

Women and Education in India

A REPRESENTATIVE STUDY

EDITED BY

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Women and Education in India: A Representative Study

Edited By:
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Jogamaya Devi College

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In loving memory of

Professor Jasodhara Bagchi

(1937 – 2015)

Though my first teacher is my mother, academic interest in women's education did not flourish within me until I began my first job at the Department of English, Jogamaya Devi College. Unmitigated engagement with the life of this institution did transform my own understanding of the concerned field of research and it brings me great pleasure to offer my tribute in the shape of this edited volume. This publication is a glorious denouement of camaraderie as the contributors, who are experts in their respective domains, comprise of long-standing friends and well-wishers who make up my lifeline to the world outside as well as the world within. I owe this to their unflinching love and support.

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Women and Education in India

A Representative Study

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01

How Dharmaśāstra Was Superseded by Hindu Law in British India

Ramkrishna Bhattacharya

Abstract

The abolition of the practice of Satī (Suttee, burning of widows) under the Regulation 17 of 1829 is a landmark in the history of India, coupled with the Act 15 of 1856 permitting widows to remarry. This two laws may well be considered to be the beginning of the end of the dominance of Dharmaśāstra, traditional civil and criminal laws current in the then India. Hindu Law finally superseded Dharmaśāstra. It has been pointed out that, in order to achieve their ends, Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar adopted two different tactics. Rammohun Roy upheld the supremacy of Manu over all other law-givers, whereas Vidyasagar bypassed Manu and advocated Parāśara as the only proper authority for the Kali Yuga (the Iron Age). Both of them were goal-oriented persons and their choice of tactics was determined by their goals. They paved the way for the new civil laws for the Hindus that later came to be known Hindu Law. A comparison with a situation in the history of science is also made in order to show how verbal testimony ultimately has to give way to reason. The paper ends with an ‘aside’ on D. D. Kosambi’s remarks on widow remarriage.

Rammohun Roy (1772?–1833) did not wish to stop the prevalent practice of concremation and postcremation of widows¹ in India by any enactment. However, when the Regulation 17 of 1829 was promulgated he along with a few of his friends publicly congratulated Lord Bentinck for this Act. When the supporters of ‘Suttee’ submitted a petition to Privy Council for the annulment of the Regulation, Rammohun himself went to England and submitted a counter-petition to the House of Lords. He was present during the hearing on all the three days (June 25, July 2 and 9, 1832). The petition of the pro-Suttee people was ultimately rejected. Rammohun sent a letter to John Poinder, thanking and congratulating him on his bold decision (July 18, 1832).

¹ These two terms were most probably coined by Rammohun Roy himself as English rendering of *sahamaraṇa* and *anumaraṇa* respectively. They first appear in his two tracts on the subject of concremation.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891), on the other hand, wanted to have the remarriage of Hindu widows properly enacted. With this view he organized, what in today's term may be called a Signature Campaign. His opponents too retaliated with a counter- campaign, urging the government not to interfere with local customs. The number of signatories appended to their appeal far exceeded those of the Petition submitted by Vidyasagar. Unlike the case of Suttee which was mainly prevalent in Bengal (undivided), the agitation for widow remarriage was an all-India affair, drawing support from interested people both in North and South India.² Vidyasagar did not take any risk: he appended a draft bill to his petition (October 4, 1855). Act 15 of 1856 received Viceroy's consent on July 26, 1856.³ The battle in favour of the widows was fought not so much in the Council or the House of Lords, as in the public domain. There was a veritable war of pamphlets, supporting and opposing the two moves, prohibition of widow burning and permission for widow marriage.⁴ Regulation 17 of 1829 contained punitive measures against those who would defy the provisions of law. The nature of the Regulation was prohibitive. Act 15 of 1856, however, was purely permissive. No widow was being compelled to remarry. Only the 'legal incapacity' that stood in the way was eradicated by this Act. No punitive measure was involved in any respect. The Regulation and the Act both concerning Hindu widows, stand out as a couple of monuments in the history of the Hindu society in particular and the history of India in general. They may very well be called landmarks in the study of what in British India came to be known as Hindu Law. The purpose of the first was to protect the lives of the widows, that of the second, to let them lead a normal life, free from any restriction imposed by the Dharmasāstras.

Rammohun Roy initiated the debate on Suttee by publishing a small Bangla tract in 1818. To this a proponent of Suttee offered a reply. This led Rammohun to publish a second pamphlet in 1819. The pamphlets were in the form of dialogue (to be more exact, duologue). Rammohun then translated his own pamphlets into English in 1818 and 1820 respectively. The second English pamphlet was dedicated to the Marchioness of Hastings (there was no such dedication in the Bangla original). The dedication runs as follows:

² It is interesting to note that references to Suttee in Greek and Latin literature are found in 317 BCE and 30 BCE respectively. Propertius, the Latin poet, upheld the dignity of Suttee in order to criticize the unfaithful wives of Rome.

³ Subal Chandra Mitra (1975) provides the text of the original petition and the proposed draft of the bill, the texts of the Act and two counter-petitions submitted by Radhakanta Dev and others as well as by Sriram Siromani and others. The discussion in the Council makes fascinating reading.

⁴ See Rammohun Roy's tracts in Bangla entitled 'Sahamaraṇ Biṣay Pravarttak o Nivarttaker Saṁvād' and 'Sahamaraṇ Biṣaye Pravarttak o Nivarttaker Dvitiya Saṁvād', 1973 pp.169-175, 190-203; Self-translation (into English) of the first in 1973 pp.568-576; of both in 1995, III:87-97 and 98-127. For Vidyasagar, see 1972 Vol. I *passim*.

The following tract, being a translation of a Bengalee Essay published sometime ago as an appeal to reason in behalf of humanity . . . (1995, III: 101. Emphasis added).

This is perhaps for the first time in India that reason was invoked without any reference to either Dharmaśāstra or any such authority (including local and popular customs, *deśācāra* and *lokācāra*) to settle a case concerning the norms of the Hindu society. Bāṇabhaṭṭa, the celebrated writer of a prose romance, *Kādambarī* and a prose biography of Harṣa, the king of Kanauj, *Harṣacarita*, had also spoken against postcremation (*anumaraṇa*) in a celebrated passage in the *Kādambarī* (text pp.264-270; translation pp.136-138). P.V. Kane has rightly praised it as a ‘most eloquent and well-reasoned passage [which] condemns anumaraṇa’ (1974, 2:1, p.628). The appeal of the long exhortation not to opt for postcremation actually is more to the heart than to the head. However, as the proverb goes, half a loaf is better than no bread.

Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, however, knew well that reason alone, unassisted by Dharmaśāstra, would not cut ice. If and only if some śāstric injunction would be presented before the public that approved of widow remarriage, it would be accepted as a *kartavyakarma*, a deed ought to be done (1972, II:22-23). The two tracts of Rammohun appealed to common sense, belief in the *śāstras*, reason, and human compassion (1995, III: 96-97). Vidyasagar, on the contrary, concentrated wholly on śāstric consent. In a reply to his opponents he asserted:

[O]ther parties have gone so far as to assert in my treatment of the subject, I had been influenced merely by compassion towards the unfortunate widows of my country than by firm belief in their remarriage being consonant to the Shastras. They have also said that to probe such consonance is an impossibility. It is true that I do feel compassion for our miserable widows, but at the same time I may be permitted to state, that I did not take up my pen before I was fully convinced that the Shastras explicitly sanction their marriage (qtd. Adhikari 1990 pp. 49-50).⁵

In their polemics against their opponents Rammohun and Vidyasagar followed two different courses – not only different but also contradictory. It was all a matter of tactics, hammered out by two powerful dialecticians. Rammohun bases himself exclusively on the *Code of Manu*, which does not sanction widow burning. He does not deny that there are other Codes, such as those of Aṅgiras and Hārīta that prescribe concremation. But if the law-makers differ among themselves (which they often do), by common consent the *Code of Manu* would hold sway over others. Rammohun’s logic is impeccable: since Manu does not sanction concremation, it cannot be valid, notwithstanding anything contrary contained in other Codes. This is

⁵ A similar statement will be found in Vidyasagar 1972, I: 250.

a classic case of *ponendo ponens*, affirming the antecedent. In support of his major premise, Rammohun refers to a couple of apophthegms: ‘Whatever Manu lays down that is commendable,’ *yatkiñcit manur avadat tatvai bheṣajam* (literally, whatever Manu says is (as beneficial as) medicine), and ‘Whatever law is contrary to the Law of Manu is not commendable,’ *manvartha-viparītā yā sā smṛti na praśasyate* (any law which is contrary to Manu is not commended) (1995, III: 108- 109). In the first ‘Conference’ Rammohun translated them as follows: ‘Whatever Manu has said is wholesome’ and ‘Whatever law is contrary to the Law of Manu is not commendable (ascribed to Vṛhaspati)’ (1995, III: 91). By extension, whatever be the local custom and however hallowed they might be because of long practice, burning of widows is bad in law, un-śāstric as it is.⁶

Vidyasagar, on the other hand, did *not* admit Manu as the ultimate arbiter. Quoting from the *Code of Parāśara*, he pointed out that the provisions in the *Code of Manu* were meant for the *Satya* or *Kṛta Yuga* (the Golden Age), it is the *Code of Parāśara* which holds in the *Kali Yuga* (the Iron Age). Therefore, whatever Manu said in respect of widows would be binding only in the Golden Age, not in the Iron Age. Manu does not recommend widow remarriage; he wants the widows to lead an ascetic life; that is, they are not to be given marriage again. Vidyasagar in this way bypasses Manu and upholds the authority of Parāśara. Now, Parāśara recommends three alternative courses (options, in today’s terms) for widows: marriage, ascetic life, and concremation (I:23). Vidyasagar points out that the third and the last courses had already been rendered ineffectual due to government order (*rājādeśa*, lit. the order of the king). Thus, one of the two remaining courses: either marriage or leading an ascetic life, remains to be followed. Since the first alternative recommends marriage, remarriage of widows is both valid and accords with Śāstra. If a widow opts for the ascetic life, she is free to do so. Similarly, she is also free to remarry: there are no śāstric impediments on the way. Vidyasagar further points out that widow remarriage is approved only for the *Kali* age not for any other (1972, II: 26).

A question would automatically arise: Did not Rammohun and Vidyasagar adopt two mutually exclusive positions? Yes, they did. Had Rammohun agreed to accept Parāśara as the only authority of the Iron Age, he would also have to admit concremation and postcremation as a valid alternative for the widows. Not only Aṅgīras and Hārīta, but also Parāśara acknowledges concremation. Hence Rammohun opted for the *Code of Manu* alone. Manu would not allow remarriage of widows, but he does not speak of the third alternative of Parāśara (concremation) at

⁶ Manu’s provisions in relation to many other issues will appear utterly inhuman and irrational to a modern reader (see, for example, 5:154: ‘Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife.’). Rammohun knew all this, but he concentrated on the fact that Manu did not make any provision for widow burning. He (Rammohun) apparently had no access to any other commentary than Kullūka’s, who does not say anything of significance on *Manu* 5:155- 158 (the passage dealing with widows). Medhātithi, another commentator on *Manu*, waxes eloquent against widow burning.

all. Vidyasagar, therefore, left Manu out of consideration and insisted on the concept of *yugadharma* (Manu I: 80-89), the right course for every Age. While Rammohun upheld the timeless sanctity of the *Code of Manu* irrespective of Ages, Vidyasagar distances himself from the idea of such eternal validity. Each Age, he said, has its own code of law. Ipso facto, the fate of widows is to be decided by the *Code of Parāśara* and no other. Had not the Regulation 17 of 1829 been in operation, Vidyasagar could not take advantage of Parāśara's approval of remarriage, for the law-maker did not reject the provision of concremation. But then Vidyasagar would have discovered another avenue to reach his goal. Both Rammohun and Vidyasagar were goal-oriented persons and well-versed in Dharmaśāstra. In addition to this, they were superlatively sharp logicians and eminently argumentative (*pace* Amartya K. Sen). Starting from two different premises they could achieve their ends.

The Hindu society before the nineteenth century was content to follow local customs that allegedly enjoyed śāstric support. The Regulation of 1829 and the Act of 1856 opened the way to a new approach: whatever was irrational came to be declared illegal as well, whether or not it had any śāstric injunction to fall back upon. This was the beginning of the end of the dominance of tradition-based Hindu civil and criminal codes. The ball had been set rolling by the promulgation of two Regulations in 1795 and 1804, declaring the practice of female infanticide illegal. The Regulations were passed by the initiative of the East India Company officials; as yet there was no Mahadev Govind Ranade, Birasalingam Pantulu and R. Venkataratnam Naidu, not to speak of Rammohun Roy or Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. In south India, the impact of the Widow Remarriage Act was considerable. Birasalingam Pantulu presided over the first widow remarriage in the south in 1881. A Widow Remarriage Association was formed in 1891, the year Vidyasagar died. E. V. Ramaswamy (1879–1973), better known as Periyar, envisaged not only a casteless society but also supported widow remarriage and personal freedom of women (Menon in Karashima (ed.) p.342). These legal measures were followed by several more Acts in the post-colonial period: The Special Marriages Act of 1954 allowed persons belonging to different religions to marry and gave them equal rights of divorce. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 gave daughters equal rights of inheritance. The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Bill of 1956 allowed female children to be adopted. This entire process dealt sledgehammer blows to the much vaunted timeless nature of the Codes of such venerable sages as Manu, Parāśara, Yājñavalkya and others.

Finalized and adopted in 1950, the Constitution of India itself ensured (at least in theory, though not always in practice) equal rights of women in public life. Articles 14, 15 and 16 stand in sharp contrast to the fundamentally male chauvinist position common to all Smṛti texts. In many respects the Constitution may be considered as hitting the last nails on the coffin of pre- modern Hindu law.

The development of Hindu law from the colonial to the post-colonial era bears resemblance to a particular feature noticeable in the history of science. Modern

science beginning with Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler had to dismantle the barriers raised by credo, traditional beliefs and conventions, which constituted the heritage of Europe. The main threat to Galileo's findings came from what in ancient Indian logic is called Śabda, lit. word, also known as Āpti (āptavacana, āptavākya), meaning verbal testimony. In Europe the authority of the word was twofold: The Bible and its custodian, the Catholic Church on the one hand, and Aristotle, 'the master of those who know' (in Dante's words) on the other. It was only by defying what the Bible or the Church or Aristotle or Ptolemy had said that heliocentrism instead of geocentrism was ultimately established. It took no less than two centuries to get the idea generally accepted (there were and are always some cranks who still believe that the earth is flat and stands at the centre of the universe but we ignore them now).

As to Hindu Personal Law, the nineteen Codes (ūnaviṃśa saṃhitās) as well as the local authorities of later times, such as Raghunandana, the neo-smārta, in Bengal, dominated till the middle of the eighteenth century. But with the passage of time, with one new Regulation and Act following another, the authority of Dharmaśāstra ultimately was largely diminished, if not altogether destroyed. The Hindu Code Bill with its provision of divorce was enacted without any śāstric support. Rammohun and Vidyasagar, however, had to proceed cautiously, paying at least lip service to the Smṛti texts at every step. Mere compassion or commonsense or rationality itself, even the combination of all these, was not sufficient to achieve their desired goal: a stringent law was required.

Let me conclude with an 'aside'. D.D. Kosambi rather derisively spoke of the activities of 'the Prārthanā Samāj (an offshoot of the [Sadharana] Brahmo Samaj) in which R.G. B[handarkar] was the dominant figure' (1962 p.38 n2). The Prārthanā Samāj tried to promote widow remarriage. Kosambi dismisses this with the following remark: widow remarriage was 'then unheard of for Brahmins though practised by some 85% at least of the population' (1962 p. 38).

I yield to none in my admiration for Kosambi both as text critic and historian, though I am not competent to speak of his scientific and mathematical works. Nevertheless, I must say that in this respect (widow remarriage) he is hopelessly wrong. First, what is the basis of his statistics? Wherefrom did he learn that '85% at least' of the non-brahmin population of Maharashtra (or the whole of India) practised widow remarriage? Since there was no provision for widow remarriage except in the Code of Parāśara (which nobody seems to have noticed before a correspondent of the bilingual journal brought out by the members of the Young Bengal in Calcutta, The Bengal Spectator, and Vidyasagar did), if a widow remarried and gave birth to children, the marriage would not be considered legitimate; the children born out of this 'marriage' would have no right to inherit their parent's property, however little it might amount to. The children would be treated as born out of wedlock in the eye of law before 1856. Such widow remarriages could at best be called common-law

marriage as per provisions in the law of the United Kingdom, not according to Hindu law of inheritance.

Kosambi, however, adds an interesting comment on Bhandarkar: ‘That he (sc. Bhandarkar) spoke for a very narrow class in the attempt to speak for the whole of India, never struck him, nor for that matter other contemporary “reformers”. Still the silent change of emphasis from caste to class was a necessary advance’ (1962 p. 38. Emphasis added).

If I understand Kosambi correctly, he seems to recognize that the social reform movement, in its zeal to redress social wrongs that both the brahmins and the non-brahmins suffered from, would help liberate the non-brahmins as well. Thus, in effect, the whole population, not just the brahmins, would benefit. It should be observed that the word ‘class’ as used by Kosambi in this context has little or no significance as per Marxist terminology.

Appendix

In Bāṇa’s Kādambarī, Mahāśvetā, a young lady, is about to kill herself after hearing of the death of Candrāpīḍa, her beloved. Puṇḍarīka tries to dissuade her from doing so. His long and persuasive speech is a masterpiece of rhetoric, combining argument with instances and exploiting commonly held beliefs and notions concerning the Other World. An extract is given below:

This following another to death [anumaraṇa] is most vain! It is a path followed by the ignorant! It is a mere freak of madness, a path of ignorance, an enterprise of recklessness, a view of baseness, a sign of utter thoughtlessness, and a blunder of folly, that one should resign life on the death of father, brother, friend, or husband. If life leaves us not of itself, we must not resign it. For this leaving of life, if we examine it, is merely for our own interest, because we cannot bear our own cureless pain. To the dead man it brings no good whatever. For it is no means of bringing him back to life, or heaping up merit, or gaining heaven for him, or saving him from hell, or seeing him again, or being reunited with him. (Trans. Ridding 1967 pp.136-137)

Puṇḍarīka then cites several instances from myths and legends as recorded in the *Mahāabhāarata*, Kālidāsa’s *Kumārsambhava* (Birth of the War-god), etc. Rati, wife of Kandarpa (god of love); Kuntī, wife of Pāṇḍu; Uttarā, wife of Abhimanyu; and Duḥśalā, wife of Jayadratha, did not commit *anumaraṇa*. All this implies that concremation and post-cremation were not obligatory. (Ridding 1967 pp.137-138)

Thus the expostulation proceeds. Fatalism is also invoked:

For by thy present grief what is effected or what won? Fate is all-powerful. Destiny is strong. We cannot even draw a breath at our own will. The freaks of that accursed and most harsh destiny are exceeding cruel. A love fair in its sincerity is not allowed long to endure; for joys are wont to be in their essence frail and unlasting, while sorrows by their nature are long-lived. (Trans. Ridding 1967 pp.138)

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pp. 10 – 28

02

Victorian Ideals and the Changing ‘Moralities’ in 19th Century Calcutta: Scandals and Female Education Movements

Biswadeep Chakraborty

*“May children of our children say,
‘She wrought her people lasting good;
Her court was pure; her life serene;
God gave her peace; her land reposed;
A thousand claims to reverence closed
In her as Mother, Wife and Queen’.”*
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1858), *To the Queen*

These are the words of Alfred, Lord Tennyson about Queen Victoria, who in her long reign of 63 years and seven months became the first English monarch to see her name given to the period of her reign whilst still living. The *Victorian Era* was characterized by rapid change and developments in nearly every sphere – bearing the fruits of *industrial revolution*; Britain was experiencing an era of unprecedented economic boom and prosperity. The major characteristics of Victorian society were Victorian *ideals* and *moralities*. Victorian period sharply demarcated gender roles in society probably more than at any point of time in history, the two sexes inhabited what Victorians thought of as ‘separate spheres’, this ideology rested on a definition of the ‘natural’ characteristics of women and men. Women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior, meant that they were best suited to the domestic sphere and men since physically superior must take charge of the outside domain. Respectability was a code of behaviour influenced by Christian values, governed every aspect of the lives of the Victorians. Victorian ideals of femininity, masculinity, domesticity, separate spheres, sexuality, marriage and the family were constructed along the precepts of gentility, in an endeavour to maintain

order in a period of change.¹ It was a period of industrial, cultural, political, social, scientific, and military change within the United Kingdom, and was marked by a great expansion of the British Empire by incorporating Indian sub-continent after *Indian Rebellion* or *Sepoy Mutiny* of 1857, as Queen Victoria took the title of “*Empress of India*”.

One major characteristic of Victorian era was its *scandals*, the Victorian Era is highly known for its strict social code and the sense of strong morality, yet not all members of British society followed the strict social code. Included in this social code was the marriage between a man and a woman. The Victorian divorce court stands with the courtroom in murder trials as one of the great social spaces for the enactment of access to the secrets of sex and marriage. This expository role was especially important in the 1880s, when rising feminist and working-class politics created a competition of social narratives claiming to tell the truth about gender and class, and throughout the late 19th century a series of highly mediated but spectacularly detailed scandals emerged. Each 'case' displayed these tensions and possibilities differently, all marked a cultural and political crisis of class, sex and gender, and all drew upon the highly versatile generic language of melodrama, in which guilt and innocence, villainy and victimization, stood in sharp opposition. As Judith Walkowitz has remarked, this was 'an historical moment when campaigns organized around opposition to various forms of sexual danger allowed 'middle-class women's forceful entry into the world of publicity and politics, where they claimed themselves as part of a public that made sense of itself through public discourse'.²

A well-known scandal that arose in the 18th century Victorian London was the *Cleveland Street scandal* occurred in 1889, when a homosexual male brothel in Cleveland Street, London, was discovered by police. At the time, sexual acts between men were illegal in Britain, and the brothel's clients faced possible prosecution and certain social ostracism if discovered. It was rumoured that one client was Prince Albert Victor, who was the eldest son of the Prince of Wales making him Queen Victoria's grandson and second-in-line to the British throne, though this rumour has never been substantiated. The government was accused of covering up the scandal to protect the names of any aristocratic patrons.³

Similarly in Victorian Calcutta, scandals involving transgression of normative sexual and gender boundaries emerged more publicly than ever before in the city's law courts, and reported with speed and sensation in the journalistic and commercial popular print world, gripped popular imagination and worked collective anxieties to

¹ See Leonore Davidoff, Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

² KaliIsrael, *French Vices and British Liberties: Gender, Class and Narrative Competition in a Late Victorian Sex Scandal*, *Social History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1997), pp. 1-26, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

³ See H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Cleveland Street Scandal*, London: W. H. Allen, 1976.

a feverish pitch. Anindita Ghosh⁴ noted that debates about sexuality in both ‘private’ and ‘public’ spaces in popular and reformist print helped the airing of ideas, opinions and concerns in unsettling times, reshaping the fundamentals of vital social institutions such as family and domesticity, while also enabling the increased visibility of women in the urban public sphere. The horrific Elokeshi-Mohunta scandal of 1874, the murder in the red-light area of Sonagatchi in 1875, and cases of serial killing of prostitutes in the early twentieth century rippled the city’s social and moral fabric. The press and publishing industry banked on the sensational murders rendering their own moral judgments on all individual cases. Bat-tala printing houses were printing several inspired stories and dramas, like মোহন্তের এই কি দশা (*Mohanter Ei Ki Dosha*), সোনাগাজীর খুন (*Sonagajir Khun*), বেশ্যাবাড়ী কাণ্ডেনী (*Beshhyabari Kapteni*), সোনাগাজীর খুনির ফাঁসির হুকুম (*Sonagajir Khunir Phashi'r Hukum*) etc.⁵ Most fascinating was ways in which local art and artists through the modes of popular picture productions like Kalighat paintings followed rather documented and narrated the episodes through mere pictorial representation.

The famous Tarakeshwar affair or the Mahant- Elokeshi affair of 1873 was the glimmering example of a textbook “Victorian scandal”. This particular scandal was not only the inspiration behind several popular stories and plays but has been extensively documented by the Kalighat *patuas* through Kalighat paintings. The affair of the beautiful Elokeshi, wife of Nabin Chandra Banerjee, with Madhab Chandra Giri, the Mahant or head priest of Tarakeshwar Shiva temple sparked a great deal of interest all over Bengal. Elokeshi was the sixteen-year old wife of Nabin, the affair involved the decapitation of Elokeshi by her husband Nabin Chandra Banerjee, a government clerk. Elokeshi lived with her parents in Tarakeshwar, while Nabin worked in Calcutta. Elokeshi and her parents had approached the Mahant for medication aiding childbirth. The Mahant, however, had allegedly seduced her and the liaison continued with the connivance of Elokeshi’s parents and a “Telibou” i.e. the wife of a local oil-seller. Nabin had come to know of this situation, upon his arrival at the village. Outraged and completely frenzied, he confronted Elokeshi who confessed and begged for forgiveness, but completely overcome by anger Nabin slit his wife’s throat with a “Bnoti” or a fish-knife on 27 May, 1873. A remorseful Nabin surrendered immediately to the local police and confessed his deed. Sometime later the famous Tarakeshwar Murder Trial of 1873 began. Both Mahant and Nabin Chandra Banerjee were found guilty of various charges which finally led to Nabin’s lifelong sentence while Mahant was sentenced to three years rigorous imprisonment with a penalty of 2000 rupees.

⁴ Anindita Ghosh, *Claiming the City: Protest, Crime, and Scandals in Colonial Calcutta c. 1860-1920*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp.123-124.

⁵ See Adris Biswas (Ed.), *Battalar Boi: Unish Sotaker Dushprappa Kuriti Boi*, Vol-1 & Vol-2, Kolkata: Gangchil, 2011.

Popular picture production and mass religiosity was complementary in 19th century Bengal. Kalighat painting which evolved as a unique style in the rapidly urbanizing cityscape of 19th century Calcutta, reflected a new language in which old and new came together, these paintings recorded the changes in lifestyles and values of the urban populace but also focuses on the very own religious deities who cut across both 'traditional rural' and new 'colonial urban' society. Kalighat style also incorporated a new visual vocabulary brought forth by new colonial technologies like wood-block printing, lithographic presses and studio photography. As Tapati Guha-Thakurta noted that ideas of 'art' and 'artist' would undergo radical redefinitions in colonial India⁶, the artists who developed the now famous Kalighat style of painting were traditionally scroll painters called *patuas* who migrated from rural Bengal and settled in the vicinity of the Kalighat temple in Calcutta but in catering to the transient, urban populace they let go of their linear traditional narrative styles and adopted single pictures with one or two figures. Hence the traditionally inherited and perfected techniques and iconography were blended with the use of watercolours and Western academic shading, to portray scenes of a changing society but most importantly the Hindu gods and goddesses. The image of goddess Kali was the main type of *pat*⁷ that was sold as a pilgrim souvenir at the stalls around the temple at Kalighat. This composition of Kali image reflects the appearance of the main deity that actually worshipped inside the temple. Religious hypocrisy, like *babu* culture and hypocrisy of the higher caste Brahmins, was often mocked through the popular Kalighat paintings for example, the cat eating fish is an allusion to the false ascetic and hypocrite known as 'biraltapasvi', connected with an old legend in the Mahabharata where a cat that pretends to live the life of an ascetic, but secretly continues its habit of eating mice. The theme came to represent the falseness of Brahmin community, whose religious orders forbade them from eating meat or fish, but who did so nonetheless. Most of the *patuas* who painted the Kalighat *pats* remained anonymous as there were never any signatures on the paintings or records to indicate any names as there would often be more than one *patua* involved. The only exceptions were Nilmani Das, Balaram Das and Gopal, who belonged to the early part of the 19th century.⁸ In the later half the Ghosh brothers, Nibaran Chandra and Kali Charan and their younger relation Kanai Lal Ghosh, are the named Kalighat artists we know as they are documented in the London's Victoria and Albert Museum's historic collection.

⁶ Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a new 'Indian' Art: Artists, aesthetics and nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.11.

⁷ A *pat* or *pattachitra* is a general term for scroll paintings traditionally done in Bengal; later the *pat* artists called the *patuas* migrated from the rural Bengal to the newly emerged metropolis Calcutta in the nineteenth century near the vicinity of the famous Kali temple – Kalighat, hence later this series of *pats* were termed as the Kalighat Paintings.

⁸ Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1989, p.134

Hence, the scene by scene capture of such a public affair like the Tarakeshwar affair or the Mahant- Elokeshi affair in the Kalighat *pats*, working into a narrative series not only strongly communicates the public acceptability and popularity of this genre and its power to represent and mould public opinion but also shows how these social scandals break the thematic tradition of the pat artists who only used to work on gods and other mythological characters but are now somewhat forced to draw on such social commentaries, manifested in the portrayals of the religious figures with heaviest of causticity in the satirical flavour. The rural artists came to Calcutta in the 19th century and discovered the city thriving on prostitution, deceit and pretense. They witnessed an age of tremendous social upheaval as it was breaking away from its zealous Bengaliness and moulded itself according to the Victorian excises in duality.

As the British continued making inroads into India's social, economic and political arenas, they felt a lack of legitimacy and felt obliged to justify their rule. What the British initially called 'improvement' or 'betterment' and, later on 'moral and material progress'⁹ will be, therefore, subsumed under the term 'civilizing mission'. The most powerful tool of self-legitimation was the colonizer's claim to improve the country and to bring the fruits of progress and modernity to their colonial subjects.¹⁰ Accordingly as pointed out by Ashis Nandy, the Indian population was placed in a 'husband and wife relationship' that justified the imposition of Victorian discipline, education and upbringing, i.e. in short the 'civilizing mission'.¹¹

As the British began Anglicizing the country, one major way was through the education of the natives and what better way to do so, but through the weakest section of society – the women.¹² The very first schools for women in India were established by the missionaries who by default had an agenda around Christianity but their contribution regarding education can never be denied. According to Jogeshchandra Bagal, the 'Calcutta Female Juvenile Society', organized by the 'Calcutta Baptist Mission Society' in 1819, opened a school at Gouribari in north Calcutta. There were only 8 students in the first year, but 32 in the next, all from the lower orders of Hindu society, and some quite adult. It is very important to note that initially these missionaries were bringing students from the lower strata of the society as the new class of Bengali 'gentlefolk' or *bhadralok* was against female education that too through the hands of foreign missionaries considered as *mlechchas* i.e., the impure foreign people. The 'Despatch of 1854' found 288 girls

⁹ See Harald Fischer-Tine, Michael Mann (Ed.), *Colonialism As Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, New Delhi: Anthem Press, 2004.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹¹ See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and recovery of self under colonialism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp.4-11.

¹² See Sunita Peacock, *The "Education" of the Indian Woman against the Backdrop of the Education of the European Woman in the Nineteenth-Century*, Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table, Vol. 2009 Issue 2, Special section p.1

schools in Bengal with 6,869 students.¹³ Although the contribution of the missionaries regarding female education in India is undeniable but their outlook at this point was too narrow as it is clear from the Christian Vernacular Education Society for India's first annual report¹⁴, where it is clear that out of everything the basic and sole idea of missionaries in India at this point is only 'Christianity' as it attacks all other forms of education in the country:

*"Education in India presents itself under three, separate forms, viz. Indigenous, Governmental and Missionary. The first of these, Indigenous education, is corrupt at the core in all its moral teaching, poor in its mental training, and defective in its whole scholastic apparatus. The second, viz. Governmental education, is on principle, non-Christian, having a direct tendency to emancipate the heathen from the thrall of idoltry, without substituting in its place any faith in, or respect for, true religion; and thereby raising up a large class of intelligent natives, who are proving themselves bitter enemies to Christianity."*¹⁵

As the native elite or *bhadralok* were not sending their girls to school, the interest in educating the daughters of elite Bengali families was perceptible in several writings. An early pamphlet urging female education titled, *Strisiksha Bidhayak* (1824), with the cover page provides an English title: *An Apology for Hindoo Female Education, Containing evidence in favour of the Education of Hindoo Females, from the examples of illustrious women, both ancient and modern*¹⁶, written in Bengali in the form of a dialogue between two native women, its major purpose was to prove to the common folk that female education was formerly prevalent among the Hindus, especially in higher classes and unlike prevalent negative notions around female education it is most beneficial. Back in those days there were several social superstitions prevalent in the society regarding ill effects of female education. These kind of social beliefs were challenged in the pamphlet as one woman in conversation with another asked her:

"Let me ask you one question. From what you said so far I can understand that education is very important for women. But old ladies of previous generations say that if a woman seeks education or gets

¹³ Poromesh Acharya, 'Education in Old Calcutta', in Sukanta Chaudhuri (Ed.), *Calcutta, the Living City Vol. I*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.86-87

¹⁴ A rare copy of 'Christian Vernacular Education Society for India, First Annual Report (London: W.M. Watts Crown Court, Temple Bar, 1859)' is available in the collection of the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

¹⁵ Christian Vernacular Education Society for India, First Annual Report, London: W.M. Watts Crown Court, Temple Bar, 1859, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶ A rare copy of *An Apology for Hindoo Female Education, Containing evidence in favour of the Education of Hindoo Females* (Calcutta: Calcutta School Book Society's Press, 1824)' is available in the collection of the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

educated then she will become a widow, is it correct? If so then pardon me I'll not seek education."

In answer the second woman said:

*"No sister, it is not correct. I've learned that in no Hindu scripture this is mentioned, but what I've heard is about many learned educated women in our Shastras. Plus we can observe that British memsahibs are educated just like British sahibs, but that doesn't make them a widow."*¹⁷

Although progressive but the ending of the book dwells on the Victorian ideal of 'domesticity' and 'the angel in the house' theory, as makes it completely clear that women's foremost duty was unflinching loyalty and devotion to her husband, irrespective of whether the husband was good or bad, devout or irreligious, rich or poor, good looking or unsightly. Hence, the women are reminded that, when they find time in between their routine housework to educate themselves, know that according to the religious laws and scriptures the greatest happiness lies in serving their husband.¹⁸

Secular Native Female School, for the secular education of girls, later renamed by the government as the *Bethune School*, was established by John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune in 1849, and achieved success in this very regard educating upper-middle class Bengali *bhadramahila*, with the help of eminent natives whom Bethune himself mentioned in his letter to Lord Dalhousie, then Governor-General, on the 29 March 1850 like Sri Ramgopal Ghosh who was known as the *Indian Demosthenes* for his brilliant oratory skills and was one of the major social reformers and leaders of the Young Bengal group; Raja Dakshinaraman Mukherji who was a native zamindar and major social reformer who heavily protested against the colonial policy regarding the suppression of newspapers and periodicals, he himself was a publisher and editor of several Calcutta periodicals and magazine and one of the founders of the British Indian Association, and eminent Sanskrit scholar and Bengali poet Sri Madanmohan Tarkalankar. And unlike the missionaries who criticized the governmental education and government schools for being 'non-Christian', Bethune clearly mentions his high regard for secular governmental education by mentioning the failure of missionaries to include respectable natives in their schools in the letter:

"[...] The failure of every attempt to induce respectable Natives to send their daughters to a Missionary School, and the conviction which I have that the system of the Government Schools is best calculated for producing a rapid and salutary effect in the country induced me to

¹⁷ *Apology for Hindoo Female Education, Containing evidence in favour of the Education of Hindoo Females*, Calcutta School Book Society's Press, Calcutta, 1824, pp.2-3. All translations from the Bengali to English are mine.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.32

*establish my School on the same principle of excluding from it all religious teaching, though I was well aware of the additional difficulty which this restriction would cause to me for procuring efficient female teachers. English was to be taught to those only whose parents wished it, all were to be instructed in Bengali and in plain and fancy work. [...]*¹⁹

In the same letter to Lord Dalhousie, Bethune also requested him to ask the Court of Directors whether it would be feasible to name the institution after Queen Victoria.

*"[...] if I could obtain your Lordship's influence with the Honourable Court of Directors in including them to address Her Majesty for leave to call the School by Her name and to consider it as placed especially under Her patronage. It will not be one of the least remarkable triumphs in India which will have redounded to the honor of Her Majesty's reign, that in the time of a female Sovereign a beginning should be made toward emancipating so many of Her female subjects from degradation and misery which are now their lot. [...]"*²⁰

But the Court was still afraid of the conservative feeling. In their despatch to the Governor-General, dated 4 September 1850, the Court of Directors signified their approval of this pioneer attempt, but could not accept the request of Bethune forwarded to them by the Governor-General.

*"We fully appreciate the intentions of Mr. Bethune in the establishment of a female school in Calcutta and approve the instructions which you have addressed to the Council of Education through the Government of Bengal [...] (But) we do not think that the present state of female education is such as to warrant the unusual proceeding of applying for the sanction of Her Majesty's name to the Female School at Calcutta."*²¹

This episode clearly proves how hostile at this point Victorian England was regarding female education. It is a well-known fact that women were seen inferior to men in most areas of the life in Victorian England. They were taught to be 'angels of their houses'²² and were only expected to be good wives and mothers at home. In the

¹⁹ Letter from the Honourable J. E. D. Bethune to the Marquis of Dalhousie, Governor General, dated Calcutta the 29 March 1850, in *Selections from Educational Records Part-II 1840-1859*, J. A. Richey, Bureau of Education India, Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1922, p. 52.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

²¹ Despatch, dated 4th September 1850, from the Court of Directors to the Governor General, In *Selections from Educational Records Part-II 1840-1859*, J. A. Richey, Bureau of Education India, Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1922, p. 61.

²² The popular Victorian image of an ideal woman was often described by the phrase 'angels of their houses' comes from the title of a narrative poem by Coventry Patmore titled 'The Angel in the House' first published in 1854, in which he holds his devoted and submissive wife up as an angel – the role model for all Victorian women.

upper classes it was assumed that a girl would marry and that therefore she had no need of a formal education, as long as she could look beautiful, entertain her husband's guests, and produce a reasonable number of children. 'Accomplishments' such as playing the piano, singing and flower-arranging were all-important. But if she could not find a husband, Liza Picard noted, then she faced a grim future as a 'maiden aunt' whose help could always be called on to look after her aged parents or her siblings' children. She might even be forced to take on employment as a governess. The instruction of females both at schools and homes, through female teachers or 'governesses' was a common practice in Victorian era, these same ideals were also changing moralities under Victorian identities in colonial Calcutta. As several 'primers' were printed at this time in Calcutta with sole intention to tap the market of instruction books created due to the start of female education, for example 'An Anglo-Bengali Primer, containing Easy Lessons in Spelling and Reading for the use of Hindu Females, By a Lady (1850)'²³. This clearly points out to Victorian 'separate spheres' where even an elementary instruction book is separated as being wrote by a 'Lady' and boasts of 'feminine accomplishments' as it is clear from its Preface:

*"This little work was begun some time ago, when the author had the pleasure of giving instruction, in reading, writing, and many feminine accomplishments, to the married ladies and children of several Hindu families of the highest respectability; and has been since finished for the use of other Hindu females, who may wish to gain a knowledge of their own and the English languages. [...]"*²⁴

Hence it is clear how in the 19th century Calcutta, these Victorian ideals were changing the moralities and traditions and shaped the dominant conceptions of 'womanhood' and 'sexualities' altogether.

As soon as Bethune School was established the orthodox society reacted sharply against the development. The school went through a rough period until it was amalgamated with 'Banga Mahila Vidyalaya', initially established as 'Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya' by Annette Akroyd, and some Brahmo gentlemen, including Dwarkanath Ganguly. A number of bright students joined the institution, namely – Kadambini Bose, Sarala Das, Abala Das, and Subarnaprabha Basu, all of whom went on to become prominent figures later. Kadambini Bose became the first woman to pass the University of Calcutta's Entrance Examination, in 1878. Her success encouraged Bethune College to introduce F.A. (First Arts) and Graduation courses in 1883. Kadambini became one of the first two native female graduates, along with

²³ A rare copy of 'An Anglo-Bengali Primer, containing Easy Lessons in Spelling and Reading for the use of Hindu Females, By a Lady (Calcutta: J. Thomas, Baptist Mission Press, 1850)' is available in the collection of the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

²⁴ Preface, *An Anglo-Bengali Primer, containing Easy Lessons in Spelling and Reading for the use of Hindu Females, By a Lady*, J. Thomas, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1850.

Chandramukhi Basu, in the entire British Raj. Bethune School was an eye-opener for the Bengali upper middleclass and led to the opening of other such schools. In 1894, out of 138 students in Bethune School, 70 were Hindus, 55 Brahmos and 13 Christians. Poromesh Acharya noted that as the girls from *bhadralok* households started going to school; the earlier schools for indigent girls gradually disappeared.²⁵ Hence it is clear that this period in Bengal witnessed a distinctive shift in ideas respecting gender relations by female education movements, but the process was vigorously contested and in no way complete. As the orthodox conservative Hindoo society vigorously attacked female education in the form of several plays, social farces and commentaries generally printed by the lowly cheap bat-tala printers for example: *Paskora Maag*²⁶, by some Radhabinod Haldar, a social farce which literally means, 'educated woman', where it is depicted that how educated women dominates their husbands and thumb them down after marriage, hence one should not marry a educated woman. As it clearly mentions on the cover page:

“স্ত্রীস্বাধীনতার এই ফল।

পতি হয় পায়ের তল।।”²⁷

This literally means:

*“The result of female independence is,
That husband now sits at wife's feet.”*²⁸

Publications of such kind evidently signpost the reactions of orthodox Hindoo society on female education, which proves that while this period of Bengal Renaissance witnessed a distinctive shift in ideas respecting gender relations and Victorian ideals changed rather moulded the existing 'moralities' and 'traditions', but the process was nowhere complete and was vigorously contested.

²⁵ Acharya, 'Education in Old Calcutta', pp.86-87

²⁶ A rare copy of '*Paskora Maag*, By Radhabinod Haldar (Calcutta)' is available in the collection of the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

²⁷ Cover Page, Haldar, Radhabinod, *Paskora Maag*, Calcutta

²⁸ Translation from the Bengali to English is mine.

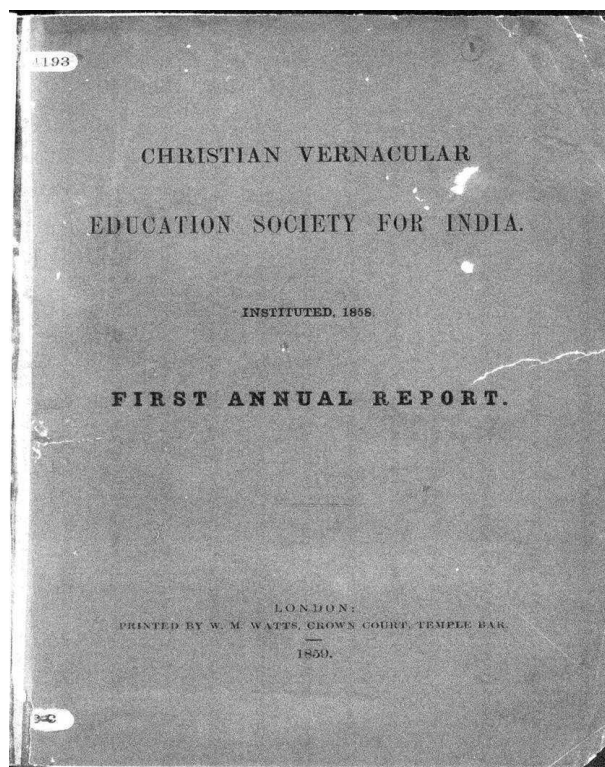


Plate 01
Christian Vernacular Society for India,
First Annual Report (Cover Page)

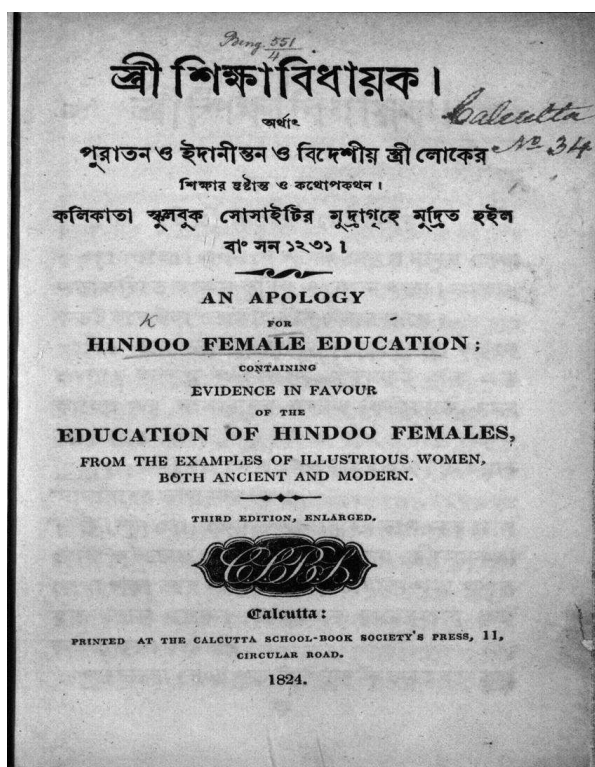


Plate 02
An Apology for Hindoo Female Education
(Cover Page)

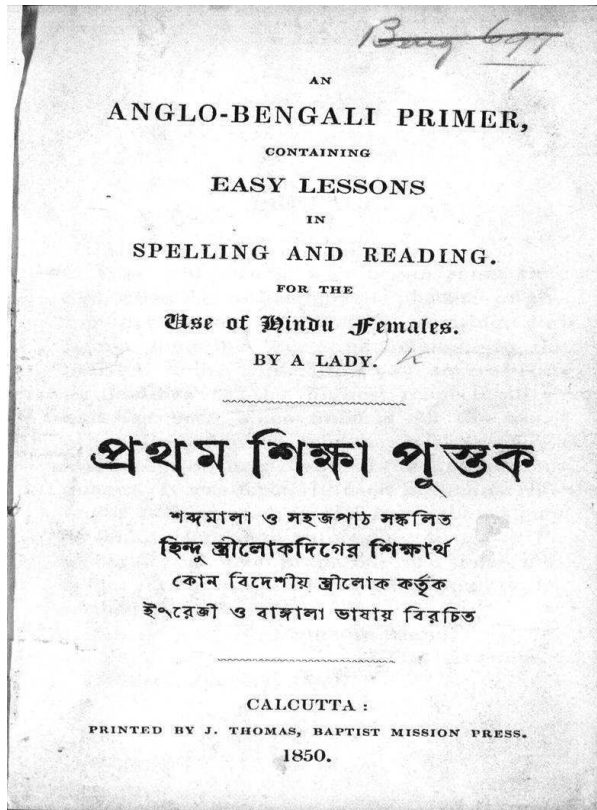


Plate 03
An Anglo Bengali Primer (Cover Page)

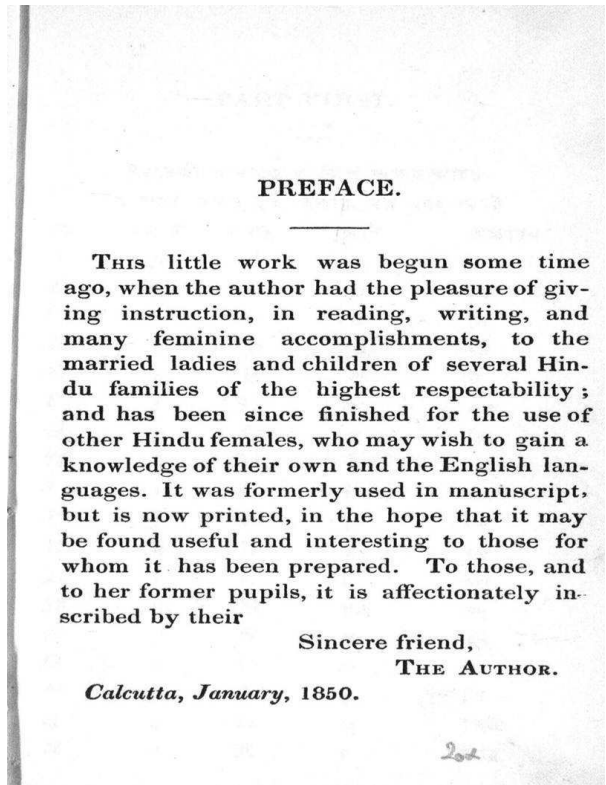


Plate 04
An Anglo Bengali Primer (Preface)

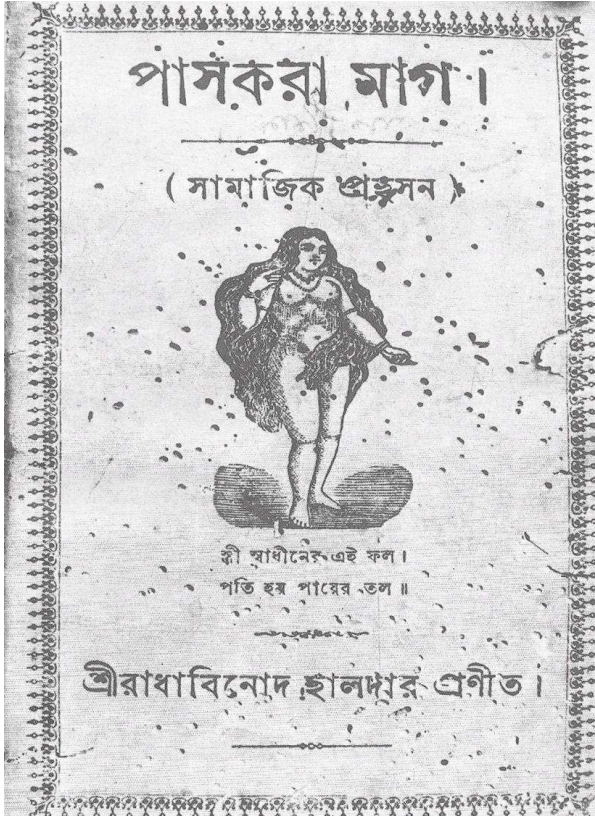


Plate 05
Paskora Maag (Cover Page)

মোহন্তের এই কি দশা!!

নাটক

২ খানি আবশ্যকীয় ছবি সংযুক্ত।
“ধর্মস্য সূক্ষ্মা গতিঃ।”

শ্রীযোগেন্দ্রনাথ ঘোষ প্রণীত।

কলিকাতা।

১৪ নং বেন্টিঙ্ক স্ট্রীট। বেন্টিঙ্ক প্রেসে
শ্রীমহেন্দ্রনাথ ঘোষ দ্বারা মুদ্রিত।

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
No Theatre either in town or mofussil should
act the Drama without the consent of its author.

১২৮০ সাল।

Plate 06
Mohanter Ei ki Dosha (Cover Page)

শ্রী শ্রী জগদীশ্বরায় নমঃ ।
সোণাগাজির খুন ।

শ্রীঅখিলচন্দ্র দত্ত
প্রণীত ।

কলিকাতা ।

চিৎপুর রোড ১১৭ নং ভবনে
শ্রীরসিকলাল চন্দ্র দ্বারা
কবিতা-কৌমুদী যন্ত্রে মুদ্রিত ও প্রকাশিত ।

সন ১২৮২ সাল ।

Plate 07
Sonagajir Khun (Cover Page)

বেশ্যাবাড়ী কাপ্তেনী ।

প্রথম অঙ্ক ।

—:—:—

দৃশ্য ।—রাজপথ ।

(গীত গাহিতে গাহিতে এক মাতালের
প্রবেশ ।)

রাগিনী বেহুঁরে ।—ভাল বেতাল ।

ওমা ধান্যেশ্বরী ।

খাঁটী তোমার রাশ নাম গুণেতে আছি মরি ॥

বোতলেতে স্থির হয়ে,

থাক যেন লক্ষ্মী মেয়ে,

পেটের ভিতর প্রবেশিয়ে হটপাট করে ভারি ।

তুমি কড় সবার চেয়ে,

মামার আঁতুরে মেয়ে,

মামার ঘরে জামাই হয়ে, সেবি চরণ তোমারি ॥

Plate 08
Beshhyabari Kapteni (Cover Page)

শ্রী শ্রী জগদীশ্বরায় নমঃ ।
সোণাগাজির খুনির ফাঁসির হুকুম ।

শ্রীঅখিলচন্দ্র দত্ত
প্রণীত ।

কলিকাতা ।

চিৎপুর রোড ১১৭ নং ভবনে
শ্রীরসিকলাল চন্দ্র দ্বারা
কবিতা-কৌমুদী যন্ত্রে মুদ্রিত ও প্রকাশিত ।

সন ১২৮২ সাল ।

Plate 09
Sonagajir Khunir Phashi'r Hukum (Cover
Page)

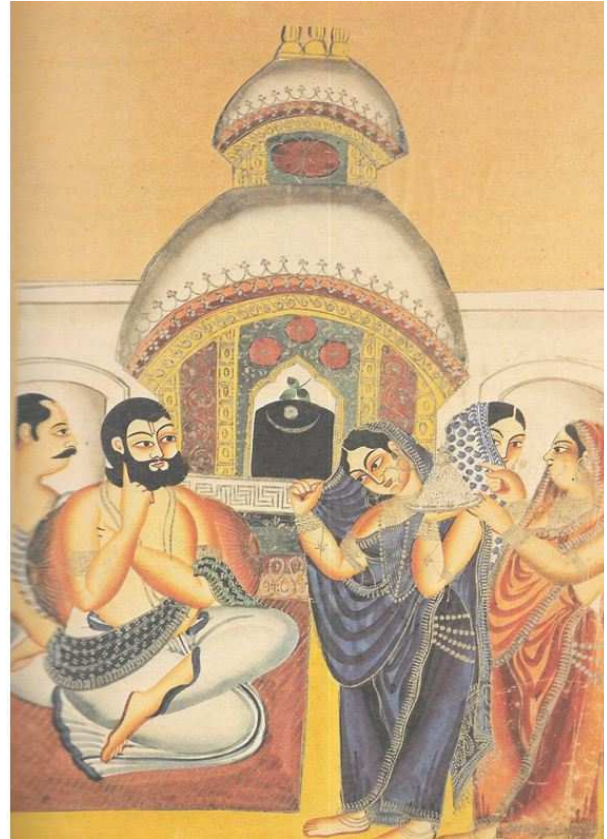


Plate 10
Mahant-Elokeshi Affair (Kalighat
Paintings)

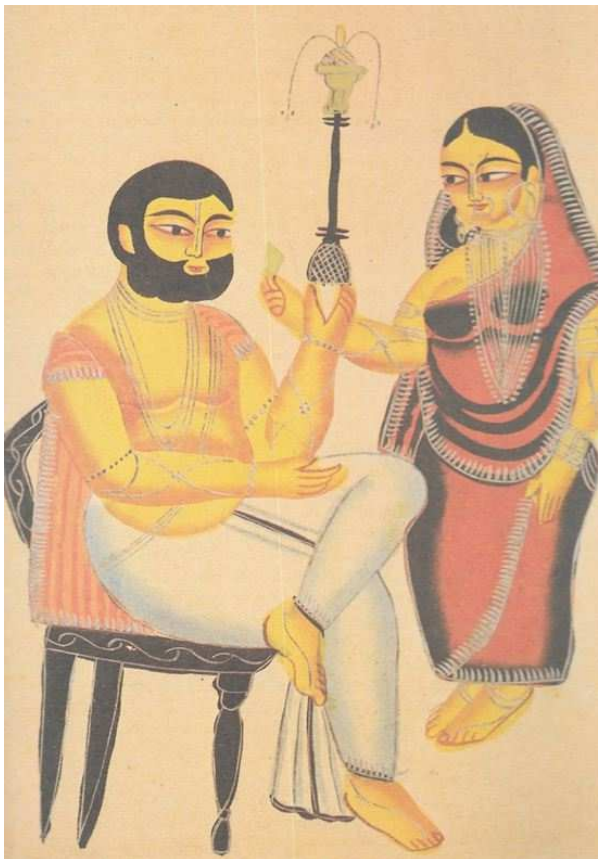


Plate 11
The Mahant and Elokeshi share a Hookah
and Pan (Kalighat Paintings)

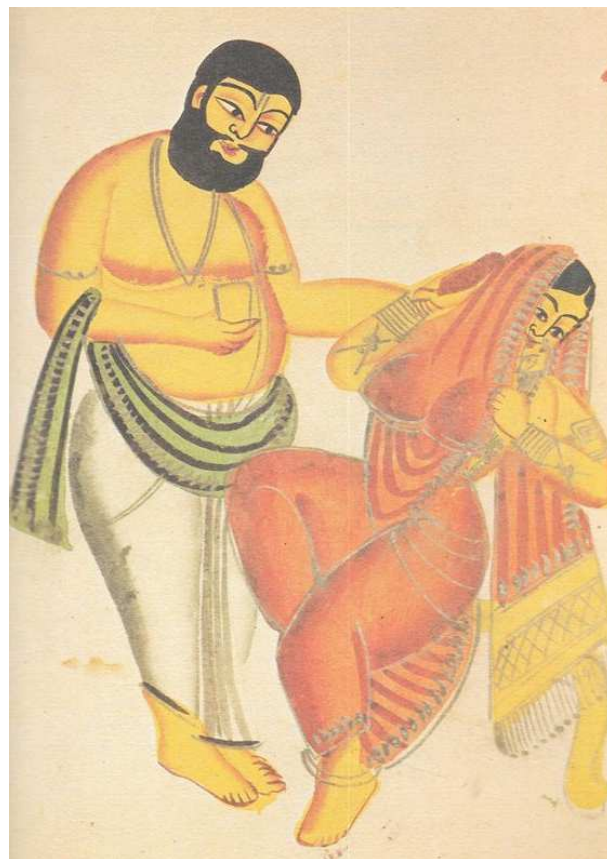


Plate 12
Mahant plies Elokeshi with liquor (Kalighat
Paintings)



Plate 13
After drinking alcohol. The Mohant
pacifying Elokeshi (Kalighat Paintings)



Plate 14
Nabin learning about affair from neighbours
(Kalighat Paintings)

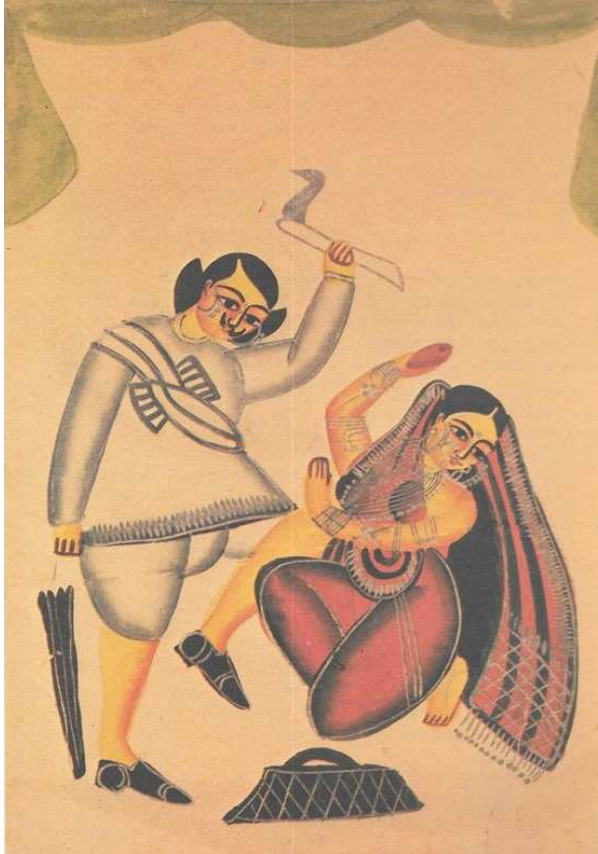


Plate 15
The Fatal Blow (Kalighat Paintings)

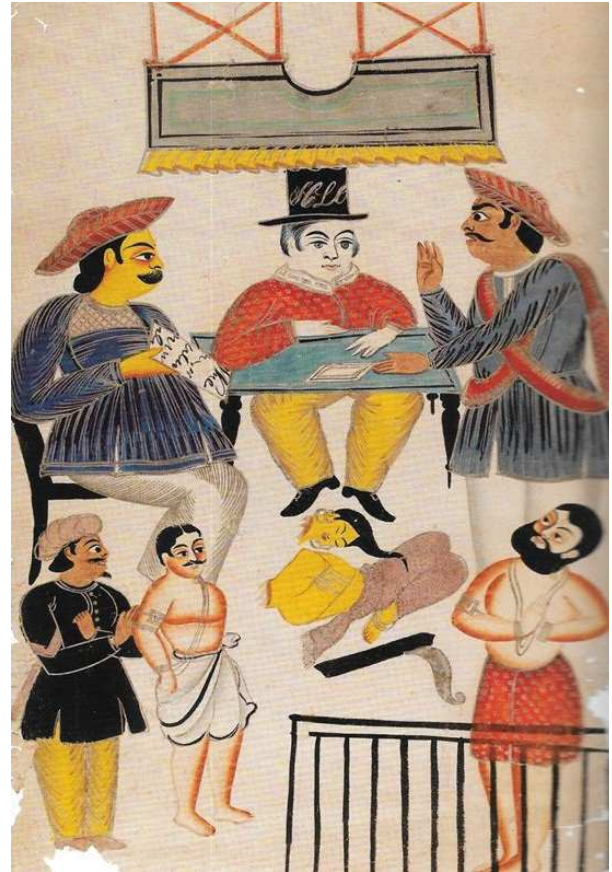


Plate 16
The Mahant is accused before the Judge
(Kalighat Paintings)



Plate 17
The Mahant turns an oil press (Cover Page)

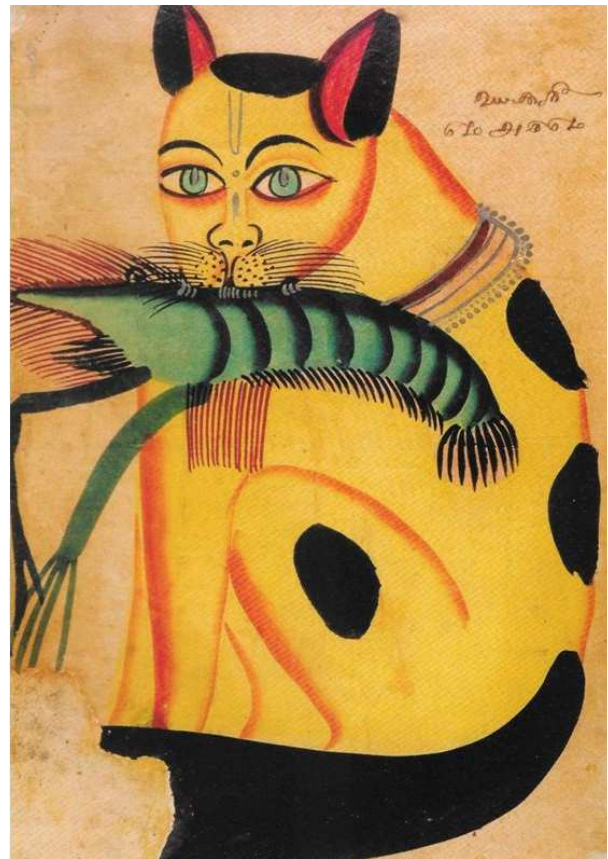


Plate 18
A Cat with a Prawn/Biral Tapasvi (Kalighat Paintings)

Women and Education in India

A Representative Study

pp. 29 – 41

03

Journey to the World of Words: Kailashbasini and Her Thoughts on Women's Education in Colonial Bengal

Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty

The overwhelming image of Indian women during the colonial period has been of passivity, of a group silenced doubly-first in nationalist discourses and second in the more recent post-colonial scheme of things. Far too often, we see women as a silent shadow, veiled and mute before her oppressors, and unquestioningly accepting a discourse that endorses her subordination.¹

In this prevalent context of silencing and subordination, it was not easy for the women in colonial Bengal to embark on the journey to the world of words. Being within a dominant Hindu brahminic patriarchal structure which then denied women's education and freedom of movement, it was difficult for the Bengali Hindu women to be able to express her thoughts in written words and to actively promote women's education. Hence, the originality of Kailashbasini Devi lies in her attempt to write a book on women's education, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Somunnoti* (*Hindu Woman's Education and Its Progress*) which was one of the early documents by a Bengali Hindu woman on women's education.

The Bengali women's condition was miserable in colonial Bengal due to their utmost subjection to Hindu brahminic patriarchy. The socio-religious customs of *Koulinya*, widow-burning, polygamy, child-marriage and child-widowhood dominated the Hindu Bengali women's everyday existence. For the British reformers, this miserable condition of Bengali women was a mark of the degeneration of Indian civilization. So the British reformist policy was to begin the process of modernization through the reform of women's condition. The first step of this reformist programme was to

¹ Anindita Ghosh, 'Introduction', in Anindita Ghosh (eds.), *Behind the Veil: Resistance, Women and the Everyday in Colonial South Asia*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2011, p. 1.

educate the Indian women.² The Bengali reformers also became conscious of ‘the woman’s question’. They were also concerned about the desolate situation of the innumerable Bengali women. They also took initiatives to answer to the woman’s question. But both the reformist groups agreed on one point, that the reform of women’s miseries could only be brought through education and to ensure women’s education, at first, they had to address the Hindu brahminic patriarchal customs which held a hegemonic control over women’s lives in colonial Bengal.

‘Caged Bird’³: The Confinement of Hindu Women in the *Antohpur*⁴

The confinement of women in the antohpur or the inner world was another obstacle in ensuring women’s entry to public education and subsequently in women’s freedom. Hindu brahminic patriarchy detained women’s freedom through the practice of keeping women confined in the antohpur in adulthood and also in their post-marital lives. As Ipshta Chanda discusses, “In upper class and upper caste Hindu society, confinement of women within the home was a mark of upper-class status, and may have been an aspirational threshold”.⁵ This confinement was considered as the mark of ‘ideal womanhood’ and therefore, it was normativised through the Hindu brahminic patriarchal ritual. Women got freedom from this ‘caged bird’ condition only after their death. Kailashbasini Debi, Nagendrabala Mustafi and Rasasundari Debi vividly described the ignominy of this confinement in their writings. How was women’s formal education possible in this confinement? Hence, both the colonial and indigenous reformers believed that for these women, the ‘crossing of the threshold’, going out of confinement was the primary prerequisite for attaining formal education.

The reformist Hindu males in the 19th century colonial Bengal were exploring the ways to get rid of this helplessness of women, this patriarchal domination through social norms, the torturous stranglehold of blind superstitions and the religious control of Hindu brahminism. They knew that change would come only through the

² Gulam Murshid, *Nari Pragati: Adhunikatar Abhighate Banga Ramani (The Advancement of Women: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization)*, Naya Udyog: Kolkata, 2011.

³ In the essay, ‘Abarodhe Heenabastha’, (‘Dire Straits in Seclusion’), Nagendrabala Mustafi compared the condition of women who were confined and secluded in the inner quarters of the home with that of the caged bird. She concluded that this confinement, this ritual of purdah was the chief cause behind the degradation of women. Nagendrabala Mustafi, ‘Dire Straits in Seclusion’, translated by Suvradip Dasgupta, in Ipshta Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi (eds.), *Shaping the Discourse Women’s Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, Kolkata: The School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University and Stree, 2014.

⁴ *Antohpur* indicates the inner or women’s quarter within a home where the women were traditionally confined in colonial Bengal. It also refers to a harem.

⁵ Ipshta Chanda and Jayeeta Bagchi (eds.), *Shaping the Discourse Women’s Writings in Bengali Periodicals 1865-1947*, Kolkata: The School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University and Stree, 2014, p.xxii.

change of personal and social consciousness and this change could be introduced through education.

Beginning of Women's Education

Though there was formal education system for boys through the indigenous *pathsala*⁶ and English schools, formal education system for girls was founded much later. It is true that women's formal education started in the hand of the Western missionaries in the colonial Bengal. But even before these missionary initiatives, we could find educated women in the Hindu upper caste well-off families and among the *Vaishnava*⁷ communities. Jahnabi Debi, Sita Debi, Suvadra Debi, Hemlata Debi and Madhabi Dasi in the Chaitanya Era⁸ and Gangamani Debi, Anandamoyi Debi, Rupamanjari or Hatu Vidyalankar, Drabomoyi Pandit, Shyammohini Debi were the women during the 18th century to the beginning of the 19th century who left their marks in the arena of education and culture.⁹ Peary Chand Mitra also talked about the educated women in his family in the English introduction of his book *Adhyatika (The Spiritual)*, "While the pupil of the Pathshala at home, I found my grandmother, mother and aunts reading Bengali books. They would write in the Bengali and keep accounts".¹⁰ Even in 1819, Raja Radhakanta Dev came to know about two English-educated women and he read a letter written in English by a woman called Ananda.¹¹ James Long was also well aware of the education of the Vaishnava women. He wrote:

*Many of the Vaishnava women can read and write. We know the case of a Vaishnava widow in Calcutta, who not only reads and writes Bengali well but is also acquainted with Sanskrit and supports herself by copying Sanskrit works.*¹²

⁶ Pathsala was a primary education system prevalent in colonial Bengal which provided basic knowledge on math and literature generally to boys.

⁷ The worshippers of Vishnu are known as *Vaishnava*. In Bengal, the *Vaishnava* community is associated with Sri Chaitanya, who was the ardent worshipper of Krishna and who became the pioneering figure of the Bhakti movement in Bengal. In this regard, the followers of Sri Chaitanya are also called the *Vaishnavas*.

⁸ Chaitanya era refers to the period of 16th and 17th centuries in the history of Bengali literature. In this era, the Vaishnava poetry flourishes. Many hagiographies of Sri Chaitanya were written during this time. The epic, Mahabharata was translated in Bengali in this period.

⁹ Dr. Basantakumar Samanta, 'Sampadaker Katha' ('The Editorial Introduction') in Dr. Basantakumar Samanta, (eds.), *Bangamahila Rachito Prothom Duti Mudrito Grontho (First Two Published Books by Bengali Women)*, Kolkata: Sahityolok, 1994, p.16.

¹⁰ Peary Chand Mitra, Preface to 'Adhyatika' ('The Spiritual') in Alope Roy (eds.) *Peary Chand Mitra Rachanaboli (Peary Chand Mitra Collected Works)*, Sopan: Kolkata, 2016, p-395.

¹¹ Dr. Basantakumar Samanta, 'Sampadaker Katha' ('The Editorial Introduction'), p.17.

¹² Quoted by Sukumar Sen in 'Literary Education of the Bengali Females in the Past', in *Bethune College Centenary Volume 1879-1979*, p-131.

But the presence of these educated women was exceptional and did not affect much the general ignorance of women's education. There was a prevalent social apathy against the formal education of women because of some presumption that women were less intelligent, so they did not require any formal education. Rammohun Ray protested against this highly presumptuous hypothesis in a debate over the custom of *Sati* or widow-burning in 1819:

First about intelligence, how can you call women unintelligent when you did not examine their intelligence ever? We can call someone unintelligent when that person was incapable of accepting and assimilating knowledge and education; you have hardly imparted education and knowledge to women, then how can you be so sure that women are unintelligent? (Translation mine)¹³

Besides this prejudice, Hindu brahminism ritualized the customs like *Koulinya*¹⁴, widow-burning or *Sati*, polygamy, child-marriage, and child-widowhood. These social, cultural and religious customs and rituals hindered the path towards women's education and women's freedom. British administrators marked these heinous customs as the causes behind the ignominy of women's lives and which in turn legitimized their colonialist intervention into the women's world in the disguise of reformatory strategy to improve women's lives. Through this intervention, women were recognized as the citizens, though colonized, of this British colony and the British justified their entry into the private world of the Indians. In this process, women's freedom from the dominating brahminic strictures became the focus of British reformatory policies. Besides this, the bunch of newly educated Indian reformers could not avoid the misery caused to Bengali women through the ritualization of Hindu brahminism. Especially, Raja Rammohun Ray, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and Madanmohan Tarkalankar etc. took initiatives to weed out these heinous customs.

Added to this patriarchal practice, an unscientific belief prevailed in the conservative household that women's education would bring in widowhood for them and consequently, it discouraged women to make any attempt to their education. This

¹³ Rammohun Ray, 'Sahamaraṇ Bishaye Prabartak o Nibartaker Dwitiyo Sambad' ('The Second Debate between the Introducer and the Accomplisher on Widow Burning'), in Prasadrājan Ray (eds.), *Rammohun Rachanabali (The Collected Works of Rammohun)*, Kolkata: Rammohun Mission, 2015 (First published in 1819).

¹⁴ As explained by Malini Bhattacharya in her 'Notes' to Bamasundari Devi, *Koulinya* "was a system of endogamy and hypergamy where social status was sought through marital alliance with a supposedly higher and purer rank within the same caste. It was regarded by nineteenth century reformers as one of the most shameful signs of the decadence of Hindu society, encouraging polygamy, a punishing system of dowry and bride price side by side (some paid dowry to attract the higher status groom; others, specially shrotriyas, sold their daughters to the highest bidder) as well as child marriage" (Malini Bhattacharya, *Talking of Power Early Writings of Bengali Women from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, Stree: Kolkata, 2003, p.24).

fear of imminent widowhood propelled the elderly women of the orthodox Hindu household to prevent any male member's endeavour in educating the younger girls of the household. Kailashbasini analysed this social prejudice:

The woman who takes up education becomes an eyesore of the entire family and thereby suffers great anguish. The elders constantly fret and fume in an effort to restrain her from this activity; female neighbours target her with a variety of taunts and forbid their daughters from speaking with her. For such reasons as these, no woman can readily set about educating herself.¹⁵

Kailashbasini had direct experience of this Hindu patriarchal prejudice working against women's education. She also had a primary aversion towards education as she was also tutored in the Hindu brahminic patriarchal discourse. The mothers and the elderly women of the traditional Hindu family often participated in perpetuating this patriarchal prejudice. These conservative womenfolk of the traditional Hindu domesticity took active role in channelizing this social prejudice into the next generation of daughters. Kailashbasini laments:

Oh, had our mothers been educated, we would not be in such a sorry state. These unlettered mothers teach their daughters exactly what they were taught themselves. They make their daughters perform various rituals and tell them what good these bring about. The daughters too accept the teachings as the word of God and follow them ever after.¹⁶

Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, in their 'Introduction' to *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, discuss this normativisation of patriarchal subordination. Further, they argue how it was necessary to disregard the custom of seclusion or abarodh to send a girl child to school and eventually, how this process of disavowal of traditional Hindu custom of women's seclusion and its probable effects on the everyday existence of Bengali Hindu women ignited fierce debates among the contemporary thinkers. The promoters of Hindu brahminic patriarchy, both male and female, vehemently opposed it. On the other hand, the progressive Brahmo and Hindu thinkers reinforced its necessity in bringing women's emancipation from the stranglehold of Hindu customs and rituals. Besides Kailashbasini's writings on women's education, the traditionalist's voice was also heard in this lampoon by Iswar Gupta who criticised women's formal education on the ground that it would eventually destroy their integrity and virtue:

¹⁵ Kailashbasini Devi, 'The Woeful Plight of Hindu Women', trans. From Bengali by Kumardeb Bose, in Malini Bhattacharya, and Abhijit Sen (eds), *Talking of Power: Early Writings of Bengali Women from the Mid- Nineteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, Kolkata: Stree and School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, 2003, p. 46.

¹⁶ Kailashbasini Devi, 'The Woeful Plight of Hindu Women', p.27.

When the women took the books in their hands smartly,
 They, learning the 'A B', fashioning as Bibi, talk in the foreign tongue.
 They end up handing the forks and spoons, forget to eat sitting in a *piri*
 They will drive on their own car to relax in the *Garer Math*
 Saying 'hoot' they wear the 'boot'; they will go to heaven by smoking
 'chooroot'.¹⁷

The popular prejudice against women's education was captured in these lines which mocked the 'educated' woman as oblivious of her tradition and her domestic duties. On the other hand, contemporary Bengali reformers like Monmohon Ghosh, Satyendranath Tagore, Sashipada Bandopadhyay, Umeshchandra Banerjee, Dwarakanath Ganguly, Kishorchand Mitra, emphasized the essential connection between women's education and their freedom. Kaliprasanna Singha reinforced this fact in his *Narijati Bishayak Prastab (Proposal about Women)*:

*If it is expectable that women will be educated, I cannot understand why they are not expected to be free. Without freedom, one cannot be properly educated.*¹⁸

Kailashbasini understood this relation between women's education and women's freedom in her own way. She began *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)*:

*No sympathetic person can deny that Hindu women live like two-legged beasts without the enlightenment of knowledge. And their lack of education brings in numerous miseries. Even if having eyes, they live like blind people without any vision. As the blind cannot be sure about the proper way and therefore, becomes affected falling into their thorny roads, these women also fail to move properly in this domestic world due to their lack of education. Nowadays, many people become conscious about the necessity of women's education and the women also gradually get the opportunity to enlighten themselves through knowledge. But their movement becomes painful for their false knowledge. So the enthusiasts of women's education, please try to wipe out these suffering of women.*¹⁹

¹⁷ Quoted by Sutapa Das from *Iswar Gupter Kabitasangraha (The Collection of Poems by Iswar Gupta)* edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. P-111-112

¹⁸ Kaliprasanna Singha, *Nari Jati Bishayak Prostab (Proposal about Women)*, Calcutta: Kabyopokash Press, 1869, p.151.

¹⁹ Kailashbasini Devi, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)* in Anindita Bandopadhyay (eds.), *Kailashbasini Devi: Rachanasangraha (Kailashbasini Devi: Collected Works)*, Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 2011, p. 79.

This quotation of Kailashbasini reveals the conflict within the thoughts of a woman-thinker who tried to analyse the role of women's education in shaping up the Bengali Hindu women's identity. The close reading of her text unfurled how she appreciated the efforts towards making women educated and how, in consequence, it brought in a sense of freedom from women's bestial existence. She was conscious how education could enrich Bengali Hindu women with claims of 'cultural superiority' as analysed by Partha Chatterjee:

*superiority over the Western women for whom, it was believed, education meant only the acquisition of material skills to compete with men in the outside world, and hence a loss of feminine (spiritual) virtues; superiority over the preceding generation of women in their own homes who had been denied the opportunity of freedom by an oppressive and degenerate social tradition; and superiority over women of the lower classes who were culturally incapable of appreciating the virtues of freedom.*²⁰

In this way, Kailashbasini resorted to the nationalist understanding of 'new woman' who could tread the dual path of tradition and modernity and did not neglect her domestic duties. Kailashbasini's model of women's education promotes women's freedom from the dominative structure imposed by the Koulinya custom and the larger mechanism of Hindu brahminic patriarchy on the one hand. On the other hand, she repeatedly urged her women readers not "to bring disgrace to the marital casket of vermillion".²¹

Kailashbasini's Model of 'Hindu Education'

Kailashbasini's second book, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti* (*The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement*) was published in 1865. Women's formal education had already begun with the establishment of Calcutta Female School in 1849. This school was popularly known as Bethune School as it was set up by John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune with the active participation by Ramgopal Ghosh, Dakkhinaranjan Mukhopadhyay and Madanmohan Tarkalankar. Some Bengali and English books on women's education had been published in this time which discussed the nature, scope and syllabi of women's education. Some of the important works on women's education at that time were: *Strisiksha Vidhayak* (*The Scope of Women's Education*) (1822) by Gouramohan Vidyalankar, Krishnamohan Bandopadhyay's *A Prize Essay on Native Female Education* (1841), 'Bharatbarshiya Striganer Vidyasiksha' ('The Education of Indian Women') (1851), Harachandra

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and Its Women', *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories: The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, p-129.

²¹ Kailashbasini Devi, 'The Woeful Plight of Hindu women', p-45.

Dutta's *An Address on Native Female Education* (1856), Dwarakanath Ray's *Strisiksha Vidhan (The Rules of Women's Education)* (1857), Ramsundar Ray's 'Stridharma Vidhayak' ('The Nature of Women's Duties') (1859), and Shyamlal Sen's 'Strijatir Vidyabhyaser Ouchityanouchitya Bichar Bishayak Prastab' ('The Proposal on Whether Women Should Be Educated or Not') (1865)²². All these works on women's education mainly discussed the necessity of women's education, the traditional Hindu household's apathy towards women's education, the prejudiced argument of conservative elderly women towards education of the girls and the proper role of women's education. In this context of growing interest in women's education on the one hand and renewed apathy towards it by the Hindu orthodoxy, Kailashbasini's book came up as the insider's perspective on women's education as she had already experienced the Hindu orthodox reaction against her education by her in-laws. Besides this, the active involvement by her husband, Durgacharan Gupta in educating her secretly within their home enabled her not only to understand the value of women's education but also to realise her potential as a woman writer.

Question of Authenticity

Even if women began to be educated in late 19th century Bengal, popular patriarchal politics did not always believe in women's capability in critical understanding of women's social condition and her ability to express her views in polemical writing. The patriarchal lords of Bengali literary world questioned the authenticity of Kailashbasini's writing. It is true that contemporary periodicals like *Bamabodhini Patrika*, *Somprakash*, *Sambad Pravakar* and *Dhakaprakash* did appreciate her writing and acclaimed her for her effort in understanding the causes behind the Bengali women's misery in traditional Hindu domesticity and in promoting women's education in late 19th century Bengal. But some male critics, like the editors of the Bengali periodical, *Rahasya Sandarva*, doubted her capacity as a woman writer and eventually presumed that her text was actually written by someone else.²³ How could a Bengali Hindu wife of a traditional Hindu household write thoughtful essays even after performing all her domestic duties? This questions compelled Kailashbasini and her publisher and husband, Durgacharan Gupta to attach a 'Pritishthapatra' (a letter of attestation) to her two books, *Hindu Mahilaganer Hinabastha (The Woeful Plight of Hindu Women)* and *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)* by the leading Brahmo thinker, Anandachandra Bedantabagish who attested that Kailashbasini herself wrote these texts.

²² Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty, and Pritha Kundu, *Ananyader Akhyan: Bhabna- Karme Bangali Nari (The Tale of Pioneering Women: Bengali Women in Thoughts and Works)*, Gangchil: Kolkata, 2018, p.83.

²³ Anindita Bandopadhyay, 'Samakalin Pratikriya' ('Contemporary Response'), *Kailashbasini Devi: Rachanasangraha (Kailashbasini Devi: Collected Works)*, pp. 165-174.

British Intervention into Women's Education: Kailashbasini's Thoughts

As real friend of India, they (the British) arrived in India and planted the immortal tree of women's education to perpetuate the happiness and prosperity of the Indians (Translation mine).²⁴

This quotation from Kailashbasini's 'Preface' to her work, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)* proves that Kailashbasini was not completely opposed to the British rule in India. Rather she supported the British initiative in propagating women's formal education in colonial Bengal. In this text, Kailashbasini showed no sense of nationalist resistance against the British intervention into Hindu women's everyday lives because she believed that the British reformist policies could contribute in loosening the Hindu brahminic patriarchal stranglehold which denied women formal education and free movement. The logic of British colonialism here is 'internal colonialism', according to Ashis Nandy, where the British reformist policies attempted "to subvert the culture of societies subject to external colonialism".²⁵ The 'internal colonialism' of the British reformist intervention in turn used the factors of external threats like traditional modes of subjugation through the denial of women's education and free movement to legitimize and perpetuate the British intrusion into the Hindu domesticity.

Kailashbasini on Women's Education after Marriage

Kailashbasini was quite concerned about the married woman's relationship with her in-laws. She knew well that this relationship was shaped up by the fact how much educated the in-laws as well as the wives were. She was conscious about the Hindu brahminic patriarchal intervention into the girl's education. In the traditional Bengali Hindu domesticity, the socio-religious norms propagated by the Hindu brahminic patriarchy hindered the girl's education and forced her to become a child-wife. She was subsequently subjected to the patriarchal domination which denied the basic human sympathy towards her hardship. Kailashbasini was aware of her socio-cultural context which did not welcome a radical change in prohibiting child-marriage and Kulin polygamy. But she hoped that if the husband along with her in-laws took initiatives to educate the unlettered child-wife, she could become an educated woman, capable of efficient execution of her domestic duties towards her children and larger family. Kailashbasini believed that an educated woman could be a better wife for the educated husband who would find a better companion in his wife.

²⁴ Kailashbasini Devi, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)*, p. 78.

²⁵ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.xii.

Kailashbasini knew well that the success of a marital relationship depends on the compatibility between the husband and the wife and this is very much determined by the level of wife's education. That is why the educated men of late 19th century aspired for the educated wives which eventually propelled the girls' parents to arrange for their education.

Cultural Revivalism and Woman's Education

Kailashbasini believed in the cultural revivalist concept of women's education in the Vedic period. In response to the British government's initiatives to propagate women's education by establishing formal schools for girls, the nationalist reformers promoted the concept of women's education in the Vedic period. The Indian reformers excavated the tales of the women scholars like Lopamudra, Gargi, Apala, Anasuya etc. from the Vedic period to prove that women's education was also prevalent in the ancient Indian civilization. They also believed that the subsequent Muslim rule in India did not give much space to women's education and promoted the customs of *parda* or veil which confined women into the fold of secluded domesticity. Later, works like Brajendranath Bandopadhyay's *Mughal Juge Strisiksha (Women's Education in the Mughal Period)* and Sukumari Bhattacharji's *Women and Society in Ancient India* show how women's education was not even given much priority in the Vedic period and the presence of women scholars were very few in a largely Hindu brahminic patriarchal structure. Brajendranath Bandopadhyay also discussed how women's education was not completely denied in the Muslim era and some women did get the opportunity to be educated. There was also a significant presence of Muslim women scholars in the Mughal family.²⁶

Kailashbasini believed in the cultural revivalist discourse of women's education in ancient India and urged her contemporary women to be educated to revive the ancient glory of the Vedic period. In her two books, *Hindu Mahilaganer Hinabastha (The Woeful Plight of Hindu Women)* and *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)*, she rather conformed to the popular discourse that women's education was hindered under the reign of Muslim rulers and how it subsequently brought in the stranglehold of darkness of ignorance and blind superstition:

All the goodness of this country was destroyed when this country (India) was invaded by the Muslims. Earlier in ancient times, educated women like Lilabati were born in this country and being immortalised for their good culture. But under the heinous rule of the Muslims, this country was

²⁶Sukumari Bhattacharji, *Women and Society in Ancient India*, Calcutta: Basumati Corporation, 1994.

*bereft of women's education and the women were degraded to the level of ignorant beasts.*²⁷

Kailashbasini appreciated the British effort in reforming this culture of superstition and women's ignorance. She also highlighted how Bengali intellectuals took various measures to introduce women's education and women's freedom from confinement of domesticity:

*They radically attempted to eradicate the ancient rules and regulation to civilize the nation. They wanted to improve the condition of the country and tried to quench women's thirst for freedom. So they are organising various meetings and write books for women's education now.*²⁸

But Kailashbasini could not support complete freedom of women from her Hindu domesticity. She was afraid: "When the people of the country was immersed into the darkness of ignorance and superstition and was accused of irrationality, the abrupt freedom from all normative discourse can bring in adverse effects in women's lives".²⁹

Conclusion

The critical reading of Kailashbasini's works unravels a dual stand of compliance and contestation. It is undeniable that her *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)* was one of the pioneering full-fledged works on women's education from a woman's perspective. She emphatically argued for women's education and vehemently contested the Hindu brahminic patriarchal discourse which prohibited women's education and fabricated various causes to convince women to accept her subordination and ignorance. But her model of education which should be imparted in a school devoid of any male association and through a syllabus based on moral books and domestic education besides the contemporary books of literature, history and geography represented a kind of conformism to the orthodox ideology of women's education. Perhaps, she could not completely overcome the overpowering influence of the Hindu brahminic patriarchy which moved her to comment, "They (women) should be educated in literature as well as in the texts on domesticity".³⁰ Perhaps this balanced stand

²⁷ Kailashbasini Devi, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)* in Anindita Bandopadhyay (eds.), *Kailashbasini Debi: Rachanasangraha (Kailashbasini Debi: Collected Works)*, Kolkata: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 2011

²⁸ Kailashbasini Devi, *Hindu Abalakuler Vidyabhyas o Tahar Samunnoti (The Education of Hindu Women and Its Improvement)*, p. 92.

²⁹ Ibid. p.92.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 92.

between tradition and modernity enabled her to carve a strategic space in the patriarchal world to make her voice heard.

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A Representative Study

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04

Learning for life, a life in teaching: the story of a teacher

Anchita Ghatak

The women's question and education

In the 19th century, the 'women's question', like the untouchability question and the communal question, emerged during the national movement as a political question that had to be solved to give shape to the vision of a free Indian nation.¹ Ideas about education were integral to this vision. Education in India is bound by religion, caste, class and gender privilege. Caste privilege is enshrined in the story of Dronacharya and Ekalavya, where the Brahmin guru was unwilling to teach the Dalit Ekalavya archery but did not hesitate to ask for his right thumb in payment when he found that despite his refusal, Ekalavya considered himself Dronacharya's disciple and had acquired skills that could put Dronacharya's cherished Kshatriya disciple, the Pandava Arjuna, in the shade.

The 19th and the 20th centuries, in India, were characterised by debates and efforts for education of girls and women. Schools for girls were established in different places India by social reformers, philanthropists and religious orders including Christian missionaries. In Bengal, one of the best-known stories about women's education is that Swami Vivekananda invited Margaret Elizabeth Noble, who was subsequently known as Sister Nivedita, to come to India to educate girls. Despite Swami Vivekananda's encouragement, it was not easy for Sister Nivedita to get support for her idea of a girls' school. Prominent men of the time, as well as ordinary folk, were wary of sending their daughters to school. Hindus believed that if a woman learnt to read and write she would surely become a widow.

¹ Vina Mazumdar, EMERGENCE OF THE WOMEN'S QUESTION IN INDIA AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES, www.cwds.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Emergence-Womens-Question.pdf

Despite all the naysayers, Nivedita started a girls' school in November 1898 at 16 Bosepara Lane in the Bagbazar area of Calcutta.² The school was inaugurated by Sarada Devi, in the presence of Swami Vivekananda and some of the other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. In 1902, the school was formalised and in 1903, Sister Christine, an American disciple of Swami Vivekananda, joined Sister Nivedita in the work. The school faced many difficulties after the death of Sister Nivedita in 1911. In 1914 Sister Sudhira took the responsibility of running the school. Since 1918, the school became a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. On 9 August 1963, it was transferred to Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, Dakshineswar. The school is now formally known as Ramkrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School.³

The first Indian who started a school for girls in India was Peary Charan Sarkar. The Kalikrishna Girls' High School was established at Barasat town in 1847. It was funded by the brothers Nabin Krishna Mitra and Kali Krishna Mitra.⁴ Inspired by Kalikrishna Girls' School, John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune founded a secular Native Female School in 1849. The government took it over in 1856, renaming it Bethune School after its founder in 1862–63. In 1879 it was developed into Bethune College, the first women's college in India.⁵

Writing in the 19th century, Jotiba Phule, whose primary concern was to break the hegemony of the high castes, referred to the subjugation of women as 'an instrument for maintaining Brahminical dominance in Indian society'.⁶ Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, also known as Jotiba Phule was a thinker, anti-caste social reformer and a writer from Maharashtra. He and his wife, Savitribai Phule, were pioneers of women's education in India. The couple was among the first Indians to open a school for girls of India in 1848–49. In 1852, there were three Phule schools in operation and their students included girls from 'untouchable' castes like Mahar and Mang.⁷

The 20th century, too, saw several girls' schools come up in Kolkata. Begum Rokeya, who is well known for her writing and contribution to girls' education was never sent to school. She learnt Bengali and English from her brothers, who had been to school. At 16, Rokeya was married off to Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hussain, who was a magistrate in Bhagalpur. Sakhawat Hussain had set money aside to build a school and a few months after his death in 1909, she started a school in Bhagalpur with only

² This was the official name for a long time. It became Kolkata in 2001. Therefore, in much of this essay, I use Calcutta.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramakrishna_Sarada_Mission_Sister_Nivedita_Girls%27_School accessed May 2019

⁴ Mahaveer Sanglikar, <https://hubpages.com/education/First-Indian-School-for-Girls> accessed May 2019

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethune_College accessed May 2019

⁶ Mazumdar, Emergence-Womens-Question.pdf

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyotirao_Phule accessed May 2019

five students. She named it Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, in memory of her husband. She could not continue living in Bhagalpur because of family disputes and moved to Calcutta, where she set up Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in 1911.⁸

Sarala Ray founded the Gokhale Memorial Girls' School in 1920. The Institution is named after Gopal Krishna Gokhale, a distinguished educationist and freedom fighter. Greatly inspired by his ideals and educational aspirations for women, Sarala Ray founded the institution as a memorial to Gokhale, to serve the cause of education of girls in the country.⁹

India is yet to achieve universal literacy. According to the census of 2011, India's literacy rate is 82.14 per cent, where male literacy is 74.04 per cent and female literacy rate is 65.46 percent. India's female literacy is significantly lower than the world average of 79.7 per cent.¹⁰ Kerala has 92.07 per cent female literacy and in West Bengal it is 70.54 per cent. Female literacy in Bihar is 51.5 per cent.¹¹

In 2011, approximately 75 per cent of the country's population, aged between 7 to 10 years, was literate. At the primary and secondary level, India has a large private school system complementing the government run schools with 29 per cent of students receiving private education in the 6 to 14 age group.¹²

According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2012, 96.5 per cent of all rural children between the ages of 6-14 were enrolled in school. Another report from 2013 stated that there were 229 million students enrolled in different accredited urban and rural schools of India, from Class I to XII, representing an increase of 23 lakh students total enrolment over 2002, and a 19 per cent increase in girls' enrolment. While more than 95 percent of children attend primary school, just 40 percent of Indian adolescents attend secondary school (Grades 9-12).¹³

Learning and growing

There is no denying that much needs to be done for school education in India. At the same time, there are many committed individuals doing their bit to ensure that students learn and learn well. Again, school teaching is a field that employs large numbers of women, where they are engaged in educating future generations, and the stories of these teachers remain largely untold.

⁸ <http://guerrillagirlsbroadband.com/broads/begum-rokeya-sakhawat-hossain> accessed May 2019

⁹ <http://www.gokhalecollegekolkata.edu.in/GokhaleCollege.htm> accessed May 2019

¹⁰ <https://women-s.net/womens-education-in-india/> accessed May 2019

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy_in_India accessed May 2019

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_India accessed May 2019

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_India accessed May 2019

Ms Neena Singh is a well-known personality in school education in India. She has lived and worked in Kolkata and has gone from being a beloved teacher in a girls' only school to establish different educational institutions in the city. This essay focuses on Neena Singh to document how a school teacher has worked for several decades to further the cause of quality education. This essay is mainly based on three different interviews conducted with her and also relies on people's impression of her personality and work, including my own. I was a student at Modern High School, in the 1970s and early 80s.

She was born in Delhi in 1940 and first went to school there. Her father moved to Calcutta because he and his brother got a contract to develop Dum Dum airport. Neena joined La Martinere for Girls, Calcutta and then moved to Sofia College, Ajmer. Her family moved back to Calcutta and in Class VII, she joined Loreto House. After completing her Senior Cambridge from Loreto House, she had wanted to study Medicine but that did not happen. She enrolled in Lady Irwin College, Delhi, to study Home Science because she felt that it would allow her to work in a hospital. This was followed by a course in Dietetics at the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Delhi (1959-60). In Delhi, she lived with her grandparents.

"During our growing up years, there was this excitement of being in a newly independent country," she says. "It was a country of opportunities and we were expected to make something of our lives." Her mother, Beena, a graduate from Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, was keen that her daughters should be able to support themselves.

Singh's first job was as a dietitian in All India Institute of Medical Science in Delhi. "That job broke my heart," she says. "It was not at all what I expected a hospital to be." She came back to Calcutta. While she was wondering what to do, her mother came across an announcement for the position of a Home Science teacher in Modern High School. Encouraged by her mother, the twenty - three year old Singh, CV in hand, went to meet the Headmistress of Modern High School, Mrs Pastakia.

Several schools were established in newly independent India. Modern High School for Girls was one such. It was founded by Rukmani Devi Birla in 1952. Singh got the job and says that Mrs Thakur, a senior Home Science teacher of the school, took her under her wing. "She gave me the best training, showing me how things were done and always ready to answer questions," Neena Singh says in gratitude.

Singh is eager to point out that she loved the first ever class that she took. "It was a new school and there were only 15 girls in Class XI, the senior most class. It was a time for learning and discovery." She says that from that first day in the classroom, she had no doubt that her future lay in teaching. After 7 years of teaching, Singh decided that she must do her B.Ed. "Two of my former students were now my

classmates,” she says, laughing. “I had to make sure I did well. It wouldn’t be good if my students thought I wasn’t up to scratch.”

Modern High School (MHS), she points out, was very different from the more Anglicised atmosphere in the places where she had studied. The school was affiliated to the West Bengal Council for Higher Secondary Education and despite it being an English medium school, there was great emphasis on learning Indian languages well. The students had either Hindi or Bengali as their First Language and many learnt Sanskrit as well. She explains that in MHS there were many different school programmes and songs, poems, plays were never in one language alone. The school had talented dancers amongst its teachers and students and a great deal of India was glimpsed through its cultural heritage. She said that MHS taught her to become comfortable in her Indianness. “I appreciated the immense diversity in our country, and yet understood all that brought us close and kept us together. Especially now, we need to focus on appreciating and encouraging diversity and uniqueness, acknowledge the richness it brings to our country and desist from highlighting differences.”

She taught in Modern High School for 24 years and says she learnt immensely from her peers and her students. Mrs Romola Banerjee taught Bengali and Physical Education, and also ran the Guide Company in MHS. When she learnt that her new colleague had been a Guide in her school, she invited her to become a Guider. “Romola di always took me along for outstation camps and I learnt so much, especially about managing schoolgirls when they were not in school,” says Singh.

Venturing out

This training stood her in good stead when she and her former colleague from MHS, Chhanda Bose, started taking young women, many of whom had been their students, on trips within India and abroad. “Chhanda was a History teacher and a writer. She conceptualised the trip and asked for my inputs. And the practical arrangements were all up to me.” The idea of these trips came about when Singh was talking to a former pupil, who had some connections with a travel agency. These trips found these two veteran teachers literally exploring the world as their classroom. Young people got an amazing introduction to history, geography and culture. They did these trips in the 1980s – at a time when vegetarianism was an almost alien concept in Europe and the US. Most, if not all, of the women in the travel group were vegetarians and they often had to make do with french fries, ice cream, chocolate and fruit.

Invited by a former colleague to become Principal of a school she had set up, Neena Singh left Modern High School to try something new. Giving shape to a new idea was an exciting process and Singh threw herself wholeheartedly into the project.

However, things did not work out and Singh realised that there was no point in fighting a losing battle and she left. She says that it was a difficult time and adds that she had seen her father battle setbacks in his business. “My father didn’t mope. He got on with things. And most importantly, he didn’t disregard the simple joys of life. As a family, we continued to have fun – go for a drive, eat ice cream.”

Singh credits her parents for giving them a secure upbringing that kept them grounded. The atmosphere in their home was relaxed and joyful. Her parents, she says, had immense faith in God and the goodness of human beings. They had two spacious rooms in their home on Moira Street, and a drawing room space – she explains that though the house was not large, her parents were large hearted people and they kept an open house. Different people dropped in, there was conversation and laughter, and sometimes relatives came to stay. All of this gave Singh, and her brother and sister, a firm belief in generosity and giving.

After leaving her Principalship, Singh began to think about future directions. Chhanda Bose and she were already tutoring students where Bose taught English and other Humanities subjects and Singh taught Mathematics and the Sciences. Singh’s network of goodwill is very strong. There was a Nursery school that ran in a lovely old house in Alipore. It also had a large garden. Some friends organised for her to rent that place in the evening when the school wasn’t using it and Singh began an initiative called Ed Plus. The purpose of Ed Plus was to enable children to learn with joy and kindle their curiosity. It ran for two hours – there was an hour of activities like yoga, music, drama and then an hour of academic work. Some of Singh’s former colleagues and students joined her in this work and the children learnt from people of great talent and expertise. Singh found that the activities paid great dividends – children looked forward to coming to Ed Plus, they learnt many things, and most importantly, their increased self-esteem and confidence was there for all to see. The fact that a child stopped stammering as a consequence of increased self confidence after drama and elocution still makes her very happy.

Creating opportunities for creativity and cultural expression is very important for education according to Singh. In Ed Plus, there were celebrations for different occasions like Republic Day, Independence Day, Children’s Day that generated great fun and enthusiasm. She finally moved Ed Plus to the premises of Divyayan, a pre-school that she founded. “The owner of the building came to me one day and handed me a set of keys saying that the premises had been very lucky for him and I should start a school there,” says Singh. One thing led to another and Divyayan was set up in 1992.

Singh sees her work with Divyayan as a time for learning and growth. She enjoyed watching the Montessori method in practice and the children working with the equipment. It helped children explore the world and learn. Her colleagues and her

students helped her better understand issues around early childhood education. Her own experience as a teacher, undoubtedly, was also of great help.

She did not understand the point of insisting on punctuality for children as young as two and three. “The little ones could come to school when it suited them. If a child came happily at ten o’clock and joined in her activities and did her work, it was good both for the child and school,” she says. Parents were welcome to stay and even come into the classrooms, if they wanted to. It was an effective and humane way to make children feel secure and get them used to school. Singh believed that the school had to give priority to the needs of children and fit itself to those needs.

The premises in Divyayan did not have a playground. The children played on the rooftop. They even splashed around in a toy swimming pool and sometimes were also taken to the Maidan to play. Much against conventional wisdom, the children were also taken on outings. “Many thought it would be difficult to manage such young children at the zoo,” laughs Singh. “There were enough adults to look after the children. And children co-operate!” With great pride she narrates how one group of young visitors were delighted to see the giraffe. They had learnt a song in school called ‘Hello, Mr Giraffe’ and when they saw the giraffes they spontaneously burst into song!

Making the most of opportunities

A tenet that Singh holds dear is that teachers must always be open to learning and trying new things. A domestic worker asked to borrow a hundred rupees because she needed to pay for private tuition for her child. Singh felt that she now had enough experience as a teacher and the time had come to do something for children who did not go to the well known schools of the city. Disha was born as an after school remedial teaching centre for children living in the slums around Hazra Road. Some of Singh’s former colleagues joined her in this venture and volunteered their time. Different subjects, taught by capable and experienced teachers, were all offered under one roof.

Other than the after school classes, Disha Foundation also runs a balwadi. Health camps are held for children and there are income generation programmes for slum women. Like all of Singh’s schools, Disha too has a Sports Day and different functions and concerts..Singh said that they used to have a carrom competition but that has stopped now because the children seemed to have lost interest. The teachers report that young people are now far more interested in fiddling on their phones than in playing carrom. “We can’t give up,” said Singh. “We will try to revive children’s interest in carrom.”

At Disha, the students plan and do the Teachers' Day programme. Last year they did a play in the street play format. "I asked them where they got the idea," says Singh. "They got the idea from You Tube! Playing with phones is not always negative. The world has so much to offer and we have to keep children and young people interested."

At Divyayan, Singh was approached by a woman whose son had Down's Syndrome. The mother said that she wanted her child to come to Divyayan. Singh said that she had very little knowledge about Down's Syndrome but at the same time, as she looked at the child she could not find a single reason why he should not be in Divyayan. She told the mother that she was willing to admit the boy to Divyayan if the parents were willing to guide her and the teachers. And this began another learning journey for Singh and the teachers of Divyayan. Children with different kinds of disabilities found place in Divyayan.

Singh says that she never says no to trying out something new. In this case, she says, this offered her, the teachers and the students an opportunity to widen their horizons. And then came the question of where the children with disability would go once their time in Divyayan was over. Divyayan was a pre-school and did not cater to children beyond six years of age. During such a conversation with the mother of a special¹⁴ child, the mother and Singh decided to start an inclusive school where children with disabilities and able bodied children would learn together. Akshar was started in 1998 under the aegis of the Rajpal Khullar Memorial Trust with Navneet Khullar as Principal and Neena Singh as Executive Director.

Singh believes that classes have to be small if teachers and students have to make the most of the classroom and school experience. Ideas like inclusion and individual attention lose meaning when classes have too many students. They have kept the class strength in Akshar to 25 students in each classroom. Children need support and protection. Teachers have to be able to listen to children to give them what they need. School managements need to create those conditions for teachers.

The best job

In 2017, Neena Singh received the Aparajita Award for her contribution to education. This is the last in a long line of awards that include Talented Ladies Award from Bharat Nirman (1997), a Rotary Award (2000), Person of the Year Award from Punjabi Baradaree (2005), Banga Seva Samman Award (2008). With characteristic modesty, Singh says that she is humbled that people think her worthy of awards. However, she says, the Ladies Study Group Award that she received in 2010, is very

¹⁴ Singh uses the term 'special' child. Disability activists and the UN use the terms 'person(s) with disability', 'child(ren) with disability' The UN has a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities aka UNCRPD.

special to her because she received it from the Dalai Lama. “It was wonderful for Disha! And to get the award from the Dalai Lama! He gave me the Award citation and as I was moving towards the podium to say a few words of thanks, I was called back to the Dalai Lama and he put the ceremonial scarf around my neck. We did not exchange a single word but I felt such communion. And when the Dalai Lama started speaking, many people, including me, in the auditorium that evening felt that he was speaking specifically to them. It was an evening to treasure – words seem inadequate. I can only say it was a ‘life moving’ experience.”

“A school teacher’s job is the best job in the world,” she says delightedly, after nearly six decades at it. “You can do great things with the mind of a child. You are laying the foundation of wonderful things.” Of course, there is this absolutely amazing experience of getting an award from the Dalai Lama, and getting accolades for her work. Alongside, there are the everyday rewards of seeing the progress made by students – in their academics, in creative expression, in their behaviour, in the confidence they gain.

When I asked Singh to describe herself she said that she was a person who was always learning and teaching. She loved to see growth and development in people, especially children, and was always willing to lend a hand to such processes. I ask her how it has been to be both a teacher and an administrator. Is there a difference? Of course, the roles are different, she says. But being a teacher is an advantage. Schools must put the children first and managements have to create conditions for teachers to give of their best. “I feel that I am able to appreciate what teachers want, see their points of view and also motivate them to constantly give of their best. Teachers cannot afford to stagnate. When I make suggestions to my colleagues, they take them seriously because they know I have been there.”

Singh feels she has been very lucky in her life. She never consciously thought of starting institutions. The institutions were created because of circumstances. “The people and opportunities came my way, and yes, I must admit, I did not hesitate to seize the moment,” she says simply. When she conceptualised Disha, she discussed the idea with one of her earliest students, a successful entrepreneur. The entrepreneur asked Singh what she would do for money. Rather taken aback by the question, Singh said that what she planned to do didn’t need money. “Everything requires money,” said her former student and made a ten thousand rupee donation to Disha.

“How right she was!” exclaims Singh. “I never think big. If I feel that something needs to be done, I try to do it. My ideas are small and fortunately, I have always found people to work with me to carry the ideas through.”

She admits that Disha Foundation has grown but it is a constant struggle to keep it going. Right from the beginning they have had individuals supporting Disha

financially. Many of the teachers are volunteers – getting a small stipend to cover their travel costs. However, Disha’s growth at a particular pace was possible because of institutional support that they got from Children International. However, institutional policies and requirements of funders change, and there are also statutory requirements of the Government of India. Disha runs with institutional funding and individual donations.

One of the things about being an administrator is that you also need to understand when an idea has run its course. Ed Plus was set up for children to learn and grow and it was a delightful experience for students, parents and teachers. “However, things started changing and parents wanted certificate courses. That was not what Ed Plus was set up for and rather than change our purpose, I felt it was better to close it down.”

There is no denying that private schools are governed by market forces. And the pre-school atmosphere in Kolkata changed too. Earlier, high schools mostly admitted children at the Class I level – when children were five or six years old. But things changed, new schools came up and more of them began taking in children for their pre-school sections. Even Akshar! So, after much thought, Divyayanwas closed in 2012.

Considering that much of her own education was in all girls’ institutions and she spent nearly a quarter century teaching in an all girls’ school, I ask Singh why she never thought of setting up a school for girls. She reiterates that she never specifically thought of starting institutions. “In a pre-school you don’t think of segregating by gender, do you?” she asks. “There’s so much to be done for gender equality. Akshar is an inclusive school. One of the ways of achieving gender equality is to get boys and girls – actually all genders – to grow up together, work together.” With a twinkle in her eye, she adds that as far as she knows, the students in her schools still identify either as male or female, but that could change.

Pushing eighty, there is no leisurely retirement for Neena Singh. She’s still doing what she loves best – deeply involved in running Disha Foundation and Akshar - and consequently touching more lives. She feels children must be at the centre of all schools and much has to be done to ensure that there are enough schools and good teachers. Teacher training courses have to move with the times, she asserts. Trainee teachers have to be exposed to new thoughts, ideas and ways of doing things. More schools have to be built so that classrooms are not overcrowded. Singh is of the firm opinion that the government and school managements have to create conditions so that teachers can do their best by children. Schools must stoke children’s desire to learn, enable them to take risks and grow beyond their mistakes.

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05

Contribution of Two Unlettered Bengali Women: Sarada Devi and Rahila Khatoon

Miratun Nahar

The topic of the following article concerns two women of Bengal who were adept in the realisation of truth and its exposition in simple words. One of them achieved as fame as the ‘Universal Mother’ – she is Sarada Devi. The other remained unknown and without fame. She could become the mother of a poet that was all. She is Rahila Khatoon. Though childless, Sarada Devi could become the mother of countless admirers. The chronicles of her striving for truth were disseminated amongst the learned by the relentless efforts of her dear disciples. On the other hand, except for her poet son and a few close intimates, the unique achievements of Rahila Khatoon could not permeate large masses of her dear countrymen.

Both of them were brought up among the rural surroundings of Bengal. No comparison can be made between these two daughters of West Bengal in terms of fame or achievement of their goals. Let me try to state why in spite of that I am attempting to discuss their achievements in the same breath. Let me say first a few words about their lives and character-traits. Sarada was born to Shri Ramchandra Mukhopadhyay and Shyamasundari Devi in the village Joyrambati in Bankura district of Bengal on 8th Poush, 1260 Bengali Era. Even in her childhood, her helpful and loving nature became evident. There is an anecdote about her facing dacoits all alone in a lonely jungle-road. She could soften their hearts by addressing them as ‘Baba’ which in Bengali means ‘father’ and thereby she displayed her power to impress people even in her girlhood. She was married at a tender age to young Ramkrishna who received attention from the neighbouring people because of his spiritual tendencies. When Sarada-Moni attained womanhood, her husband told her that he was not interested in leading the life of a couple. Her inner light was evident in the reply that she gave to her husband that day. She said that she would not be a hindrance to her husband’s efforts to achieve spiritual liberation which she proved in

her later life. When she reached middle age, she acknowledged Sister Nibedita as her daughter and thereby displayed a mind free of racial or religious prejudices remarkable for those days. Even though she was in the midst of the then Bengali society which was steeped in mere ritualistic beliefs she could show that one could dispel the gloom with one's superb individuality. In her old age, the simple Bengali lady was the inspiration for Swami Vivekananda and the Ramkrishna Mission. Thus she could display her brilliant originality in every period of her life. She did not get the opportunity of receiving formal education. Even then she displayed great wisdom to her admirers.

Sarada Devi was the daughter of an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family of Bengal. The other lady was the daughter of an orthodox Muslim family of Bengal. She was borned in a village called Jhumka in the district Murshidabad on 1st baisakh, 1320 Bengali Era, when Sarada Devi had not yet left this earthly abode. Rahila tied the marital knot with Abdul Khalil Khan of Sarmastpur village of the same district. She too could not get the benefit of institutional education like Sarada Devi.

This exceptional daughter of Bengal dedicated herself to the liberation of her country from foreign rule. She became a member of the assistance section of one of the most important organisation of the independence movement called 'Anushilan Samiti'. A centre of the Anushilan Samiti was set up at Sarmastpur in Murshidabad district. Rahila became a member of the women's section of that centre. Her husband was the secretary of that centre. Rahila was jailed for three days in the Nawabgunj jail of Rajshahi district for being a worker of the independence movement. The members of the Anushilan Samiti learned to shoot guns, the use of other weapons and to make bombs and engaged themselves in agitated work in their respective areas. The women members of the Samiti had to assist them in various ways to serve their country. Rahila Khatoon became a part of this group of patriots.

The chief similarity between Sarada Devi and Rahila Khatoon is that both these women, having grown up in the midst of subaltern Bengali society in those days, could come out of the seclusion of their homes and become a light and beacon to show the way to their countrymen. Another point of similarity is that both could be unlettered followers of truth which is evident from their utterances which enlighten rural people with little education as well as educated group of countrymen. Let me first quote some preachings of Sarada Devi:

1. Do not expect reciprocal love from those you love. In that case you love all equally. She knew very well how her exhortation to love all equally would help in the unification of her countrymen.
2. One should be engaged in some work. An idle mind and body generates evil thoughts. She invited her admirers to regard work as a form of worship.

3. Chanting of the Lord's name is necessary. Just sit for a few minutes and think what you had done the whole day. Thus she stressed the fact how important it is for self-introspection.
4. A flickering lamp cannot emit light. It is similar to a mind perturbed by desires and cravings. What an appropriate analogy!
5. You know about moonlit nights and dark nights. Similar is the case with human mind – sometimes happy and other times unhappy. It seems that she even surpassed eminent poets in her ability to use metaphor and analogy.
6. He who desires does not get fulfilment. He who does not desire is fulfilled. In Ethics, this is called Paradox of Hedonism according to which he who strives for the objects of desire remains far from achieving those objects.
7. There are no riches like that of contentment and there is no quality better than tolerance. These are two very simple human pre-requisites for survival.

Those holding highest degrees in formal educational institutions will not be able to impart such wisdom to their students striving to gain supreme knowledge.

Rahila Khatoon did not achieve fame as a preacher or a teacher of the unlettered. In spite of that her dear sons have done their best to highlight her teachings to her countrymen. Her elder son Abdur Rafiq Khan and her grand daughters have established the 'Rahila Cultural Society', the organisation that celebrates every year 21st February as 'Rahila Cultural and Literary Festival'. Besides West Bengal and Bangladesh, the poets and writers of Tripura, Bihar, Orissa, Meghalaya, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam etc. are honoured with 'Rahila Award' on this day. Another son of Rahila, Abdur Rab Khan publishes regularly a magazine called 'Rahila' in the name of his mother. Some examples of the utterances of their mother, who has justified her name, are given below:

1. 'Truth is the pillar of honesty.' She means to say that he who clings to truth attains the treasure of honesty. She herself realised this and tries to impart this to others through analogies.
2. 'Those who speak ill-words disappear in darkness' – Those who speak ill-words cannot light up the soul of anybody. They are the creatures of darkness, says Rahila.
3. 'The mind of the person who praises others is enlightened.' – This saying always moves me. I think that whoever speaks well of me is because of his inner light. Otherwise he could not have spoken thus.
4. 'Do not neglect others, else you will be neglected.' – Those whom you look upon with derision will hinder your advance. This is a harsh truth of reality.
5. 'Sorrows break down selfish arrogance.' – The selfishness that clogs the mind is broken down only by sorrows. The Poet Rabindranath writes, 'unless you burn this incense, you do not get any fragrance'.
6. 'The great have no national identity. Humanity is their religion.' – The evils of casteism could thus be brushed aside by an illiterate housewife.

7. 'The desire and striving for the welfare of human being is to be regarded as worship of God. He who serves human beings serves god.' – This eternal truth has been voiced by a village woman belonging to subaltern class in simple words.
8. 'No work is demeaning. Work sanctifies a man.' People of Bengal have not yet learnt that no work is too small. Rather quality and value of a work, they believe, is determined by the salary that it entails.

Having read these sayings of Rahila Khatoon which lay to character building of any human being, her devoted and charmed admirers speak thus:

We overcome all fear
 We bask in golden sunshine
 We your sons
 We your daughters...
 We traverse the untrodden path
 To crush the stones on our way
 To overcome oppression
 To override evil.

Truth became self-evident in these two simple souls. Thus they could give articulation to their inner minds. They are unlettered followers of truth. Mother Sarada is mother to all, she is far famed. On the other side though, Rahila Khatoon was unknown, she was a true torch-bearer of SARADA DEVI – a well-known woman who came from subaltern class.

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06

Ends or Means: Education, Women and Islam in Kerala¹

Nilanjana Gupta

Nowadays, educational attainment is considered to be a reflection of a country's or community's level of attainment and 'development'. Gender disparities in educational attainment are interpreted as an indicator or what may be called a 'proxy value' of gender inequality in society as a whole. The Report of the International Seminar held at UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE), Hamburg, 27 January - 2 February 1993, for example, begins, "As women's education has become one of the key development objectives in the nineties, it is crucial to examine the assumptions under which policies, programmes and projects are formulated towards this goal. More recently, the concept of empowerment has been tied to the range of activities undertaken by and for women in different areas, education included."² India is no exception to this and the fact that since Independence, the overall literacy rates in India have been rising and the difference in literacy between men and women has been narrowing, access to higher education for women has increased, and there has been a steep rise in the percentage of women opting for the so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering, medicine) disciplines has been interpreted as a sign that gender disparity in Indian society is being successfully overcome. However, a disaggregation of the data shows that the gender gap in education, beginning with basic education, is most pronounced in the Muslim community in India as summarised in the Sachar Committee Report commissioned in 2005 as follows:³

¹ This study was possible because of the funding provided under the University with Potential for Excellence (Phase II) Programme of the UGC. I am also indebted to Indrani Bhattacharya who worked as Project Fellow of the project.

² Report of the International Seminar held at UIE, Hamburg, 27 January - 2 February 1993 in Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo (ed), *Women, Education and Empowerment: Pathways towards Autonomy*, Hamburg: ERIC Clearinghouse, 1995.

³ 'Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India', http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/sachar_comm.pdf, accessed June 2019.

In the field of literacy the Committee has found that the rate among Muslims is very much below than the national average. The gap between Muslims and the general average is greater in urban areas and women. 25 per cent of children of Muslim parents in the 6-14 year age group have either never attended school or have dropped out.

These figures have led to a general notion that the Muslim community in India is not interested in educating their children, especially their female children and would much rather send their children to religious institutions for theological instruction. However, the Committee also pointed out that this common stereotype that Muslims preferred to send the children to madrasas for education was not true. The Report said:

Only four percent of Muslim students actually go to madrassas primarily because primary state schools do not exist for miles. Therefore, the idea that Muslims prefer madrassa education was found to be not true.

In the context of these general understandings about education, gender and development, this essay will discuss the case of Kerala as the first state in India where full literacy for men and women was achieved despite the fact that the state has a high percentage of Muslims. The role of madrasas and other educational institutes set up by Muslims which provide education to women will be discussed. The paper will also raise questions about the need for introducing a qualitative element to literacy and education if we are to see these statistics as indicators of empowerment as the United Nations Reports do. The paper will end by suggesting that the lower rates of literacy and education for Muslim girls and women in India is not necessarily a result of religious proscribing, but depend on a much more complex set of factors.

Religion	Percentage
Hindu	54.73%
Muslim	26.56%
Christian	18.38%
Sikh	0.01%
Buddhist	0.01%
Jain	0.01%
Other Religions	0.02%
Not Stated	0.26%

*Census 2011

Islam, as we are all aware, is a book-based religion and Islamic religious injunctions have through the ages encouraged the pursuit of knowledge. In fact, the great institutions of learning in the Arab world and across Africa were renowned for their

scholarship in mathematics, astronomy, geometry, natural sciences and philosophy in the medieval age. Jack Goody in his essay “The Arabs and the Italian Renaissance”⁴ reminds us of the extremely crucial role played by Islamic institutions in the so-called ‘dark ages’:

For the Bible had said all that was necessary on the subject and further enquiry was not encouraged. It was not much different with Judaism and Islam, except that in the Near East Abbasid Islam welcomed the classical knowledge that Orthodox Christianity had largely rejected and scholars were sent to centres of learning, including to Byzantium, to collect classical manuscripts and have them translated into Arabic. In this way, important scientific texts were preserved and, subsequently, found their way to the West, stimulating attempts to recover other work in the early Renaissance in Europe. This knowledge was not frozen, but was built on by the Muslim world in various ways and they developed their own traditions in astronomy, medicine, geography and timekeeping, all activities that chimed with the interests of the Islamic world and fed into those of the European Renaissance.

Thus, historically Islamic institutions of learning were not confined only to theological knowledge but taught and developed the sciences through engaging with texts and experiments. India too in the precolonial period was part of this network of knowledge as is explained in the Introduction to one of the first English translations of the travelogue of the Arab scholar Al-Biruni (written in the 11th century). The translator says, “To Alberuni (sic) the Hindus were excellent philosophers, good mathematicians and astronomers...”⁵ and the reason for his extended visit to India was to collect knowledge and manuscripts to enrich their own scholarship.

However, with the advent of colonisation, there was a systematic decline in the indigenous institutions of knowledge. The traditional institutions had almost exclusively been for men as was true in all parts of the world, and most women were educated, if at all, at home.

With the establishment of the British system of education during the colonial period, increasingly madrasas became limited to theological instruction and so-called secular education was seen to be outside the purview of these institutions which became exclusively theological in nature. “...the madrasas transformed from an official and mainstream educational system of pre-colonial India to a relatively marginalized

⁴ Jack Goody, ‘The Arabs and the Italian Renaissance’, in Al-Rodhan N.R.F. (ed), *The Role of the Arab-Islamic World in the Rise of the West*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 25-37.

⁵ Abu Al-Rahain Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Alberuni, *Alberuni’s India*, trans. from Arabic by Edward C. Sachau, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1910, pp.18.

institution under British colonization.”⁶ There was also a resistance especially among the Muslim community to enrol children in the schools and colleges set up which followed the British systems. Due to a number of factors, the situation in India just after Independence was grim as far as the educational statistics go.

According to the Census of 1951, the literacy rate of males was 21.16% while that of the female population was a mere 8.86%. The gender gap is still high in 2011 with male literacy recorded at 82.14% and female literacy at 65.46%. This gap is widest in the Muslim community as pointed out in the Sachar Committee. While the Sachar Committee Report talks about the aggregate numbers and overall situation in India, it should be noted that Kerala with a 26.5% Muslim population, Karnataka with 12.9% Muslim population or Tamil Nadu with over 5% Muslim population,⁷ are among the states with the highest success in educational attainment for both men and women. Uttar Pradesh on the other hand with 16.9% Muslims has the lowest literacy rate among male and female populations as well as in the total population.

In order to go beyond stereotypes to understand such gender and community-based literacy and education differences in India, we need to take a closer look at a number of factors. This essay will briefly recall the many histories of Islam in India and also take note of a series of what can only be called educational movements in Kerala.

Islam came first to Kerala, probably in the life time of Muhammad himself through the active trade routes that were dominated then by Arab sailors and traders. Accounts of contemporary travellers describe the large number of established Muslim trading families along the coasts of southern India and the high respect in which local monarchs held them.⁸ For example, writing about the Rastrakuta kingdoms (mid eighth to early tenth century), Al-Masudi, the Arab traveller comments that ‘...among the kings of Sind and Hind, none treats the Muslims who are established in their domain with more distinction than the Ballarhara’ [the Arab name for the Rastrakuta kings]. According to him, more than 10,000 people lived in the district of Saymur who were Muslims born of Indian parents. Many contemporary accounts talk of the rules laid down by the Zamorins of Calicut (Kozhikode) one of most busy port and trading areas too. There is evidence of similar situations in what is now Tamil Nadu. Mutual respect, trade and inter-marriages are referred to in all travellers’ accounts of the Southern regions of India.

This history is very different from the dominant story of Islam as the religion of conquerors and of forced conversions that we get from the Northern and North-

⁶ Sohaib Baig, ‘Traditional Islamic Learning in Colonial India: The Madrasa through the Eyes of a 20th Century Islamic Reformer’, unpublished Senior Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2012.

⁷ Census 2011.

⁸ See for example Burjor Avari, *Islamic Civilisation in South Asia: A History of Muslim Power and Presence in the Indian Subcontinent*, London: Routledge, 2013.

Western parts of the country. Another major difference is the identification of Urdu as the language of Muslims in India. This too is not a reality in the southern states of India where theological texts of Islam are to be found in abundance from ancient times in local languages. While this is an interesting history in itself, what concerns us in this essay is the way that education and discourse about education has developed in these areas.

Recent books and articles about Kerala have suggested that an indigenous and local form of modernity and democratisation, often referred to as 'Kerala Modernity' gained momentum based on the impact of the 'social philosophy and reformative endeavours' of Narayan Guru (1856-1928). One important focus of Narayan Guru's reform agenda was education and access to education. However, in the accounts I have read, Guru's reform seems to be directed largely towards reforms of the rigid caste divisions and their exploitative character and very clearly remains within the confines of Hindu texts and beliefs and is addressed to the community of Hindus in Kerala.⁹ In fact the entire volume *Kerala Modernity* does not discuss the Muslim or indeed Christian community and their role or function in the development of this indigenous modernity.

One essay which does consider the reform movements within the Muslim community in Kerala is "Islamism and Social Reform in Kerala, South India" by Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella.¹⁰ In this anthropological study, the authors argue that "Reformist enthusiasm is part of Kerala-wide patterns discernable across all religious communities... Kerala's Muslims (like Kerala Hindus and Christians) associate religious reformism with: a self-consciously 'modern' outlook; the promotion of education;..."¹¹ They give a brief history of the reform movements within Islam across India centred around the famous madrasas at Deob and Bareli and Firangi Mahal (all located in Uttar Pradesh) and point out that Islamic reform movements in India are multiple and complex. In Kerala, they argue, a proper understanding of reform movements within the Muslim community is possible only "...by appreciating the very local (and unassailably 'authentic') specificity of Kerala's highly radical reform movement and by placing the Kerala Naduvathul Mujahideen (KNM) agenda into its context as part of wider Malayali concerns with social reform and 'progress'." My own fieldwork in the Kozhikode (Calicut) area included visits to the Samastha Kerala Jam'iyathul Ulama (SKJU) offices, schools and colleges run by this section of KNM which is dedicated to education, specifically theological instruction.

The injunction that all Muslims should learn to read, recite and understand religious texts, particularly the Koran, is taken very seriously by the Samastha Kerala

⁹ See Sathheese Chandra Bose and Shiju Sam Varughese (eds), *Kerala Modernity: Idea, Spaces and Practices in Transition*, New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2015, or several essays by Sathheese Chandra Bose on the reform movement and its impact.

¹⁰ *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 2/3, Islam in South Asia (Mar. - May, 2008), pp. 317-346.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 317.

Jam'iyathul Ulama, one of the largest organisations in the state. This organisation, which claims to have the highest number of members and followers in Kerala, was formed in 1926 in Kozhikode and the booklet published by the organisation about its own history reveals their understanding of the history of Islam in Kerala. First it distinguishes the Kerala tradition as Indo-Arabic as opposed to the Indo-Persian variety of Islam found in the northern parts of the country. This, by implication, suggests a more 'authentic' form of practice. Next it recalls the sweeping changes brought into Kerala following the so-called Mapilla rebellion and the severe repressive reactions of the British administration. To quote:

... the responses [to the repression] took three different forms. The first group of some elites and so-called intellectuals braved to embrace the modernity and western culture in its full form and to discard religion seeing it as the major cause of their backwardness. The second response was from some modern educated personalities and some religious educated fellows, who were influenced by the modernist and reformist movements within Islam like Wahabism and Salafism...The third response came from the traditional spiritual leadership of Sayyids, Ulama and Sheikhs of Thareeqas.¹²

Naturally, this organisation identified itself with the third response which claimed to propagate a 'traditional and pure' form of Islam but one that was in its own way connected with the wave of social reform that was sweeping Kerala in early twentieth century.

In 1951 the organisation decided to set up a board for madrasa education and in 1952 ten institutional applications were received for registration under the board created by the organisation. By 2014 (the time of publication of the booklet) there were 9346 madrasas registered. The entire system is run like a parallel school board. Every day after the regular classes are over, the registered students are taken by bus to their Islamic religion classes which often use the buildings of existing primary schools. Teachers use the blackboard and other furniture available to them. There are teachers, both male and female, paid by the local organisers, while the Board provides text books, syllabus and their own examination system. The medium of instruction is Malayalam and these organisations claim that there is no connection between Islam and Urdu. Their emphasis is on Arabic as the language of the Prophet and the Koran. Students receive a certificate as they complete each year.

¹² Samastha Kerala Jam-iiyyathul, 6thed, Samastha Kerala Jam'iiyyathul Ulama, 2014.



Religious Classes in Kozhikode under SKJU

Photo credit: Indrani Bhattacharya

By 2014, the SKJU had awarded 28,34,591 5th grade certificates, 11,37,539 7th grade certificates, 1,70,444 10th grade certificates and 4860 +2 level certificates. There were 87,058 teachers and 107 inspectors. The central office in Kozhikode which we visited, is bustling with office staff and senior maulvis. There are registration books, examination schedules, regular monitoring of classes and the entire space feels like the office of any central school board. In the discussions and interviews with the senior members, we were told that this organisation believes that all children should complete their education under the state system, but religious knowledge pertaining to everyday life was also required and that is what they provided. They had a separate madrasa for those students who wished to become maulvis or maulanas which is residential in nature, with serious boys who were inclined to live a holy, scholarly life. What is interesting about this organisation is that it replicated the entire set-up of the regular state system of education and runs a parallel system in terms of structure, while ensuring a certain quality, conformity and direction in the religious teaching. As the figures suggest, this is a very successful model.

In their adoption of the common syllabus, registration, teacher training, central examination, pedagogy and certification, this organisation has moved far away from the traditional ideas of the madrasa education which is still found in many institutions across India. In those institutions, students are admitted to the institution according to their existing levels of knowledge. The teachers and the students sit on the ground. No blackboards are used, as oral communication and verbal repetition are considered to be the best way of transmitting knowledge. Rote learning, proper pronunciation of the holy texts and proper ways of performing

rituals are the main focus of instruction. Many institutions such as Darul Uloom in Deoband still organises public debates as ways of assessing and certifying students, though even these institutions are slowly changing. Thus, the SKJU follows modern pedagogy and educational structures.

The KNM and its affiliate SKJU believe in religious education, but as a necessary supplement to the ‘modern’ education offered by the state systems which is necessary to live and work in the contemporary world. They do not see themselves as ‘modernist and reformist’ however which is how they characterise other ‘puritanical’ and ‘fundamentalist’ strands of Kerala Islam. (The adjectives are all used in the booklet to characterise the forms of Islam they are critiquing). Rather they see themselves as providing a balance between Western-style education, necessary to rid themselves of ‘backwardness’, without losing their religious and spiritual moorings. In this set of reforms, the organisation emphasises the role of women in Islam and their right to education of all kinds—religious and others.

While we did not find any gender-segregated data in the records, the organisers informed us that this system was meant for both girls and boys and that there were common classrooms and examinations and our visits to a few such classes reflected the same picture. Teachers too were of both genders. Only their residential madrasa, meant for serious scholars of Islam were restricted to boys as they felt that in Islam the maulvis or maulanas had to be male. However, this system is a much better organised way of imparting basic Islamic education of the sort considered to be essential for all Muslims and always in supplement to other forms of education. In Kerala however, there has been a trend of blending religion with education in many different ways since the nineteenth century when the need for modern education was advocated by many Islamic scholars from within the previously conservative communities. To quote:

The first lead in the awareness campaign was Makthi Thangal (1847-1912) himself who is considered by many as the very doyen of Kerala Muslim renaissance. Through his books, speeches, pamphlets and debates, he championed the cause of Muslim women and the importance of their education on modern lines. Saidali Kutty Master of Tirur (1856-1919) through his journal Salahul Iqvan was another reformer who played a major role in this connection. Sheik Muhammed Mahin Hamadani Thangal (d. 1922) who fought relentlessly on several fronts for the cause of Muslim education, and Maulana Chalilakath Kunhahammed Haji (d. 1919) the well-known scholar in the field of Madrasa reforms were the other unforgettable names in this behalf. Kunhahammed Haji, not only encouraged women’s education, but also set an example in the field by sending his daughters to schools at a time

when the conservative ulama issued decrees declaring such acts as 'haram'.¹³

Kunhahammed is also credited with revising the traditional Dars-i-Nizami syllabus and teaching methods which originated in India in the late eighteenth century at Firangi Mahal Madrasa in Lucknow and is still followed in Dar-ul-Uloom and other madrasas around the country. Not only did he introduce literary works and emphasise theological logic and reasoning that had been left out of the traditional syllabus, he encouraged modern aids such as blackboards, maps, and structuring children into classes with examinations and other modern organisation mechanisms of education. He also undertook the reformation of the hybrid Arabic-Malayalam script to make it easier to teach and use.

One important aspect of this reform movement was that the need for state-sanctioned contemporary education was emphasised and religious education was separated from that. Thus, these early reformers provided the background for the kind of parallel education set-up that organisations such as SKJU created. The second significant aspect was the encouragement of women to pursue education.

From the beginning of their interventions in the sphere of education, these reformers believed in offering all forms of education to both male and female students. Indeed, they also allowed women to enter the mosques and pray on the premises, which is still prohibited in mosques controlled by most sects of Islam. According to many commentators, these changes were made within the overall acceptance of the need for social and cultural change that characterised the particular form of Kerala modernity in the early twentieth century across all religious divides.

There are some sectarian divides between the Sunnis in Kerala, but many of them work together or have merged and are unanimous in their opposition to what they characterise as wahabism, which they claim has no connection with the history of Islam in Kerala. For example, in our interview with officials of Samastha Kerala Sunni Jamiatul Ulama, they said “In 1920s, world was changing and some fundamentalist Islamic movements were also taking place. Wahabism and other very restricted and very orthodox philosophy started to come to Kerala too. But here, many Islamic scholars did not like this. This Islam was not something that we knew here. Kerala Jamiatul Ulama was formed in 1924, but from the beginning, it had inner contradictions. After merger of two parts [of the organisation] of Kerala, the name became Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulama.”¹⁴ However, all these factions agreed that they now all work together and share the same vision regarding education. Most of them also claim allegiance with Kerala Nadwathul Mujahidin, the

¹³ U. Mohammed, *Educational Empowerment of Kerala Muslims: A Socio-historical Perspective*, Kozhikode: Other Books, 2007, pp. 87-88.

¹⁴ Personal Interview with officials of Samastha Kerala Sunni Jamiatul Ulama, Tayyab (Office Co-ordinator) and Yusuf Misbahi (Education Dept.) on 28 September 2016.

larger political and social organisation which was formed in 1950. The KNM has a separate mass organisation for women called the Muslim Girls & Women's Movement (MGM) whose primary objective is to campaign for women's rights to education.¹⁵

On our visit to Farook College in Kozhikode, one of the first colleges to be established in this part of Kerala, we found a full-fledged institution with 20 departments, ranging from Arabic, Islamic History, English, Computer Science, Mathematics, Commerce, Physics, Botany, Physical Education and Zoology. It is recognised as an Autonomous College by the UGC and received a rating of A+ and a score of 3.51 by NAAC and is affiliated to Calicut University. It was also awarded the UGC College with Potential for Excellence tag. This is a private college run and controlled by the Rouzathul Uloom Association which was established in 1942 with the specific target 'to educate and uplift the Muslim backward community of Malabar region.' It also 'claims to be 'the primary facilitator of women education in the region.' Farook College is only one of several institutions run by this organisation which claims to have over 10,000 students on its present day sprawling campus with several colleges complete with computer facilities, wifi connectivity, full library and hostel facilities for both male and female students. The Rouzathul Arabic College is devoted to Islamic courses but the curriculum includes topics which are deemed to be of use in future professions, such as Islamic Finance and modern Arabic Language and Literature and includes a module on Tourism and Travel. The Newsletter lists a variety of activities such as the Student Union elections and an Arabic Poetry Competition. One student is congratulated for being awarded a full scholarship to study in Qatar University. There is also a Farook Training College for B.Ed degrees and a Farook Institute of Management for MBA. In addition, there are fully residential schools from the primary to the Senior Secondary. Admission is open to students from all backgrounds (religious or otherwise) and the rules for reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes are followed according to the state requirements. On the day of our visit, we did not find it different from any other well-run college in India. In our interviews with some of the teachers and the Principal Dr Mustafa Farooki, we were told that many students chose to study Arabic, including a few Hindu students, because this opened up the opportunity for work in the Gulf countries. The Arabic courses in Farook College and Rouzathul Uloom Arabic College are different as the BA course in Farook College includes a lot of modern Arabic Literature and concentrates on modern Arabic while the Arabic College includes the versions of Arabic used in ancient sacred texts. However, both follow the syllabus approved by Calicut University and both degrees are awarded by the University. Urdu is not taught at all. There is no uniform or dress code and they follow a Monday to Friday week. The only differences from any other college are that students are required to wear white clothes on Friday and there is a masjid on campus which

¹⁵ Personal interview with Saidutty C, Manager of Centre for Islamic Education and Research (CIER) and State Committee member of KNM on 26 August 2016.

students can use for prayers if they wish. However, this is entirely up to the students to decide. All the people we spoke to explained the role of their organisation and the colleges under it as being the first to convince and persuade female students to participate in education till the highest level. Some also mentioned the growing trend of wearing hijab among female students and commented disapprovingly that this was not part of Islamic practices in Kerala but was being propagated by some fundamentalist groups influenced by wrong notions.

We found many groups and organisations in the Kozhikode area itself all of whom claimed allegiance to the KNM, ran religious classes before or after regular school and declared, as did the Centre for Islamic Education and Research another education-based organisation, that their syllabus was “liberal and modern”. The medium of instruction and examination in all the classes was Malayalam. All of them particularly emphasised their role in promoting education among girls and women.

In fact, the success of educating Muslim women in Kerala is quite astonishing as the recent Report on Higher Education published by the Department of Human Resource Development, Government of India (2017-18) shows:¹⁶

State	Muslim			Other Minority Communities		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Kerala	63875	85316	149191	48606	68548	117154
West Bengal	113100	117635	237035	5996	6978	12974

In other states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Assam, the figures for female students is significantly lower than that of the male students. In West Bengal, as the figures above show, the enrolment is practically equal. However in Kerala, the figures for female enrolment is higher in the ‘other minority communities’ category too, which seems to reflect the impact of the social reform movements in Kerala on all communities. This is therefore an illustration of what a sustained reform agenda can establish across social, religious and economic categories if it is led from within the communities themselves. Education for women has become an accepted and desired norm in society in Kerala as a whole.

However, reform movements which focus on only the issue of education for women need to be taken further to ensure that women can become fully empowered citizens in all senses of the word. The veteran journalist and author Binoo K. John writes, “Despite the overwhelming contribution of women to Kerala’s economy, the state refuses to let go of patriarchy... Patriarchy’s hold on Kerala is most worrying and has

¹⁶‘Higher Education Report: All India and States Profile 2017-18’, website of Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Government of India

https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/eUGC_HE%20AIS%20Profile%20.pdf, accessed September 2019.

no place in its larger narrative of progress and its embrace of modernity.”¹⁷ Our own experiences while on the field trip corroborated this gendered modernity.

According to the National Crime Bureau Statistics, Kerala ranks second only to Delhi in the percent of crimes reported annually and is classified in the “Very High Crime” Category, and even more relevant for this discussion, has contributed more than five percent of the national number of crimes against women, a figure significantly higher than the percentage of population of Kerala in the population of India.

While, therefore, the reform movements in the state in the early twentieth century have resulted in an astonishing rise in the education of women, and also as we know in the health sector, it is time to look beyond literacy statistics and college enrolment figures to understand a more holistic and rights-based understanding of the status of women.

However, education is always the first step.

¹⁷ Binoo K. John, *The Curry Coast: Travels in Malabar 500 years after Vasco da Gama*, New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2016, pp. 19.

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07

“Girls’ education is necessary in today's world”¹: Understanding Changing Attitudes Towards, and Aspirations for Girls’ Education in Rural Bihar

Rebecca Gordon

Abstract

There have been vast developments in educational access in Bihar, however education levels remain characterised by wide gaps between urban and rural populations, with rural girls and women experiencing the lowest levels of access to education and learning.² The literature notes both economic and social-cultural barriers to girls’ education in India, particularly for those from marginalised rural populations and highlights the role of parental attitudes and aspirations in influencing girls’ educational access and achievement. However, there have been relatively few studies looking at parental, and in particular mothers’ attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls’ education. Fewer studies have focused on rural Bihar and the perspectives of women from scheduled castes, tribes and other disadvantaged castes. Therefore, through one on one interviews and focus groups with staff and members of a grassroots microfinance organisation, this research seeks to explore mothers’ attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls’ education in rural Bihar to give insight into whether and why changes have taken place. Predominantly, economic factors, such as increased awareness of opportunities for girls’ employment and a changing economic situation for the family were noted. However, these were accompanied by important socio-cultural shifts in the requirement for higher levels of education for marriage and mothers’ improved understanding of the potential for education to lead to greater wellbeing and social standing for their daughters. A complex interplay of greater ‘returns’ to girls’ education and ‘respectability’ that arose from it was thus influential in changing parental attitudes towards, and aspirations for girls’ education.

Introduction

¹ Interview #1, 21st October 2017

² See ASER (2018) Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2017 <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202017/aser2017fullreportfinal.pdf> accessed on February 2019

There has been vast progress on girls' education in India since the Right to Education Act of 2009. Enrolment has increased across the country and there has been an increase in literacy rates from 64.8 percent in 2001 to 74.04 percent in 2011. Though improved, women's literacy rate is still at 64.5 percent in comparison with 82.14 percent for men.³ A particular improvement in female literacy, of 20 percent between 2001 to 2011, has been seen in Bihar, the largest improvement of any state in India.⁴ However, despite increases in women's literacy, girls' in rural and socio-economically marginalised communities in rural Bihar, still face exclusion from education. Bihar still had the second lowest female literacy rate, at 53.33 percent⁵ and recent data analysis found that in India, girls aged 20-24 from low socio-economic backgrounds living in rural areas reported receiving only two years of schooling.⁶ Even when girls are in school, only 17 percent of girls from rural India who are in school are learning the basics.⁷

Studies on barriers to girls' education worldwide have often mentioned a lack of financial incentive or means to educate girls, and research in India has found pro-male bias in household allocation of educational expenditure.⁸ Socio-cultural perspectives on the importance of girls' education may also lead to a lack of support from parents; in West Bengal, parents were found to be 45 percent less likely to state that they would like their girl to graduate or study beyond secondary school compared to a boy.⁹ Socio-cultural norms also influence other duties that girls are expected to perform. For example, girls' engagement in domestic chores at age 12 was noted as the biggest contributory factor to the persisting gender gap in access and learning in Indian secondary schools.¹⁰ Gender-related norms and poverty

³ See Indian Census (2011) 2011 Census Data, <http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-Common/CensusData2011.html> accessed on February 2019

⁴ See Kishore, Bhattacharjee. Women's Education in Rural Bihar: Issues and Challenges, 2015. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318080118_Women's_Education_in_Rural_Bihar_Issues_and_Challenges accessed March 2019

⁵ See Indian Census (2011) 2011 Census Data, <http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-Common/CensusData2011.html> accessed on February 2019

⁶ See Rebecca Gordon, Lauren Marston, Pauline Rose, and Asma Zubairi, *12 Years of Quality Education for All Girls: A Commonwealth Perspective*, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge, 2019.

⁷ See Rebecca Gordon, Lauren Marston, Pauline Rose, and Asma Zubairi, *12 Years of Quality Education for All Girls: A Commonwealth Perspective*, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge, 2019.

⁸ See Mehtbul Azam, & Geeta Ghandi Kingdon 'Are Girls the Fairer Sex in India? Revisiting Intra-Household Allocation of Education Expenditure,' *World Development*, vol. 42, 2013, pp. 143-164.

⁹ See Lori Beaman, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande & Petia Topalova, 'Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India,' *Science*, vol. 335, no. 6068, 2012, pp.582-586.

¹⁰ See Renu Singh & Protap Mukherjee, 'Whatever she may study, she can't escape from washing dishes': gender inequity in secondary education – evidence from a longitudinal study in India,' *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, vol. 48, no.2, 2018, pp. 262-280.

remain important structural barriers to girls' schooling in rural India and are directly associated with parental attitudes towards girls' education.¹¹ If we can better understand parental attitudes towards schooling girl children, particularly in families that experience higher levels of economic and socio-cultural marginalisation, then interventions or policies to support this can be improved. This study uses data from research with women members of a grassroots microfinance organisation in rural Bihar, to specifically explore changes in women's attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education. This chapter will next outline the context of girls' education in rural Bihar, assessing the current literature on parental attitudes towards girls' education.

Context and Current Understanding

State of girls' education in Bihar

Research from India has shown that girls are less likely to go to school than boys and have persistently higher rates of drop-out and poor attendance.¹² This was particularly the case in Bihar, historically the most economically disadvantaged state in India with one of the lowest mean levels of education.¹³ The Annual Status of Education Report¹⁴ found that 21.2 percent of female youth (14-18) in Bihar had been enrolled in school or college for less than eight years, a higher proportion than boys. In relation to educational outcomes, only 31.5 percent of girls aged eight-ten can do basic arithmetic compared to 37.2 percent of boys. This gap widens with age, as 58.6 percent of girls aged 11-13 and 70.3 percent of girls aged 14-16 are able to do basic arithmetic, in comparison with 66.7 and 80.4 percent for boys respectively.¹⁵

An important trend in Bihar is that girls are more likely to be enrolled in government schools than boys. ASER¹⁶ found that 80.8 percent of girls (aged seven-ten) in school

¹¹ See Satyanarayana Ramanaik, Martine Collumbien, Ravi Prakash, Lottie Howard-Merrill, Raghavendra Thalinja, Prakash Javalkar, Srikanta Murthy, Ben Cislighi, Tara Beattie, Shajy Isac, Stephen Moses, Lori Heise & Parinita Bhattacharjee. 'Education, poverty and 'purity' in the context of adolescent girls' secondary school retention and dropout: A qualitative study from Karnataka, Southern India, *PLoS One*, vol. 13, no.9, 2018, pp.e0202470

¹² See Renu Singh & Protap Mukherjee, 'Whatever she may study, she can't escape from washing dishes': gender inequity in secondary education – evidence from a longitudinal study in India,' *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, vol. 48, no.2 2018, pp. 262-280

¹³ See Karthik Muralidharan & Nishith Prakash 'Cycling to School: Increasing Secondary School Enrolment for Girls in India,' http://conference.iza.org/conference_files/worldb2013/prakash_n5110.pdf accessed on March 2019.

¹⁴ See ASER (2018) Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2017, <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/Publications/ASER%20Reports/ASER%202017/aser2017fullreportfinal.pdf> accessed on February 2019.

¹⁵ ASER (2019) *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2018*, <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/aserreport2018.pdf> accessed on February 2019.

¹⁶ ASER (2019) *Annual Status of Education Report (Rural) 2018*, <http://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202018/Release%20Material/aserreport2018.pdf> accessed on February 2019.

are enrolled in government schools, compared to 72.1 percent of boys and that learning rates are lower in government schools than in private schools in Bihar. This evidence supports the claim that while education for girls' enrolment in Bihar has increased, there are still large disparities in learning outcomes and due in part disparities in the numbers of girls in private schools may contribute. Girls' attendance at government or private schools can be affected by parental aspirations for girls' education, and therefore it is important to understand how these aspirations may be formed.

Understanding parental attitudes towards, and aspirations for girls' education

The existing literature in India notes the intersection of gender-related norms, poverty, caste and rural residence as influencing parental attitudes and aspirations for girls' education.¹⁷ Dréze and Kingdon¹⁸ find that parental motivation is highly significant to the probability of a girl being in school, demonstrating the importance of understanding what drives these motivations. Two key themes emerge from the literature on parental motivations for girls' education, economic factors and socio-cultural factors.

A report, drawing on data from Bihar (among other states) found that a significant minority of parents did not value girls' education in 1998, with key determinants of this being ownership of a small amount of land, number of rooms in the house, the girl-child being enrolled in school and the belief that education is important for girls' marriage prospects.¹⁹ Although there is less gender bias in enrolment at the primary school level in India, there is a significant difference in the probability of parents investing in girls' education at higher levels.²⁰ Azam and Kingdon²¹ found a pro-male bias in terms of expenditure on education among children aged ten to 14 in four states of India (including Bihar). Differences in earnings are often presented as proof

¹⁷ See Satyanarayana Ramanaik, Martine Collumbien, Ravi Prakash, Lottie Howard-Merrill, Raghavendra Thalinja, Prakash Javalkar, Srikanta Murthy, Ben Cislighi, Tara Beattie, Shajy Isac, Stephen Moses, Lori Heise & Parinita Bhattacharjee. 'Education, poverty and 'purity' in the context of adolescent girls' secondary school retention and dropout: A qualitative study from Karnataka, Southern India', *PLoS One*, vol. 13, no.9, 2018, pp.e0202470; Ramachandra, S. Ekbote, E. R. (2016) 'Factors Responsible for School Dropout: A Systematic Approach,' *Universe of Knowledge: Research Analysis*, 1(2): 92-105.

¹⁸ See Jean Dréze & Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, 'School participation in rural India,' accessed online at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/93997.pdf>

¹⁹ See Sheila Kathleen Miller, 'Determinants of Parental Attitudes Regarding Girls' Education in Rural India,' Masters Thesis at Georgetown University, unpublished PhD dissertation, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown University, 2007.

²⁰ Tanvi Bhatkal, 'Gender Bias in the Allocation of Education Expenditure: Evidence from Andhra Pradesh, India,' *Young Lives* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08aa840f0b649740006e0/gender-bias-in-the-allocation-of-education-expenditure.pdf> accessed on January 2019.

²¹ See Mehtabul Azam & Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, 'Are Girls the Fairer Sex in India? Revisiting Intra-Household Allocation of Education Expenditure,' *World Development*, vol 42, 2013, pp. 143-164.

that returns to education differ by gender²² and family economic constraints are less likely to affect sons.²³

Socio-cultural factors can also have a large impact on parental attitudes and aspirations for girls' education. Increasingly, parents may recognise girls' education as a sound economic decision, but there can be confusion over aspirations for girls' schooling due to the belief in the role of women as wives and mothers²⁴; there is a consideration of whether education may lead to a better job for a girl, or whether parents prioritise her marriage. Parents from low castes are only about half as likely to believe that the prospect of a good job in the future is a reason to educate their daughters.²⁵ This may interact with entrenched beliefs that the education of boys is 'retained' by parents as an investment, whereas the education of a girl is 'lost' to the family she marries.²⁶ Research focusing on scheduled caste girls found they were under pressure to marry early, as their roles are defined largely in terms of their marital status and childbearing potential.²⁷ Some parents feared sending girls to school in case this negatively affected her marriage prospects.²⁸ It is therefore clear that the economic position of parents intersects with, and affects, socio-cultural

²² See Harold Alderman & Elizabeth M. King, 'Gender differences in parental investment in education,' *Structural Change and Economics Dynamics*, vol 9, 1998, pp.453-468.

²³ Geeta Ghandi Kingdon, 'Where has All the Bias Gone? Detecting Gender Bias in the Intrahousehold Allocation of Educational Expenditure,' *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, vol. 53, no.2, 2005, pp.409-451; Monica Das Gupta 'Family Systems, Political Systems and Asia's 'Missing Girls': the construction of son preference and its unravelling,' *Policy Research Working Paper 5148*, 2009, Washington DC: World Bank

²⁴ See Satyanarayana Ramanaik, Martine Collumbien, Ravi Prakash, Lottie Howard-Merrill, Raghavendra Thalinja, Prakash Javalkar, Srikanta Murthy, Ben Cislighi, Tara Beattie, Shajy Isac, Stephen Moses, Lori Heise & Parinita Bhattacharjee, 'Education, poverty and 'purity' in the context of adolescent girls' secondary school retention and dropout: A qualitative study from Karnataka, Southern India, *PLoS One*, vol. 13, no.9, 2018, pp.e0202470; Ramachandra, S. Ekbote, E. R. (2016) 'Factors Responsible for School Dropout: A Systematic Approach,' *Universe of Knowledge: Research Analysis*, 1(2): 92-105; Ramachandra, S. Ekbote, E. R. (2016) 'Factors Responsible for School Dropout: A Systematic Approach,' *Universe of Knowledge: Research Analysis*, 1(2): 92-105.

²⁵ See Sriparna Bose & Sunita Bose, 'The Role of Parental Perceptions in the Gender Bias in Education in West Bengal, India: Results from a micro survey,' <https://paa2009.princeton.edu/papers/90847> accessed on April 2019.

²⁶ See Sheila Kathleen Miller, 2007.

²⁷ See Ravi Prakash, Tara Beattie, Prakash Javalkar, Parinita Bhattacharjee, Satyanarayana Ramanaik, Raghavendra Thalinja, Srikanta Murthy, Calum Davey, James Blanchard, Charlotte Watts, Martine Collumbien, Stephen Moses, Lori Heise, Shajy Isac 'Correlates of school dropout and absenteeism among adolescent girls from maringalized community in north Karnataka, south India,' *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 61, 2017, pp. 64-76.

²⁸ See Lalitha Bhagavatheeswaran, Sapna Nair, Hollie Stone, Shajy Isac, Tejaswini Hiremath, Raghavendra T, Kumar Vadde, Mahesh Doddamane, H.S Srikantamurthy, Lori Heise, Charlotte Watts, Michele Schweisfurth, Parinita Bhattacharjee, Tara S. Beattie. 'The barriers and enablers to education among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe adolescent girls in northern Karnataka, South India: A qualitative study,' *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 49, 2016, pp. 262-270.

norms, which impact on parental attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education.²⁹

Purewal and Hashmi³⁰ provide a framework to understand parental attitudes to girls' education encompassing two concepts, returns and 'respectability' in rural Pakistan. Education in rural Bihar may similarly not be framed in terms of social mobility, but complex economic and social considerations. The theory of returns is the idea that by supporting girls' education, they will eventually contribute economically to the family. However, as we have seen, in light of the assumptions related to girls' marriage, and preference in spending on education, understanding this has can be complex. 'Respectability' is girls' vulnerability in the public sphere, where they carry the burden of 'respect' through limited mobility in comparison to boys and the need to adhere to certain socio-cultural norms of rural society.³¹ In many cases negative perspectives on girls' education are related to the potential disruption it may cause to gender roles within the family. The socio-cultural determinants of parental attitudes and aspirations act alongside the economic ones, and thus the concept of returns and respectability, equally reflective of economic and socio-cultural considerations that influence parents' attitudes to girls' education, will guide the analysis of the findings of this research. Whilst there is some understanding of parents' attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education, generally parents' educational aspirations have been examined to explain variation in children's educational achievement. There is far less understanding of the factors which affect parents' attitudes and aspirations, particularly related to girls' education. In order to understand this further, this paper seeks to ask have mothers' attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education in rural Bihar changed, and if so, why has this change occurred?

Methods

The methods detailed relate to my overall PhD study, working with a grassroots microfinance organisation, predominantly serving women from scheduled or disadvantaged castes or tribes who comprise approximately 90 percent of their membership.³² The main focus of the research was on the impacts of organisational membership on girls' education. However, a key topic that emerged was mother's attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education. Although not in the scope of my PhD research directly, the findings from this topic are of interest, as noted above.

²⁹ See Navtej Purewal & Naimatullah Hashmi, 'Between returns and respectability: parental attitudes towards girls' education in rural Punjab, Pakistan,' *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 36, no.7, 2015, pp. 977-995.

³⁰ See Navtej Purewal & Naimatullah Hashmi, 2015.

³¹ See Navtej Purewal & Naimatullah Hashmi, 2015.

³² See Gil Yaron, Rebecca Gordon, John Best & Sunil Choudhary, 'Microfinance for the marginalised: the impact of the Rojiroti approach in India,' *Enterprise Development and Microfinance*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1755-1986.

Twenty one-on-one interviews with seventeen women staff and one male staff member from the organisation, focussed on insights into changes in the lives of women members of the organisation's self-help groups (SHGs). The sampling frame came from the overall staff list; interviews were chosen randomly, so the fact I had worked with staff members before did not lead to bias. In order to compare and understand women's attitudes towards girls' education further, thirty focus-group discussions (FGDs) with members of the organisations' SHGs were conducted. Fifty SHGs were randomly selected from the overall number of SHGs, and then thirty were purposively selected to ensure diversity in ages, geographical locations and the amount of time that groups have been set up. Interviews and FGDs took place either in the organisation's office or in the villages in which staff lived, or SHGs met. I worked with a translator who was also a member of staff at the organisation, as the women involved knew him well and felt comfortable with him. He also felt comfortable in the context, which was important given the geographical location and socio-economic position of women involved. Although a female translator may have been preferable, it was difficult to find one that satisfied the above criteria, and so knowledge of the context was prioritised.

All interviews and FGDs were recorded, translated and transcribed for analysis. Additional practical considerations include my own positionality and ethical practicalities detailed in other articles.³³ This research received ethical approval from my University Ethics Committee and as part of the Indian Government visa application process. The analysis used inductive coding and this chapter details the findings under one of these themes 'perspectives on girls' education.' There are a number of limitations in answering the research question for this paper, firstly the fact that it was not a specific research question of the overall PhD study. Secondly, due to the fact that the organisation focuses on women's empowerment and agency, members' perspectives may not be representative of women in rural Bihar. Therefore, these findings are presented as only reflecting on the changing attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education among members of this organisations' SHGs.

Findings and Discussion

Overall, participants in this research agreed that parental attitudes towards girls' education had positively changed, *"now, people are giving more attention to the girls' education. Earlier the people didn't want to teach the girls,"*³⁴ alongside changed aspirations *"my aspirations for my daughter has changed lots. Now I am*

³³ See Michelle Brear & Rebecca Gordon (forthcoming) 'Translating the principle of beneficence into ethical participatory development research practice,' forthcoming; Rebecca Gordon (forthcoming) 'Challenging ethical assumptions: Refusal of Anonymity in Cross-cultural Feminist Research,' forthcoming.

³⁴ FGD #18, 10th November 2017.

confident that my daughter will at least complete her 12th class."³⁵ However, they did acknowledge that attitudes were still very mixed "*views regarding educating children are different among different people.*"³⁶ In order to understand why attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education have changed, I present the perspectives of mothers (and one father) in terms of how these changes have been attributed to economic considerations, 'returns' and socio-cultural considerations, 'respectability.'

Understanding the impact of 'returns' on mothers' attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education

Positive attitudes towards, and aspirations for girls' education, were predominantly framed in terms of the economic benefits that education would bring, including by the one man interviewed, "*educated girls can earn after marriage and having a double income will help the family to prosper.*"³⁷ Previous literature has noted that government promotion of education has contributed to an increasing awareness of the connection between girls' schooling and enhanced economic options.³⁸ Research has also demonstrated the positive impact that knowledge about job options can have on girls' access to education.³⁹ This process was also noted in over half of the FGDs conducted, "*because girls are progressing, they can get job in police, teaching field, Angan Badi etc. This way the future of our daughters will be bright and settled. That's why we are educating our daughters more than our sons*"; "*now there is more possibility of getting jobs for girls, therefore we want to educate our girls more and more.*"⁴⁰ In particular, women noted that they had become more aware of opportunities available due to government efforts to provide jobs for girls from scheduled castes, "*there is opportunity for girls in government which is for education (cycle, dress) even job is being reserved for girls. That is why perception has changed.*"⁴¹ Job reservations were referenced directly by five different FGDs, demonstrating the effect that the prospect of wider economic opportunities, or 'returns' can have on women's attitudes towards girls' education. However, it must be noted that discussion around these changes in attitudes in relation to economic

³⁵ Interview #12, 23rd October 2017.

³⁶ FGD #22, 11th November 2017.

³⁷ Interview #11, 22nd October 2017.

³⁸ See Geeta Ghandi Kingdon, 'The Progress of School Education in India,' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2007, pp.168-195; Peggy Froerer 'Learning, Livelihoods and Social Mobility: Valuing Girls' Education in Central India,' *AnthroSource*, 2012, <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2012.01189.x> accessed on February 2019.

³⁹ See Robert Jensen, 'Do Labor Market Opportunities Affect Young Women's Work and Family Decisions? Experimental Evidence from India,' *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 127, 2012, pp. 753-792.

⁴⁰ FGD #28, 19th November 2017.

⁴¹ FGD #21, 10th November 2017.

opportunities were also related to socio-cultural shifts in the acceptability of girls' mobility, *"educated girls are getting equal remuneration in job so more education to girls is beneficial. Now girls are using bicycle to go school and we were not allowed to do that in our earlier age."*⁴²

The role of government policies in attitudinal shifts related to girls' education was frequently noted, including by the male interviewee *"well previously, girls were not allowed to study due to the backward mindset of parents and society, but now due to the government policies this change has happened."*⁴³ Specific reference was also made to the government facilities provided to support girls' education that economically supported parents, *"even the children of poor people are changing their future. It's all become possible due to the facilities provided by the government."*⁴⁴ In Bihar, one such policy, the government provision of bicycles to improve girls' access to secondary education, referenced in an above quotation, led to a modest positive effect on the number of girls passing secondary school examinations.⁴⁵ It appears that government policies promoting girls' education and providing economic support have led to more supportive parental attitudes.

In addition, the impact of a changing economic situation within a family, due to a reduction in cost of girls' education, or an increase in income, may be significant in influencing parental perceptions on the returns from girls' education. The changing financial circumstances of women, due in part to their membership of the microfinance organisation, was referenced as influencing their aspirations for girls' education *"we were daily waged labourers, we could not afford to hire land ... now we are doing all that, which increased our income, now we are able to educate our daughters. I hope my daughter will get a job after completing her education."*⁴⁶ As noted in the previous literature, the relationship between perceived returns from education, economic status and opportunity costs are important in influencing parental aspirations towards girls' education. Other studies in Bihar have shown that stable family income was linked to more positive attitudes towards girls' education.⁴⁷ However, there was also a common theme that mothers already had high aspirations for their girls' education, but that changing economic circumstances had allowed them to realise their aspirations, *"aspirations were always there but not having*

⁴² FGD #15, 9th November 2017.

⁴³ Interview #11, 22nd October 2017.

⁴⁴ FGD #6, 1st November 2017.

⁴⁵ See Karthik Muralidharan & Nishith Prakash (2013) 'Cycling to School: Increasing Secondary School Enrolment for Girls in India', http://conference.iza.org/conference_files/worldb2013/prakash_n5110.pdf accessed on March 2019.

⁴⁶ FGD #22, 11th November 2017.

⁴⁷ See Sheila Kathleen Miller, 2007.

resource to fulfil aspiration. Now loan makes easy to fulfil our aspirations. Since loan from Rojiroti is very easy so you can borrow to fulfil your aspirations."⁴⁸

Returns to education, as framed in wider 'development discourse', have reflected on the importance of socio-economic gains more widely⁴⁹, such as the impact on women's fertility and family size.⁵⁰ These additional returns were also referenced widely by women as leading to their changed aspirations for girls' education, "*if a girl is educated a family is educated. An educated girl can educate future generations.*"⁵¹ It is clear that while overwhelmingly, increased job opportunities for girls and greater understanding of the importance of education in achieving them have motivated improved attitudes towards girls' education. It is also clear that non-monetary returns from education have also had an impact on changing parental aspirations for girls. Evidently returns to girls' education are important for changed attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education, but the literature has also highlighted impeding socio-cultural norms as a major barrier to girls' education which needs to be explored.⁵²

Understanding the impact of 'respectability' on mothers' attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education

The barriers to girls' education noted in the previous literature that relate to 'respectability,' or socio-cultural norms, were also mentioned by participants in this research, for example restrictions in mobility, "*they are girls, so, they cannot go anywhere*"⁵³ and the fact that girls' education is valued less because they leave the family home after marriage, "*once married, girls go to the in-laws place, so aspiration is not equal for boys and girls.*"⁵⁴ However, in spite of these remaining socio-cultural barriers, there was also evidence of changing socio-cultural norms, which had positively influenced mothers' aspirations for girls' education. For example, in one discussion, whilst a number of women had mentioned that it was harder for girls to receive benefits from education, due restricted ability to travel for work, one woman had an alternative perspective, "*now the girls are riding bikes, driving cars, where is the problem? Now our government is providing bicycles to girl students. They don't remain in 'Ghunghat' (hiding face) ... It depends on girls only, which path they follow,*"⁵⁵ perhaps reflecting changing socio-cultural norms

⁴⁸ FGD #1, 30th October 2017.

⁴⁹ USAID *Education from a Gender Equality Perspective*, 2008, USAID Office of Women in Development

⁵⁰ Khadijah Fancy, *The State of the World's Girls 2012: Learning for Life*, 2012, Plan: United Kingdom.

⁵¹ FGD #10, 2nd November 2017.

⁵² Payal P. Shah 'Girls' Education and Discursive Spaces for Empowerment: perspectives from rural India,' *Research in Comparative and International Education*, vol.6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 90-106.

⁵³ FGD #29, 19th November 2017.

⁵⁴ Interview #16, 28th October 2017.

⁵⁵ FGD #20, 10th November 2017.

related to girls' mobility and choice within education, which might lead to greater support from their mothers.

As noted, marriage and socio-cultural expectations for marriage can be a large barrier to girls' education. However, reflections from the interviews and FGDs showed both changed perspectives on the importance of marriage in comparison to education and also changed expectations related to level of girls' education needed for marriage. Both factors were mentioned as having changed women's attitudes and aspirations for girls' education. Staff from the organisation was particularly vocal about their own changed attitudes towards girls' education, *"earlier girls were treated like a burden and were married off in the early stage, but they were not ready to take up the responsibility of a marriage. My parents got me married at the age of 15, but I will not do this to my daughter. I think that she should start earning then think about marriage."*⁵⁶ This prioritisation of education was also mentioned in a number of FGDs, *"my daughter is studying in class nine. Suppose if I get her married, she would go to her husband's house, then there is little chance that the groom's family will provide education to my daughter. So we let them complete their education; thereafter their marriage will take place."*⁵⁷ Previous research in India has demonstrated that girls often dropout of school after marriage, and that the marriage of daughters is often given higher priority than their education⁵⁸, so these findings do seem to suggest a shift in attitudes, with a prioritisation of education over marriage.

Pertinent in considering the impact of 'respectability' or socio-cultural considerations on parental attitudes and aspirations for girls' education are the implications of education for girls' marriage prospects. Purewal and Hashmi's research⁵⁹ found that due to socio-cultural norms, such as negative connotations of girls walking to school and coming into contact with men, and the impact this would have on marriage prospects, influenced parental aspirations for girls' education. However, in this context, women in all FGDs mentioned that perspectives on girls' education and the marriage ability of girls had changed, *"earlier, marriages of uneducated girls were easy because boys also didn't get education."*⁶⁰ There are now expectations that girls should have an education, in order to be 'respectable' for marriage. Women noted the influence of these changes on their attitudes towards girls' education, and likely associated improved aspirations, *"anywhere we go for marriage negotiation, the first question asked is how much is the girl educated? So, it has become essential to educate the girls, whether the parents are poor or rich."*⁶¹ The changed social

⁵⁶ Interview #20, 6th November 2017.

⁵⁷ FGD #27, 19th November 2017.

⁵⁸ See Renu Singh & Protap Mukherjee, 2018.

⁵⁹ See Navtej Purewal & Naimatullah Hashmi, 2015.

⁶⁰ FGD #13, 8th November 2017.

⁶¹ GD #27, 19th November 2017.

pressure related to girls' education and marriage has meant greater support for girls' education, *"due to social pressure, now parents have to treat both children equally... No-one wants to marry an uneducated girl, so it is compulsory to provide basic education for girls."*⁶² This change in requirements for marriage for girls was also noted as having an impact on changing fathers' attitudes to girls' education, *"when the father of a girl goes somewhere for marriage proposal, he is asked whether the girl is educated. This opens the father's eyes and he also takes an interest in girls' education."*⁶³

However, the alternative view was also given, that in spite of these changing societal perspectives related to wanting educated girls for marriage, educating a girl further can cause problems for marriage, particularly due to her family's marginalised economic status, *"when a girl has passed inter or graduation, we have to find a boy who is graduate or M.A, but ... they demand a dowry of Rs. Five lakhs. We are poor people; how will we manage?"*⁶⁴ Indirect contrast to the earlier quotation, it was also noted that fathers point to higher dowry costs in order to support their negative attitudes towards girls' education. However, mothers are taking steps to challenge this thinking, *"father says that she has to go to another house, so investing in her education is worthless... but we say no, we will educate our daughters. If she will be educated, wherever she will go she will be able to earn her livelihood."*⁶⁵ This demonstrates the complex interplay between economic and socio-cultural considerations for women in this area; if there are increasing social pressures for higher levels of girls' education for marriage, these need to be assessed in light of economic considerations given the higher dowry that will be demanded, and remaining attitudes towards girls' education as being a waste if they leave their family home. In numerous FGDs this contrast between fathers' and mothers' attitudes were noted.

One factor noted by a number of women as part of FGDs was how wider societal changes in levels of girls' education had influenced their own aspirations for their daughters, *"all of us are aspiring to send their daughters for higher studies. If one girl applies for it the rest want to follow. Now the path of higher education is open for girls."*⁶⁶ Although this leads to a change in the 'respectability' that comes from girls' educational success, arguably the changes are still driven by economic considerations, as noted in one FGD, *"when we see that someone's daughter is doing a job somewhere, we think that if I educate my daughter she will also do the job."*⁶⁷ Related to observing the benefits of education from others in their socio-cultural

⁶² Interview #11, 22nd October 2017.

⁶³ FGD #20, 10th November 2017.

⁶⁴ FGD #16, 9th November 2017.

⁶⁵ FGD #28, 19th November 2017.

⁶⁶ Interview #20, 6th November 2017.

⁶⁷ FGD #22, 11th November 2017.

environment, and the impact this can have on girls' lives, women in the FGDs noted their exposure to women with higher levels of education, in reference to the women who led their SHGs and the impact this had on their aspirations for their daughters *"we as well as our children see and observe madam that since she is educated that's why she is able to do this job."*⁶⁸ This is in line with previous research that found the gender gap in adolescent educational attainment was erased in areas of India where quotas for women in local government structures were introduced, demonstrating the impact role models can have on girls' education⁶⁹.

Finally, women also mentioned changes in their attitudes towards, and aspirations for, girls' education due to changes in their own knowledge, and realisation of the importance of education for greater wellbeing for their daughters. For example, *"when our mind got open, we started educating them... if the children will be educated, obviously their mind will get open."*⁷⁰ This was reiterated by others, *"when the group was formed, we people sit together, exchanged our views and came to know many new things...the group has not only changed our thinking but it also provided economic assistance to fulfil such dream."*⁷¹ This shift in attitude towards girls' education beyond economic considerations has emerged from a variety of areas, such as exposure to wider social networks, role models for girls' education and access to knowledge and information about the wider benefits of education. The changing view of the purpose of education and understanding its role in opening up minds, and enabling dreams, came through strongly as a reason for women's aspirational changes for girls' education, *"if a girl will be educated, she could also get a job. But, if she doesn't get a job, the knowledge she has cannot be snatched, that will always remain with her. If she will be educated, she can go anywhere;"*⁷² *"if we educate them, wherever they will be, they will be happy. She will be able to do something to make her life happy."*⁷³ This is in line with perspectives that schooling is intrinsically beneficial and can bring about social mobility and opportunity⁷⁴, and the linkages between social mobility, opportunity and 'respectability' for girls.

Conclusion

It is evident that there has been a shift in parental attitudes towards girls' education, accompanied by higher aspirations. Although it was acknowledged that this had not occurred within all families, it is clear that those interviewed recognised their own positive attitudinal change. Overall, the predominant explanation given for attitudinal and aspirational shifts was the increased awareness of economic

⁶⁸ FGD #20, 10th November 2017.

⁶⁹ See Lori Beaman, Esther Duflo, Rohini Pande & Petia Topalova, 2012.

⁷⁰ Interview #13, 8th November 2017.

⁷¹ FGD #10, 2nd November 2017.

⁷² FGD #20, 10th November 2017.

⁷³ FGD #6, 1st November 2017.

⁷⁴ See Payal P. Shah, 2015.

opportunities, particularly the availability of jobs for scheduled caste girls, alongside families' improved financial standing. This had enabled mothers to support their daughters' education and realise pre-existing aspirations as well. However, it is apparent that there is a complex interplay between economic factors and the impact of changing socio-cultural norms cannot be understated. The transference in the prioritisation of marriage over education, linked with perceived returns to education, has arguably had an impact on both mothers' and fathers' perceptions of girls' schooling. The need for higher educational levels for girls when arranging marriages, alongside improved educational attainment more generally, has raised the benchmark for girls' education, and subsequently altered mothers' and fathers' attitudes. Finally, other socio-cultural changes, including a greater awareness of the impact of education on overall quality of life, augmented mothers' aspirations for girls.

These findings cannot be generalised beyond this location; it must be acknowledged that there are specific impacts of membership of the grassroots microfinance organisation that were noted leading to improved attitudes towards girls' education. For example, the presence of female role models improving awareness of the potential of girls to earn a living and women's ability to sit and discuss girls' educational potential. However, the role of these factors in changing attitudes towards, and aspirations for girls' education could provide useful insights for those working in policy-making and programme development in this space. It would be interesting to undertake further research in Bihar, looking at a wider stratification of families to determine if these shifts were also noted amongst parents who were not part of microfinance groups, or perhaps had experienced less change in job opportunities available to girls.

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08

Women in Medical Education – From ‘Lady Doctors’ to Professors

Rosina Ahmed

There is a time in a young person’s life around the age of 18 years when the world suddenly springs wide open –there is a huge step from school education to university, and with it comes the need to learn to wend a way round obstacles and false starts to find a place in the adult world. It is the beginning of a journey of discovery – new friends, new places, new ideas and new horizons. The dreams of young women at this time of self-discovery are likely to be no different from those of young men, though the choices they make may be moulded by various external expectations and pressures. Over the years there has been a gradual increase in the number of Indian girls choosing to study science subjects, although this is obviously still a challenge – as recently as in 2017 the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, felt the need to make budget provisions for the Vigyan Jyoti scheme, a programme aimed at encouraging more girls to study the sciences in senior school¹. The increasing number of girls entering medical education may indicate that biological science is more attractive or acceptable to schoolgirls than the other sciences, and in some institutions the intake of female medical students is now over 50%. In 2016 it was reported that over the preceding five-year period the medical colleges of India produced 4,500 more female medical graduates than male.² The majority of working doctors were still men, hardly surprising following many years of gender disparity in admissions.

What happens to women who qualify as doctors? In 2015, as a part of its Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WHO commissioned a detailed study on the health

¹ Padma TV, ‘A Year Since Launch of Govt Scheme to Get Girls Into Science, What's Happened?’ *The Wire*, 5 September 2018.

² R Nagrajan, ‘More girls study medicine, but your doctor may still be a man’, *Times of India*, 10 January 2016.

workforce in India.³ The report draws on data from the Indian census of 2001. It must reflect the ground realities of the country, and makes for stark reading. For doctors who describe themselves as practitioners of allopathic medicine, the number of working men outnumbers women by almost 5 to 1. West Bengal appears to do particularly badly in this regard, with only 8.8% of allopathic doctors being women, marginally better than Bihar and UP, but much worse than Sikkim and Meghalaya, where over 40% are women. However these figures obscure the full picture, as it seems that many of these so-called allopathic doctors are actually unqualified practitioners, and for West Bengal only around 35% actually have a medical qualification. The preface to the report includes this snippet, which superficially appears to be good news for women doctors, although it is a worrying comment on overall health provisions in India –“One of the interesting findings in the study was that the percentage of female doctors who had medical degrees was much higher than male doctors... viz. if one was somewhere in India with no personal knowledge of individuals but in need of a doctor, one would do better in a probabilistic sense by going to a woman doctor!”

The history of women practicing medicine in India is not very well documented. In traditional medicine, from the ancient times of the *vaidyas*, one name seems to have survived – Rusa, in the 8th century, wrote some medical texts that were translated into Arabic. It is also reported that widows in some doctors’ families were accepted as doctors themselves.⁴ In medieval times and later there were significant changes in the position of women in Indian society. It is possible that some women were able to be educated at home, but in the public sphere both education and the opportunity to work almost disappeared, and there is little information on women doctors. A few names appear again in the early 19th century, when some women practiced traditional medicine. A fragment of verse eulogises the medical skills of two of these women in Calcutta – although their own names seem to be lost, it is clear from the poems that Jadur Maa and Rajur Maa were formidably clever and knowledgeable, and held positions of respect.⁵

Renaissance Europe saw enormous and exciting advances in science and almost every other field of learning. Medical education began to develop a structure that is still with us today. The Schola Medica Salernitana in Salerno, Italy is considered to be the oldest medical school and the forerunner of modern medical teaching, and as far back as in the 9th century this institution started to provide a basis for rational treatment of patients. Some ideas that were set out on dietetic and hygienic practices, or a code of conduct to help physicians to respect patients and relatives, are still valid

³ S Anand & Fan V, ‘The Health Workforce in India’, *Human Resources for Health Observer Series No. 16*, World Health Organisation, 2016.

⁴ A Saini, ‘Physicians of Ancient India’, *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 2016, 5(2), pp. 254–258.

⁵ S Ray, “Women Doctors’ Masterful Manoeuvrings: Colonial Bengal, Later Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries”, *Social Scientist*, 42(3/4), pp. 59-76.

today.⁶ The early medical universities that gradually opened in different cities in Europe did not accept women as students, so the opportunity to study medicine and qualify as doctors was restricted to men. Of course all professors of medicine were male too, and one of these distinguished individuals, Thomas Laycock from Edinburgh, is on record as having expressed his opinion that women seeking medical careers must be "basely inclined" – meaning that they were either prostitutes or would perform abortions.⁷ The first record of a woman who graduated as a physician in modern times is Elizabeth Blackwell, in the USA in 1848.⁸ To be accepted as a medical student at Geneva Medical College in upstate New York she had to gain a unanimous vote of 'no objection' from all enrolled male medical students. Even after she qualified and travelled to Paris she was forced to take up a position as a student midwife because she was rejected as a doctor. In 1859, the General Medical Council in Britain reluctantly registered her, as its rules accepted graduates from foreign universities, and Blackwell has the distinction of being the first woman on the registry. The obstacles that women faced seemed so great that this pioneering physician thought that the only solution would be to establish women-only medical colleges.⁹ A few years later, in 1865, the Society of Apothecaries in Britain issued its first licence to practice to a woman. It took years of exceptional commitment and effort for Elizabeth Garrett Anderson to overcome the objections of doctors to gain that licence – in 1863 she was refused permission to be admitted to the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, so needed to be privately tutored in medicine while she worked as a nurse.¹⁰ Another 10 years later, Edinburgh University enrolled a group of seven women to study medicine – the first women ever enrolled to study any subject at any British university. Their path was not easy – in spite of doing exceptionally well in their exams, they were pelted with mud when they tried to attend anatomy lectures, and at the end of their studies were not allowed to graduate. Five of these women eventually managed to qualify as doctors from universities in Europe, and the General Medical Council admitted the pioneer of the group, Sophia Jex Blake, to the medical register in 1876.¹¹ It has taken Edinburgh University almost 150 years to recognise these committed, ground-breaking women, and finally, in July 2019, each of the Edinburgh Seven was awarded a posthumous degree of MBChB¹¹.

⁶ E de Divitiis et al, 'The "schola medica salernitana": the forerunner of the modern university medical schools', *Neurosurgery*, 2004, 55(4), pp. 722-44.

⁷ S Roberts, *Sophia Jex-Blake: A Woman Pioneer in Nineteenth Century Medical Reform*, London: Routledge, 1993.

⁸ Elizabeth Blackwell, M.D., Consulting Physician, New Hospital for Women', Obituary, *British Medical Journal*, 1910, 1, pp. 1523–1524.

⁹ E Blackwell, 'Address on the Medical Education of Women', read at The New York Infirmary, 1863.

¹⁰ L Kelly, 'Elizabeth Garrett Anderson: early pioneer of women in medicine', *The Lancet*, 2017, 390 (10113), pp. 2620-2621.

¹¹ A Shepherd, "Edinburgh Seven" are granted degrees 150 years after their studies. *British Medical Journal*, 2019, p. 366

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries many countries across Europe, Asia and Africa registered their first women medical graduates, including my own namesake Rosina Heikel, in Finland in 1878.¹² Every one of these women would have extensive knowledge of her subject and would have passed many examinations. In addition, many would have to bear judgement of her character. Mary Putnam Jacobi, a pioneering American doctor, put this powerfully into words in 1882 – “These ask not, ‘Is she capable?’ but, ‘Is this fearfully capable person nice?’ Will she upset our ideal of womanhood, and maidenhood, and the social relations of the sexes? Can a woman physician be lovable; can she marry; can she have children; will she take care of them? If she cannot, what is she?”¹³

The 19th century brought Western medical education to India too, and in 1835 The Medical College was established. As it was the first medical college in Asia it started off with no further descriptors to its name, though it was later called Medical College, Bengal and then Calcutta Medical College. It was established to teach Western medicine to the ‘native’ population, and was soon followed by two other colleges in Bombay and Madras. Of course women had no place in these institutions either. Rigorous study, particularly of the sciences, was considered too great a challenge for the fragile female brain, and academic study at all universities was closed to women – in fact there were strong disincentives for Indian women who wanted any kind of education that would lead to professional employment¹⁴. A subject like medicine created special challenges, and with the social customs of the time it seemed inconceivable that men and women would be able to examine the naked body together. The converse of the need for academic gender separation was a perception that women who lived in partial social seclusion might not agree to be examined by men, and so the benefits of medical care would be inaccessible to much of the population. At the time, the only European doctors in India were army officers, and this led to an extraordinary situation, where Indian women, who would be likely to have many medical complaints similar to those of men, apparently received treatment only ‘between the breasts and the knees’, often limited to issues such as dietary deficiencies and adherent placentas that caused problems in childbirth.¹⁴

At the time it seemed unlikely that women from India and other similar societies could possibly become doctors themselves, so a few European missionary women took on the task of bringing medical care to these communities. As time went on, in a huge and diverse country, the limitations to this approach became clear. With the support of the Dufferin Fund there was an attempt to create hospitals for Indian women run by Civil Surgeons, where treatment would be provided to ‘*zenana* women’ by Indian women trained in Western medicine. These women were to be

¹² MP Jacobi, ‘Shall Women Practice Medicine?’, *The North American Review*, 1882, 134 (302), pp. 52-75.

¹³ <http://www.helsinki.fi/akka-info/tiedenaiset/english/heikel.html> Last accessed 20 April 2019.

¹⁴ G Forbes, ‘Medical careers and health care for Indian women: patterns of control’, *Women's History Review*, 1994, 3(4), pp. 515 - 530.

called 'Hospital Assistants', not doctors, and their training would be supported by the Dufferin Fund. In the early stages their work would be supplemented with female doctors of European descent, mainly missionaries. The costs of the entire scheme would be low, as Hospital Assistants were paid a fraction of what European women were paid, and a tiny fraction of what a male doctor would have earned. Immediately, hierarchies had been set in place – women would do the same work as men, with lower pay, and 'native' women would be paid even less than others. This scheme had lower eligibility criteria and a less rigorous course structure than the degree course and had many critics, who were sure that the women being trained would emerge half-educated, and would degrade the medical profession, though this attitude may have been at least in part because their training was in vernacular languages and not in English.¹⁵ Later, the 'Hospital Assistants' took successful charge of many rural hospitals, and from scheme this emerged the term 'lady doctor', still frequently heard today.

The first record of an Indian woman enrolling for a degree in medicine was in 1881, and she had to leave India to do so –Anandiben Joshi entered the Women's Medical College in Pennsylvania in 1881, and graduated in 1886.¹⁶ An interesting early photograph shows three women who graduated together –Anandiben from India, with the first Japanese and the first Syrian women to graduate in Western medicine.¹⁷ In the same year, 1886, another woman also graduated as a doctor – Kadambini Ganguly, the first woman from an Indian institution, was awarded her degree from Medical College, Bengal.¹⁸ It had taken almost 50 years for the first medical college in the country to admit its first woman student. Kadambini was born in 1861, the same year as Rabindranath Tagore and Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray. After she graduated she travelled to England, gained several further medical qualifications, and later, back in India, she established a successful private practice. She faced exactly the same insults as the women in Edinburgh a few years earlier, and stood her ground forcefully when she fought a successful court case against a newspaper editor who labelled her wanton and wayward. Another early woman in medicine was Kadambini's contemporary Abala Bose, who studied at Madras Medical College. She emphatically supported a woman's right to education, "not because we may make better matches for our girls ... not even that the services of the daughter-in-law may be more valuable in the home of her adoption, but because a

¹⁵ M Bhadra, 'Indian Women in Medicine: An Enquiry since 1880', *Indian Anthropologist*, 2011, 41(1), pp. 17-43.

¹⁶ L McNeill, 'This 19th Century "Lady Doctor" Helped Usher Indian Women into Medicine', *Smithsonian*. Available at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/19th-century-lady-doctor-ushered-indian-women-medicine-180964613/> Last accessed on 24 August 2017.

¹⁷ http://xdl.drexelmed.edu/item.php?object_id=2373, Last accessed 19 April 2019.

¹⁸ M Karlekar, 'Anatomy of a Change: Early Women Doctors', *India International Centre Quarterly*, 2012, 39(3/4), pp. 95 - 106.

woman like man is first of all a mind, and only in the second place physical and a body”.¹⁹

In the 21st century, over a century after these historic beginnings, the women of India have been in the international public eye with horrifying incidents of violence against women, which significantly increased between 2011 and 2015.²⁰ In 2018, the country ranked 108th out of 149 countries in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index²¹ and 130th out of 189 countries in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index.²² There may be as many female astronauts of Indian descent as there are men, but Indian men far outnumber women as the first authors of published scientific research, by 2.8 to 1.²³ Looking at research publications in medicine alone, the most papers with women as first authors are in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, possibly reflecting an interest in women’s medicine, or a preference of female patients for a female doctor. Several articles in the lay press describe women’s experiences in the medical workplace.²⁴ Long, inflexible working hours push some women into specialties with shorter hours, often non-clinical subjects. Factors such as poor safety, lack of transportation and absent sanitation discriminate against women, particularly in rural areas, where there is an enormous need for doctors. In spite of being ignored, being called nurses and being discouraged from engaging with challenging situations, some women doctors describe how they continue to treat their patients with commitment. On the other hand, many qualified women drop out of medical practice altogether. These articles ask a question – should the selection process for medicine be different, and focus on enrolling students who would later continue to work as doctors? The unwritten implication is that women are wasting medical school places.

In 1981, exactly one hundred years after Anandiben, a group of women entered Calcutta Medical College in their first year. In 1986, exactly one hundred years after Kadambini, they graduated as doctors. During their student years the college celebrated its 150th foundation day. Calcutta Medical College was the pinnacle of success in the Joint Entrance Examination for medical colleges in West Bengal. Hundreds of thousands took the exam, only the top 150 could study there, and

¹⁹ K Madden et al, ‘Routledge Handbook of the History of Women’s Economic Thought’, London: Routledge, 2018. p. 8.

²⁰ V Suvarna et al, ‘The Formal Systems Response to Violence Against Women in India: A Cultural Lens’, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 2018, 62(1/2), pp. 51-61.

²¹ ‘India ranks 108th in WEF Gender Gap Index’, *Economic Times*, Last accessed on 19 December, 2018.

²² <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>. Last accessed on 20 April 2019.

²³ M Thelwall et al, ‘Gender and research publishing in India: Uniformly high inequality?’, *Journal of Informetrics*, 2019, 13(1), pp. 118 - 131.

²⁴ See, R Nagrajan, ‘More Women Study Medicine but few Practice’, *Times of India*, 11 January 2016. Also, YA Dar, ‘The Glaring Case of the Indian Medical Ecosystem: More Female Medical Graduates but Less Female Doctors’, *Silicon India News*, 6 September 2018. M Warriar, ‘The Weekly Dose: Sexism in Healthcare’, *Asiaville News*, 7 March 2019.

women and men competed on equal terms. Today, this group has its share of dedicated clinicians, professors, researchers and entrepreneurs and everyone is still working in medicine. Why is this group different from the women described in newspapers and journals? In 2019, over 30 years after getting professional registration, they are at the peak of their medical careers, can they make a difference to the female medical students of today? I decided to trace these doctors, my friends and contemporaries, the Women of '86, to see where they are in today's world, and to ask their opinion of women, and medicine, and medical practice in India.

In 1981 this was a small group, 25 women in a class of 150, only 1/6th of the class. The stress of the medical curriculum meant that one did not finish her studies, approximately the same proportion as for men in the same year. Of the 24 who graduated there was one I could not trace, but she is on the medical register of her country, one of India's neighbours, and is probably out there somewhere, treating patients in some part of her mountainous nation. Three did not answer, one in India, one in the USA and one somewhere in between, I know that all three work as doctors. That left 20 – a small number to try and draw any conclusions.

Nine of these women doctors work abroad, mostly in the USA, and the rest in India. There are six gynaecologists and six paediatricians. These specialties are often considered women-friendly, but they have not chosen an easy ride – of these 12 women, five are super-specialists with tertiary specialisations, three are professors in academic departments, three are chairs or clinical leads, one is a consultant to an international organisation and one runs her own nursing home. The two women in laboratory medicine are both double-qualified in clinical medicine too, and describe the challenge of straddling two fields, where knowledge of one contributes to excellence in the other. There is an anaesthetist, and two surgeons who both lead specialised departments in busy institutions. Three are in clinical medicine, one stands out as a consultant cardiologist who has been voted best in her state three times. One paediatrician also wanted to choose adult medicine, as “medicine was like solving a mathematical problem – but as a woman, my father said to do paediatrics not adult medicine”.

One of the groups is single and one divorced, all but five of the rest are married to doctors. Only six use their birth surnames professionally, most use only their husbands' surnames and two have incorporated their birth surnames as a middle name. All but two have children, and although most would not try to influence a daughter's choice of career, there were two who said that they would discourage them from studying medicine. For the majority, 15, medicine was their first choice of career, and all but one said that they had no regrets about the choice they made. Historically, both male and female doctors frequently come from 'medical families'. In this group too, 14 have doctors in their close family, and seven said their choice of career was influenced by medical family members – one of these was “convinced (by her family) that medicine was the career for women not physics or maths, which only

men take up". The majority thought medicine was a rewarding career and could not imagine an alternative, although there were several provisos, ranging from the pressure of the course, "when finals came it was overwhelming", to having a balance between work and family – "I took time out for an important family problem and felt it led to a decline in (my) career, and my colleagues judged it as a discredit for me", and "discrimination from older family members who felt that I was neglecting my children". One spoke about the recent change in the public perception of doctors – "recently, because of lack of respect in the profession, and violence against doctors, I really feel I should have chosen some other career". In retrospect, the group is happy with its choices, and even one who first wanted to do something else is now enthusiastic – "in spite of initial dislike I reconciled myself to train passionately, and I must admit I enjoyed it!". Only two think occasionally about other occupations they might have chosen.

Going back to academic experiences in college, nine, almost half, volunteered to take extra exams for competitive medals or awards, and four won university medals or honours in one or more subjects. Following their basic medical degree, almost every woman in this group has a higher academic qualification. Almost 35 years after graduating, two are still looking towards further qualifications – one is studying hospital management, and another, who had early struggles with the death of her husband and the need to bring up her son as a single parent, has a MPhil and is thinking about a very specialized PhD.

How did the group choose their specialties? A microbiologist described the "universal need of the subject which is challenging, based on population and geography", and a cardiologist was influenced by her "family history and father's death". One gynaecologist said that her choice of specialty was made because of "the happiness you can give to a mother and family by delivering a child" and another chose "as I am a woman and I need to know more about women". Most of the rest made a personal choice to specialise in a subject they particularly liked during their years of training – one was "inspired by the teaching of a charismatic professor". At some stage of their careers, six women, including both surgeons, said that they had been specifically discouraged from following their choice of specialty. A gynaecologist said that there was "gender discrimination at all stages and (she) had to work hard to overcome it", and a surgeon "often (felt) left out of the men's club". Five said that they had faced sexual harassment at work, on the other hand one described medicine as a "great career - one of few options worldwide that is associated with less sexual harassment".

By any measure, this group has achieved professional success. Two head major research labs as well as working as clinicians. Almost all head or chair their departments, or work as independent clinical consultants. Two were part of a core doctors group that established a successful multispecialty hospital, and two others have headed professional organizations. Several have research publications in international journals, and one edited a specialty textbook that has recently been

published. One led her neonatal ICU to become the first in the UK to gain UNICEF accreditation. Another went out into her tsunami-affected community, to establish a program to train and support teachers to provide psychosocial counselling for PTSD in schools. She describes having the “privilege to work with some of the poorest sections in the remotest parts of the islands” and the “special feeling when the people of these areas remember you with love and gratitude”. However, only one is a professor in an Indian medical college– the only one who will have the opportunity to teach and train Indian medical students.

It is possible, having spent over 30 years in the medical profession that many in this group have buried any other aspirations they might have had. Most could not name anything at all that they might have chosen as an alternative career, except one who might have been a kindergarten teacher, and another a businesswoman. Two women dance and enjoy yoga, another enjoys walking and cycling, and there was one aspirational comment about sky diving, but the majority seems to have little interest in physical activities. Their hobbies include music, travel, cooking lost recipes and writing poetry. Several mention social work with deprived communities, one thinks about going into politics. One woman spends time on her dream project that encourages language diversity, and says this passion is because “I truly love children, diversity and unity. I never forgot my roots; I love the personal touch over social connections”. What do these successful women hold special? One said “all of it ... teaching and training the next generation of doctors, being a role model for female neonatal trainees....travel, music, family and friends”. Another, who leads a research lab, says “I have had many lucky breaks. I wanted to change practice from one-size-fits-all to getting the right fit for the right patient, to find new drugs, to get transplants to last longer, so that my patients can live better lives”. A professor in a teaching hospital says “I have always tried to have a balance between career and family ... I was the first doctor in my family, and had to struggle a lot but it was worth it. Being a medical teacher is best, and nothing is more satisfying than seeing my students doing well”. Only two women mentioned professional burn out, and would retire rather than have their career overwhelm them.

We came to a broader question – what do these women think of media reports that seem to contradict their own experience? They were asked to comment on an article from the Times of India²⁴, which says that most Indian women who study medicine do not continue to work in the field. A professor wrote of her personal experience, which seems to support the contention – “I have noticed a gradual rise in the number of female medical students, most batches have >50%, but many women sacrifice their career for their family, marriage and children”. Other reactions to the article are mixed. Only two agreed, one said it was “unfortunately true. I know several female MDs who are not working; women give up more easily when faced with competition and use family responsibilities to justify their decision”. Three women disagreed strongly – “(the article has a) chauvinistic note and is definitely untrue” and “I don’t agree, I’m not sure if the statistics are right, most do continue to practice no matter

what, and many have excelled. Some take a break for a while but they eventually return". On the whole however, the reaction was reflective – "unless we get cooperation from families and husbands we are helpless, because in India family is of prime importance to the majority of women, irrespective of profession, social status or economic background", "it is a waste of human talent, women suppressed by husbands and in-laws who expect them to spend time on household work and children first" and "most women have to juggle family and professional responsibilities which males don't have to do. Many take temporary or permanent sabbaticals, or are dependent on their husband's relocations. Families without people in the medical profession are unable to understand the hardship and sacrifices. These breaks are harmful, and women have to try twice as hard to reach the same position".

Is there a solution to this problem? The popular opinion in the group seems to be that this is only possible if there is a change in patriarchal attitudes in the wider society – "The public attitude needs to change a lot, they need to understand that women can change the face of medical care as women are more caring and dedicated. Mothers should teach their sons to show family responsibility to their wives", "In general, in most societies, the efficiency, ability and professional expertise of a woman are always questioned. Our country is no exception ... although this situation is better than before ... sophisticated education has failed to change the core of the heart of our society ... In professional life women have been effective and efficient in many areas and in various countries ... our society has room to learn and change and embrace women physicians as life savers".

Finally, are the Women of '86 different? "It is disappointing to read this – but possibly our batch may be similar to other batches from Calcutta Medical College? Were we more motivated in CMC? Is there a difference between big cities and small or rural colleges? What about differences between different states because of socio-cultural differences?" There are more questions here than answers.

The Women of '86 are not average. Most had the privilege of being born in families who supported and encouraged their choice of career. The selection process that took them to the highest ranking medical school was extremely competitive, and encouraged survival of the fittest. Their academic ability ensured that they entered premier postgraduate institutions and training programs, and were able to build successful careers wherever in the world they chose. Both nature and nurture contributed to their journeys, and there was always a very high possibility that these women would stand out. Their experiences are examples of what is possible, and do not disprove the wider reality. There is no doubt that their stories may not be illustrative of the difficulties faced by other women doctors.

India has a huge shortfall of qualified doctors, and it is important that all those who start out in medical education continue to work as doctors once they graduate. The

country cannot afford to lose enthusiastic, able, committed doctors, and special effort is needed to ensure that young women starting medical training have an enabling career pathway. 'Family responsibilities' seem to carry the blame for obstructing or abbreviating women's careers – rather a contradictory statement, as it is families who make a community and a country, and these families need doctors too, as professionals and not just as family members. On the other hand, the opportunities for women doctors are enormous and limitless –it is, as it always has been, an exciting time for women in medical education.

I would like to acknowledge the Women of '86, the women doctors who graduated from Calcutta Medical College in 1986, for their support and enthusiastic input.

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09

Women in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Science – Hypatia and Beyond

Rahi Soren

One of the major concerns of the twenty-first century is the reduction in biodiversity, particularly species diversity at a very high rate due to natural and anthropogenic actions. A large number of species goes either extinct or are threatened because of over-exploitation or habitat destruction on account of anthropogenic reasons. In all countries across the world significant number of species is now threatened. Understanding men and women's perceptions of nature is important for the success of conservation efforts, particularly the management of biosphere reserves¹. However, the fact that man does not consider himself a part of nature but indeed considers himself superior to nature,² seems to gain significance when placed against man's attitude that woman is both inferior to him and thus, closer to nature. However, there has been prolonged debate on the relationship between women and the environment, on the roles of women in playing both as a conservator and her role in improving the environment. As both users and managers of the natural resource base, women have an extensive knowledge of their environment. They can often predict the location and yields of indigenous wild products, and by using a variety of species, they promote sustainable utilization. Women decide or help decide when and where wild plants and small animals should be collected, trees cut for firewood and fodder, and grasses exploited. In their role as primary subsistence producers, women are also responsible for maintaining soil fertility.³ In many cases women are seen as key actors and are targeted in practical development interventions aimed at protecting the environment. However, women

¹ See Diego Martino. "Gender and urban perceptions of nature and protected areas in Bañados del Este Biosphere Reserve". *Environmental management* 41.5 (2008): 654.

² See Susan Griffin. *Woman and nature: The roaring inside her*. New York: Open Road Media, 2015.

³ M Vollers. 1988. Healing the ravaged land: Third World women and conservation. *International Wildlife* 18(1): 4-9.

have also been blamed for degradation such as deforestation, as their search for fuel-wood for domestic use becomes ever more desperate.

Extensive research on gender, development and natural resources management has supported the development of conceptual frameworks connecting gender with the political ecology of conservation and development. Gender has shown to play a key role in local livelihoods and shaping perceptions related to nature and conservation. The question remains: what is the role of gender in regard to wildlife use and conservation? The connections between gender and wildlife use are diverse as they depend on particular economic, cultural and ethnic contexts. An important strand in all environmental action is how participants come up with a shared idea of nature that provides the basis for their collective action. The role of gender in this important incident in the early roots of environmentalism also raises other questions about gender and environmental change. As gender has shaped popular ecological thought, how has it factored into the evolution of ecology as a science? What role has gender played historically in assessments of environmental risk? Are qualities of fearlessness, bravery, prowess, invulnerability, and the like associated with masculinity and the normative?

According to environmental activist, Vandana Shiva, the marginalisation of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. She opines, “Diversity is the price paid in the patriarchal model of progress which pushes inexorably towards monocultures, uniformity and homogeneity”⁴. Women have been the custodians of biodiversity in most cultures. They have been selectors and preservers of seed. Women have remained invisible as farmers in spite of their contribution to farming as people fail to see their work in agriculture. However, like all other aspects of women's work and knowledge, their role in development and conservation of biodiversity has been rendered as non-work and non-knowledge. Their labour and expertise has been defined into nature, even though it is based on sophisticated cultural and scientific practices.

In the evolution of women's role as wildlife conservator or to be a scientific conservator, recognition did not come easy. Many studies have found that women and men often hold significantly different views about the importance of wildlife or how conservation should be undertaken at the local level.⁵ There is a dearth of empirical research about gender issues and wildlife; lack of training opportunities; ambiguities about the concept of gender itself; and a lack of adequate opportunities to discuss the role of gender in conservation. These factors may help explain the disconnection between perspectives ‘on the ground’ and the forceful policy

⁴ Vandana Shiva. “Women's indigenous knowledge and biodiversity conservation.” *India International Centre quarterly* 19, no. 1/2 (1992): 205-214

⁵ Monica V. Ogra. “Gender and community-oriented wildlife conservation: views from project supervisors in India.” *Environment, development and sustainability* 14.3 (2012): 407-424.

statements related to gender and conservation.⁶ A historical perspective on gender and the environment can make a valuable contribution to our understandings of environmental risk and decision-making in the current perspective. As is gender not just a concern of women-or men, so is the issue of wildlife conservation: it is a human concern.

Technological progress in science has resulted from combined efforts of men and women; however, contributions attributed to women lag far behind from that of men. As human society evolved, the emphasis on hunting gave way to agriculture and animal husbandry during the Iron Age. During this transition, the role of women in discovery and technological innovation diminished. The role of women in science varies according to field, but a common pattern is evident: many female faces exist at the bottom of the pyramid whereas few are found to be engaged in extensive scientific research. The perception of the wildlife and natural resource manager is largely based on male imagery emphasizing qualities of assertiveness, emotional detachment, and abstract scientific logic. This role model is similar to one which Kennedy described in his study of the forestry profession: “the traditional (masculine) forester role model [is] achieved by having our rational intellectual process (our will) dominate our emotions and other weaker aspects of our human nature... Dominance and control (not mutuality, support and relationship) are the traditionally respected thought and management styles”.⁷

Wildlife ecology and management is a relatively young profession with its roots in research, teaching, and practical applications of men like Aldo Leopold and Paul Errington. Wildlife management was first offered as an academic degree in 1939 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Professor Leopold, the founding father of wildlife management, had only 1 female graduate student during his career; Frances Hamerstrom. Though there are no women of Leopold’s stature (and few males) in the wildlife field, women have made significant contributions to the natural sciences through other outlets. Hypatia of Alexandria (ca. AD 390) was the first female teacher of mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and mechanics in Egypt.⁸ She was fortunate in her education due to her father’s determination that she develop into a ‘perfect’ human being — this during an age where women were considered to be less than human. Women travelled around the world to study natural history during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, e.g. Englishwoman Mary

⁶ Stephen R. Kellert and Joyce K. Berry. “Attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors toward wildlife as affected by gender.” *Wildlife Society Bulletin (1973-2006)* 15.3 (1987): 363-371.)

⁷ Carol Gilligan. *In a Different Voice*. “Psychological theory and womens development.” Cambridge, MA (1993).

⁸ Kerry L. Nicholson, Paul R. Krausman, and Jerod A. Merkle. “Hypatia and the Leopold standard: Women in the wildlife profession 1937-2006.” *Wildlife Biology in Practice* 4.2 (2008): 57-72

Kingsley.⁹ Discussion of this period is limited, partially because the exploits of these courageous and adventurous women should receive separate attention. As Bonta points out that natural history studies by American women, even if published, “had been overlooked in standard chronicles of natural history because of women’s position in society during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century. Women were viewed as amateurs, even though professional men in the same fields who had achieved great renown often had the same amount or even less professional training than the women”.¹⁰

The seventeenth and eighteenth century exploits of Maria Sibylla Merian are amazing. Unfortunately, she did not integrate her discoveries into the existing body of scientific knowledge. Had she done so, she would have been considered a “connoisseur rather than an investigator of metamorphoses”.¹¹ Her accomplishments are the more incredible because women even in the nineteenth century had difficulty publishing anything other than popularized observations. Outstanding among women in the nineteenth century who clearly projected her ideas is Ellen Swallow (Richards), whom Robert Clarke identifies as the woman who founded ecology.

The journey of the women of Indian Diaspora as carriers of culture and preservers of identity was no easy one because of the circumstances in which they made the journey and the patriarchal nature of Indian society. The voice of the silent majority, i.e. woman, has been rarely heard in the historical documents which record the statements of the literate and thoughts of the influential. The part played by Indian women in the great 19th century Diasporas which have irretrievably transformed so many former colonies of the British and French Empires, has been especially undervalued. Indian indentured women have tended to be portrayed as dependents and spouses, reluctant to migrate, and of negligible labour value, or as lone females of dubious virtue. Such characterisations were the work of contemporaries – the European officials who authored so many of the documents we use today – but they have been echoed by many later historians. Women scientists form not only a very small proportion of women in India, but also a minor proportion of all Indian working women. Despite their education and class advantages, prevalent patriarchal notions affect the work and career of women scientists as much as that of women from unorganised sectors, or indeed from other professional streams such as doctors or lawyers, since a woman is looked at primarily in the familial context as daughter, wife or mother.

⁹ Mary Henrietta Kingsley (13 October 1862 – 3 June 1900) was an English ethnographer, scientific writer, and explorer whose travels throughout West Africa and resulting work helped shape European perceptions of African cultures.

¹⁰ Marcia Bonta. *Women in the field: America’s pioneering women naturalists*. Texas A&M University Press, 1991.

¹¹ George Evelyn Hutchinson. “The influence of the New World on the study of natural history.” Philadelphia, PA: Acad. Nat. Sci, 1977.

Ecology is a notoriously heterogeneous field, and boundaries are even more difficult to define before the recognition of self-conscious ecology in 1894, when ecology was taken up as a course of study in American universities.¹² Near the turn of the nineteenth century, women broke through barriers to graduate education in science. Carson's detractors, for example, often cast her as a hysterical woman.¹³ Evidently, traditional gender roles provided an important pillar of support for the schizoid vision of nature and society that Carson had challenged. Before the publication of Carson's path-breaking book *Silent Spring* (1962), cultural ideologies of gender were polarized into distinct categories of masculine and feminine. Carson was trained in biology, experienced in analyzing scientific scholarship, and talented in communicating such ideas to the public. Moreover, she always understood nature fundamentally in terms of ecological relationships. Carson was a conservationist and had long supported most federal conservation policies. However, as her biographer Linda Lear observed, Carson progressively "became more troubled by the political implications of multiple use conservation, especially the economic and technological pressures to reduce and transform the natural world".¹⁴ As women raised their voices in the battle over pesticides and heralded *Silent Spring*, did the stature of men—especially male scientists—then diminish? Carson and *Silent Spring* served as the subject of many editorial cartoons published between 1962 and 1964. In one of them, the artist portrayed an unidentified woman and a male scientist facing off in a 'Backyard Battle' - features obscured by a gas mask, the woman is armed only with a fly swatter and a sheaf of papers labeled 'The Dangers of Poison Sprays'. The scientist fends her off with a presumably toxic spray-can exuding a cloud of fumes, while in the other hand he clutches a long, missile-like, and suggestively phallic object-tilted downwards. Monstrous, with masculine, muscular hands and forearms, the woman towers over the diminished, feeble physique of the male scientist. If the female figure is meant to represent Carson, then note that she is not dressed as a scientist at all; the garb is rather that of a housewife.

The cartoonist recognized that in the pesticide debate, masculine and feminine were inextricably intertwined. For the feminine to gain power, the implication is that the masculine must lose it, and then must compensate somehow. Many of Carson's detractors seemed to perceive a similar power struggle between humans and nature which is a constant battle for dominance. However, Carson represented the biggest threat not in her role as a hysterical, angry, powerful woman, the role in which her attackers deliberately tried to cast and confine her. Rather, at her most dangerous attitude, Carson blurred the categories of humans and nature, and thus

¹² See Jean H. Langenheim. "Early history and progress of women ecologists: Emphasis upon research contributions." *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 27.1 (1996): 1-53.

¹³ *Rachel Louise Carson* (May 27, 1907 – April 14, 1964) was an American marine biologist, author, and conservationist whose book *Silent Spring* and other writings are credited with advancing the global environmental movement.

¹⁴ See, Maril Hazlett. "'Woman vs. Man vs. Bugs': Gender and Popular Ecology in Early Reactions to *Silent Spring*." *Environmental History* (2004): 701-729.

demonstrated one strategy in challenging a social system based on similar oppositions. She took a step outside the value system that gave meaning to the connections between femininity, hysteria, witchcraft, dissent, and alternative visions of nature. As her example proved, ecological ideas threatened to change far more than people's ideas about nature. This paradigm shift had the potential to affect social, economic, and political structures as well.

Attacks against Carson in major sporting publications reached an audience of predominantly male readers. At the same time when these articles reinforced man's domination of nature, they backed off from exploring pesticides' ecological implications. Likewise, they aligned themselves with the same ideology that also supported negative gender attacks against Carson. The idea of wilderness is complicated in this regard. As Donald Worster has observed, wilderness serves as an important ethic of environmental restraint.¹⁵ Though wilderness depended on boundaries between humans and nature, as Carson had warned that man's domination of nature was an outmoded ideal, many conservationists still used rhetoric that assumed that man had conquered wilderness.

The initial debate over *Silent Spring* revealed that another paradigm was emerging, inchoate yet powerful. Gender seemed a means, rather than an end, to exploring what this new popular ecological vision would mean for the shared futures of humans and their environment. Throughout history, the science of wildlife biology and the profession of wildlife management have been dominated by men. In the early part of the 20th century there were few women wildlife biologists and they were typically junior collaborators or assistants. Women tend to drop out somewhere along the career path and did not reach higher academic positions. There are many reasons why women do not advance into higher positions. All have been found to influence the retention of women in scientific careers. Initially family encouragement may be lacking; later, women students may lack female role model and mentors. In college, women, may face pressure to select majors other than sciences.

Historically, marriage and family life affect women naturalists in odd ways. Some like Mardy Murie were unpaid, unrecognized naturalists until their spouse died, and they came into their own. Others like Florence Merriam Bailey were forever overshadowed by their male siblings (C. Hart Merriam) and spouse (Vernon Bailey) who had access to the institutional support that the women lacked. So while family ties opened up access to the work, the recognition was often lost. Nakhaie reported that there may be several advantages for academic women to have a family and that women with families tended to publish more than women without.¹⁶ Nakhaie speculated that family life may produce a stable social life and higher self-respect.

¹⁵ See Donald Worster. *Nature's economy: a history of ecological ideas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

¹⁶ M. Reza Nakhaie. "Gender differences in publication among university professors in Canada." *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie* 39.2 (2002): 151-179.

Although women have become increasingly prominent as ecologists, it still seems timely and useful to consider the progress women ecologists have made in overcoming both personal and societal obstacles, particularly with regard to research contributions. Citations exemplifying their research reveal the significance of women's contributions and the extraordinary range of subjects studied. Women ecologists clearly and slowly have made progress since the beginnings of what came to be known as 'self-conscious ecology' near the turn of the century.

One predominant stereotype in sciences is that women simply cannot do science as well as men; that there is something in their physical, psychological, and intellectual nature of women that prohibits them from becoming great scientists. Attitudes about what is acceptable for women to accomplish have changed over the years. Historically, wildlife agencies were primarily concerned with hunting, trapping, fishing and utilitarian management, whose prime participants were men. Studies and surveys find that women tend to be more involved in non-consumptive uses of wildlife, such as bird watching and wildlife viewing.¹⁷ Women also tend to protest activities that may inflict cruelty, harm, or suffering of animals. Women wildlife managers tend to perform jobs with non-traditional foci, such as threatened and endangered species, biodiversity, and public-affairs. However, these topics are now in the mainstream of wildlife management.

Nevertheless, role conflict continues and most likely always will, but women are beginning to stand more steadily apart from traditional roles and are perhaps ready to assume leadership in the arts as well as in other areas. . It is desired that wildlife utilization projects would include a facilitator for women's activities, who would assess the needs of the women, facilitate communication of these needs to decision-making bodies, and inform women of their rights and obligations under the aegis of the programme. Women's work and knowledge is central to biodiversity conservation and utilisation because they work between sectors and perform multiple tasks.

However, according to Czech, men and women are willing to accept a slower rate of economic growth for the sake of wildlife conservation, perhaps to the point of precipitating the 'steady state revolution'.¹⁸ The most direct evidence was support among both genders for policies that would lower the rate of population growth and reduce per-capita consumption - the fundamental components of economic growth. Valuation of economic growth at a level not significantly different from valuation of species conservation as well as less than valuation of environmental health is consistent with an acceptance of slower economic growth to the extent that the

¹⁷ Stephen R. Kellert and Joyce K. Berry. "Attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors toward wildlife as affected by gender." *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (1973-2006) 15.3 (1987): 363-371.

¹⁸ Brian Czech, Patrick K. Devers, and Paul R. Krausman. "The relationship of gender to species conservation attitudes." *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (2001): 187-194.

public seems to grasp the ecological principle of competitive exclusion (i.e., the scale of human economy increases at the expense of the economy of nature).

Though it is not to be forgotten that wildlife-related decision-making processes originally focused on activities that have been dominated by men, the range of interested parties involved in the decision-making is expanding. Differing views from women make their contributions unique and crucial to a field that promotes diversity and adaptive management techniques. The inclusion of diverse opinions increases the potential for more creative decisions and perspectives on management decisions. Including both women and men in conservation projects has been shown to improve conservation outcomes: Agarwal's study of gender composition in membership of 135 community-based forest management groups in India and Nepal found that improvements in forest condition, forest regeneration, and canopy growth were significantly related to a higher proportion of women in the decision-making bodies.¹⁹ However, the existing empirical and theoretical research on the links between gender and community-oriented conservation has been influential in the realm of international policy but has largely not been incorporated into professional training. To strengthen links between conservation rhetoric and practices, increased opportunities for professional capacity building among project supervisors and staff members is critical. Nearly two decades have passed since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) Earth Summit held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and with it the passage of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and its implementation guidelines, Agenda 21. CBD and Agenda 21 articulate the practical and ethical importance of biodiversity conservation in conjunction with equitable and sustainable conservation planning.²⁰ The documents also emphasize that women play a vital role in the sustainable use of biological resources and possess skills and knowledge valuable for conservation planning, and yet they have been historically excluded from participation and decision making about the environment.

Recognizing that gender inequality is structural, many environmental institutions began to apply gender mainstreaming (hereafter, GM), the integration of gender concerns into institutional policy and practice.

Gender inequality in science is common to most nations. To a large extent, this inequality is a product of the socio-cultural environment in which science is conducted. The professional environment and the socio-cultural context are inextricably linked together in the practice of science. According to Mehrotra and Chunawala, "there is evidence of an absence of role models for women in scientific careers in India. Analysis of illustrations drawn in the latest high school textbooks of 'science and technology' show men being portrayed as engineers, doctors, scientists

¹⁹ Bina Agarwal. "Gender and forest conservation: the impact of women's participation in community forest governance." *Ecological economics* 68.11 (2009): 2785-2799.

²⁰ Felix Dodds, ed. *The way forward: beyond Agenda 21*. Vol. 3. Routledge, 2019.

and other professionals, whereas women's roles are only as housekeepers and nurturers, mothers and nurses".²¹ As a result, representation of women in higher education in India is still scarce in the 21st century. An analysis of 9,957 papers published by Indian scientists and indexed by Web of Science in 12 sub-disciplines of life sciences during 2008–2009 indicates that academic institutions produced the highest number of papers. Study shows, of the total scientific articles published by Indian scientists in the discipline of life sciences, about 20 % were authored by female scientists including about 3.4 % exclusively authored by female scientists. The study indicates that women scientists published about 0.36 articles per author and male scientists published 0.50 articles per author. Thus, the study supports the theme that women scientists are less represented than male scientists.²²

Despite the obstacles that society has placed in the way and the conflicts that women have experienced in breaking out of traditional role, women have made a substantial contribution in wildlife, ecology and conservation science. Eminent contributors include Rosalie Barrow Edge (1877 - 1962); a suffragist and advocate for the preservation of birds, Herma Albertson Baggle (1896 - 1981); the first female naturalist who worked for the National Park Service, Margaret "Mardy" Murie (1902 - 2003); worked hand-in-hand with her husband Olaus Murie to accomplish important wilderness victories like the establishment and expansion of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Rachel Louise Carson (1907 -1964); an American marine biologist, author, and conservationist whose book *Silent Spring* and other writings are credited with advancing the global environmental movements, Celia Hunter (1919 - 2001); fought alongside Mardy and Olaus Murie to safeguard the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Anne LaBastille (1935 - 2011); an ecologist who authored scientific papers, popular articles and books like the *Woodswoman* series and *Women of the Wilderness*, Dian Fossey (1932 - 1985); an American primatologist and conservationist known for undertaking an extensive study of mountain gorilla groups, Jane Goodall (1934-); primatologist and wildlife activist continues her work for more than half a century, Birutė Marija Filomena Galdikas (1946 -); a Lithuanian-Canadian anthropologist, primatologist, conservationist, ethologist, and author.

Wildlife ecology and conservation science is relatively a young discipline in India. Nonetheless, contributions from women scholars include Sulochana Gadgil's (1944 -); whose interest ranges from monsoon and ocean dynamics, climate variability and agriculture and evolutionary biology, Priya Davidar (1952 -); specializes in tropical ecology and conservation biology, Renee M Borges (1959 -); works in the areas of chemical ecology, plant-animal interactions, behavioural ecology, and evolutionary

²¹ Swati Mehrotra, and S. Chunawala. "State of the Art: Gender Illustrations in the New Science and Technology Textbooks'." *a meeting 'Women in Science: Is the Glass Ceiling Disappearing' at NISTADS, New Delhi.* 2004.

²² K. C. Garg and Suresh Kumar. "Scientometric profile of Indian scientific output in life sciences with a focus on the contributions of women scientists." *Scientometrics* 98.3 (2014): 1771-1783.

biology. These eminent scientists have come up as role models for generations of young researchers and conservationists. In an expansive essay, Janaki Lenin traces the contributions of Indian women to wildlife conservations and research. She documents the narratives of women facing challenges in the field. Prerna Singh Bindra, conservationists and writes opines, “I have faced situations – and a few scary ones – where men have tried to take advantage of the fact that I was alone in a forest. But then I have faced that even in Mumbai or Delhi. It is intimidating at first, but as you grow older, you learn to deal with it. You fight back. There is no option”.²³ In recent years, many women biologists have entered the field, and have chosen to do field work in remote locations. Few women that head non-governmental organizations that they established are rare, like Zai Whitaker at Madras Crocodile bank and Belinda Wright of the Wildlife Protection Society of India.

Staying committed to the cause of nature and wildlife conservation, there are the women who have taken on the might of a whole ministry. Convinced and fearless, they have called the bluff of threatening seniors and refused to budge from their uncompromising ethical stand in the face of transfers and suspensions. They have helped frame policies and guidelines that today stand in good stead for the cause of wildlife conservation. As Priya Davidar, “Young ecologists are now taking the lead and with their vision and intelligence, are making changes both small and large across the landscape that is India. This is the hope for the future.”²⁴

²³ <https://www.sanctuaryasia.com/magazines/cover-story/9969-women-for-our-wilds.html>

²⁴ https://www.ias.ac.in/public/Resources/Initiatives/Women_in_Science/Contributors/priyadavidar.pdf

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A Missionary Initiative: The Foundation of Loreto College, Kolkata

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Loreto College, Calcutta was established in 1912 by missionaries of the Irish Chapter of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM) or the Loreto Sisters, as they are better known. The Order was founded in 1609 by an Englishwoman, the Venerable Mary Ward (1585-1645), who firmly believed that 'women in time to come shall do much'. From the very outset, therefore, she conceived of the IBVM as an unenclosed Congregation, for the nuns of this Order did not remain confined within the walls of their convent but went out into the world to work for the uplift of women and children especially through the apostolate of education. The Indian mission of the IBVM began when Mother Frances Teresa Ball, the Superior of Loreto Abbey, Rathfarnham, Ireland, responded to an appeal from the Vicar Apostolic of Calcutta in 1841, by sending a group of 12 women, professed nuns and postulants, under the leadership of Mother Mary Delphine Hart to Calcutta. Loreto House, Calcutta, opened in 1842 as the first European Girls' school in the region and the precursor of a number of other Loreto day schools of the city. In course of time Loreto education spread beyond Calcutta to smaller towns like Asansol, Ranchi and Shillong, extending as far afield as Lucknow, Simla and eventually Delhi. Loreto Convent, Darjeeling was established in 1846, 35 years before the coming of the Darjeeling -Himalayan Railway. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Loreto Sisters, who were the first European nuns to have been seen in Northern India, should have taken the lead in establishing one of the oldest women's colleges of the country, Loreto College, Calcutta (1912), before proceeding to advance the cause of women's higher education in two other centres, Loreto College, Lucknow (1955) and Loreto College, Southfield, Darjeeling (1961).

Mother Colmcille's pioneering work, *First the Blade*, a history of the IBVM in India, is useful to anyone interested in the past of Loreto, but its focus does not lie on any one of its institutions. This paper, which seeks to look at the early years of Loreto College, must, therefore, turn to other sources as well, such as the College logbooks,

the Annals of Loreto preserved in its Archives and back numbers of *Palm Leaves*, the annual magazine of all Loreto institutions in India. Out of these fragmentary and admittedly limited resources, an attempt has been made to glean something of a fading history.

The context in which we may understand the primacy of the educational programme adopted by the Loreto Sisters, needs to be established more precisely in terms of race and gender. The IBVM first came to India more in response to the perceived needs of domiciled European and Eurasian girls rather than those of the natives. Calcutta had a large Catholic population tracing its roots to pre-British Portuguese and French settlements in Bengal. There were few Catholic institutions to serve their educational needs in the region, and certainly none for girls. The main clientele of Loreto education was therefore for many decades Catholic. The Sisters set up schools and orphanages that would cater to the poorer classes as well as satisfy the more well-to-do Eurasian families who wanted their daughters to be educated at a standard comparable with that then available to European girls. There was no consciously feminist agenda in the endeavour of the nuns to educate the women entrusted to their care. Even as their educational institutions began to take in more and more Indian students, they did not conceive of them as individuals for whom English education was solely a means of securing gainful employment in the machinery of state. Rather, their training was intended to develop their aesthetic and moral sensibility, enhancing their effectiveness in their expected roles of nurturers, whether as school teachers or home-makers. Even when Loreto graduates began to step beyond the spheres traditionally demarcated for women, the moral emphasis continued to prevail over the purely intellectual in the objectives of the nuns who were in charge of their education.

The development of English education in Bengal has largely been historicized in terms of its role in the formation of the Bengali 'Bhadralok' and his status as a colonial subject. Yet it was only some hundred years after Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Basu, the first two women graduates of Calcutta University, broke the barriers to women's higher education in Bengal in 1883, that the story of the impact of Western education in the construction of the Bengali 'Bhadramahila' began to emerge out of the shadows. The historiography of women's higher education in the region is still in a nascent state. The preoccupation of historians with the Bengali male intelligentsia has also tended to obscure the presence in this milieu of those segments of the population that remained outside the structures of Bengali society. As a colonial port city which became the capital of British India and the second city of the Empire, Calcutta rapidly gained a heterogeneous population that extended well beyond the native Bengali inhabitants of the region. While the bulk of the migrants was composed of casual labourers and low-paid Indians from outside the city, the opulence and glamour of Calcutta, which led the Duke of Connaught to refer to it in 1921 as 'the London of the East', owed much to the foreign merchants who flocked to the city which was the largest centre of foreign trade in the East. They

included Armenian merchants whose wooden chapel was erected on the site of the present Armenian Church as early as in 1707. Jews from Aleppo founded their early settlements in this part of the country from around 1798. Like the Armenians, they were very active in the real estate business of Calcutta. The Parsis moved eastwards from Bombay and Gujarat. Rustomji Manak, a Parsi, was the first Indian broker employed by the East India Company. The Chinese immigrants were situated lower down on the economic ladder, but their special skills became an indissoluble element of the kaleidoscope of the Calcutta scene. Chinese and Anglo-Indian cuisine vied with the fare offered by restaurants such as the Italian Firpo's and the Swiss Trinca's. The large European presence in the city was, naturally, chiefly English, but also included a sprinkling of other nations such as the Portuguese, Italians, and the Belgian Jesuits of St Xavier's.

Although the founding of Loreto College in 1912 coincides with the shift of the capital of India to New Delhi, the spirit of the Raj lingered in Calcutta for another 50 years, as did the rich diversity of a way of life inextricably associated with it. This is faithfully mirrored in the following excerpt from a talk given by Krishna Mazumder, a student of the college, on the occasion of the College Speech Day in 1952: "We have estimated that no less than 29 languages are used by our 180 students, and they include, besides English and the Indian vernaculars of the different provinces, Persian, Chinese, Burmese, Swahili..., Portuguese and even American!"

The college was a miniature India, with a student population drawn from Punjab in the North to Tanjore in the South, and from Sikkim in the East to Sindh in the West. Besides the daughters of Indians settled in Burma and East Africa, it had students from Parsi, Jewish, Armenian, and Chinese communities of the city, not to speak of the Anglo-Indians for whom it was originally set up. It is not surprising that a missionary college like Loreto, which was born out of conditions made possible by the expansion of Britain's imperial power, should replicate within its system the cosmopolitanism of its location. What is worth noting, however, is that despite the end of Empire and the subsequent economic decline of Calcutta which led to the emigration of large numbers of Anglo-Indians and foreign settlers from the city, the student profile of Loreto College has retained some degree of its mixed origins.

The Loreto authorities aimed to provide their students with an all-round education, the foundation of which was laid, so they held, by combining the dissemination of knowledge with character-training. Their dedicated efforts in this direction had made this teaching Sisterhood widely respected especially in the Eastern and Northern parts of the country within the first 50 years of Loreto's mission in India. But as the number of students swelled in the Loreto schools there arose the immediate practical problem of finding suitable teachers to meet their growing needs. In the 70 years from 1842 when Loreto's journey in India began to 1912, when Loreto College was founded in Calcutta, two-thirds of the nuns came from Ireland, some as professed nuns from the mother house, Loreto Abbey, Rathfarnham, others as postulants from

other parts of the country. Since 1889 Australia sent reinforcements to the subcontinent, there being 12 Australian nuns in 1912 with others to follow. Meanwhile, in accordance with the regulations of the new code of education in Bengal, Loreto House and Loreto Convent, Darjeeling, were accorded the status of Higher Secondary schools, an honour which, as *Palm Leaves* 1912 wryly notes, 'entails increased expenditure as well as requiring a highly qualified staff.' Thus it was that Mother Mary Gonzaga Joynt (1838-1928), the first India-born Provincial of Loreto in India, realized that the Indian province would soon have to turn to its own resources to service its schools where it was becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified teachers for the senior classes. Mother Colmcille recounts the details of the Mother Provincial's quest for a solution:

Mother Gonzaga had seen some of their ex-students passing on to the Government Training College in Kurseong but that was not what she wanted. She next tried the experiment of sending a few of the young nuns to take their training in St. Bede's College, Simla, an institution of the Congregation of the Institute of Jesus and Mary. Australia had solved the problem by establishing its own Loreto Training College. Why should not India do the same? It was possible, after passing the Intermediate Arts examination of Calcutta University to follow the course for Licentiate of Teaching, and secure a certificate recognised by the Government. In this way, too, the young teachers would be solidly grounded in their religion and in the high ideals of the teacher's vocation.¹

The founding of a Teachers' Training College in Calcutta was thus the realization of Mother Gonzaga's dream. She followed its growth with keen interest right up to the last years of her life and saw with satisfaction how its alumnae formed the teaching staff not only of Loreto schools but of Anglo-Indian schools through the length and breadth of the country. For her service to the cause of education she was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal in 1914.

Yet Mother Gonzaga's pioneering achievement, viewed in the context of the history of women's education in India, assumes a significance that extends beyond its original impulse. While catering to a specific need in the sphere of teacher-training, the college also created an opportunity for Anglo-Indian girls in this part of the country to enjoy the benefits of higher education. As they were slowly but steadily joined by girls from other Indian communities, Mother Gonzaga witnessed, within her own lifetime, the students of the College venturing both intellectually and professionally beyond the scope of the premise on which the institution was founded. It is possible to see in this very excess the distinctiveness and vibrancy of Loreto College and its relevance to the wider life of the nation.

¹ Mother Mary Colmcille, *First the Blade: History of the I.B.V.M. (Loreto) in India 1841-1962*, Calcutta: Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyay, 1968, p. 162.

The course of study in the college was to extend over three years, with a two-year Intermediate course followed by a further year of theoretical and practical work prescribed by the University of Calcutta for the Licentiate in Teaching. Pending affiliation to the University, students were to be permitted to take their I.A. examination as non-collegiate candidates. In 1913 the newly founded college was affiliated to the University of Calcutta at the I.A. and L.T. levels. I. A. candidates from Loreto College took the following papers in their course: English Literature and Composition; French Literature and Composition; Mathematics; Greek, Roman, and English History; Botany. Students who wished to appear for B.A. and B.T. examinations could now also do so as non-collegiate candidates. In recording the news of university affiliation for the college, the Catholic Herald indicates the way in which old-fashioned and modern elements were jostling for space in formulating contemporary notions about an ideal education for women. While making special mention of the fact that the college staff was 'composed entirely of graduates', the report adds:

*The intellectual development of the students is carefully attended to and everything is done that will make them useful and capable women. They receive lessons in Drawing, Needlework and Practical Dressmaking from fully qualified Art and Work mistresses. In winter they will attend a course of lessons in Practical Domestic Science.*²

Such a programme was evidently framed not only to turn out qualified teachers but also culturally accomplished women, equipped with a training in 'feminine' skills that would serve them well in both their domestic lives as well as their future school careers. The same note may be heard in the words of an early Prospectus of Loreto House: 'The object of this Institution is to give young ladies a first-class education, together with every accomplishment *suited to their sex* while devoting special attention to their moral culture.' (Italics mine)

Yet no effort was spared to cater to the special academic demands of higher education. The Prospectus states confidently that 'The training of the students preparing for the L.T. is in the hands of two Mistresses of Method from Europe who hold the Cambridge Teacher's Diploma. The College staff is composed entirely of Graduates.' An entry in the college log-book for 1913 presents a few details about the staff including Sister Baptist Reville B.A. from the Royal University of Ireland who was also certified for Physics and Elementary Chemistry under the Technical Department for Ireland. She served the college in the capacity of Professor of English and French. Another Graduate from Ireland was Miss Mary McNulty, Professor of English, History and Psychology whose qualifications included the Cambridge

² *Palm Leaves* 1932, p. 2.

Teacher's Diploma. Miss E. d'Eca, an Honours Graduate in Mathematics from the University of Calcutta, was Professor of Mathematics. She carried, in addition, a High School Teachers' Diploma from the Dow Hill Training College in Kurseong. Sister Joseph Antonia Burke F.A. from the Royal University of Ireland was certified for Botany, Geography, Chemistry and Elementary Physics from the Technical Department for Ireland besides carrying a Cambridge Teacher's Diploma. She was Professor of Botany and Psychology. Significantly, two of the four members of staff mentioned at this point are formally identified as Professors of English, though in actual practice in the first 40 years of the college there was little rigidity about the subject-specialization of those (especially the nuns) who taught various courses.

Information about the early teachers of English in the college is scanty. The nuns who did the bulk of the teaching are not identified by name in the available records, possibly because they did their work in a characteristically self-effacing manner and tended to be more eloquent in speaking of their students than of themselves. Those who had studied under them have either passed on or have but a dim recollection of their student days. Lilian Cooke who had graduated with Honours in English in 1927 wrote back in 1960 after many years abroad, remembering with warm gratitude Mother M. Baptiste, Mother Antonia, Mother Joseph, Mother Dolores, Mother Mary Agatha and Mother Joseph Agatha, Mother Colomba and Miss d' Eca. Most of these are today scarcely more than names in the fragmented memory of the college. What little we know of the nuns who taught in the pre-independence era is primarily thanks to Mother Colmcille in her book *First the Blade*. She tells us that Mother Baptist Reville came out to India in 1906. Beginning her teaching career in the Simla and Darjeeling convents, she spent the remaining 35 years of her life at Loreto House, first in the school and then in the college. She served as an able lieutenant to Mother Gonzaga Joynt, working tirelessly to raise the college to full affiliation to the University. From 1927 her duties were confined to the college, of which she remained Principal until her death in 1943. Mother Colmcille mentions that while studying for a degree in Modern Languages, Mother Baptist Reville had travelled extensively in Europe, was widely read in English, French and German literatures, and proficient in Latin and Mathematics as well. 'Having first raised the school departments in Calcutta and Darjeeling to Cambridge Certificate level, she set herself to lay the foundation of an Arts Faculty which would be at least comparable to that of continental universities.... In point of fact, Mother Baptist and her helpers set a standard in the humanities higher than that demanded for merely qualifying for a degree.'³ Her aim was to stimulate her students to think on their own and to attain a precise and distinctive style of expression. She did most of the teaching of French and English herself, her lecture notes showing her constant effort to add to her already considerable knowledge of literature and literary criticism.

³ Colmcille, p. 272.

In his article on 'Loreto Teaching in India, 1843-2010' Tim Allender ⁴ points out that at about the time when Loreto College was first established in Calcutta, teachers who had graduated from European universities (most of whom were Europe-born), received their professional salary at twice the rate that was fixed for Indian graduates. As for female Indian teachers without university qualifications, they could not hope for more than a pittance as pay. This discriminatory policy of the colonial education establishment worked to the advantage of the Loreto institutions which could call upon the services of teachers holding diplomas and degrees from Europe but requiring no more than their living expenses. Where government and Protestant institutions were obliged to pay high salaries to their European staff, Loreto could count on the expertise of women educators for whom teaching was not a profession but a vocation. In 1917, there were three Protestant religious women engaged in active teaching in the entire province of Bengal. In the same period Loreto employed 36 women religious as teachers and they constituted 45% of its entire staff. This pool was replenished periodically by the arrival of teaching nuns from beyond Europe, from newer worlds like Australia and Mauritius, enabling the Order to maintain the high reputation of Loreto education that it had gradually established through its Indian mission.

In January 1913 the Registrar of Calcutta University sent the registration numbers of three students, Blanche Pires, Leonora Joseph and Molly Cohen who were presented for the I.A. examination in March that year as non-collegiate students. The I.A. class consisted of the following students: Sister Evengelista, Sister de Lourdes, Flora Lotteri, Maria Steele, Alice Doran, Lilian Manuk, Stella Cohen and Vera Namey. Of the eight students who subsequently took the I.A. examination as collegiate candidates, four went on to take their L.T. examination in 1915. Loreto students were sent to either Bethune College or Diocesan College to take their University examinations before the implementation of a policy of having Home Centres.

In July 1913, the second academic year of the college, the new I.A. class included Usha Acharjee and Santa Sircar alongside Iris Le Blond, Elizabeth Borges and Winifred Crowe. Santa Sircar was the daughter of the eminent doctor Nilratan Sircar; her sister Kamala would follow her into the college in 1917. Within a year of its foundation, therefore, the college was looking beyond the Anglo-Indian community for its students. There is little to surprise us in this development, for girls like Santa and Usha, nurtured as they were by the Loreto schools, would have felt quite at home in the atmosphere of Loreto College. Lotika Ghose, daughter of the poet Manmohan Ghose and niece to Shri Aurobindo, graduated from the college in 1923 with First class Honours in English. If in the early history of the college names such as those of Kamala Bose, Sunita Gupta, Renuka Ray, Suroma Sen, Manorama Basu, Anila Basu, Nobo Basu and Ashalata Khastagir, constitute a Bengali minority, their very presence

⁴ Tim Allender, 'Loreto teaching in India, 1843-3010: Transcending the Centre-Periphery Paradigm' in Barnita Bagchi et.al (eds.), *Connecting Histories of Education: Transnational and Cross-cultural exchanges in (Post) Colonial Education*, New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014.

suggests that educated and progressive Indian families were now ready to entrust not only the schooling but also the higher education of their daughters to the fledgling institution run by the Loreto nuns. In 1912, nearly 33 years after the establishment of Bethune College in 1879, the number of women's colleges in Bengal in particular and in India as a whole remained woefully small. By opening their college to all communities the Loreto Sisters were not only widening the access of Indian women to University education but were also providing them with an alternative cultural model which appealed especially to the more Westernized families.

In 1921 the college obtained affiliation up to the B.A. standard in English, French and Botany from the University. Although the affiliation did not extend to the Honours level, students of the college were prepared for the Honours course if they opted for it. Accordingly we find Mercia Heynes-Wood passing the B.A. examination with Honours in English, and being awarded the Santorani medal for standing first among female candidates in the B.A. examination of Calcutta University. Again, Edna Weingartner and Margaret McLaren both obtained first class results in the B.A. English Honours examination of 1925, with Edna securing the first and Margaret the fourth places. Edna was awarded the Rustomjee Muneckjee gold medal.

Clearly it was time for the college to take its academic programme to a higher level. Identifying its core strength, the college applied to the University in November 1926 for affiliation up to the Honours standard in English. In addition, it also sought affiliation up to the Pass standard in Economics. This, coupled with the application for a special grant of Rs 3000 to fit up a Physics and Chemistry laboratory and a further recurring grant of Rs 2000 for apparatus, suggests a readiness to move in new directions, to modernize, as well as to build on earlier achievements. The college did not limit itself to the Arts but also prepared its students for the Intermediate examination in Science from 1932, though this programme was eventually discontinued.

On 26 January 1927 the college was inspected by Dr Mookerjee and Mr Stirling and on 19 February it was again inspected in connection with its proposed affiliation up to the B.A. Honours standard in English. The Honours class consisted of seven students: Lilian Cooke, Kathleen Parton, Mary Saldanha, Ena Sweeney, Marjorie Khan, Monorama Bose and Dorothy Clayton. Dorothy Clayton had the fourth place in the subject in the University. The following year Deena Kooka did her college proud with a first class Honours in English. Within five years of obtaining affiliation in English Honours the college achieved a rare and impressive 'double': in 1932 Molly Stephen and Grace Kirkpatrick secured the first and second positions in the University, both being placed in the first class. Following in the illustrious footsteps of predecessors like Mercia Heynes-Wood and Edna Weingartner, Molly was awarded the Maneckjee Rustomjee Gold Medal, the Santomoni Silver Medal and the Preonath Ghosh and Gagantara Dasi Silver Medal; this feat was emulated in 1953 by Sister Maeve Hughes who later served as the Principal of the college. In 1939, the

year marking the beginning of the war which was eventually to hasten the end of Empire, Chitra Majumdar became the first Bengali student to secure a First class Honours in English from the college.

While English reigned in the college it did not reign in splendid isolation. Log book entries for 1930 and 1931 mention the I.A. candidate Nergis Adrescher offering Hindi while Romola Chakraborty and Bijoy Mitter took "Bengalee" along with English as their subjects. In 1934 the university was applied to for permission for a few students to appear for subjects in which the college was not affiliated. Those who were granted permission included Sumitra Devi Parischa who took Hindi for the B.A., Razia Ahmed and Zakiah Ahmed who took Persian Honours with Urdu Pass. In the B.A. examination of 1935 both Raziah and Zakiah were placed in the first class. By 1935 as many as 18 I.A. students took Bengali as a subject, though all of them simultaneously read English. As early as in 1922 the Principal held a meeting of the Staff and decided to apply for affiliation in Latin up to the I.A. and B. A. standards. Available records do not tell us when or whether this affiliation was granted, but in 1935 we note two Intermediate students taking Latin while among their seniors in the B.A. Honours class in English there is one student for Latin. Latin may naturally be the classical language of choice for study in a missionary institution, but what is unusual is the recorded result of Padma Misra who in the B.A. examination of 1938 was placed in the second class in Sanskrit. The cosmopolitan composition of the college is here clearly reflected in the diversity of language options taken up by its students in the first three decades after its foundation.

The language that stood only second in importance to English in the college curriculum was French. When the college was first established in Calcutta, Mother M. Baptist Reville was designated Professor of French as well as English, which indicates that French was part of the college curriculum from the very beginning. In 1921 the college was affiliated up to the B.A. standard not only in English but also in French and Botany. But long before this, the students of the college were already taking French as a subject in the I. A. examination as many of them had moved up from the Loreto schools where they had been given a strong foundation in the language. After the college received University affiliation in Honours, French was chosen by many English Honours students as a subsidiary subject. Of the nine English Honours students who appear in the Rolls of the college in 1932, as many as seven had opted for French. Of the four Pass course students of the same year, three took Bengali and one French. The high standard set by the college in French is evident from the performance of the students in examinations. Not only did Loreto girls obtain distinction in the I.A. exam but we also find Dorothy Elias and Joyce Rouse securing First Class Honours results in French in 1937.

The study of French at the B.A. level continued in the college till the mid-sixties. Professor Krishna Sen who read English Honours in the college from 1962 to 1965 chose French as her subsidiary subject which had three Papers. The syllabus was

fairly heavy and Professor Sen recalls reading, among other things, Ronsard's poems and Flaubert's short stories. As there were only four students taking French, classes would be held thrice a week at 8.15 before the commencement of regular college classes. Despite the small number in her class, Mother Loyola, who taught French, was very exacting and would speak nothing but French in the class though she herself was Irish. The tradition of French studies in Loreto gradually faded as it became difficult to find replacements for the older, retired Sisters who were proficient in French.

In the 176 years of the Indian mission of Loreto, many Houses have been opened across the hills and plains particularly of Northern and Eastern India; where circumstances have altered, the Sisters have withdrawn and moved in changed directions. Having in the past played a key role in educating girls from the upper strata of Indian society, today the Order views the education of the marginalized segments of society as its priority. New Loreto centres have been opened in rural areas, among the remote hamlets of the hills of Sikkim and the workers' colonies of the tea-gardens of Darjeeling. With the emergence of new commitments, the Sisters have let go of some of their earlier responsibilities. The college section of Loreto Convent, Lucknow closed down in 1970, and Loreto Southfield was handed back to the Government in 2008. Loreto College, Calcutta, remains the only institution of higher learning managed by the IBVM in the world today.

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A Representative Study

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Scripting the Feminine: Bethune College and Women's Education

Samata Biswas & Nirajana Chakraborty

On 30th May 2019, a news portal (*edexlive*) featured Kolkata's Bethune College on their website, with a screenshot of the online Undergraduate Admission for of the College.¹ The news was quickly taken up by different websites and newspapers, and the College was lauded for this exemplary innovation—including Humanism in the religions section of the online application to Undergraduate Courses. In no time, other colleges in West Bengal followed suit. Every year, during admissions to different courses, when students are faced with the task of declaring their religion, many disclose a discomfort in doing so. Asia's first women's college, Bethune College, chose to respect the discomfort of these students. This news broke at a time when the authors of this article were finishing up writing, and they couldn't think of a better introduction—since even the inception of Bethune College was concerned with democratization of education in terms of gender and religion.

This article deals with the notion of women's education in myriad ways: the immense ideological churning that gave rise to women's educational institutions in 19th century colonial India, largely centered itself upon the question of women. Tanika Sarkar in *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation* shows how both the reformists and the revivalists, the missionaries and the colonial government, all sought in different ways to educate women, to make women conform to their ideal notions of femininity. In that education, physical demeanor and housekeeping was as important as rudimentary reading and writing skills - and each was expected to contribute to the regeneration of the family and of the community.² In this article we look at the development of Bethune College and the generations of extraordinary women who

¹ <https://www.edexlive.com/news/2019/may/30/secularism-much-this-kolkata-college-will-now-let-you-choose-humanism-among-other-religions-in-your-6356.html> Last accessed on 5 June, 2019.

² Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.

taught and studied here—but also take a close look at life as a boarder, Bethune students' contribution in political and social movements, in the spheres of literature and culture, their participation in sports and academics. Education then, in this instance transcends the narrow confines of curricula; and enquires into what enabled Bethune students to prove their mettle in different spheres of life, and how the present day institution was shaped by the active contribution of its students and teachers.

History of Bethune College's establishment

The history of Bethune College is closely connected to that of the Bethune Collegiate School, as well as the debates regarding women's education, education of the native populace and the history of the British rule in India. John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, a Legislative member of the Supreme Council of India and the President of the Council of Education came to India in 1848 and started the Calcutta Female School for Girls in May 1849, on land provided by Raja Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee. The School shifted to its present address and building in 1851, a month after Bethune's demise, but the work for keeping the school going was taken up by Lord Dalhousie, the Governor General of India, till the school was taken over by the government in 1856. The School committee included many educational and social reformers of the period, most notably Pundit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar who was the secretary till 1868. For a long time however, the school (renamed after the demise of its founder) drew very few students, since it had been designated as a school for upper caste Hindu girls, and families of such girls were reluctant to let their daughters continue to go to school after the first couple of years. Although the Government Normal School was added to Bethune School in 1872 and a Lower Bethune School (a cheaper school) was opened for the education of 'respectable' Hindu girls incapable of paying the steep fees at Bethune School—the standard of students was not found to be remarkable. On the other hand, the Ballygunge Banga Mahila Bidyalaya was considered to be the most advanced school in Bengal and its managers had applied for a large grant to carry on the good work.³ In 1878 the two were amalgamated, and Kadambini Basu, a student of the BMM wrote and cleared the Calcutta University entrance examination, missing First Division by a single mark.

The appearance of women students in the entrance examination of Calcutta University and their subsequent education at the university were considered moot points for a long time because no such student had applied for the same till 1875. In 1876, Dehra Boarding School for Native Christian Girls wanted to send up a girl student to the qualifying examination and it was decided at the University Senate that she was to be examined (so as to not discourage her) but not entered into the

³ Jogesh C Bagal, "History of the Bethune School and College", in Kalidas Nag and Lotika Ghose (eds.), *Bethune College and School Centenary Volume 1849-1949*, Kolkata: Bethune College, Reprint 2004, pp. 107-132.

results even if she passed. This was Chandramukhi Bose (one of the first two female graduates of Calcutta University as well as the first native lady Principal of Bethune College). In 1877, it was reported to Calcutta University Syndicate that Chandramukhi had acquired the desired standard and subsequently girls were now able to sit for the university qualifying exams and receive a degree. On 27 January 1877, the Syndicate ordered that 'the time has arrived when steps should be taken for the admission of women to the University Examination in Arts'. Arthur Hobhouse, the then Vice Chancellor, in his convocation address on 10th March 1877 categorically stated:

The impressions made on all of us in the early years of our life—the most tender, the most cherished, often the most powerful and enduring—are those which we receive, each of us, boy or girl, at our mother's knee. How can we hesitate to train and inform, in the best way we can devise, the hearts and minds of those who have such momentous social duties to perform? ...

I am well aware that the conditions of Indian society, especially the seclusion of women, and what I may be permitted to call the lamentable practice of marriage in the nursery, throw great obstacles in the way of education women. Many years, or rather many generations, must elapse before such education can become prevalent...I say, let us encourage them; it is all we can do ...⁴

The justification for providing 'higher' education to women then was three pronged: one, the changing times (as the University Syndicate pointed out), two, since educated women would teach their children the better, and three—the elevation of their (Indian women's) condition in life. It is curious to note the continuation of similar, if not absolutely same logics two and a half centuries down the line.

Kadambini was conferred a special fellowship for two years by the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, subject to her education in the First Arts, but there were no women's colleges at that time, and the only option left to the government was to either open a women's college or to introduce collegiate classes in Bethune School. The government opted of the latter, and Kadambini became the first and only student of college classes in Bethune School. Babu Sasi Bhusan Dutta, M.A., was the first teacher recruited in this institution, transferred from Cuttack College to Calcutta so that classes could be held to enable Kadambini to appear in the First Arts examination. At the same time, Chandramukhi Bose was admitted to the Free Church Normal School where she pursued her First of Arts classes. Chandramukhi passed the F.A. examination in the second division and Kadambini in the third, in

⁴ Arabinda Guha, "Early History of Bethune College", in Mira Bhattacharjee and Shanta Sen (eds.), *Bethune College Centenary Volume 1879- 1979*, Kolkata: Bethune College, 1979. pp 3.

1881, and both began studying for a university degree in Bethune School's college classes.

The admission of Ellen D'Abreu to the collegiate classes brings us back to the question of religion, one that had been evoked at the beginning of this article. D'Abreu was of Eurasian origin, and had passed the university entrance examination in 1879. When she sought Higher Education, there was some confusion regarding the scope of non-Hindu women studying in Bethune College. JED Bethune had, in 1851, transferred the deeds of his school for 'Hindoo women' to the East India Company, but in the codicil attached to the deed had called the school a 'female school' in perpetuity. During Bethune's lifetime girls appearing for University Entrance Examinations, let alone working towards a college degree had not even been imagined. Hence, the codicil was interpreted in principle to allow Ellen D'Abreu to join the collegiate classes. From then on, the college classes were open to all who had qualified in the University Entrance Examination, provided they were 'Hindoos by nationality'.⁵ Ellen passed her F.A examination in 1881.⁶

A long list of similarly successful candidates followed, Kadambini and Chandramukhi became the first female graduates in India as well as in the British empire, in 1883. Their graduation was marked and commented upon at the university convocation; and soon others followed suit. Chandramukhi would later become the first 'lady' Principal of Bethune College, and several other graduates of the college joined her in teaching capacity, Kamini Roy being one of the most notable ones. From its inception with one, and then two students, who studied F.A and B.A (for the first years without Mathematics—since it was considered to be too difficult for women), Bethune College now hosts about a thousand students in its thirteen undergraduate and five post graduate courses. But it needs to be borne in mind, Bethune College in particular and higher education in general has always been fortune of the privilege few. For example, in 1881-82, there were 41,349 students attaining formal education in Bengal, and while this was a forty times increase from 1850s, they still represented 0.80 percent of the total female population. Of these, only six students were enrolled in the collegiate section of Bethune School. By 1927 it went up to 334.⁷ Needless to say, many of these women were enrolled in Bethune College, and for the many years that followed, students of Bethune College came from extremely privileged backgrounds, both financially and culturally. A glimpse of their lives as boarders in the college hostel can be found from memoirs.

⁵ *Ibid* 19

⁶ Bagal, "History of the Bethune School and College", p. 41.

⁷ Barbara Southard, "Bengal Women's Education League: Pressure Group and Professional Association", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 18, No. 1, 1984, pp. 55-88.

Akhtar Imam's memoir *Eden theke Bethune (From Eden to Bethune)*⁸ ends with her recollection of Bethune hostel life (1935-1937) and it would be useful to quote here, for our purposes, a longish extract translated by us. This recollection also becomes relevant when viewed in context of a concern raised in lieu of women's standard of living in the hostel by native Hindu men and then Bethune's Principal's deft and nuanced handling of the matter. First, the quote:

The arrangement at Bethune for food was very nice. One had to pay twenty rupees for food charges in those days. We would eat five times a day; Breakfast in the morning, rice at nine, then Tiffin in the afternoon--rice, dinner at five in the evening and supper at eight thirty. A cup of milk was mandatory at supper. Apart from this there would be a feast every month. Pulao, chop, chicken or mutton curry, and some fried stuff. In short the food was sumptuous. On rainy days or on holidays we would get tasty khichdi as the morning meal. There would be several fried accompaniments. Hilsa fry was the most delectable. We would be given a bowl full of warmed ghee to pour as much as we wanted into this khichdi, making it more rich and enjoying every meal ...

*There was no religious division on the dining table. All of us, believers in Hinduism, Brahmo-ism, Islam, Christianity, would eat together in great happiness. But when the plate next to mine had fried crabs, I did not like it at all. Although the crab fry would resemble shrimps in every respect, the very name crab was enough to make me nauseous. But on those days us Muslin girls were always given other curries to eat, not crabs.*⁹

Two or three things are worth pointing out from this excerpt. First, the sheer variety of nourishing food that was available to the boarders of Bethune College. If we remember that Indian women have been historically denied their fair share of nutrition, then a government college, arranging for such nutritious fare for its boarders was indeed commendable. However, the steep fee of twenty rupees per month (in the 1930s) must have been out of the reach of most women, but then again most women were not allowed to enter institutions of higher education--nevertheless the possible discrepancies between the living conditions while at Bethune and afterwards, had generated some heated discussion.

About 50 years before Akhtar Imam came from Dhaka to Calcutta to study at Bethune, one Sasibhusan Dasgupta wrote a letter in *The Indian Mirror*. He asked, why should 'the training of a girl be more expensive than that of a boy? The question presumably stemmed from the long list of objects guardians were expected to supply

⁸ Akhtar Imam, *Eden Theke Bethune*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1990.

⁹ Ibid p. 70-71

when a student joined college as a boarder. They ranged from clothes to shoes (the types were specified) and other things. In his letter, he writes,

Great harm is done to the boarders by making them live in the college in a style more expensive than an average gentleman's home. It would make them either ineligible for marriage, or else unfit to make a happy home on a small income ... the members of the committee would do well to place themselves in the position of the guardians, rather than legislate like Epicurean gods sleeping beside their nectar.¹⁰

The letter also held the then 'lady' Principal Chandramukhi Bose responsible for such extravagance, since by virtue of being a Christian, she would not have been able to adhere to the culture of the Hindu Zenana. Chandramukhi's rejoinder, with respect to the boarders' clothing was clear and to the point—she claimed that

A boarding institution like the Bethune College, cannot be possibly be managed in the same style that a Hindu zenana is managed ... the maintenance of discipline and several other considerations require that the boarders should dress not in a costly, but in a decent, respectable and lady-like manner, considering they have daily to appear before male professors, teachers and others.¹¹

The authors of this article have not been able to trace any reference to or controversy regarding the food that the boarders were provided. But it can be assumed to not be inferior, but in fact superior to that available at boys' hostels in the first half of the twentieth century.

What Dasgupta's letter and Chandramukhi Bose's rejoinder also highlight is the changing imagination of women's role in Bengal. Shailaja Chakrabarty, who joined Bethune College in 1908 writes about the college's encouragement towards its students' engagement with public spaces and discourses of its times, in her memoir chronicled in the centenary volume.

Bethune College had a special prestige in those days. Anyone important, either from the country or abroad, coming to the city, would definitely visit Bethune College. The Principal was invited everywhere. If there was a good lecture somewhere, she (the then Principal, Kumudini Das) would either take us with her, or send us with Hemaprabhadi or Surabaladi. We had the opportunity of hearing Gokhale's famous speech on "Free Primary Education" at the Town Hall. As far as Rabindranath was concerned – we would in groups go wherever he spoke or hosted a

¹⁰ *In the Footsteps of Chandramukhi*, p. 92 – 93.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 94.

*prayer. During the Swadeshi movement, on no cooking days we did not eat. We would inform the matron from before that we will not. In spite of being a government college there was no altercation or clash of opinions with the Principal or the professors in this regard.*¹²

However this state of idyllic cohabitation with the colonial government and its representatives did not continue forever. With the intensification of the freedoms struggle more and more students from Bethune College wanted to play an active role in India's march towards self-determination. One such incident demonstrating the widening rift between the authorities and the students' body is the nation wide strike called in 1928 in the wake of the Simon Commission report. We are lucky to have two sides of the same event very well documented, one, through the memoir of Bina Das (Bhowmick), a student and the other, the letters written by the then Principal, G.M. Wright. Bina Das records the agitation among the students for not being able to participate in the nationwide students' strike, something unthinkable to them by virtue of being a government college. Still, a few of them went around the classrooms, writing on the board with chalk: 'There's a nationwide strike tomorrow. We the students of Bethune School and College have decided to participate in this strike. We request each and every one of our sisters to not come to school tomorrow.'¹³

Alongside this, they ran a whisper campaign, and not a single student showed up at the school or the college the next day. However, those boarders who stayed in their rooms and refused to attend classes were threatened with severe disciplinary action. The Principal, Mrs. G.M. Wright had been directed by the education department to keep the college functional at any cost, and her letter to the D.P.I. Mr. Oaten, is a testimony to the foolhardiness of such a decision. Wright also had to inform the boarders that '...their continuing defiance would necessitate a report to the Government with the possible result of the withdrawal of their scholarships and their expulsion from the college.'¹⁴ Bethune had three hostels then, and the students were informed that those failing to obey the directives of the Government would be removed from the school, the college and the hostel, and proceeded to suspend 21 such students.¹⁵ Following this the day scholars came as a body to the Principal and asked to share their punishment, reiterating that 'We observed Hartal as we believe it due to our self respect as Indians. What we are doing now is due to our desire to share the punishment which has fallen on the two hostels in consequence of acting in union with us' (216). This was followed by all students of the first year, some of who would go on to become important figures in the Independence movement: like Ila Sen (who read out the students' statement at the Town Hall) or Bina Das herself. But writing about the other signatories, Uttara Chakraborty comments: 'But the other

¹² Bhattacharya, *Bethune College Centenary volume*, p. 99 - 100.

¹³ Ibid. p. 111

¹⁴ *In the Footsteps of Chandramukhi*, p. 213

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 214

girls like Lila Mukherjee or Hiran Basu or Chameli Datta or even that lone Anglo-Indian girl, Catherine Richards, who had so bravely put their signature on the letter-girls who had barely crossed their teens... also deserve to be mentioned'.¹⁶ The event was resolved through the involvement of civil society (including that of Subhash Chandra Bose) and great public hue and cry, following which G.M. Wright (who was probably working under oral directives from the then D.P.I., Mr. Oaten) sought early retirement. Malati Guha Roy's account, recounted when she was 92 years old, provides the readers with an amusing picture of G.M.Wright's successor Rajkumari Das (also incidentally the younger sister of Chandramukhi Bose) trying to quell the nationalistic fervor among her students. Once when entering the college, Guha Roy was accosted by a bunch of male students, lying on the pavement in front of the gate, barring entry as part of a student's strike. Scared of her father, a stern government employee, Malati gained admission after promising to while away her time under the trees, and not go to classes. But Rajkumari Das had been making rounds of the campus, to ensure that students do not participate in anti-government activities, and Malati had to hide in order to escape Rajkumari Das's argus eyes. Rajkumari Das had famously commented about Kalpana Dutta (member of the independence movement and subsequent communist movements), 'This girl must be removed from my college – otherwise she shall take all the girls away'. However, and we also read this in Malati Guha Roy's account – despite Rajkumari Das's attentive efforts to curb all anti-government activities, Ila Sen and her friends continued to organize students to serve the motherland. Rajkumari Das gained some notoriety by identifying Ila Sen from among a group of students, for the police to arrest. Pritilata Waddedar¹⁷(later historians, for example the volume *They Dared: Essays in honour of Pritilata Wadder*, have designated her surname as Wadder- though in living memory and numerous textbooks she continues to be Waddedar)¹⁸ took up where Ila Sen left off-supplying 'banned' publications and encouraging them to participate in the freedom struggle.¹⁹

Much before Ila Sen or Pritilata, Bethune students had participated in various forms of politics, starting from Kadambini herself, who had participated in Congress meetings. The famous Saraladebi Chaudhurani (nee Saralabala Ghoshal) was involved in the physical and mental rejuvenation of Bengali men, prescribing a rigorous curriculum for the same. She was also a key organizer of Hindu mela, as well as a student of Bethune College, scoring highest among all women students in BA. Jyotirmoyee Ganguly (Kadambini's daughter) organized women's volunteer corps for the Congress meeting in 1917, Lotika Ghosh et al did the same for Congress' Calcutta convention in 1928. Lotika Ghosh also formed the Mahila Satyagraha Samiti in 1938 during Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha, and would later on become one of

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 219

¹⁷ Bhattacharya, *Bethune College Centenary Volume*, p. 410 - 411.

¹⁸ Simonti Sen (ed.), *They Dared: Essays in Honour of Pritilata Wadder*, Kolkata: Gangchil, 2011.

¹⁹ Ibid

the members of the Constituent Assembly. Leela Nag was instrumental in organizing women to ask for their social and electoral rights. At Dhaka she established Dipali Sangha that taught women means of self-defence and various kinds of martial arts, including *lathi-khela*, also setting up a fund for women's self defence. Leela Nag was associated with many organizations that believed in armed revolution, but she also kept up her social work and editorial responsibilities. Pritilata Wadder was a member of this group before she joined Bethune College.²⁰ Leela Nag's contribution to the cause of women in the Eastern part of Bengal has been remembered fondly by many political activists and freedom fighters, she also worked tirelessly for rehabilitation during the Noakhali riots.

In 1928 students of Bethune College, Kamala Dasgupta, Kalyani Das, Surama Mitra et al formed the first ever women students' organization in India: the Chhatrisangha. Kamala Dasgupta was a renowned freedom fighter, member of the Yugantar party, imprisoned in the Dalhousie bomb case and author of important volumes such as *Rokter Akshare*, *Swadhinota Songrame Banglar Nari* etc. Maitreyee Basu (Indian National Trade Union Congress and member of the Parliament), Sulata Mitra (member of Yugantar, imprisoned for picketing), Meera Duttgupta (General Secretary of Chhatrisangha, member of the Legislative Assembly and functionary of the Forward Block) were also notable in their participation in the freedom struggle and political and civil rights movements thereafter. Apart from them, Kalpana Dutta (Joshi), Ila Sen, Bina Das, Pritilata Wadder's lives and activities are well documented in research and popular resources, and will not be mentioned here.²¹ However—it might be worth our while to think about the spread of nationalistic sentiments in the students of Bethune College and the unusual number of women who rose to the ranks of leadership in the independence movement. Women who studied in Bethune College almost inevitably belonged to dominant groups in society, several of them had close ties with nationalist leaders, but that someone like Pritilata who almost singlehandedly built connections with underground revolutionary organizations without any family support, was truly remarkable. The close proximity of the Anushilan Samiti office and gymnasium (right across the road) must have also helped. But what we have chronicled here is merely a sketch of prominent students of Bethune College—who participated in Congress led movements as well as in armed resistance, Communist parties and other social organizations. We do not yet have a clear picture of the hordes of students and ex students who must have acted as volunteers in the Congress conferences, rejected foreign goods, taken up the Charka or facilitated the underground revolutionaries by safeguarding proscribed literature and transmitting messages. Police records and newspapers would not have had their names, but in the hartal of 1928 or the strike of 1930, many students participated, whose records can perhaps never be recovered. The existence of hostels would also

²⁰ Simonti Sen. "Pritilata: A Girl with an Unusual Dream", *They Dared*, p.17

²¹ Purabi Biswas, "Bethune College-er Chhatri: Rashtriyo Andolone", *Bethune College Centenary Volume*, pp. 63-75

have enabled students to mobilize and build solidarities, and gradual disappearance of which may be conjectured to have contributed to Bethune students' participation in social and political movements after independence. In fact, in the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the number of politically active Bethune College students dwindled significantly. Perhaps, with histories of those years being written now, we shall have a clearer picture of their participation in food movements, teachers' movement, movement against tram fare hike, or even the Naxalite movement.

One thing however remains clear, the connection between the excellent sporting and physical education facilities available at Bethune College till about 1960s and students' participation in social movements. Both Pritilata and Kalpana had been students of Dr. Khastagir's English High School for Girls where they were badminton players and continued with their sporting activities even in Bethune, often spending their tiffin time playing badminton. Narmada Biswas was the first woman from Orissa to join Bethune College (1910- 1914) and from her we find out about the different kinds of sports that women were encouraged to participate in. There were provisions for badminton and croquet; students could ride on the cycle before classes. In 1921-22 a tennis court was laid on the South side of the college. It was difficult for day scholars (78% of the total students most of the time) to participate in sporting activities in any sustained manner, but the boarders often made the most of the facilities available. In fact, during Pritilata and Kalpana's time, tennis and badminton were compulsory for boarders. In 1928 the college employed Miss Doris Webber as a physical trainer, who thought sarees to be the most unscientific attire to play any sports in. However, students like Ashoka Gupta either pinned their sarees up or wore them in 'malkoncha' style, but continued to play undaunted. Suparna Ghosh Bhattacharya, who has done an extensive and in depth study of the physical education curriculum in Bethune College, thinks that the saree was a necessary marker of the essentialised Indian femininity of the students, and to stop them from becoming 'Memsahab' like. Bethune College also instituted Bratachari activities (following the initiative of Sir Gurusaday Dutta). Both on behalf of the college and by the students, sports and physical education was regarded as 'physical, intellectual and moral welfare of the students', for which purpose the senior students of the College set up in 1930 a Bethune College Union.²²

This corporate initiative of the students was further strengthened in 1934 through four sub-committees/departments which were to be constituted through annual elections. These sub-committees were: (a) Social and Excursions, (b) Debate, (c) Magazine and (d) Sports.

²²Suparna Ghosh Bhattacharya, "Physical Education in the Curriculum: The Case Study of Bethune College", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26:12, 1852-1873.

The newly built spacious student's common room was not only provided with current magazines (such as Sport and Pastime), newspapers, radio, etc. but also had facilities for certain indoor games such as chess, table tennis, carom, bagatelle and cards. Formal indoor games were introduced in the common room hall in 1940. The playground attached to the school and college, despite financial difficulties provided a drill shed (constructed in 1928) as well as facilities for a number of outdoor games such as basketball, badminton, tenniquoit, lawn tennis, volleyball and athletic games (track and field games).²³

In the 1950s the National Cadet Corps were introduced to the College and a lot of women joined. Apart from physical activities, participation in the NCC also helped the students inculcate self confidence and self reliance, to overcome their shyness and to become self-disciplined. However, the impetus for Bengali women to participate in physical activities had always been less, given that the ideal championed by both the Hindu and Brahmo reformers and the revivalists had been that of motherhood—the physical education for women was also expected to create stronger mothers and therefore stronger children. Although the NCC members went from strength to strength, learning signaling, paragliding etc., the college and parents ceased to be encouraging in such activities within the next twenty years.²⁴ As in the case of educational policies in Bengal, physical education was gradually sidelined by the late 70s, both government and College spending minimal amount on physical education and sports. At present Bethune College hosts sports for one or two days annually, and although several kinds of funds are generated to buy sports equipments and physical training equipments (treadmill, TT table, badminton racquet, exercycle etc.), the equipments languish in dusty rooms that are seldom opened. Unlike many other colleges in Calcutta, Bethune continues to have a large sports ground, however the ground is cleared only on the occasion of the annual sports. This marked decline in sports activities in the College has to also be read in conjunction with the disappearance of compulsory physical education in schools and colleges—what Bethune College witnesses then is a gradual disappearance of state-sponsored physical activity for women, existing in conjunction with popular exhortation to be more active and therefore more fit.

Women's participation in the social movements did not only concern their physical abilities of endurance but saw a growing interest in them to be a part of the intellectual and literary polemics of the time. Founder of the first women's organization in India Bharat Stree Mahamandal, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani²⁵ worked extensively for women's education in both urban and rural areas. Her belief was that learning must involve a cultural aspect and thus she developed methods of educating

²³ *Ibid*, 1855-1856.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 1857-1858.

²⁵ Mentioned above.

“centering round a particular craft”, that aided also in opening up a commercial platform for women craftsmen. She also wrote in magazines like *Bharati*, and later edited it for several years. Her autobiography *Jibaner Jhora Pata (The Scattered Leaves of My Life)* is an interesting account of her life as an activist and educationist. Kamini Roy, who graduated with a degree in Sanskrit honours from Bethune College, is a notable personality in the literary context. A reformist and a prolific poet, she was influenced by the ideals of Renaissance in the west and the Puranic myths, a synthesis of which we find her oeuvre, tempered by both feminist and nationalist concerns of contemporary times. Other students of Bethune College who went on to become eminent poets include Hironmoyee Devi, also an author, Priyamvada Devi and Binaykumari Basu. Many women as social workers attempted to impact a change by writing books for children. Sukhalata Rao was one such writer, who writings centered on both oral folktales and myths of Bengal and her own re-imaginings of the western fairytales she had read. Shanta and Sita Devi wrote a new emancipated woman into their serialized novels, and represented a wider culture they were exposed to in life without taking a much debated then, as now, feminist stand. Sukhalata Rao’s sister Punyalata Rai Chaudhuri was also an important literary figure of her times.²⁶ Nalini Dash, who was both a student and the Principal of the college, was the creator of the memorable Bengali girl detective gang—Goenda Gondalu.

In the world of dance, Bethune College’s student, Manjushree Chaki Sarkar was a remarkable figure whose merit in developing her theory of dance-styles as well as practicing them in choreography is noteworthy. Former teacher of the college, Karabi Bhattacharya recounts two interesting events in the history of Bengal’s famous cultural phenomenon, the dance-dramas and dramas of Rabindranath that are closely linked with Bethune College’s history. In 1888 Rabindranath Tagore’s *Mayar Khela* was staged for the first time in the very premises of Bethune campus and in 1948, on the centenary celebration of the institution, the six selected songs of *Bhanusingher Padabali* were for the first time conceptualized and performed as a stand-alone dance-drama. In the vocation of singing, women like Kanak Das, Amiya Thakur and Malati Ghoshal are held in high esteem for their contributions to popularizing and enriching Rabindrasangeet. In the world of film and theatre Maya Rai, Shobha Sen, Konkaboti Devi and Chondraboti Devi find special mention. Chondraboti acted in several films, both Bengali and Hindi, like *Pratishati* and *Devdas*.²⁷

It has not been very difficult to pen this account of the genesis and growth of Bethune College over more than a hundred years. In our task we have been aided by several fantastic volumes, all of which have been referred above. Another memorable task without which none of these volumes would have been possible was the collection and preservation of the Bethune College archives through a state grant in 2004. In

²⁶ *Bethune College Centenary Volume*, pp. 1-78 (Bengali)

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 79-85 (Bengali)

fact, the meticulous documentation of these archives led to the publication of the two editions of *In the Footsteps of Chandramukhi*. The Bethune College archive also contains famine papers, and important documents on physical education. However, post 2004, the careful documentation and segregation of the archival material have stopped due to a paucity of funds, and new work regarding the history and legacy of Bethune College has not been forthcoming. In the meantime, Bethune College has celebrated the birth centenary of former principal and children's author Nalini Dash, mourned the demise of one of its most celebrated English teachers, Shanta Mahalanobis, and gone from strength to strength in the sphere of formal education. However, the history of the years post 1975 is yet to be written, and is a task for later academics and enthusiasts to carry it. It would require a careful examination of police and state archives (both of which are not yet open), a meticulous documentation of official correspondence, inter-college memos, and the college magazine. However, given the present status that Bethune College continues to enjoy in Bengali imagination, and the great academic record that it continues to uphold, it can easily be surmised that the admirable work started by nineteenth century educationists is being carried out ably by their twentieth and twenty first century counterparts.

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12

Tagore and the Spirit of Enlightenment: Feminization of the Male Bastion of Education

Sukla Basu (Sen)

Tagore the educationist is often as waywardly innovative as he is a poet or a novelist, perhaps even more so and if we are not to judge him too harshly we must always keep in mind that his god is one whom he worships as a female adorer. Like Shakespeare he has an androgynous mind. Feminization of the educative spirit is not an unusual intellectual practice for him but one that comes as easy to him as song making. But all along we must have to remember that often his theories are at a variance, with his praxes. With Tagore, we must have to remember that the fluidity of his ideas make him the great artist he is, in words and in pictures. His actions often betray the instability of authority that often marks a man's ever-widening sphere of creative activity. In fact, Tagore was often beset by problems of his own ambitious though enlightened plans and suffered along with his co-operators. This paper shall bring to light an aborted plan of women's education while talking about his unique status as an educator who turned ancient classical practices of *tapovan* learning into radically modern methods of pedagogy.

Few know that as Tagore was a pioneer of wall/ classroom less education in modern India, he was also the first school director to introduce co-educational courses in Santiniketan. This in itself was an achievement of stupendous significance. It was an effort to override gender barriers when caste differences still persisted in the ashram.

But nothing succeeds like success. Tagore's daring experimentation at the beginning of the last century has not received the recognition it deserves primarily because it failed. It was only in the third decade did Tagore's amalgamation of the girl's section into the Naribhabana create an awareness of what lady students could achieve even in a colonised society; colonised not only by the British but by indigenous beliefs, practices, conventions and hangovers from Manu¹ and his kind of inhibitory functionaries. Written in 1915 but deliberated through Tagore's active life as an

educationist, “Streetiksha” is an essay on what constituted women’s learning in contemporary society but which, according to Tagore’s practice, was also definitive of a universal truth.

Tagore responds to a letter by Smt. Leela Mitra,

If education is a means of achieving humanism and receiving an education is the primary right of any human being, I do not understand the principle by which you deprive a woman of this right Again, those men who think that women have been created for their own benefit, will keep a little left over education for their wives after their own consumption that it will not suffice for women’s proper enlightenment. Those who are interested in providing equal education for both men and women do not fall under the category of ordinary men; they are seated on high in our esteem. I am not talking about them. Therefore the onus of endeavour is on those who aspire to knowledge and they [women] shall have to descend on the battlefield. If you cannot free yourself by your own strength and interest you shall never be really free. What others do for you is only another name for bondage. What men have wished for the ideal of women’s education is a mere plaything for the enjoyment of men. (Strisikkha x) (Translation mine).

Well, Tagore clearly falls within the category of extraordinary men who wish to provide equal education to both men and women. Thus, with this intention in mind he opened his girl’s school in 1908, trying to admit girls to the opportunities available in Santiniketan. Unfortunately it had to shut down two years later - a sad story of administrative failure which Tagore was unable to re-write in the way he revised his own writings.

However, Tagore was not the first enlightened educator to think of woman education in India. Jotirao Phule had started a girls’ school in 1848 and a boy’s school later. Savitribai his wife and a co leader of Dalit education in Pune was India’s first native headmistress (O’Connell 29). Vidyasagar established forty schools for women with the government grants-in-aid for general education but in 1858 the government expressed an unwillingness to use the funds for female education. In the first decade of the twentieth century the picture of female education was not too bright. Families of eminence like the Tagore’s and other well to do liberal families in Kolkata and elsewhere in Bengal would employ governesses or teachers for home education but that was not sufficient for mass education at all. The ‘purdah’ schools², again, were not the perfect choice for a liberal arts education for women. Tagore’s own sufferings at school sensitised him to his children’s education, which is why he founded the Santiniketan Brahmacharyashram on a bare piece of land at Bolpur, after a few failed attempts at creating a school proper for children at Silaidah with the help of an English teacher.

Mrinalini Devi had died just a year after Tagore started his school (1902) and she was the best ashram mother the modern *tapovan* would ever have. Tagore was not very lucky in the availability of lady superintendents, (one of the reasons the girl school was forced to shut down two years later) although ladies close to the teachers and workers were mostly chosen. There had been no provision for, rather no thought of including girl students when the ashram was founded, a singular lack of insight from so advanced a thinker as Tagore. Distance from Kolkata gave the school a lot of intellectual and spiritual freedom but, unfortunately there was no escape from caste prejudices. From the very beginning reigned the Brahman elitism of certain teachers and guardians that students had to touch the feet of teachers Brahmin in caste but had only to fold hands before others. This question plagued Tagore's idealism and only a few days after Mrinalini Devi's death he had written in answer to Manoronjan Bandyopadhyay's³ letter in this issue, "... .. whatever goes against Hinduism should not be included in this school... .." (Mukhopadhyay 174) and citing the Sanhita approves of the above mentioned conduct. One who had decidedly parted ways with Balendranath's⁴ ideal of not preaching Brahmo dharma by not including any courses on it, seems to compromise severely the idea of secularism we tend to associate with Tagore. His initial idea of *tapovan* where the school would not depend on any fees from students also went on a spin when both student and tutor had to enter a financial agreement with the administration where students had to pay fees and tutors demanded and received sufficient pay for their services. Even then, the school was often in the red. Most teachers seemed not in agreement with Tagore's nearly Utopian ideals and this remained a site for division of opinion and difference of practice throughout Tagore's lifetime even when the ashram had become a university.

Although it makes modern critics like Manabendra Mukhopadhyay wonder why Tagore did not allow female education to figure at all in his scheme of things when he founded Pathabhabana on the principles of a modern educational enterprise in 1901, the girls' school started in 1908 (Amita Sen alone gives the date as 1909), it was seen by most contemporary teachers and guardians as a betrayal of the Brahmacharyashram concept in the first place but Tagore was determined to see his idea through. Co-education was not practiced by any school in India then, the regional as well as Catholic missionary schools stringently maintaining the gender divide on pseudo moral grounds.

Probhatkumar Mukhopadhyay in his *Rabindra Jibani* writes,

The girls' school was established naturally and without fanfare; co education was not existent in any Bengali school - the poet himself was not beset by any complex questions at that point of time. He had arranged for his daughters' Mira and Bela's education from time to time, but that was not part of any school system. The school ran from October 1908 to September 1910." (Mukhopadhyay 173)

If we read *Rabindra Jibani* and *Santiniketan Visva Bharati* (Mukhopadhyay's memoirs), together, we learn that apart from Mira, there also were other girls from known families, like Arunendra Thakur's motherless daughter Sagarika, widowed Labanyalekha from Silaidah, Hemlata, Kshitimohan Sen's sister-in-law, Pratibha and Sudha from Gaya, friends of Sen, Hiranbala, Anandalekha from Dhaka, again, related to Sen. As this too was a residential school, Tagore earmarked 'Dehali' for their stay and himself shifted to the first floor of 'Santiniketan' house. 'Natun bari' was occupied by 'Sishubibhaga' and guardians like Jagadananda Roy and Manoranjan Bandopadhyay were beginning to think of admitting their daughters to this school. Tagore had informed Bandopadhyay that "The regulations and fees for the boys' school will be applicable to the girls' school" (Mukhopadhyay 174). It can be understood that although the girls' school was structured rather loosely, Tagore had decided on an arrangement at par with the boys' school.

The conflict of ideologies was multifocal. Widow remarriage had not quite caught on. Both Vidayasagar and Tagore would prompt their sons to marry widows. Not all such marriages were happy and all male guardians were vulnerable as fathers to give their daughters into 'flawless marriages', hence the social pressure for bringing up girls in a relatively 'pure' environment which co education might not provide. Tagore's boys' school was not accepted as a model school in Kolkata. Yet it survived. His girls' school was not so lucky. The dichotomy that existed from the first provided the fault lines of Tagore's co education scheme. When thirteen year old Rathi was admitted to the Brahmacharyyashram 1901, stringent patriarchy would not allow Tagore to admit daughter Madhurilata alongside him although Rathi protests that "Didi was much smarter" (Mukhopadhyay 175). The central scope of boys learning was to achieve it without the presence of girls in their midst, hence the boys in order to be 'real Hindus' - Tagore's words, (Mukhopadhyay 174-75), had to be gender segregated.

However, in 1908 for the married Mira, Tagore was trying to do what he could not for his eldest child, now that her husband Nagendranath was away in the States for his studies in Agriculture. But it would be wrong to think that it was a mere whim of the poet that led to the opening of the girls' school. In Kolkata, Bethune had already founded the first girls' school in 1849 and Vidyasagar's 40 more had followed. Most Brahmo girls were educated at home and some Hindu girls too. In Bolpur too a primary school for girls had started in 1906. Bengali fathers had begun to feel the urge and the necessity to have their daughters educated and as more and more teachers came with their families to teach at Santiniketan, it was only expected that parents would like their girls to be educated alongside their sons in the Tagore enlightened atmosphere of the ashram. It seems that Tagore was quite alone in his design and establishment of the coeducational school but Kshitimohan Sen seems to have had a role to play surely as many girls came through his reference or were related to him. Tagore had to stay away from Santiniketan a lot and had to rely on those functionally attached to the ashram, this being a major reason for the ultimate failure of this project.

In a letter to Sen who had asked whether Tagore did not have any duty towards the girls' education, Tagore had replied,

When I decided to devote myself to the ashram, all my relatives were inimical to the idea. I escaped to Santiniketan. With me came poverty, lack of funds. My wife helped in the task of rehabilitation. But she passed away. She was the first who was sacrificed to the ideal of the ashram. We will have to acknowledge the sacrifices of women. Therefore women's contributions shall one day here be recognised. (Mukhopadhyay 177)

When Jagadananda⁵ got his two daughters admitted. The mother of Ajitkumar Chakraborty⁶ - Sushila Devi, became the lady superintendent of the girls' section and in 1910 Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay's mother Giribala Devi also joined work in a similar capacity. Before this, the wife of the late teacher Mohitchandra Sen -another Sushila Devi had been the Section incharge. None of them proved very efficient however and probably there was little love lost between supervisors and inmates and disagreement about division of labour.

Tagore himself speaks little about his girls' school but Amita Sen recounts from acquired memory that Rabindranath, full of thoughts for the common weal, now found opportunity to fulfil his long time dream of doing something for the girls. The girls would receive lessons alongside the boys sitting under trees. In the evening they would learn songs from Rabindranath himself, learn to recite, attend mandir on Wednesday and enjoy playtime the whole week through. These days passed in joy (Sen 12) (Translation mine).

Yet from the administrative point of view, there were lapses not in policy but in practice. Prabhat Mukhopadhyay reminds us

The school became coeducational. From the very beginning, certain strict regulations and discipline which male teachers, lady teachers and students alike would have had to maintain, should have been implemented in the ashram. But the poet was not experienced enough [to run a residential coeducational school, that is]. For that the right superintendents were not available at the right time. As a result problems arose regarding the running of the ashram which, according to contemporary codes of social behaviour, were thought to be harmful (Mukhopadhyay 299) (Translation mine).

While the school was running Tagore provided for the entertainment of the students in a unique fashion. Reversing the gendered roles of actor and spectator he made the

girls act while boys sat behind shades to watch the performance. Here Kathleen O'Connell comments on it.

It was at this time that Rabindranath began a drama programme involving women students. They were at first reluctant to participate, but he solved the problem by composing a play called "Lakshmi's Test" which had only female characters. In a reverse situation the boys sat behind "Purdah" to watch the play (O'Connell 93)

However, an unfortunate incident disturbed this coming to an equilibrium state of the coeducation experiment.

One of the male students who was going through personal problems committed suicide and the ashram went into mourning. The girls went home and the hostel was closed. However it did not signal an end to women's education because the daughters, granddaughters and nieces of the teachers filled the place of the former students and the classes and activities continued (O'Connell 93)

Yes, for a time. But in 1910 he was forced to close down the girls' section. Tagore was genuinely hurt with his inability to fulfil his project. Depressed he immediately retired to Silaidah. Soon he would start planning for a girls' school there with Rathi as the Head. But sadly, this plan did not see the light of day.

One can read the poet's mind from a letter he wrote to Ajitkumar at this time. It is to be the year of *Gora* where he explores through revision after revision the meaning of life in both the individual and social spaces of nationalistic identity. He writes in that letter:

It is time that we turned ideology into force. It is a sadhana we must try to inculcate into the ways of the ashram so that we may survive... We are too weak, too unresolved. Everything drops from our hands; we cannot hold onto anything; cannot keep anything in our grasp. We cannot build institutions strong enough to survive... .. (Mukhopadhyay 180)
(Translation mine)

Clearly this is a reference to the dissolution of the girls' school that hurt him so, Tagore has lost so many dear ones by this time and internalized his grief that he stoically embraces his failure and moves on. To 1922.

Tagore had no or little difficulty now to introduce women education when the Vidyalay becomes Visva Bharati in 1921. This reemergent trend of liberalized education with, non segregated gender presence in class or syllabus and the vibrantly artistic medium of knowledge dissemination had finally caught the imagination of

the Brahmo and elitist Hindus in Kolkata and undivided Bengal. They sent their girls willingly to be educated in a holistic manner in an institution far away from the buzz of the city and its distractions.

Tagore's bereavement was apparently over. He devised special courses for girls which show how enlightened was Tagore's views of women education. In this section of my paper I shall be drawing heavily on memoirs of the girl students, the ashram *konyas*, who have left such close reports of the inner beliefs and sincere practices of Tagore the educator.

When "Nari-Bhavana" was started in 1922, the girls lodged at "Dwarik" and "Notun Bari" but as the number of girls increased Sree-Bhavana was built to accommodate them. In 1908 the demand had been for primary and secondary education for girls. This demand was in the rise ten years later and the changed status of Tagore, the Nobel laureate washed away all impediments in the path of co-education at Visva Bharati. Tagore could now invite girl students to participate in courses open to the boys' and provide for special self-defence courses like jujutsu and 'lathikhela' by employing experts from far flung parts of the country. He was now on a victory lap and he knew it. Stree Siksha becomes measure of what he thought should be of first importance in women education and strove constantly to his death in 1941 to implement these.

That the Lord has created men and women as separate entities is in itself a wonderful achievement is acknowledged by both the poet and biologist. This particular segregation in the physical world has led to the streaming out of power and pleasure through difference. I do not believe that this flow of beauty and strength can ever be dammed by the immense pressure exerted by schoolteachers or syllabus committees. Actually, given an option, I would always keep my faith in the lord rather than the teachers. Thus I firmly believe that even though girls are taught Kant and Hegel, they will still continue loving their children and not regard men as mere good for nothings. (Stree Siksha) (Translation mine)

We shall be translating and quoting now from one distinguished lady student, Sri Sailanandini Sen from Vidya Bharati who describes vividly experiencing Tagore through his life sustaining and life enriching educational theories and practices. In "Gurudeber Ashrame Chhatri Jiban" [Life as a Girl Student in Gurudeb's Asram] she writes:

At the inauguration of "Sree Bhavan" Gurudeb delivered a lecture on "My ideals regarding Sree Bhavan" in which he stated extensively about his plans and ideas behind the teaching-learning process for the girls in the ashram. Now after a lot of experience in life and getting directly

acquainted with European lifestyle and education, I have come to realize that in order to inculcate Gurudeb's elevated thoughts and far reaching intentions he made all the necessary arrangements. How easily and effortlessly our Asramguru performed the tough task of involving our lives with his ideals, made me feel that if I did not have the good fortune of sharing Gurudeb's ashram life, I would have missed out on the riches of life. (Sen 224-25)

She tells us something that is very close to Tagore's views on female education. As an educator Tagore had always to be aware of society's demands from a learned woman's function in the household. She tells us something that is very close to Tagore's views on female education. As an educator Tagore had always to be aware society's demands from a learned woman's function in the household. He writes,

Society has a notion of its own about women that it is easier for them to love. Thus all rules about women are rules of love. Society thus demands that women will love in such a way that it will reflect their love for family. They will take care of their parents, brothers and sisters, husband and children. Their work is to love everyone and that is their ideal. (Stree Siksksha)

Sailanandini goes on to narrate an incident where Tagore wished to test the girls' hospitality skills. He informed them that he wished them to entertain some guests [read Tagore and three teachers] in their hostel rooms. They were to prepare the food themselves. Saila was only twelve at that time. Learning from a senior student Sarojini, the young girls made a few 'sandeshes' and spread these out on a plate. I quote

No one ever hesitated to go near Gurudeb as there was such affection, understanding and cheer in his eyes that everyone liked to be close to him... ... As they all sat down to eat Gurudeb only broke off a piece of sweet. The other teachers too partook of very little. Then Gurudeb asked a girl to sing. He made us aware that this was also a part of hospitality. He also asked another girl to recite a poem. Then we accompanied them to the door next to us and saw them off. (Sen 225)

Tagore expected the girls to look after their sick friends. He himself came to visit them and brought medicines and flowers for them. There was sympathy for these girls all around and Tagore ordered that these young nurses be given a glass of Ovaltine to keep the caretakers healthy. The girls looked after the very small children; arranged their desks on Wednesdays; sewed on their torn buttons, make their beds. When Kalabhaban students came to paint frescoes on the walls of Sisu Bibhaga, the little boys were put under the charge of the senior girls and slept on cots by their sides.

But one of the best exercises given to them was that of jujutsu lessons given by Japanese professor Takagaki who came with his wife to settle in Santiniketan. The girls also performed in Kolkata at the New Empire. Tagore was far sighted enough to provide for the girls' defence, a measure that seems essential for all women in present day India. This was in 1931 when *Nabin* was also staged. Tagore would not tolerate any lapse of discipline or any imperfect exhibition of the arts, whether performance or martial. Prabhat Mukhopadhyay called it by a Tagore song "With the sword in one hand and a garland in another" - a perfect blend of strength with beauty. Learning music was also a fun thing, from Dinda, Dinendranath Thakur, while Tagore supervised rehearsals when plays were in progress. Sailanandini writes,

We used to come to 'Surpuri' (Dinendranath's house) from Sri Bhavana, to learn music, all seniors and juniors together. Sailajada and Saileshda also came to these classes ... After classes he [Dinda] would call out, 'Kamal, the children's voices are choked. Please bring the sherbet and cakes you made yesterday' ... There was a touch of easy familiarity and even intimacy all around ... (278)

This was in keeping with Tagore's own style of indulging young children for earlier in this article we have learnt that the poet on returning home with them after a successful presentation of the martial arts or dramatic performances in Kolkata would ply them with icecream and 'sandesh'.

She concludes,

On the basis of these experiences, today I can understand that Gurudev's foresightedness and his ideas on education and the effort he put to establish these. I could not realize this when I was a student myself, but the various activities of ashram life, unknown to us, began to accumulate within [to become rich lessons in later life] (231)

Coming back to "Stree Siksha" we find Tagore making a case for an important division in acquiring knowledge where 'pure' knowledge is to be imparted to men and women alike but where applied knowledge is the requirement, women may be imparted a special kind of learning which make them proficient in familial work. "Pure knowledge is required to educate women to be human beings, but over and above it applied knowledge is necessary to tutor women to be womanly. Why should we not accept this logic?" (Stree Siksha) (Translation mine)

That Tagore made provision in his school for women to be womanly is amply, (which is not a bad thing at all), brought out in this piece of writing by Amita Sen, in *Ananda Sarbakaje*, published by the Tagore Research Institute. It opens our eyes to the various issues of women education in contemporary Bengal when education was beginning to be seen not as a hindrance to women's position in society but an added

privilege, specially in the marriage scenario, marriage being the goal of all women then as it is still now in the twenty first century. This memoir is about the youngest daughter of Nandalal Bose, a very talented dancer and actor before her controversial match to her husband Keshabchandra Sen, Amita Sen's uncle. Caste had come in the way of this loving couple. Abanindranath had painted her portrait and everyone in Santiniketan adored this dark complexioned Chitrangada on stage. However, matters were solved amicably although a large part of her in laws' family did not approve of the match.

Amita Sen writes,

The Jamuna who had earlier been engrossed only in music and dance now accompanied her in laws to attend a social function in Barisal. She had her 'ghomta' firmly in place. Everyone was overwhelmed by her courteous behaviour Her disapproving relatives now came often to visit the happy family of Jamuna.

Does not the success of the ashram girls reflect the success of Tagore's educational policies and their implementation? Those who have been brought up in the rays of Tagore's sun have overcome all obstacles in their paths and established themselves as caring, nurturing wife/ mother figures in their households. (Sen x) (Translation mine)

In a written reply to my request for memoirs regarding ashram girls Prof. Sharmila Roy Pommot has written a detailed report as recent as 19th May 2019 on three memorable women. Sharmila di as we call her is an eminent painter, singer and teacher of repute whose schooling was in Visva-Bharati, Kala Bhavana and Sangit Bhavana. She has taught at Sorbonne University and has been visiting professor at Visva-Bharati as well. Her creative powers are immense, brought to fruition by the magic of Tagore's educational policies at Santiniketan. I quote,

My first understanding of the multi-tasking roles that were/are played by women of Santiniketan, Visva Bharati, dawned to me when I started to observe our 'Ma'.

Smt Uma Roy around the age of four...in acted as the first queen of 'TASER DESH',(country of cards) and toured with Gurudeb Rabindranath. They went to present this delightful drama with songs and dances in New Empire and even in Bombay and Sri Lanka.

Rabindranath, by introducing co-education of boys and girls in 1908, gradually gave shape to the notion of the new woman. His educational ideas as well as his short stories, his literary works and heroines like 'Nandini', 'Kumudini', 'Srimoti', 'Chitrangada' and 'Chandalika' give brilliant testimony of women as strong protagonists in society.

In 1953, together with some other creative ladies of that period, such as Indira Debichoudhurani, Pratimadebi, our mother Uma got busy to establish an experimental school for children of pre-school age. I was one of the students of the first batch of Ananda Pathshala that started with little means but with full dedication on behalf of many ladies of Santiniketan.

Uma, right from the beginning, following the foot-steps of her educationist parents, loved to teach and taught women of different social backgrounds, handi-crafts, embroidery and 'Batik'. This was a useful way for many to earn money and contribute to the family-budget

Gouridi⁷ taught us creative handicrafts and design. Her classes were held outside very often and, true to the pedagogy of her father Nandalal, her sole source of inspiration for forms was Nature. She showed us how to observe, how to see the movement of forms, their inter-relations, tones of colour and finally how to interpret all that through a stylized form of design or pattern. Her ever-curious mind led us to experiment with vegetable -colours: tie and dye methods were utilized in new unorthodox ways. Gouridi designed costumes, put make-ups that the dancers wore for the dance-dramas Her 'ALPONAS' were simple yet organically rich, flowing with an inner rhythm.

Gouridi, a young woman of 18, engaged to be married, went on stage in Kolkata when girls of good families and reputations did not do so. She had Rabindranath himself acting and singing beside her as a strong support. The play was welcome with eulogies by critics like Ramananda Chattapadhyay and severely criticised by the conservative press. Thus, Gouridi paved the way for all future generations of women singers, actresses, and artists in Bengal, a revolutionary step indeed.

We have seen Gouridi creating and discovering new techniques till she died a true child of her father Nandalal who imparted this notion of 'art of living' when the divine urge to create governs all even in old age.

Sujata Mitra chose to enlighten, to teach through the Arts, As she was one of our close family friends, I witnessed her battle to survive economically, teaching embroidery and 'Batik' to poor women so that they could survive too. She went to Madras, and to Allahabad to teach designing. She also taught women from the villages at Sriniketan. She always cared for the down-trodden and stayed very close to the Santhali communities, a true child of Kalimohan Ghosh, her father who helped Gurudeb to create Sriniketan.

... ... I try to look upon the different paths taken by these three women is first of all their utter absence of ego, and secondly, their deep sense of responsibility towards the surrounding world, thirdly their ever wakeful creativity. (Prommot)

Tagore's feminization of the educational impulse seen in post Renaissance Bengalee education of men from their early childhood may be seen as a flowering of Tagore's poetic impulse. "Later in his life he himself would say,' the creation of the ashram [coeducation being a defining part of it] was like creating poetry; the ashram was a poem like other poems 'in a medium not of words'.(Mukhopadhyay 123) The masculine and feminine principles were united in his two efforts to make education holistic, balancing pure knowledge and applied knowledge carefully with a sense of propriety in keeping not only with his times but reaching out to the future. He would sit on the stage when the girls sang and danced on Kolkata stages and elsewhere so that they would not come in for censure. A Utopia of knowledge profound was his ashram where gender sensitization led to it becoming a haven for women's aspirations becoming real in a world that was not yet ready to give woman her due.

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Notes and References

1. Proverbial writer of Manu Sanhita (2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE), a patriarch.
2. The so called schools transported girls to and fro, in carriages that were heavily curtained so that the girls remain invisible to the public.
3. He was one of the head masters of Patha Bhavana who was never totally in sync with tagore's idealism.
4. Nephew of Rabindranath who had actually started the Brahmacharyashrama a year earlier.
5. Another well known head master.

6. A teacher at the ashrama, inmate and a close companion of Tagore as well as an eminent critic of his literary works.
7. Gouri Bhanja, the eldest daughter of Prof Nandalal Basu.

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Women and Education in India A Representative Study

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13

Binapani Ashram: Where Tagore's Concept of Holistic Education Finds Expression in Promoting Women Education of the Tribal Girls and Marginal of the Society

Nilmani Mitra & Satyabrata Bhattacharya

*T*amso ma jyotirgamaya' i.e. take us from darkness unto light, is the Vedic hymn manifesting human urge to achieve higher goal from the existing one. Such achievements on continual basis lead to development. Inspired by its spirit of this mantra societies keep on making progress in terms of education, culture, living standard or so. Such society becomes a source of educated and enlightened minds who lend support to the less fortunate societies who languish in the pangs of poverty, illiteracy, social stigma leading to perennial backwardness. Time and again, as chronicled histories in different countries sensitive minds who are pained to find their brethren to be in abysmal state of affairs, come forward to show the way for improvement for the society as a whole.

Manjushree Saren (nee Bhattacharya) and Barka Saren are such enlightened and inspired souls who have dedicated their lives for such a backward tribe as Santhals, inhabiting the tribal belt of District Birbhum in West Bengal. Their firm commitment and indomitable passion to assist the downtrodden and marginal has ultimately found expression, despite several difficulties, in the form of **Binapani Ashram**, 'a home away from home' in Mouldanga village in the neighborhood of Sriniketan in West Bengal. It is an exemplenary saga of great courage and conviction the couple has shown with cooperation and financial assistance from the people and corporate from across the country.

Binapani Educational and Welfare Trust, popularly known as **Binapani Ashram**, was founded in 1997 by Barka Saren and his wife Manjusree Saren to provide formal education, health care and cultural uplift for the poor tribal children

of Mouldanga village in Sriniketan area of Birbhum district in West Bengal. Twenty years later, the institution continues to grow and evolve as it pursues its goal of empowering local tribal children, especially girls, by making them more self-reliant through a comprehensive programme, incorporating education, vocational training and enrichment activities and simultaneously helping them assimilate into mainstream life. True to its founders' vision, Binapani Ashram has provided quality welfare services to an increasing number of first generation learners since its inception as a **registered Trust in 1997**. It is important to emphasise here that Binapani Ashram is a registered Public Charitable Trust, bearing registration no. 1730, dt., 21.03.1997 and not an orphanage or government aided destitute home. The Ashram identifies itself in being an educational support system and an institution promoting women's empowerment that runs exclusively through individual and corporate support. The institution bearing PAN AABTB4011B is registered Public Charitable Trust and donation made to Binapani ashram shall qualify for deduction U/S 80G(5)(VI) for the I.T.Act.,1961.

Manjusree is the fourth child of Professor Debidas Bhattacharya who migrated to India with his family in 1950, following a communal disturbance in Dhaka city. He settled in Santiniketan as Professor of Botany at Viswa-Bharati and stayed there till the end of his life, June, 1974. Manjusree, then in her tender and formative age, got deeply influenced by the ashram style of education, at Patha Bhavan, pioneered by the great Poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. It was not merely book-centered rather holistic in nature, encompassing the entire gamut of learning from nature and the society. Further, she was struck by differences in access to education and culture between her and the tribal children around her as Santiniketan belongs to Birbhum district which contains a sizable population of tribal Santhals.

The background of upbringing of Manjshree in the cultural environment of Santiniketan as was founded by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and maintained by him for a holistic education for school children inspired Manjushree to instill identical environment to educate the children of Binapani Ashram. Barka Saren belonging to Santhal community also had the burning desire to do something progressive to bring the society to which he belonged to be a part of mainstream. Having worked in Viswa- Bharati as a teacher, Barka is a keen admirer of Tagore's legacy. It is their common aspiration of social service to the benefit of tribal children that inspired them to tie the nuptial knot to provide the mission strength of a joint enterprise. For short, it was a wonderful confluence of ideas. It was however not very easy for them to so do because of social reservations to Brahmin girl marrying a Santhal man. This was the year 1978 and the people in general were not accustomed to witness marriage between a Brahmin bride and Santhal groom. Worst was still awaiting, Manjusree's mother failed to pursue any local Hindu Priest to solemnise her daughter's wedding in accordance with the Hindu scripture. But both, Manjushree as an educated and emancipated woman and her mother Binapani Bhattacharya as a highly progressive house wife stood against this kind of social

injustice or adjudication. At this conjecture, Dr. Surajit Sinha, the then Upacharya (Vice-Chancellor) of Visva-Bharati assured Manjusree's mother that he will arrange to solemnise the wedding which was fixed on 12 May, 1978 in the best way possible by him. In the evening of 12 May the Upacharya of Visva-Bharati along with Kanika Bandopadhyay and Nilima Sen, the two great exponents of Tagore songs of yesteryears arrived at Manjusree's residence in the evening. The singer duo was requested to play the role of the priest to solemnize the marriage of Manjushree and Barka on that auspicious evening. 'They offered 6 selected Tagore songs from *Gitabitan* of which the last one was presented in duet format.... "*ananda dhara bohichhe bhubane*'....said Dr. S. Bhattacharya, Chairman of the Trust. Further, Dr. Surajit Sinha, former Upacharya of Visva-Bharati profusely congratulated Manjusree and her mother, Binapani Devi for exemplary courage and commitment they have shown to win over the prevailing caste barrier and social stigma attached to inter-caste marriages. He further added, "this is a marriage between a man and a woman, taking place in *heaven on earth* (Santiniketan) and Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore is blessing the couple for a happy, prosperous and active life". It should be mentioned that Manjusree and Barka do not possess any other document for their marriage, except those 6 Tagore songs as witness of their desire to pray and to say '*my heart is your and your is mine*'.

This great and remarkable wedding in Bhattacharya family in Santiniketan has created a ripple in the educated society in India. Manjushree received congratulatory notes from different people and organizations. The officers' club of Steel authority of India sent a telegraphic congratulatory note for her courageous decision and the club members also sent five hundred rupees as gift for the newlywed couple. Barka Saren went back to his home with his wife, Manjusree on the same day, following the tribal custom. Kolkata based daily, *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, published the news of the wedding of 12 May, 1978 and of the follow-up reception at Barka Saren's house, under the header '*Sundar Najir*' (wonderful act). The Anthropological Survey of India authority filmed the entire sequence of the tribal rituals of the wedding observed at Barka Saren's residence in his village home at Muluk Kalitala near Bolpur. From the ethnological point of view, it is the first recorded marriage, between a Brahmin bride and a Santhal groom with whole hearted acceptance from both the participating families. The film was screened repeatedly by Delhi Doordarshan Centre in early 1980's to create public awareness against caste and religious biasness.

Their post marriage period was also full of trials and tribulations towards fulfilment of their mission. It took them around two decades to give a tangible shape to the support system, they had dreamt of in the form of Binapani Ashram after the name of Manjusree's mother who had been her great support and inspiration in establishing the institution as a centre for emancipation of tribal children, specially girls in their community from their hapless condition.

The theme or the core ideals of the institution is to provide holistic education to tribal children in tune with Tagore's ideals of complete and free education. The poet is fondly adopted as **Ashram Guru** so that the institution could prepare its road map based on his teachings and direction towards development of the tribal children in letter and spirit. The children were mostly from tribal community and first generation learners from neighbouring villages.

The Ashram started with only five tribal children in 1991 and since its registration as Trust body, it grew strength to strength in last twenty years. At present, it is a well known organization, generating trust and confidence amongst both, the tribal and general section of the society through its activities. Their schedule comprises of comprehensive programme of education incorporating vocational training, cultural activities and other related pursuits to develop them to assimilate into main stream life. The present roll strength of the ashram is 75 girls, ranging from class 1 to 10 standard. There is a huge demand for admission to Binapani ashram but the ashram authority cannot admit more than 75 students for want of bed space.

Following are the Ashram's proudest features:

1. Running an English-medium Primary and Pre-Primary school Christened as Binapani Memorial Academy – that provides highly subsidized education and free Tiffin to the children of local disadvantaged communities. The construction of the school has been made possible by the collective effort of a large number donors, corporate bodies and well wishers of Binapani ashram. The selfless support and encouragement to the organizers of the Trust by its friends have virtually materialised the raising of such a brick-concrete 3 storied edifice within the Ashram premises within a span of 3 years from 2013-2015. It is presumed that the present institution would enable the local tribal community and especially the economically backward families to send their children to a modern English medium school for a multipurpose holistic education. At present the institution will offer formal education from Nursery, kindergarten I & II to Class V Primary standard. The school will be multipurpose co-educational English medium institution which would offer vocational training at some stage. Binapani Memorial Academy is primarily committed to unlock learners' potential and nurture their talent to meet socio-economic and technological needs of our community so that they can contribute in making responsible, accountable and answerable citizens of India.
2. Providing free accommodation and food to 75 school-going local tribal and girls from economically backward families at the Binapani Ashram Girls' Hostel. The hostel building is a 12,000 square feet, four-storied facility in Mouldanga village near Sriniketan. It is complete with living area, community hall, dining hall and kitchen to accommodate 75 girls+2 lady superintendents and 1 house maker.

3. Having 45 Madhyamik (Class X) graduates, most of them have gone on to pursue higher education and job oriented professional training. Some of the seniors have secured job in corporate, govt. sponsored institutions or private enterprises. Trust feels proud of one Sukla Mondal, a Madhyamik pass out of 2005 completed graduation in Japanese language and studies securing record marks in Japanese language in 2010 from Visva Bharati. She is currently employed in managerial status in the Japanese translation department of Larsen & Turbo at Chennai corporate house. Sukla's stunning performance in real life speaks of her zeal and confidence to win over the odds and unknown.

In her own words:

Binapani Ashram is one of the places which I would never forget in my life. It was a great place for those who could never think to get education in their life or could get support for too long ... when I entered in Ashram in 1999 I did not know English grammar at all. Marango (Manjushree) and Maramba (Barka) used to come every day to Ashram to teach us English language. It was my root for knowledge. My parents were not sent to school and they wanted to literate their children ... thanks to Binapani Ashram for its support in my intial days of learning.¹

Another girl Subarna Saren after H.S examination in 2008 was admitted to Biharilal College of Social Sciences under the University of Calcutta. She scored brilliant results in all examinations she appeared during and after graduation. She secured First Class in B.Sc, M.Sc. and B.Ed. and finally qualified in School Service Commission test and is appointed as teacher of Home Science in Nischintapur Rakhal Das High School in Kulpi in South 24 Parganas. Surbarna says:

Binapani Ashram gave me the support to get me where I am today. Whatever I have accomplished today was possible because of the care, love, affection and the direction I received from Binapani Ashram.²

4. The resident students as well as the primary level children enjoy learning at the smart classroom, equipped with a computer and a large flat screen TV for educational and entertainment purposes. This is a gift from SBI Life Insurance Company .This is a marvelous instrument to make complicated things quite easy and enjoyable for the children in understanding everything, from pollination of flowers to English grammar and what not. Once in a week movie for children is screened for entertainment of the resident girls.
5. Operating a well-equipped computer training centre since 2016 where students can learn basic computer usage skills. There are 8 computer sets, where 16

¹ Personal Interview

² Personal Interview

students can take lesson at a time. Teacher's computer is connected via net for best teaching and learning by the pupils. The computer sets and associated instruments have been received as CSR support from Kolkata based, Electro Mechanic Co. Pvt. Ltd.

6. Maintaining a well-stocked on site library appropriate for the school. There is huge collection of primary and middle level school books on learning English, Mathematics, Science, General Knowledge, Humanities, Environmental Studies and story books. There is separate collection of books by and on Rabindranath Tagore. The entire collection of books has been received as gifts from donors and well wishers of the Ashram.
7. Running a 9-months tailoring and Embroidery certificate course since March 2017, open to girls from both the Ashram and the surrounding villages. Recently there has been a tie-up between Binapani Ashram and a private institution which will undertake govt. sponsored skill development programme for 200 girls per batch in near future. Binapani Ashram will offer the infrastructural and service facilities to the private party in lieu of financial assistance for 6 resident girls of Binapani ashram.
8. Offering horticultural and food preservation training courses, instructed by trained persons of different fields. This programme is accommodated in summer vacation as work shop projects. These are sponsored projects because organisers need good amount of money for running the training course in order to procure food items, fruits, vegetable and spices in good quantities and fuel for cooking or processing. The processed food items are consumed by the resident girls themselves.
9. Providing opportunities for formal education, physical exercise and cultural enrichment to the students in the form of yoga and Karate instructions, music, dance and drama classes. Regarding formal education of the resident girls of Binapani Ashram , the class one standard fresher are admitted to Binapani Memorial Academy, English medium school, running under the administration of the Trust and the others. From class five onwards, students join the local govt. sponsored school in the neighborhood. Thanks to State Bank of India, Kolkata corporate house, who arranged for a 40-sitter Tata Vehicle from its CSR fund in 2012. The bus is used for transportation of not only hostel girls but also for some the village girls who cannot afford to hire private transport to attend school. Usually the senior girls are supposed to leave the hostel after appearing in the Class X terminal examination in order to create space for newcomer but on occasions few girls can't afford to continue their higher studies from their home for socio-economic reasons. All the resident girls follow the hostel rules, starting from attending prayer at 6 in the morning, attending school, participating in games, performing in cultural functions of music and dance and also organizing a

literary meet on full moon day, in every month of the year. The Trust employs in-house lady superintendant, home tutors, housekeepers and adequate securities for protection of the inmates. The girls are taken for local educational tour to nearby places or some time to Kolkata, in small groups to visit the Alipore Zoo, Indian Museum and Birla Planetarium etc. These tours are usually sponsored by our donors and well wishers.

10. Regular cultural and extracurricular activities are undertaken by the ashram authority with an eye to expose the girls to all sorts of cultural experiences and training by the performers. It is a part of holistic educational method, where the students are offered to test his or her likings and natural aptitude from among different activities and branches of knowledge, starting from gardening to creative writing. The annual tree plantation and monsoon celebration within the Binapani ashram premises is on such function which starts with the Chief guest, planting young sapling being assisted by colorfully dressed tribal girls around invited guest. Five little girls, symbolising, five essential and natural components of the planet earth, like soil (*Khiti*), water (*Op*), Sun light (*Tej*), earth (*Maru*) and air (*Bom*) take the centre place of the stage. The orator quote verses from Tagore, indicating the importance of five natural environmental factors which govern the normal cycle of life on planet earth. Parents of the resident girls, who are mostly from farming community, receive grafted fruit and medicinal plant sapling to plant them in their village home. On the same occasion the Ashram girls are given away prizes for their performance in the terminal examination and proficiency in extracurricular activities. Besides the Tree plantation ceremony, the ashram girls also arrange on annual cultural function, where normally the students stage a piece of Tagore scripted dance drama for public to appreciate. Further, all National important days and memorial days of great men and women and UNSCO-marked international days are observed with due sincerity and respect.
11. A rural health care centre has come up recently within the premises of Binapani Ashram. It has been developed with active participation and financial assistance from one unfortunate Chaudhuri couple, Anup and Madhumita Chaudhuri, who lost their only daughter, an in-service graduate engineer as victim of cancer at an immature age of 23. The health outlet is dedicated in memory of the departed soul, entitled Nabaneepa Memorial Clinic. The health care unit serves both the ashram inmates as well as the local villagers. One qualified registered physician and a paramedical assistant manage the service of the centre.
12. Manjusree and Barka Saren received felicitation from different social and cultural groups. Barka Saren appeared in DD Bangla for presentation of Tagore songs in original Bengali as well as its translated version. Manjushree has been felicitated by ICICI Bank at Mumbai, as *Advance woman of India*. Vodafone Company honoured her by accommodating her life and activities along with another 50 women from India. Manjushree has been christened as *Tribal Activist* in a bound

volume, entitled *Women of Pure Wonder*, published by the telephone company for her involvement with the tribal and the underprivileged, especially in the field of education, culture and health care.

Shri Barka Saren's Contribution and active co-operation formed the very base of the construction of the Binapani Ashram hostel building. He donated his entire inherited property of nearly Rupees 30 lakhs to build the Binapani Girls' Hostel to accommodate 80 girls and a community hall details of which has been given above. Manjusree and Barka Saren are the life spirit of Binapani Ashram. The inmates of the Ashram call them, out of their love and respect, as *Maramba* as senior father and *Marango* as senior Mother. Barka Saren is well versed in Santhal, Bengali, English and Sanskrit literatures and with the inspiration of Manjusree he has translated as many as 25 Rabindra Sangeet into Santhali language to make them closer to the mind and spirit of Santhal community. Barka Saren has released his first cassette of translated version of Tagore songs, '*Santhali Bhasaye Rabindra Sangeet*' on 24 March, 2002, at a city music store in Kolkata. Gora Sarbadhikari, the then the Principal of Sangeet Bhavan (Music Faculty) of Visva-Bharati said "The album deserves immense importance. While directing, the quality was the only thing that I had in mind and took utmost care to ensure that Saren's style of singing adheres to the same style, popularized by Mohordi." "It was a fascinating experience, bringing out an album in an ethnic language", the remark came from the satisfied translator cum singer. Barka Saren who has been training in Tagore songs from 1993 under Prof. Sarbadhikari in Santiniketan, took upon himself the task of translating the songs, so that the authenticity could be retained. Thus '*tehen jhipir jhipir japut mahare*' actually is a near perfect translation of the original song '*aaji jhoro jhoro mukhoro badoro deene*'. So long a preserve of the Bengali 'elite', Rabindra Sangeet is now about to reach the original inhabitants of the place where Tagore composed the songs. The fact that the album is a success is evident from the reaction of its target audience. According to Raja Murmu, an employee of an NGO at sriniketan, '*Gan gulo akebare amader moner katha bale. Ei pratham Rabindrasangeet ke aapon kore nite parlam*' (The song says what is in our hearts. For the first time, I could identify myself with Tagore songs).³ On the other hand the songs in Santhali language have created a remarkable social impact in the life of the resident girls of Binapani hostel. The Santhali version of Tagore songs, with the exact grammar and tune are quickly picked up not only by the tribal girls alone but also the non-tribal inmates of the hostel, thus creating a new bondage of friendship and integration for the girls, coming from different places and of varied castes. The children themselves selected few from the list of songs to accommodate them as part of the morning-evening prayers. The Ashram organizers get opportunity to include the translated songs in regular cultural function, organized by the Ashram as public function.

³ Personal Interview

The senior inmates and ex-students of Binapani Ashram have also successfully performed in Auditoriums in Kolkata on dance drama, based on Tagore's literature, recited or lent their voice in Rabindra Sangeet to take achievement of the Ashram outside of the Ashrama premises and thus enhancing the institution's pride. It has already been told that Binapani Ashram serves as an educational support system and an institution of women's empowerment which runs exclusively through individual and corporate support. Anyone, who identifies with its goals and objectives, can lend his/her support as a sponsor or as donor, fund raiser or as a volunteer or an instructor at the school. Binapani Educational & Welfare Trust is managed by Board of 15 Trustees under the chairmanship of Dr. S. Bhattacharya, Manjusree Saren as the Secretary and Dr. Shukla Bhattacharya as the Treasurer. The account of the Trust is regularly audited by a chartered firm and submission of annual Income Tax return is mandatory for the Trust.

Women and Education in India

A Representative Study

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Crossing the Rubicon: Women in Higher Studies at Jogamaya Devi College

Reena Bhaduri

1. Background

In the development of Gender studies, the history of Women's Education as the evolutionary process is not yet an established field of study. In the area of women's education as a phase in the colonial period (late 19th C. to early 20th C.), it is more or less the history of *streeshiksha* to female schools, initiated, founded and administered mostly by private and missionary efforts monitored and controlled by the Raj Sarkar (DPI). For syllabus, examinations and recruitment of teachers, these schools were affiliated to the University of Calcutta. The slow but steady change which started with the process of decolonization and emergence of nationalism, at first it did not lead up to crossing the hurdles to college education for women. During this time initiative and efforts taken by Brahmo leaders, in case of their own women, were commendable. Also the changing element was that as individuals women were fighting hard to demand and get the right to higher education, even in professional stream like medical.

During this period there was not much progress in founding colleges for imparting general education for women at undergraduate stage. Gradually women themselves raised their voices to demand their right to higher studies. Generations of women with reformist, enlightened social background, fought for the privilege of attaining college education. This led the way to the progress in higher studies as a viable process of life-long learning and self-development. In the post-colonial Indian society intergenerational portraits of college educated women to international images of strong and powerful educated, empowered women were gradually emerging.

In many ways post independence women's education laid the foundation or the ground work for the later development of women's history and gender studies in India. Educational trajectories with other associational activities emerged in the

open. Attitude against patriarchal notions of the so called Indian nationalism and the imperial/colonial stereotyping of Indian womanhood as always dependent and subservient to men, came to be questioned by women themselves. Recent researches in the history of women's education have started showing trends of disconnected, mutually allusive networks depicting that women are active in the fields of education and social reforms.

2. Prelude

In Calcutta, the centre of British rule in India, the spread of western education along with the rise of middle class as a phenomenon was quite early. Most of the new educational institutions came up in the Northern part of the city. Southern side was much later included in the already existing urban metropolitan structure. The huge area in between was divided on the line of white Town (central west) and Black Town (North). Southern part was administered by South Suburban Municipality, later on merged with Calcutta Municipal Corporation. Facing the Hooghly on the West, Bhowanipore area was adjacent to the White Town at the centre.

Further south Kalighat was a much older neighbourhood. H. E. Cotton in *Calcutta: Old and New* (1910) writes that 'Bhowanipore is a popular native place inhabited by affluent Hindus ... a great favourite one with a large community of important lawyers practicing in the nearby High Court, and Alipore Court.' Dr. Ganga Prasad Mookerjee's house and family played the most prominent role in the cultural and social development of the area.

For the spread of education, dominant role was played by the Christian Missionary Organizations. From Bhowanipore to Tollygunge most of the schools and libraries were run by Church Missionary Society of India; London Missionary Society's Institution was at the centre of Bhowanipore. Their main objective was to impart education for native Christian youth, to train them to be the future preachers.

On the other hand the middle class educated non-christian students suffered from lack of opportunities to good quality education for their children. From the end of the 19th C. the social composition of enlightened professional families, resident of the neighbourhood, led them to found good schools for general education. Some of the illustrious residents took initiative to change the prevailing atmosphere in favour of the development of educational institutions in South Calcutta. The family of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee was one such.

For various reasons from the beginning of the 20th C. some of the missionary institutions were either being merged or closing down. Doveton College/Parental Academy closed down in 1911. London Missionary Society's Institution had a school, a College and a Theological Seminary which also closed down in 1911. LMS College

and Bishop's College followed suit in 1915. Quite a large number of non-Christian students availed the opportunity of getting western education in these institutions. Closure of these institutions created vacuum in education and caused crisis among the upper middle class educated residents. This was true in case of boys only.

In the second half of the 19th C. school education for females made some progress. In the next phase the supporters of women's higher education had to fight a tough battle. First and foremost hurdle for women was under age marriage. It was as late as in 1929 that H. B. Sharda Act was passed where minimum age of marriage for girls was 14 and for men was 18. But due to parental interference the Act could never be implemented. Even in progressive, liberal families 'matriculation passed bride' was enough for Western educated grooms. Men preferred to marry younger girls of at least 10 to 12 years. It was a rare occasion when girls were allowed to pursue college education at post-marital stage. The natural fall out of early marriage was premature motherhood which made things almost impossible for girls.

In Calcutta University, the period of reforms and reorganization (1904-1914) led by Sir Asutosh Mookerjee (1864-1924) witnessed the restructuring of affiliated undergraduate studies in Colleges. Syllabus was not gender specific, but co-education was a much later agenda in shifting the gender landscape. 'Women only' colleges were coming up for undergraduate studies. In North Calcutta Bethune College was the pivot of college education for women. In most of the cases, progressive Brahmo families and also enlightened Bengali Christian families allowed their daughters to get college education.

In South Central Calcutta missionary institutions were founded at the earliest. In 1842 Loreto Sisters established Loreto House; gradually a chain of Loreto schools came up at many places in and out of Calcutta. In 1912 a liberal arts college for women, affiliated to Calcutta University, was opened. In early 20th C. some of the westernized elite families sent their women to Loreto College to expose them to English language and culture. It was more for social ornamentation than for real learning. With time, the College changed its Vision and Mission which made it a top must educational institution in Calcutta.

Another missionary collegiate school in Bhowanipore area was St. John's Dioacesan (1876). It was affiliated to Calcutta University in 1909 and the college was inaugurated in 1911. Its distinguished alumni included Lady Abala Bose, Sarala Roy, Mayitreyi Devi to Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, Sharmila Tagore and many more. But the college section was disaffiliated and delisted by the British Government, because on 7.5.1931 Bina Das, the renowned freedom fighter, a student of the college, shot at Sir Stanley Jackson (Governor of Bengal) at Calcutta University Convocation. In South Calcutta delisting of Disccesan College created crisis in women's education.

There were other important factors which stimulated demand for undergraduate colleges for women. In the 30s of the 20th C. Presidency College did not allow admission of girl students, the rule went on till 1944. It never opened a separate women's section. Thus when women were allowed to be admitted, it automatically became co-educational.

3. The Nucleus

Formed by eminent citizens of Calcutta in 1872, the General Committee of the South Suburban Group of schools was established to promote educational facilities in South Calcutta. In 1874 South Suburban School was founded and Dr. Ganga Prasad Mookerjee one of was the founder members. His son Asutosh was a student (1876-1889) when Acharya Shivnath Shastri was the Head Master. In 1905, Mitra Institution, Bhowanipore Branch was established by Sri Bisheswar Mitra. By that time Sir Asutosh headed all these Institutions when he was Vice-Chancellor for first two terms, 1906 and 1914.

In 1915, Sir Asutosh proposed to establish South Suburban College which would function under South Suburban Education Committee. By next year, June 3, 1916 the approval order from the Government and the university came. The name of the newly founded Institution was South Suburban College and Sir Asutosh was the President of the Governing Body. Initially, it functioned from 126, Lansdowne Road. Within a year there was huge pressure from the public to increase number of seats. Accordingly, the College was shifted to Bijni House on 157, Russa Road and in 1918 – 1919, the college was elevated to General Degree College. In the first few decades of the 20th century, the college made tremendous progress in all spheres of activities and its reputation attracted attention of brilliant teachers and students from everywhere.

On May 25, 1924, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee passed away in Patna. The whole nation mourned the untimely demise of one of the greatest educationists and nation builders of the century. June 15, 1924 at the Condolence Meeting of the College the members of the Governing Body took unanimous resolution to change the name to Asutosh College. May 25, 1925, the first death anniversary of Sir Asutosh, at the Memorial meeting presided over by the then Mayor Chittaranjan Das, it was unanimously resolved to form Asutosh Memorial Committee to preserve his hallowed memory (later Asutosh Memorial Institute, Regd. 1929).

After the untimely demise of Sir Asutosh, his sons Rama Prasad and Syama Prasad, and son-in-law Pramatha Nath Banerjee worked hard to carry on the legacy of their great mentor in the field of education. By Syama Prasad's relentless persuasion and close co-operation of the then Mayor of Calcutta, Subhash Chandra Bose, Calcutta Municipal Corporation granted land and by 1935 the new campus for Asutosh

College was completed and the college shifted to its final destination with buildings, a hall and a library.

In 1932 by the proposal and initiative taken by Syama Prasad, it was decided to open Asutosh College Morning Section (for Women) and an Evening Section (for commerce). Together the three colleges were called Asutosh group of Colleges administered by Asutosh College Governing Body and the Governing Body of the Memorial Institute. In 1934, Governing Body President Shyama Prasad went on to become the youngest Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University.

Much later (1956-57) Morning Section was separated and came to be known as Asutosh College for Women. After the demise of Jogamaya Devi, wife of Sir Asutosh, the name of the college was changed in her name. In 1979 according to Calcutta University New Regulations, Jogamaya Devi College was elevated to the status of separate independent entity, under the aegis of University Grants Commission.

4. History of the Journey

Declared primary objective of Asutosh College Morning Section was:

The empowerment of the women by education, and transform the society into a cohesive, prosperous mutually beneficial one ... The college encourages the students to be able to establish themselves in any station and work with confidence, independence and dedication.

Morning section for women started with some specific advantages. In those days its prime location was very convenient for young girls to commute even from the southernmost parts of the city. Also, it was a residential area safe for girl-students. Women's section was going to operate in the same Asutosh College buildings. Already the other facilities like class rooms, common rooms, library, and laboratory were available. At first, it was decided that Day College Faculty would be teaching in the women's Section. Gradually its own Faculty would grow. So from the beginning, the whole infrastructural advantages were enjoyed by the Women's Section including experienced teaching staff. Within a short time, brilliant teachers, academics and intellectuals were attracted to Asutosh Group of Colleges.

Both male (majority) and female faculty Members started teaching in the Women's section. Leela Majumdar (1908-2007) a distinguished scholar, writer and cultural personality, first class first in both B. A. and M. A. in English (C.U.) was the first lady professor to be employed in the institution. She writes in her *Reminiscences/Somewhere Else*:

Came to know that Asutosh College was opening a women's section where they needed a lady lecturer to take care of it. In their ancestral house (77 Asutosh Mookerjee Road) Syama Prasad babu, alone in his

Office, took the interview. After asking some casual questions he said 'So, you are joining from this Monday?' I was greatly surprised! Without waiting for the answer he said, 'Girls have already started taking admission. It's not right to be late.' Both sides were fully convinced about the positive note of the initial connect.

Morning Section started from 6.30 am to 10.30 am. The Day College started from 11 Am ... After a few days I realised why the time gap between the Day and the Morning Sections was so strictly observed. In 1932 girls were publicly not visible at all. It was quite natural that people were curious to observe them. When morning classes were on, huge iron gates were shut tightly by the darwans, always on duty. After the classes were over, they accompanied the girls to cross the main road over to the other side. Only after that the 'poor' boys were allowed to enter the College gate!

I was almost of the same age with some of my students. If we sat together it was difficult to make out between the students and the teacher. After some time I had to give up the idea of spending time together in their Common Room.

In those days young women who were gradually coming out of home-turf to get higher education, themselves were in a dilemma. They pondered on whether they were neglecting their most important role in the society of a homemaker, Most of the liberals were apprehensive with the same contradiction According to Leela Majumdar, first principal Panchanan Sinha, with his long beard, a fusion of softness and strictness, was an universal favourite to teachers and students. One day he threw challenge to the girls who he treated like his own daughters, saying-'women getting higher education can't manage household work, can you cook? It will not do if you just say, yes, you will have to prove it.' On a fine Sunday noon, 72 girls invited all the Teachers and non-Teaching staff of the Morning Section. They prepared a sumptuous lunch with varieties of Bengali delicacies. This bears testimony to the fact that faculty members had an excellent relationship with students.

Some of the lady professors like Sarama Sen and Sujata Chowdhuri (Roy) were lecturers in the English Department, William Radice's comments about Sujata Chowdhuri 'she represented Bengali culture at its best,' is an eloquent testimony to her personality. Surama Mitra taught in the Philosophy department, admired for her scholarship and depth of knowledge. The story of her involvement with her mentor Prof. Surendra Nath Dasgupta, an outstanding *Pandit* in Philosophy and Comparative Religion created consternation in the society. Arundhati Sen was a student of the College in Bengali Department, taught for a long time and later became the first lady Principal in 1968. She was also a great singer and sang *Vande Mataram* at the Annual Conference of Indian National Congress (1928, Park Circus).

Her reminiscences give a graphic description of the College life at that time. There is no indication of gender discrimination or bias of any kind. Girl-students and teachers were getting used to enjoying College life with ease and élan.

Another famous alumna was Mahashewta Devi (1943-45). She later wrote that she was not so much of a studious person, more of an activist. She joined students groups to do relief work during Bengal famine in 1943. There was not much politics involved in the relief work. She joined Girl Students Association run by SFI, also to manage other natural disasters like flood, earthquake and plague. This was the path to the ideal of duty and responsibility to people, shown by the leaders.

Theirs was the most brilliant batch of students : Alaka Majumdar / Chatterjee (scholar-writer-educationist), Gita Roychowdhury/Mukherjee (History teacher, Politician), Tripti Bhaduri/Mitra (Cultural icon, theatre and screen personality), Dr. Tulika Sen, Dr. Kalyani Chattopadhyay, Ahalya Rao et. al. Innumerable names of distinguished alumni are available from different sources – Rabindranath Tagore's granddaughter Nandita (Kriplani) (excelled in dance, music, theatre, literature etc.), Joya & Bijoya (cultured sisters from the Ray family, exponents of Rabindra sangeet), Bani Ray (powerful writer, novelist, from a zamindar family whose mother Giribala Devi wrote 'Raybari'), Gauri Nag (DPI), Justice Padma Khastogir, Dr. Shobha Ghosh (Doctor) Shobha Sen (a great theatre and screen personality). In the reminiscences of Dr. Kalyani Chatterjee (post-independence) she noticed many of the educated, enlightened middle class households sent their daughters to this College. Among the students there were South Indian, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindusthani (from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) girls who came to study.

Women participated regularly in extra curricular activities proudly representing the College in the outside world. Asutosh College had a regular Magazine edited by a male student from the Day Section and a female student from the Morning Section. In 1937 Joint Editors were Narahari Kaviraj and Bani Ray and in 1938 Santosh Bose and Pratima Banerjee. A handwritten wall Magazine with editorials, essays, poems used to be put up on the Board fixed up in a frame.

Asutosh Memorial Hall was only of its kind in South Calcutta at that time, holding many important programmes: Rabindra Nath Tagore's play *Parishodh* was staged here for the first time. A Memorial Meeting to pay respect to Maxim Gorki, the famous Russian writer, after his demise, was held here too on 18.6.1936. Bengal chapter of Progressive Writers Association was inaugurated in this Hall on 16.8.1936. Felicitations were given to eminent ladies like Sarojini Naidu, Indira Devichaudhurani, Sucheta Kriplani, et. al. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, a great Hindi poet, performed and inspired all by her rendition of *Jhansi Ki Rani*. Amola Shankar (Nandi) performed in this Hall before she left for Almora.

5. Conclusion

The year of 2019 is marked as the centenary year of some of the most distinguished Alumni of Asutosh College for Women (later came to be known as Jogamaya Devi College): Amola Nandi/ Shankar, renowned dancer and cultural icon. Pratima Banerjee Mukherjee (academic, writer, social worker), Karuna Sen / Banerjee (actor, writer, painter, famous for her role as Sarbojaya in Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali*), Aruna (Gauri) Dasgupta / Sen (academic and proficient in performing arts) and Roma Mitra, Aruna Sanyal, Vasant Puri, and many more. Asutosh Mookerjee Memorial Institute and a centenary committee came together to observe the centenary of Pratima Mukherjee (1919-2019) with participation of Jogamaya Devi College Alumni Association. Amola Shankar, by our sheer luck, is still present with us. We intend to pay tribute to them too.

This is the story in outline of how women broke the shackles of subjugation and subservience, found out their own voice and came out of social boundaries to make a niche in higher education. In the first phase men took initiative to establish female schools; for years it was sufficient for girls to study up to Entrance/Matriculation stage. In the next phase everything went wrong with child marriage, premature motherhood, excessive investment in the role of homemaker only, etc.; nobody thought they could go for further studies beyond introducing children to alphabets. College education was not necessary to keep domestic account. Women were considered incapable of going up for higher studies.

It took long time for women to come out of the home-turf, prove their ability to go for higher studies at any length. But finally they crossed the Rubicon. Leela Majumdar's vision of New Women in the Golden Jubilee Number of Jogamaya Devi College Magazine expresses the dream which finally came true, that of the New Women, inspired by education and learning, honest and courageous, strong and fearless, responsible to society, liberal without any prejudice and bias, to look at the world at large with open and free outlook, their ultimate mission to practice humanism. They would not go for material life only; they would have faith and trust in the tradition and culture creating a new legacy for the future generation of women. This is not only a story of female education, it is a history of Women's emancipation through education, learning, co-existence to dream and fight for idealism for the coming generations of Women, the New Women.

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15

Is Education an Equalizer in a Society?: A Case Study on the Girl Students of Jogamaya Devi College, Kolkata, India

Lekha Mukhopadhyay & Kajol Kumari

In economic literature, education in a society is considered as investment for 'human capital', the most important factor for productivity, economic growth and social prosperity. Education is considered also as an equalizer in the context of economic and social disparity. By creating opportunity for an individual to overcome the disadvantages of social background, education may place oneself on an equal footing with others upon entering the job market to earn the livelihood. Education creates freedom that consists of capabilities to survive as well as the capabilities to function well in the society. Amartya Sen one of the pioneers of connecting development with expansion of freedom, however, emphasizes on the complex inter connectivity between freedom and capabilities. He exemplified that illiteracy and undernourishment are the results of low income. Controversially, again, education and good health are the important determinants of income.¹ Various case studies exhibit that instead of transforming patterns of inequality, in a typical education-society-economy interface, education system reproduces and reinforces such patterns of inequality across the genders, and also within and across the generations.² Parental educational background symbolizes the social status, the social capital, which consists of the quantity and quality of the parents' social relationships through which they acquire information about educational strategies and opportunities for their offspring. In our existing market-driven economy, one's educational performance acts as a good predictor of one's potential success in the job market, which is true also for educated parents. Thus better educated parents, better endowed with financial social and cultural capital can and like to invest greater

¹ See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

² See S Taylor and D. Yu, *The importance of socio-economic status in determining educational achievement in South Africa*, A Working Paper of the Department of Economics and The Bureau for Economic Research at The University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2009.

amount of those capital in the education of their offspring. Children's educational outcomes - their cognitive skills, grades, and educational attainment are found to be closely linked to their parents and sometimes in particular, the mother's level of education.³ Various empirical studies show how children with disparate levels of mother's education also differ enormously in their economic circumstances, educational success, and health, all of which have consequences for their later economic success as adults.⁴

Given these set of ideas at the backdrop, in the arena of higher education for women, present work intends to focus on a broad research agenda: how the women students enrolled for higher education at the undergraduate level, with disparate levels of parental and mother's education differ with respect to their economic conditions, and educational performance. The issue has been addressed on the basis of a field survey during 2014 on 117 sampled students enrolled for first year classes for Bachelor of Arts, Science and Commerce degree in Jogamaya Devi College, Kolkata, which is one of the oldest and leading women's college, affiliated to Calcutta University, India. For analytical purpose, five study variables have been selected; two of which are economic *viz.* per head income of the family and monthly spending on private tuition. Rest of the two variables are: parental level of education (considering the higher one) and mother's level of education. They are proposed to be the determinants of the students' educational performance in the pre-college level and opportunity to select the subject stream at the graduation level. This is considered by the variable: percentage of marks in the last school leaving final examination. The statistical and econometric analysis show that because of better performance in the last school leaving examination, the students who have been able to enrol themselves for Honours (Advanced) courses in each stream, having greater opportunity in future job market are on an average are those with higher level of parental and mother's education and higher per head family income (monthly) and spending higher amount for private tuition (monthly), compared to the students enrolled for General courses with lower opportunity in the future job market. This is an indicative of the dismal fact that the present education system in our society, in the context of women's education also is functioning as an instrument for perpetual social cultural and economic inequality.

³ See A. Sutherland, *The Many Ways Mothers' Education Matters*, Blog post of Institute of Family Studies, Available at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-many-ways-mothers-education-matters> accessed August 2018.

⁴ See D. Hernandez and J. J. S. Napierala, *Mother's Education and Children's Outcomes: How Dual-Generation Programs Offer Increased Opportunities for America's Families, a Report of Foundation for Child Development*, Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED558149.pdf> accessed July 2018. Also, J. F. Harding, P. A. Morris and D Hughes, 'The Relationship between Maternal Education and Children's Academic Outcomes: A Theoretical Framework', *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2015, pp. 60-76.

2. Data collection and methodology

In 2014 Kajol Kumari, one of the students of Economics department of Jogamaya Devi College and also the joint author of this paper, in preparation of her term paper for B.Sc Part III Examination in Economics (Advance) as per course curriculum of Calcutta University, collected data from 117 sampled undergraduate students who were enrolled in the 1st year for the Bachelor of Arts (BA), Science (B. Sc) and B. Com course curriculum. The sample size was 10% of the total number of students ('population') enrolled and having at least 50% of attendance in the classes, which was 1177 during that year. She took the individual survey method with the structured and unstructured questionnaires after sampling the students by stratified random sampling method. 10% students were selected randomly (using Random Number Table) from each of the 20 subject strata based on different subject streams. Strata wise distribution of total number of enrolled students (in terms of number and in terms of percentage) has been shown in the chart diagrams 1 and 2. They show that, among all, the largest number of students taken admission was in BA General (14% of the total number of students, enrolled) followed by B Com Advance (11%), Geography Advance and B Com General (9% each), Zoology Advance (7%) and so on. The lowest number of students enrolled was in Sanskrit Advance.

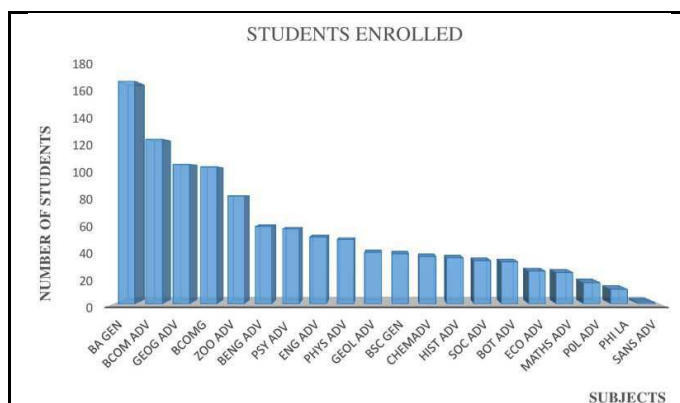


Diagram 1: Number of students enrolled in different subject streams

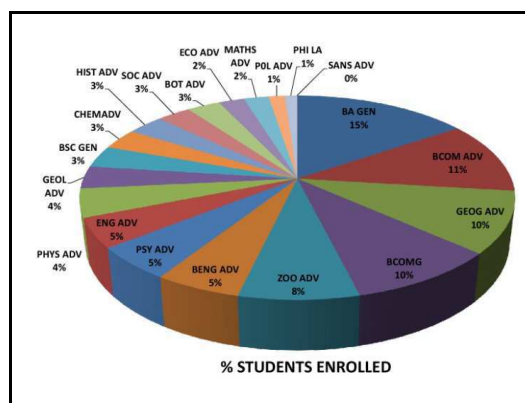


Diagram 2: Percentage of students enrolled in different subject streams

In our educational system, in general, the students' choices of the subjects at undergraduate level are constrained by the grade/ marks/ credit points they secured in the last school leaving examinations. Thus average percentage of marks secured in the last school leaving examination is the lowest (47%) for BA General where students' enrolment is the highest (14%). This is to be compared with only 3% of the students' enrolment having the highest average marks by the students of Geology Advance (GEOH). This is followed by English Advance (ENGH) and Economics Advance (ECOH) with the respective 4% and 2% of enrolment by admission. Mostly for the students from general stream and those under the subjects of humanities and social sciences (except English; Economics being considered as science subject as per CU course curriculum), average percentage of marks are found to be lower. The lower the percentage of enrolment in a subject associated with the higher the

percentage of marks in the examination, immediately triggers off the following three research questions of great significance:

- (i) Who are those larger number of girl students, taking admission to the subjects with lower percentage of marks, not having the opportunity to get admission to the subject which is opted by relatively smaller number of students who have secured the higher marks in school leaving examination?

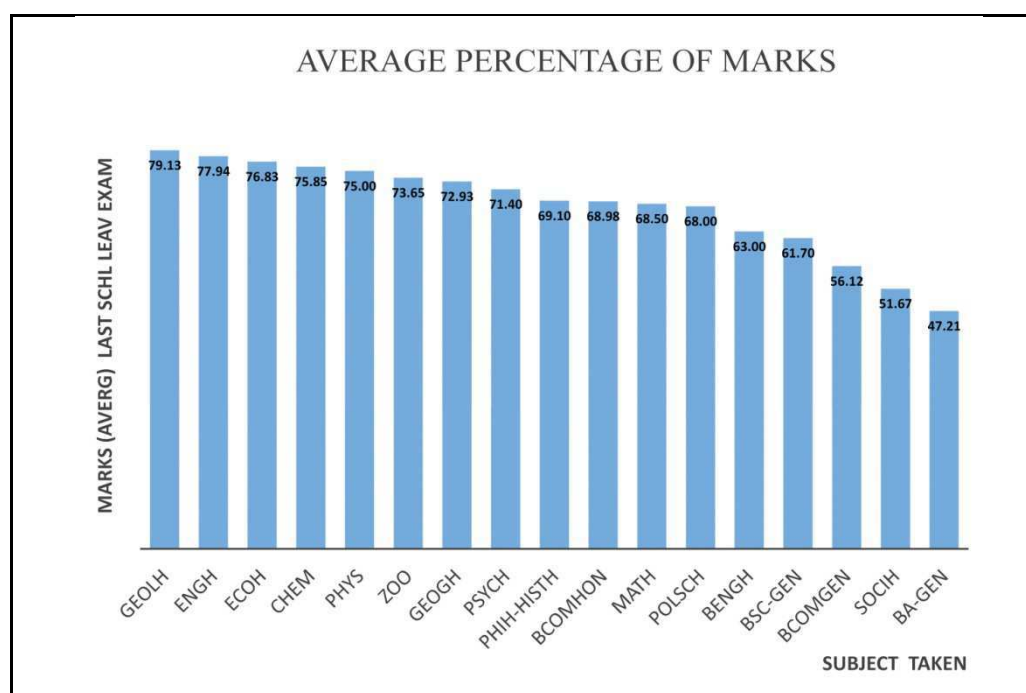


Diagram 3: Average Percentage of Marks in the Last School-leaving Examination of the Students Enrolled in Various Subject Streams

- (ii) Do these students in general face the socio-economic constraints different from those who could opt for the subjects because they secured higher marks in the last school leaving examination?
- (iii) What are the determinants of the different capabilities of the students that create the difference in economic opportunities in their life in terms of employability in future?

The first question relates to identification, while the second and the third highlight on the issue of equity. Identification of the students is done in terms of five proposed socio economic parameters. First set of parameters is concerned with *parental educational background*, comprising:

- (a) *Maximum* (FATHEREDC , MOTHEREDC) and, introducing a gender dimension;
- (b) MOTHEREDC

[The educational levels have been classified into the seven strata: (i) Illiterate; (ii) Primary education; (iii) Above Primary but below Secondary; (iv) Up to Secondary (10th standard); (v) Up to Higher Secondary (11th and 12th standard); (vi) Up to Graduation; (vii) Post Graduation or more].

Second set of parameters is concerned with *economic background*, which is constituted by:

- (c) PERCINC *Per head (per capita) monthly income of the family*, and,
- (d) EXPTUTON *Monthly expenses on private tuition*

After identifying the sampled students in terms of the proposed parameters whether there exists any interconnectivity or not, between (a) the percentage of marks secured in the last school leaving examination (marks used as the eligibility criteria for admission to an undergraduate course) b) her father's educational level c) her mother's educational level and d) her per head monthly family income and e) her monthly expenditure on private tuition have been tested by a set of statistical analysis. The bivariate correlation analysis has been made to find out the degree of association between two of each of those five afore mentioned (a) b) c) d) and e)) variables. Wherever the correlations are found to be strong, they are deployed to construct a model of interconnectivity by path diagram analysis.

3. Analytical Results

3.1 Identification of the sampled students in terms of the parental educational background

While identifying the sampled students in terms of parental educational background (i.e. higher among the father's and mother's level of education) the highest level of parental education is found to be Secondary level for 52%, 42% and 31% of the students respectively from B.A (Bachelor of Arts) and B. Com (Bachelor of Commerce General and B. Com Advance (Hons.)). Higher secondary level for 75% of the students from B.Sc (Bachelor of Science) General is found to be the highest level of parental education. For the students with B.A, B.Sc, B.Com at the

Parental Highest-Level of Education	Subject Streams					
	B.A. Gen	B.Sc. Gen	B.Com. Gen	B.A. Hon	B.Sc. Hon	B.Com. Hon
Illiterate	00	00	00	04	00	00
Primary	06	00	00	00	00	00
Below secondary	18	00	21	17	05	08
Secondary (Standard 10 th)	52	00	42	21	05	31
Higher Secondary (11 th & 12 th std.)	12	75	11	21	14	23
Graduation/U- graduate	12	25	21	38	42	31
P.G. or more	00	00	05	00	35	08

Table 1: Highest Level of Parental Education of the Students (%) across Different Subject streams

Advanced level for majority of them (38%, 42% and 31% respectively) the highest parental education is found to be graduate/ under graduate. For the students with B. Sc Advance significantly the highest parental education is Post Graduate and above for 35% of the students (Table 1, Chart Diagram 3). In general, it is evident that the parental educational level increases as we move from the students in General stream to the students enrolled for Advance courses. In the literature on educational research, in many ways attempts have been made to show how the children's educational attainment, their cognitive skills, their grades are determined by the mother's level of education. Mother's level of education acts as the human capital, cultural capital and social capital and there by influence the educational outcome of her children (Harding, Morris, et.al). In our present context, for 24% of the students in BA General, mothers are reported to be illiterate. For 17% of BA Honours (Advance) and B. Com General students' mothers' illiteracy are reported. In case of B.Sc. general, it is evident that for 50% of the students', mother's education level is secondary and 50% have higher secondary background. Mothers of 38% of the students with B.Com General are having the educational background below secondary level. Mothers are having Higher secondary background for 26% of the students with B.A honours (Advance). It is remarkable that only for B. Sc Hons (Advance) students (16%) mothers have post-Graduate or higher than that educational background. The percentages of the students of B. Sc Honours having undergraduate or graduate mothers are also remarkably high (47%). In general mothers' educational level is found to be higher for honours (Advance) students than that for students enrolled for General stream. The mothers' educational levels of students enrolled for Science Honours/ Advance are further higher than that for students enrolled for the subjects in Humanities with Honours/ Advance.

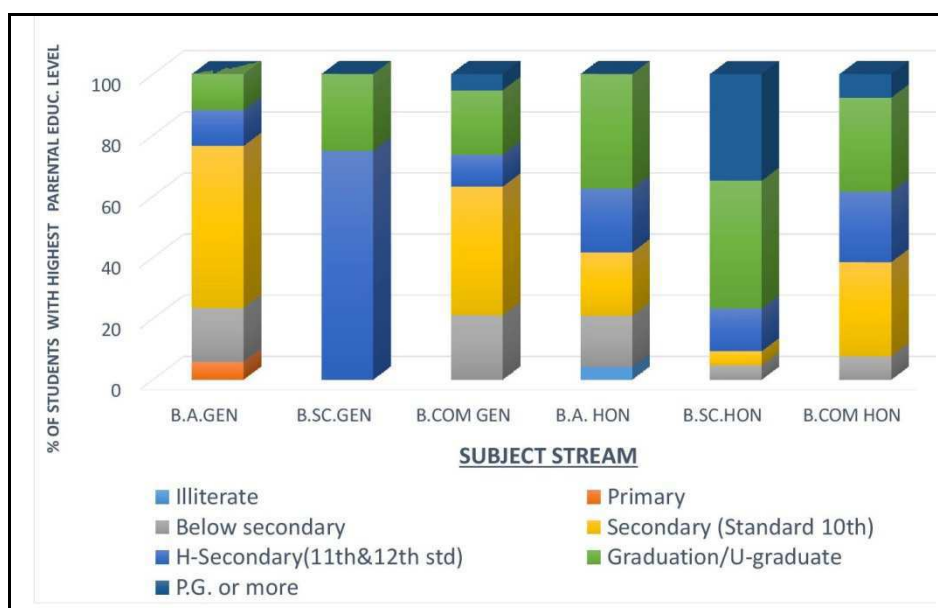


Diagram 4: Highest Level of Parental Education of the Students (%) across Different Subject Streams

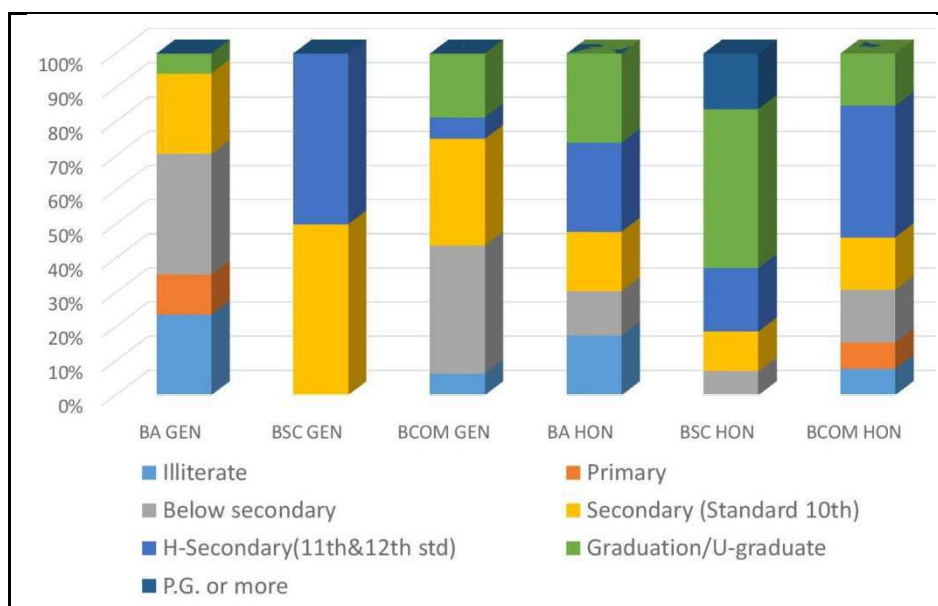


Diagram 5: Mother's Level of Education of the Students (%) across Different Subject Streams

Level of mother's education	Percentage of students in different subject stream					
	B.A. Gen.	B.Sc Gen.	B.Com. Gen.	B.A. Hon.	B.Sc Hon.	B.Com Hon
Illiterate	24	00	06	17	00	08
Primary	11	00	00	00	00	08
Below secondary	35	00	38	13	07	15
Secondary (Standard 10 th)	24	50	31	17	12	15
H-Secondary (11 th & 12 th std.)	00	50	06	26	19	38
Graduation/U-graduate	06	00	19	26	47	15
P.G. or more	00	00	00	00	16	00

Table 2: Mother's Level of Education of the Students (%) across Different Subject Streams

The observed facts as summarized in Table 1& 2 Chart Diagrams 3 & 4, indicate that family education background in terms of parental/ mother's level of education may have a significant role on enrolment of students in Jogamaya Devi College in various disciplines like humanities, science commerce at the general (pass) and at the advanced level. Generally the students having a strong background, i.e., good performance in pre-graduate examination, get enrolled in science/ commerce/ humanities with honours. But students whose performance is not good in pre graduation exams end up opting for general courses. The observed relation of the students' enrolment in various streams with percentage of obtained marks (Diagram 1, 2 and 3) and then their relations with their parental/ mother's educational

background triggers of the research question: Is that interconnectivity statistically significant in our present context?

3.2 Identification of the sampled students in terms of their economic background

Second proposed set of parameters to identify our sampled students is concerned with their economic background, in terms of monthly per capita income of their family and expenditure on private tuition. Considering averages (mean) per capita income of the groups of science students with subjects of humanities and without honours having the percentage of marks lower than the others.

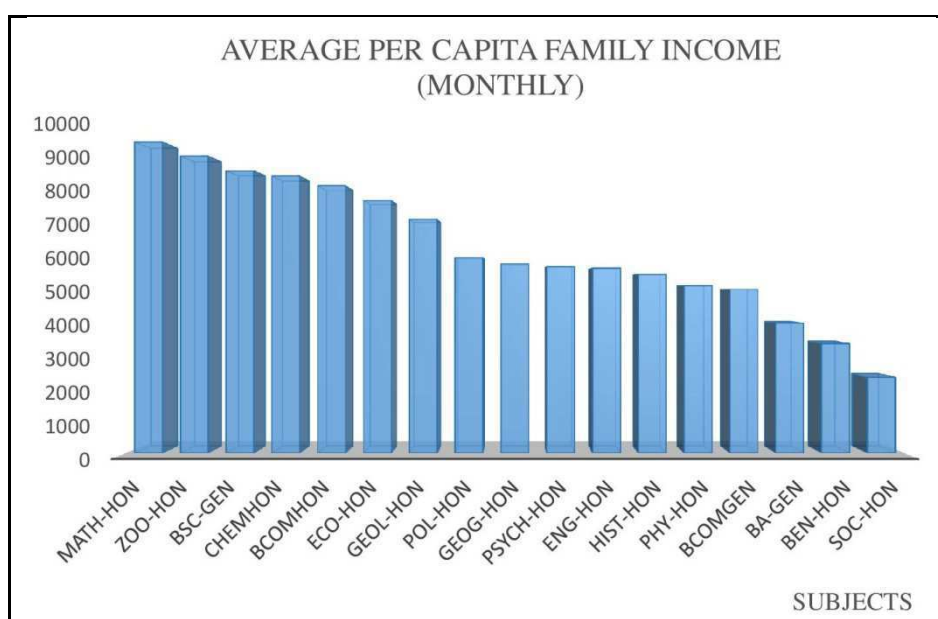


Diagram 6: *Average Per Capita Family Income of the Students across Different Subject Streams*

So far the expenditure on private tuition is concerned, the mean expenditure by honours students is found to be higher than general students except for the case of Commerce students. In case of B.A the honours students are spending almost twice than the general students. BA honours student's mean expenditure on private tuitions is Rs. 668.75 while for General students it is Rs.305.88. When considering for science stream the honours students have mean expenditure Rs.1500 and the general students have mean expenditure Rs.975. It reflects that the honours students spend more on private tuition than their general counterparts. Subject wise it is also found that Honours students in Science subjects are spending more on private tuition than the honours students with subjects on arts and humanities (exception being Political Science).

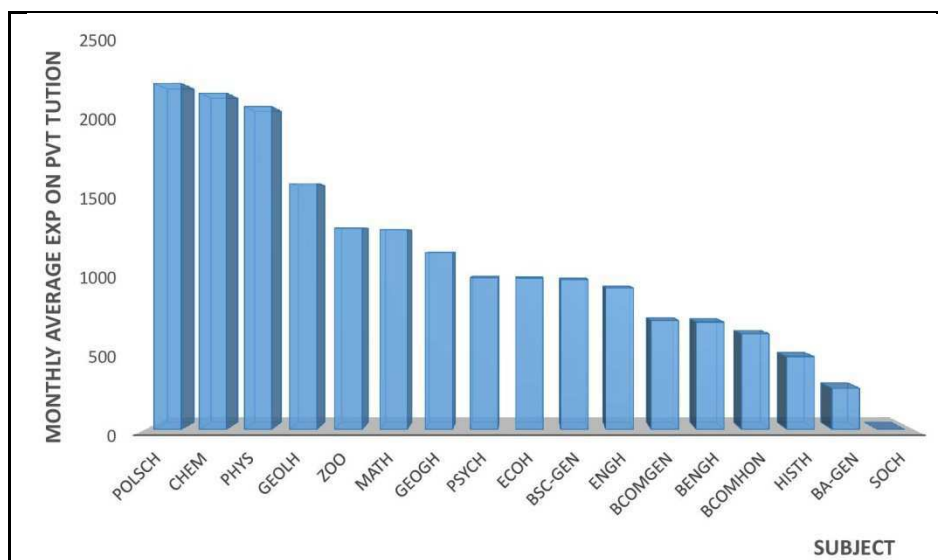


Diagram 7: Monthly Average Expenditure on Private Tuition of the Students across Different Subject Streams

3.3 Students' educational performance, parental educational background and economic background: correlation and interconnectivity

In sub sections 3.1 and 3.2 the linkage between students' educational performances, their enrolment in different subject streams, parents' educational levels, per head family income and monthly expenses on private tuition have been shown in descriptive statistics. To perforate into the analysis further, to assess the strength of the linkage between various parental educational factors and various economic factors a correlation (Pearson) analysis has been carried on. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 3. In each cell the first component is the correlation coefficient with coefficient with value closer and closer to 1 (being a ratio, maximum value of correlation coefficient is 1), stronger and stronger the relation between the two variables (given in row and in column). The second component shows the statistical significance. ** against a value of correlation coefficient indicates that in 99 out of 100 cases of our collected data the relation (as envisaged in the correlation coefficient) holds good. If it is significant at 0.05 level, then in 95 out of 100 cases the relation (as envisaged in the correlation coefficient) holds good. From Table 3 it is clear that between five proposed variables, MOTHEREDC, FATHEREDC, PCINC, EXPTUTON, PERCMARKS, the linkage between any and every two of the variables is statistically significant except the correlation between MOTHEREDC and EXPTUTON. Mother's educational level is found not to be statistically significantly related with expenses on private tuition. On the basis of the results in correlation analysis a model of inter-connectivity has been proposed and fitted into the collected data and tested by statistically. In the proposed model the percentage of marks of the students (PERCMARKS) in the last school leaving examination (which is considered as the criterion by the college authority to get admission and enrolment in a particular subject stream (Science/ Arts/ Honours/ General etc.) is proposed

		MOTHEREDC	FATHEREDC	PERCAPINC	EXPTUTON	PERCMARKS
MOTHEREDC	Pearson Correlation	1.000	0.769**	0.400 Coefficient with value 1**	0.251*	0.536**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.013	0.000
FATHEREDC	Pearson Correlation	0.769**	1.000	0.452**	0.204*	0.474**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.044	0.000
PERCAPINC	Pearson Correlation	0.401**	0.452**	1.000	0.113	0.265**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.269	0.008
EXPTUTON	Pearson Correlation	0.251*	0.204*	0.113	1.000	0.307**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.013	0.044	0.269		0.002
PERCMARKS	Pearson Correlation	0.536**	0.474**	0.265**	0.307**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.008	0.002	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Coefficients among the Proposed Study Variables

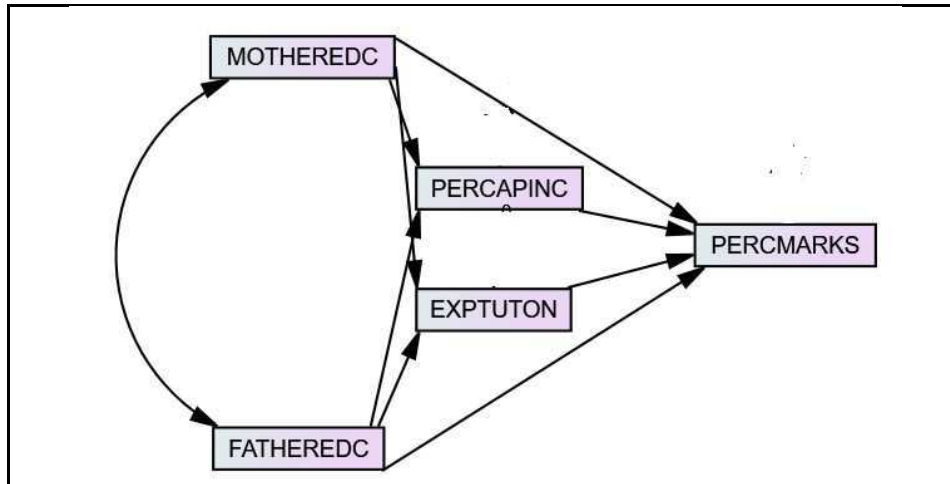


Diagram 8: *Proposed Path Coefficient Model to check the inter connectivity between the parental education, economic conditions and students' performance in examinations*

to be the dependent variable. PERCMARKS depends on MOTHEREDC (mother's level of education), FATHEREDC (father's level of education), PERCAPINC (per capita monthly income of the family), and EXPTUTON (monthly expenses on private tuition).⁵ Again, each of the PERCAPINC, EXPTUTON is dependent on MOTHEREDC and FATHEREDC. The functional dependence that the proposed model considers are:

$$PERCMARKS = f_{(MOTHEREDC, FATHEREDC, PERCAPINC, EXPTUTON)}$$

$$PERCAPINC = g_{(MOTHEREDC, FATHEREDC)}$$

$$EXPTUTON = h_{(MOTHEREDC, FATHEREDC)}$$

while, *MOTHEREDC* and *FATHEREDC* are interdependent on each other.

In other words, in the model, the student's educational performance (% of marks) is proposed to be directly dependent on mother's and father's education level and indirectly dependent on them through family income and expenses they carry on private tuition (Diagram 8 where single headed arrows indicate the one-way link of causality and double headed arrow indicates the 2-way inter-linkage/causality relation. Using SPSS21 AMOS graphics we have estimated the direct effects of *MOTHEREDC* and *FATHEREDC* on *PERCMARK* and their indirect effects through *PERCAPINC* and *EXPTUTON* .The generated path diagram with path coefficients

⁵ Per capita income and expenses on private tuition are used as the indicators of the student's family's ability to bear the cost of her education. [Only 2% of the sampled students are found who do not spend anything on private tuition]. It is further assumed that family's present ability to spend for education (in terms of expenses on private tuition and per capita income) remained same six months back (from the date of survey when she passed the last school leaving examination)

indicating the size of the effect of the proposed variable on PCMARKS is shown in Diagram 9.⁶

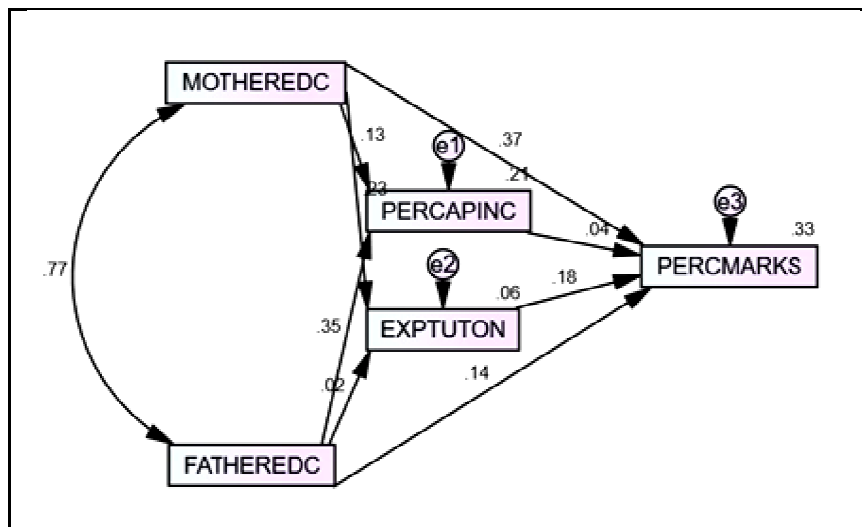


Diagram 9: Result of the Path Coefficient Analysis of Inter Connectivity

Standardized Direct Effects					Standardized Indirect Effects				
	FATHEREDC	MOTHEREDC	EXPTUTON	PERCAPINC		FATHEREDC	MOTHEREDC	EXPTUTON	PERCAPINC
EXPTUTON	0.025	0.232	0.000	.0000	EXPTUTON	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
PERCAPINC	0.350	0.132	0.000	0.000	PERCAPINC	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
PERCMARKS	0.135	0.372	0.184	0.035	PERCMARKS	0.017	0.047	0.000	0.000

Table 4: Standardized⁷ direct and indirect effects (path coefficients) on student's % of marks of the father's and mother's educational level, per capita family income and expenses on private tuition in the proposed path coefficient analysis.

From the path coefficient analysis it is found that the mother's educational level has the highest percentage of direct effect (DE) on the percentage of marks secured by the students which is 0.372 (Table 4, Diagram 9). Dividing the DE by the correlation coefficient between MOTHEREDC and PCMARKS (Table 3) we get 69% (= $0.37 \times 100 / 0.54$) of its correlation is due to direct effect, 31% is an indirect effect. The

⁶ The proposed model is found to be good fit (CMIN = 0.001; $p = 0.98$).

⁷ Standardised estimates result from the regression analysis that have been standardized (i.e., taking each original value to be estimated after subtracting from the mean value and dividing the whole by standard deviation) so that the variances of dependent and independent variables are 1.

second largest size of the effect is 0.35 of FATHEREDC on PERCINC, which is 78% ($= 0.35 \times 100 / 0.45$) of its correlation attributed by the effect. The bidirectional arrow in the path diagram (Diagram 3) between MOTHEREDC and FATHEREDC with its path coefficient = 0.77 indicates a strong positive relationship (77 out of every 100 cases) between the two. The students from the family coming from with higher level of father's education are strongly associated with the family with higher level of mother's education also. Multiplying the Path Coefficient (direct effects) by its respective zero order correlation and summing across all of the independent variables we get the value of $R^2 = 0.34$ (Table 5). In our given data therefore 34% of the variation in the respondent student's percentage of marks (which indicates her opportunity to opt for the various subject streams) is accounted for by her mother's education level (MOTHEREDC), father's education level (FATHEREDC) and family's monthly per capita income (PERCAPINC) and her expenses on private tuition (EXPTUTON). In the proposed chain

EXPLANATORY VARIABLES	DIRECT EFFECT (DE)	CORREL COEFF (r)	DE* r
MOTHEREDC	0.37	0.54	0.20
FATHEREDC	0.14	0.47	0.07
PERCAPINC	0.04	0.27	0.01
EXPTUTON	0.18	0.31	0.06
R ²	0.34		

Table 5: Contribution of each proposed explanatory variables in R^2 (a statistic to measure the goodness of fit of the proposed model)

of interconnectivity, however mother's level of education is playing the largest significant role, while the father's education level and expenses borne on private tuition are the second and the third largest attribute to the variation in student's educational performance. Per head family income is not found to be of much importance in this interconnectivity model.

4. Conclusion

Free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 6 and 14 today is a fundamental right of citizens under the 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India. Yet, the state of education of women in India is far from 'free' or as totalising and encompassing, as the right appears to guarantee. Although the government, through its various initiatives such as the 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (aimed at providing primary education especially to girl children from disadvantaged rural areas) and 'Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao', have attempted to improve the education of women, the barrier to educating women is not always monetary and within the purview of the state, in many cases the barriers are social cultural and most importantly institutional. The empirical study in this paper on the under graduate students of

Jogamaya Devi College, one of the oldest Girls college since 1932 under Calcutta University in south Kolkata, India, corroborates these facts. This college is imparting education to more than 4500 girl students every year from not only West Bengal and its neighbouring States but also from the neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh to the students from backward classes and first generation learners and also those from economically challenged backgrounds. Thus the student-community of the college from which our study units have been sampled may be considered as a good representation of the existing social set up with a gender dimension. The empirical analysis on those students' pre-college educational performance (in terms of the % of marks secured in pre-college final examination) and thereby their enrolment in various subject streams with Honours/ Advance, General, Science, Commerce, Arts and Humanities, exhibits a distinct hierarchy which is socio-economically culturally institutionalized. Their parental educational background, their spending on private tuition (indicative of their ability/ willingness to bear the private cost of education) themselves are creating an educational hierarchy to the women students to determine who will get access to the higher education at the Advanced (Honours) level, and who will not. The father's level of education is an important attribute to the family income but not to the pre-college educational performances of the women students of the college. In the whole gamut, however, the mother's educational level although not significantly attributing to family income but is found to be strongly connected with the students' pre-college educational performance which is used as the criterion for enrolment in the subjects in college education. Lower the level of mother's education lower is the opportunity for the women students in the present generation to study the subject whose employability in the job market is higher. Majority of the graduate jobseekers in India during 2009 were found from general academic disciplines with Arts graduates topping the list comprising about 40 per cent of the graduate job seekers.⁸ Thus the present study reveals the dismal fact that low level of education/ un-education of the women acts as an instrument to perpetuate the intergenerational inequality in opportunity particular among the women.

⁸ Khare, M (2014). Employment, Employability and Higher Education in India: The Missing Links, *Higher Education for the Future* Volume 1, Issue 1, The Kerala State Higher Education Council, SAGE Publications.

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