December, 1850), 'Bethune Society'(11th December, 1851) of Dr. J.F.Mouat, the Council of Education, 'Bidyotsahini Sabha'(June, 1853) of Kaliprasanna Singha, 'Bamabodhini Sabha'(1863)¹ etc. But 'Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha' was one of them, established on 5th April (Sunday), 1863, by some local (Uttarpara) educated youths under the leadership of Harihar Chattopadhyay². This paper is intended to explore the rise of *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* and its role for the cause of women emancipation of colonial Bengal.

Before going to the detailed discussion on '*Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha*' it is necessary to find out what was the background behind the establishment of '*Hitakari Sabha*'. Nilmani Mukherjee in his book '*A Bengal Zamindar. Jaykrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and His Times 1808-1888*' wrote that "Jaykrishna Mukherjee had no active role in the history of the *Hitakari Sabha*"³. But this organisation for public welfare in Uttarpara, a few miles from Calcutta, owed its origin to the illustrious Mukherjee family of Uttarpara of whom Jaykrishna Mukherjee and his brother Rajkrishna Mukherjee were well-known for their philanthropy and patronage of public causes⁴. Incidentally, Jaykrishna Mukherjee was born on August 24, 1808(9th Bhadra, 1215.) in the village of Uttarpara, now a municipal town in West Bengal, owing its present day importance to the factory of the Hindustan Motors Limited⁵. He was one of the great controversial figures of nineteenth century Bengal. An archetypal member of the 'New Zamindars' who emerged after the Permanent Settlement, he got qualified himself in many fields of activity. Jaykrishna initiated many overtures in society, necessitating reorganisations, especially in the field of education.

In order to understand the rise of '*Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha*' it is essential to note down a few words about the contributions of Jaykrishna Mukherjee to bring Uttarpara to the limelight of history. The *Hitakari Sabha* and the history of Uttarpara are intimate connected and very lightly the importance of Uttarpara as a centre of intellectual activities directly or indirectly contributed to the origin and growth of the *Hitakari Sabha* in this subsequent period. The general picture of Uttarpara society was extremely depressing. Their existence was marked by certain aimlessness. Mentally they lived in a kind of fatalistic torpor and they had no will for change. They lived an idle and monotonous life, their only recreation being music, dramatic performances and addiction to drugs and the wine. For education they were almost care less. This was the pattern of life of old and youths both⁶.

Jaykrishna was, however, immediately concerned with the problem of his own backward village because Jaykrishna studied the movements which were changing the intellectual climate of Bengal. He believed that what it urgently needed was a good English School. Towards the end of 1845 the two brothers sent an application to G. F. Cockburn, Magistrate of Howrah, pointing out the necessity of opening a good school to serve the populous villages of Uttarpara, Konnagar and Bali. The Government welcomed this proposal, accepting the terms and conditions of the endowment. The school was opened on May 16, 1846 by Robert Hand, its first Headmaster⁷.

Founding the boys' English School was, however, only a part of Jaykrishna's educational programme for Uttarpara. Simultaneously, with their proposal for the boys' school, Jaykrishna and Rajkrishna had submitted another similar proposal for establishing a girls' school at Uttarpara for which also they promised an endowment. Jaykrishna not only made the proposal to open a public school for girls but intimated his readiness to send his two daughters Laxmi and Saraswati there to be educated. In 1845, the step was nothing short of being revolutionary. Up to that time only the missionaries had been active in this field. It is true, some leaders like Raja Radhakanta Deb and Raja Vaidyanath Roy of Jorasanko had supported female education, but no one had as yet dared thinking in Jaykrishna's terms. It was remarkable that in formulating his educational programme for Uttarpara Jaykrishna thought not only of the boys of his village but also of the little girls behind the *purdah* whose opportunities were even less. The Council of Education considered the proposal but thought it advisable to put off the matter for the time being. Jaykrishna and Rajkrishna received a vaguely encouraging but non-committal reply from the Council in June, 1845. In this way, Jaykrishna's first effort to promote female education, which anticipated Bethune's by at least four years, proved to be unsuccessful⁸.

Again in 1849 Jaykrishna and Rajkrishna wrote to the Council of Education, renewing their proposal of 1845 to found a girls' school at Uttarpara. As this proposal awaited the decision of the Council of Education, its President, J. E. D. Bethune, the new Law Member, went ahead with his own scheme of founding a girls' school in Calcutta. The Hindu Female School (later known as Bethune School) was opened on May 7, 1849 which Bethune described as a day "of no common gladness and Triumph". Bethune then alluded to the problems he had to face in formulating his school. Similar difficulties would doubtless beset Jaykrishna's venture. So, once again Jaykrishna and his brother received a polite negative reply from the Council. Jaykrishna, however, was unable to take any immediate steps to open a girls' school at Uttarpara⁹.

After that as we shall see later, initiative in this respect eventually passed to his brothers Rajkrishna Mukherjee and Bijaykrishna Mukherjee (step-brother of Jaykrishna Mukherjee). It may be noted that, the modern Bengali educated middle class elite were intellectually alert, socially progressive and politically conscious. They were also sufficiently conscious to lead the social reform movement of Bengal and naturally had taken much interest in the cause of education and of course female education and all other injurious social customs that barricaded the progress of the society. Incidentally, the Mukherjee family of Uttarpara seems to have been directly influenced by such a situation and having been failed to establish girls' school, they took up other course of action to materialise their goal. Though they did not get any co-operation from Government to open a girls' school at Uttarpara but they continued their impetus with private enterprise. Here we can say that, they were inspired by some kind of mentality which was the impact of Western education and Bengal Renaissance. In fact, they had the credit to internalise the degraded position of women in society and realised that without education the women emancipation was impossible in those days. Finally, on 23rd February, 1863 Rajkrishna Mukherjee and Bijoykrishna Mukherjee established Uttarpara girls' school and in that time the students was only 8 (eight) in number. This may be considered a success of their endeavours first of its kind and obviously further attempt was suppose to be taken up for a overall development of women and of course to save them from so called social customs.

Fortunately, the situation was favourable to them. Because, at this hour there was a trend of establishing cultural and literary societies in Bengal and the purpose was to ameliorate the social, intellectual and moral condition of people of Bengal¹⁰. In these circumstances '*Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha*' was established. This was in fact, a result of the enthusiasm of the period and the responses of the educated youths a feeling developed in Uttarpara for the cause of the formation of an association which could bring to light the issues of women particularly the modern education leading to emancipation from the age old tradition.

After the establishment of Uttarpara *Hitakari Sabha* the sessions of the *Sabha* were held firstly at Uttarpara Government Vernacular School and then by the request of Jogindra Chandra Mukhopadhyay it was held in Uttarpara Girls School. Hence, the Uttarpara Girls' School and *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* merged with each other. But from 19th July, 1863, the office of the *Hitakari Sabha* was permanently established in the residence of Rajkrishna Mukherjee and the annual sessions of the *Sabha* was held in his residence. So, on one hand, the *Sabha* enjoyed the co-operation of Rajkrishna Mukherjee and on the other, Bijoykrishna Mukherjee attached himself with the welfare activities of *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha*. Bijoykrishna was the first President of the *Sabha*¹¹.

In the words of Mary Carpenter, who visited India in 1866, "The great objects of the *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* are to educate the poor, to distribute medicines to the indigent sick, to support poor widows and orphans, to encourage female education and to ameliorate the social, moral and intellectual condition of the inhabitants of Ootterparah and the places adjoining"¹². Though the organisation had very wide objects, it mainly concentrated on the spread of women's education for its economic crises and the Report on Public Instruction for 1876-77 stated that "The chief authority on the subject of female education in the Burdwan division is the *Hitakari Sabha*"¹³.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Bengal those organizations were took the impetus for the spread of female education, amongst them *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* was most important for its wideness and permanency. Women education was being promoted in many districts of Bengal such as Burdwan, Bankura, Hooghly and Howrah for the assistance of *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha*. It was the contemporary organization of *Bamabodhini Sabha* and for the growth of encouragement in women education and this *muffosil* organization initiated examination of the school girls'. This *Sabha* did the advertisement in 1864 and from 1865 started taking the examination of girls' students of Hooghly and Howrah district. The *Hitakari Sabha* realised the importance of scholarship to the girls' as an inspiration for education and this was as a recognition of their merit in the examinations held throughout the year. There were three types of scholarship examinations namely 'Lower Primary', 'Upper Primary' and 'Middle Vernacular' (Previously known as Junior, Senior and Final scholarship examinations). The course of studies in each scholarship examination was for two years. For the participation in the scholarship examinations affiliated school authority had to appeal the *Sabha*. The Eighth Annual Report of the *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* stated that girls' school of Uttarpara, Bali, Konnagar, Rishra, Serampore, Mahesh, Johannagar, Shibpur and Ariadaha use to participate in the above mentioned scholarship examinations¹⁴.

Gradually, the students of the *Sabha* were increased in every year. At first the examinations of affiliated schools of the *Sabha* were held at the end of academic year or on March. In later period, the examinations were held in the month of December or earlier. There were no examination fees for entry to sit in the examination until 1915. One could enjoy her scholarship if she regularly studied in the next course in any school. In that connection, poet Kamini Roy from Howrah girls' school got the scholarship for her good result in the examination of the *Sabha*. Side by side, *Hitakari Sabha* initiated to award head *Pundit* of girls' schools to encourage them through competition for which girls' would be prepared to take highest position in the examinations¹⁵. So, the honour and recognition of teacher is truly appreciable. *Hitakari Sabha* firstly took initiatives to spread the primary education for women to Howrah and Hooghly district and then in all Burdwan division. It is very clear that, the *Sabha* followed the model of modern education of the British.

This *Sabha* not only established girls' schools, but also it arranged *Zenana* education for aged women. Though the female education got the special attention by the impact of Renaissance, but for aged women seclusion was the obstacle for education. So, the *Sabha* had to device the alternative way for female education that was '*Zenana Education*'. In this connection, we may refer the initiative of Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjee who for the first time in 1840 realised the importance of *Zenana* education¹⁶. It is likely that, the *Hitakari Sabha* successfully responded to this trend and this example no doubt justifies the

realistic attitude towards the progress of women education of colonial Bengal and this single example sufficiently justifies the progressive attitude of the *Zamindar* family of Uttarpara. From 1868 *Hitakari Sabha* started 'Zenana Examination' or 'Antahpurika Examination' for the girls of Final examination - "A *Zenana* candidate is one who prosecutes her studies at home after the age of twelve or after marriage"¹⁷. Mary Carpenter wrote in her book "Six Months in India" about this type of special education that "Young ladies who are obliged to leave the school on account of marriage are permitted to continue their studies in the *Zenana*, and to hold scholarships. A native convent female teacher, who was employed in the school, visits them at their home and conducts the necessary examinations"¹⁸.

The course of studies prescribed by the *Sabha* was appropriately suited to their condition of life, calculated to make them exemplary mothers and wives consisting of advanced literature including ethics and studies from *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Arithmetic, Hygiene, Midwifery and so on. From 1871, the *Sabha* started scholarship for *Antahpurika* candidates to pay sufficient attention to their studies. In 1872, Rajbala Devi of Uttarpara and Sailanandini Devi of Bali took part in the *Antahpurika* Examinations and got the scholarship. In this way, from 1868-1939 *Hitakari Sabha* continued the *Zenana* Examinations and during the years total 80 women passed out and got the degree in these examinations. Most important thing is that, many Muslims and Santhals women took part in this examination and came out successful¹⁹. It is thus clear that, the *Sabha* had broad based attitude towards society and the women in particular and their programme was never confined in a narrow circle.

The *Hitakari Sabha* and its various welfare activities did mentioned again and again in several Governmental Reports and cotemporary periodicals regarding women education. For example, Mr. Henry Woodrow, Inspector of Central Division stated in his Report: "The greatest progress in Female Education, and the best schools, whether English or Vernacular, are to be found in the district under *Pundit* Madhab Chunder Turko Sindhanta,the progress of female education is greatly due to the labours of the OOTERPARAH HITOKARI SHOVA....."²⁰. In this Report he mentioned *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* as '*Ooterpara Desh Hitoyeni Shova*' because of its increase of the numbers under instruction, beneficial action and prospect of general improvement in the quality of the instruction imparted. Mary Carpenter wrote in her book titled "Six Months in India" about the activities of *Hitakari Sabha* in which displayed by a body of young men interested in the training of their sisters and daughters²¹. Beside these, many cotemporary periodicals like '*Hindoo Patriot Patrika*', '*Aryadarshan Patrika*', '*Banabodhini Patrika*' etc. were also highly appreciated about its activities and achievements²².

Keeping in view the burning need of education among women and even the aged ones the *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* did an admirable job to diffuse education among women. Its contributions were even recognized and appreciated H. J. Raynolds, Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University and he cited it in his convocation address on March 10, 1883 that "The exertions of that admirable institution, the *Uttarpara Sabha* have largely contributed to the measure of success which has been attained". Lastly, it is perhaps worthy of mention that, for its admirable effort in the field of female education, the *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* in those days had rightly been called the "Female University"²³.

We have already seen how the *Hitakari Sabha* had taken up certain initiatives to uplift the status of Bengali women and in this respect, they had to cross over many socio-political barricades to materialize its goal. It is likely that, the *Hitakari Sabha* was nothing but the product of the age. I mean that of nineteenth century and when the women question became an issue of the Bengal Renaissance. The *zamindar* family of Uttarpara timely responded to this cause and in this regard, they made an exceptional contribution for the progress of female education of colonial Bengal.

Notes and References

1. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, 'Banglar Nabya Sanskriti' (in Bengali), Visvabharati, 1958, p.1; see also Maleka Begum & Saiyad Ajjul Hoque, 'Ami Nari, Tinshe Eacharer Bangali Nari' Iuhas' (in Bengali), The University Press Limited, Dhaka, First Published- 2001, p.61.
2. Basanta Kumar Samanta, 'Hitakari Sabha, Sree Siksha O Tatkalin Bangasamaj' (in Bengali), Sahityalok, Kolkata, Agrahtayan 1394 (B.S.), November 1987, p.11.
3. Nilmani Mukherjee, A Bengal Zamindar, Jaykrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and His Times 1808-1888, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1975, p.156.
4. Nemai Sadhan Bose, Indian Awakening And Bengal, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, Reprint-1990, p.364.
5. Sri Jnanendra Nath Kumar (Compiled), Bangsha Parichoy, Vol.3, Aswin 1339(B.S), Kolkata, p.170
6. Nilmani Mukherjee, op.cit. p.77
7. ibid, pp 78-81.
8. ibid, pp. 82-83.
9. ibid, pp. 153-156.
10. Basanta Kumar Samanta, op.cit. p.15. The young educated youths of Uttarpara they should aspire for some kind of associations and institutions such as 'Bethune Society' (1851), 'Uttarpara Samaj' (1853) by Jadurath Mukhopadhyay (father of Jaykrishna Mukherjee), 'Uttarpara Association' by Jaykrishna Mukherjee and Hindu School (1817) in Calcutta, Serampore College (1818), social welfare activities of Serampore missionaries etc. through which they could put their ideas into practices and which could serve as a forum for their intellectual activities. These groups of young aspirants were sufficiently near Calcutta to be influenced by the intellectual movements of the Capital, and also near Serampore to derive some lessons from the work of the Baptist Missionaries.
11. Basanta Kumar Samanta, op.cit. pp. 15-16.
12. Nemai Sadhan Bose, op.cit. pp. 364-365.
13. Loc.cit.
14. Basanta Kumar Samanta, op.cit. PP. 34-36. They enjoyed monthly scholarship in the Lower Pimary, Upper Primary and Middle Vernacular examinations respectively Rs.1 (one), Rs.2 (two) and 3(three). The duration of enjoyment of the scholarships were for two years (in previous for one year).
15. The Eighth Annual Report of the Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha for the year 1870-71, p.14; see also Basanta Kumar Samanta, op.cit. p.37.
16. 'Social and Educational Movements for women and by Women 1820-1950' an article by Latika Ghose in Bethune College & School Centenary Volume 1849-1949, Calcutta, p.132. Reverend Krishna Molan Banerjee wrote an essay in 1840 on "Indian Female Education" and here he recommended 'private tuition' instead of 'a system of public school', in view of the influence of purdah.
17. The Annual Report of the Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha, 1938-41, p.70.
18. Mary Carpenter, 'Six Months in India', Vol. 1, London, 1868, p. 244.
19. Basanta Kumar Samanta, op.cit. p. 39.
20. Report of the Director of Public Instruction 1865-66, Appendix A- Inspectors' Reports, p.10.
21. Mary Carpenter, op.cit. pp. 242-243.
22. The Hindoo Patriot Patrika, May 7, 1866, wrote: "It is much to be wished that every town in the Muffosil had its Hitakari Sabha".
23. Aryadarshan Patrika, Chaitra, 1283 (B.S) wrote: "The spread of female education is the most important activities of the Sabha and for this Bangladesh is specially indebted to the Sabha"; see also 'Samayik Prasanga' an article in Bamabodhini Patrika, Baishakh, 1307 (B.S), p.3.
24. Sudhir Kumar Mitra, Hoogly Zelar Iuhas -O- Banga Samaj (in Bengali), 1968, Vol.3, p.1238.