Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernisation, 1849-1905

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Preface

This book is a modest study of how a section of English educated Bengali men exposed their women to the process of modernization during the late nineteenth century and how women responded to these male efforts. It also gives an evaluation of how far some Bengali women were modernized as a result of the male initiated reform movement. While a number of books on how social reformers such as Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Bidyasagar, Akshay Kumar Datta, Keshab Chandra Sen and Dwarkanth Ganguli contributed to the elevation of the downtrodden Bengali women have been published, no one has tried to give an account of how women themselves responded to modernization. This book seeks particularly to throw some light on this aspect, so long neglected.

I am grateful to the University of Melbourne for giving me a post-doctoral research fellowship for two years (1978-1980) as well as for giving a grant for securing research material from overseas.

I appreciate the help of Professor Sibnarayan Ray under whose supervision I did my research. He helped me in clarifying my ideas.

I am very much indebted to Professor David Kopf, Dr Marian Maddern, Dr Ellen McEwan and Dr Meredith Borthwick for reading the manuscript and for suggesting improvements. I am also grateful to James Wise, Patrick Wolfe, Professor Joan Hussein, Ali Anwar and Pauline Rule for their valuable suggestions.

I am extremely grateful to the Ford Foundation, Dacca, for giving me a generous grant, which covered almost the entire cost of publishing the first edition of this book. I am also grateful to Ms A. Germain for the keen interest she showed in the publication of this book.

First the work of writing my PhD dissertation and then the work of writing this book kept me considerably away from my wife, Eliza, my daughter, Gargi, and from my son, Panini. Besides, Eliza helped me in various ways. My indebtedness to my family is indeed hard to acknowledge properly. My two younger brothers, Dr M. G. Quibria and Dr M.G. Kabir also helped me in many ways. I am really thankful to them.

Finally I would like to thank the Chaturanga Press and its workers for printing the book in less than three months. Because it was rather hurriedly printed, there are quite a few printing mistakes. The index is also inadequate.

A note on Bengali male and female names

To distinguish between male and female names, I have generally used the full names of women writers, unless they are very frequently referred to. Traditional women would generally use *Debi or Dasi* at the end of their names. These are not surnames. Debi literally means a goddess and Dasi a slave.

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INTRODUCTION

If any one phase of Bengal's history has attracted the particular attention of modern historians, it is the nineteenth century. The specific area of interest of these historians is the awakening of Bengal, which includes both the process of modernization that set in possibly from the beginning of the century[1] and the emergence of nationalism, a later phenomenon.[2] Whether or not this awakening can be called a "renaissance" is also a point of great debate. Economic and socio-cultural aspects of nineteenth century Bengal have also been the subject matter of many studies.[3] Because of the pluralistic nature of Bengali society, all these studies whether on modernization or on the growth of the middle classes,[4] have tended to be partial. In most cases, nineteenth century historiography of Bengal concerns the rise and development of an educated elite popularly known as the *bhadralok*.[5] This segment, for most part, belonged in area to the city of Calcutta; in religion, they were Hindus; and by caste, they were Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas. These three castes constituted only about five percent of the total population of Bengal.[6] The number of Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas residing in Calcutta was, of course, smaller and did not even constitute one percent of the populations. Thus despite the fact that it is perhaps the most important part of Bengal's history of that period, the historiography of the *bhadralok* is only partial. It is more so since historians of

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1. For example see Asiatic Society, *Renascent Bengal* (Calcutta : Asiatic Society, 1972) ; N.S. Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal* (3rd ed. ; Calcutta : Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay,1969) ; K . K. Datta, *Renaissance Nationalism and Social Changes in Modern India* (Calcutta Bookland Private Limited.,1965) ; B. Ghosh, *Banglar Nabajagriti* (Calcutta : International Publishers, 1948) ; A. C. Gupta (ed.), *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (Jadavpur : National Council of Education, 1958) D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1969) ; D. Kopf. *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton : Princeton University Press , 1979) ; R. C. Majumdar, A. K. Majumdar & D. K. Ghosh, *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance* (Bombay : Bharatiya Bidya Bhavan, 1965) ; A. Mukherjee, *Reform and Regeneration in Bengal* (Calcutta : Rabindra Bharati University, 1968) ; A. Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal : Search for Identity* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advance Study , 1977) ; S. Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays* (New Delhi : People's Publishing House, 1970).

Besides, such biographical works as S. Sastri's *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj* (Calcutta : S. K. Lahiri & Co., 1904); B. Ghosh's *Bidyasagar O Bangla Samaj* (1st Orient Longman ed.; Calcutta : Orient Longman, 1973) ; and N. Mukherji's *A Bengal Zamindar : Jaykrisna Mukherji of Uttarpara and His Times* (Calcutta : Firma K. L Mukhopadhyay, 1974) are also very good documents of the awakening that took place in the nineteenth century.

2. This has been discussed more or less in all the works on the development of Indian politics, especially in the ones that trace the emergence of nationalism in India. The following works deal in the subject in detail : S. N. Banerjea, *A Nation in the Making* (London : Oxford University Press, 1925) ; L. A. Gordon, *Bengal : The Nationalist Movement* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1974), and B.B. Majumdar , *History of Political Thought from Rammohun to Dayanda* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1934).

3. See, for example, A.F. S. Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal* (Leiden : E.J Brill, 1965) ; N.C Chaudhuri, *Bangali Jibane Ramani* (3rd ed.; Calcutta : Mitra O Ghose, 1971) ; B. Ghose , *Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara* (Calcutta : Author, 1968) ; R. C. Majumdar, *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta : Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960) ; S. Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (2nd ed.; Calcutta : Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,1974) ; and P. Sinha, *Nineteenth century Bengal : Aspects of Social History* (Calcutta : Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay,1965).

4. Books on the development of the Bengali middle classes are few in number. Of these, B. B. *Misr' as Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times* (London : Oxford University Press, 1961) still appears to be the best . B Ghosh's *Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara* and N. K. Sinha's *The Economic History of Bengal* ,Vol. 3 (Calcutta : Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970) are also useful.

5. For a comprehensive definition of the term *bhadralok* see J. H Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1968, pp. 5-7.

The term has been widely used by A. Seal in his The Emergence of Indian Nationalism (Reprint ; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and by D. Kopf in his *The Brama Samaj and the Shaping of Modern Indian Mind.*

In the present work , I used the term to mean educated middle class including Bengali speaking Muslims.

6. Report on the Census of India, 1901, Vol. pt. 1 (Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902) , p. 459.

Bengal have completely ignored one half of the *bahadralok* - their women. It has been considered important to study the role of women in the changing Bengali society for a better understanding of Bengal's awakening.

The recent studies of Bengali women, based mostly on secondary sources and perfunctory in nature, a number of which were done by women, record some important events that took placed among Bengali women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[7] These studies show how and when female education was introduced and gradually accepted in Bengal, when the female BA or MB came out from the Calcutta University, when women started to publish, when women's seclusion was broken and such other things. To have brought to light these developments, for so long unknown, is certainly a significant step towards the understanding of the history of Bengali women. However, like the male historians, the female historians also treated these developments separately, as though they took place outside the general historical scene and neither influenced the male-defined world nor were influenced by it. Besides some very important questions such as how the roles and status of women changed, how their attitudes towards the institution of marriage were being increasingly based on new values, and how the growth of the individuality and personal autonomy affected the relationship between man and woman in the context of the family remained unasked. However it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the socio-cultural history of nineteenth century Bengal without the knowledge of how men first initiated, and then, seeing that women were becoming less subordinate and orthodox, reacted against the modernization of women. Above all, one has also to know how women themselves responded to the process of modernization and how their self-perception became transformed.

The purpose of this book is to assess the impact of modernization on Bengali women as part of the modernization of Bengal. Whether or not women, locked up in the zinana , were satisfied with their very inferior position in the family and considered their lives meaningful with their social, and work roles, it was the concern of a section of English-educated men to give to their women some education and thereby modernize them, because they found it impossible either to advance their society or to fulfill their own lives without uplifting their women. They therefore launched a movement, which at once aimed to elevate their women and to enrich their own lives. By the end of the nineteenth century, this movement coupled with other aspects of social change, brought about a considerable transformation of the roles and status of women as well as of their self-perception. How a male-initiated movement, is an area of interest that this study points to. How partly owing to the change in women's behaviour patterns and values and partly owing to the emergence of nationalism, men reacted and even became hostile to the movement they themselves had started is also considered. However, the focus of the study is on how women with different social and familial backgrounds responded differently to the process of modernization.

The term" modernization" as used in this book might seem unsatisfactory to some. Definitions of modernization as given by different social scientists are dissimilar; no two definitions carry the same meaning. *In Modernization: The Dynamics of Growth* (edited by M. Wiener), for instance, C. Black, D. McClelland, E. Shils, A. Inkeles and other social scientists give widely different definitions of and look from different angles at modernization.

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7. These studies include J.C Bagal's *Women's Education In Eastern India* (Calcutta : World Press, 1956) *and Jatiya Andolane Banganari* (Calcutta : Bishva Bharati, 1954); B.N. Bandyopadhyay's *Banga Sahitye Nari* (Calcutta : Bishva Bharati, 1951) *and Samayikpatra Sampadane Banga Nari* (Calcutta : Bishva Bharati, 1951) ; U. Chakravarty's *Condition of Bengali Women Around the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Calcutta: Author, 1963) ; C. Deb's *Thakurbarir Andar Mahal* (2nd Print ; Calcutta : Ananda Publishers, 1980) ; P. C. Ganguli's *Banglar Nari Jagaran* (Calcutta : S.B. Samaj,1946) ; M. Roy's *Bengali Women* (Chicago : University Press , 1975) ; S. Sen Gupta's *A Study of Women in Bengal* (Calcutta : Indian Publications, 1970) ; and M. M. Urquhart's *Women of Bengal* (London : Y.M.C.A., 1925).

While to Cyril Black the growth of new knowledge and its application to human affairs are the most significant features of modernization, to D. McClelland they are self-reliance and an achievement orientation. Edward Shills attaches more value to the development of skills and to a spirit of creativity. Alex Inkeles finds the following characteristics common in all modern men: 1. disposition to accept new ideas and try new methods; 2. a readiness to express opinion; 3.a time sense that makes men more interested in the present and future than the past ; 4. a better sense of punctuality; 5. a greater concern for planning, organization, and efficiency; 6. a tendency to see the world as calculable; 7. a faith in science and technology; and 8. a belief in distributive justice. Moreover, the concept of modernization, for example, of an economist and that of an educationist differs widely. However, I have used the term to describe the change the women of *bhadralok* families experienced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The change that these women underwent appears to constitute modernization at least according to the definition given by Inkeles. Whether or not other social scientists would call this change modernization in the strict sense of the term, the extent of change was considerable. Women in general as described in early nineteenth century Bengali literature and press accounts, and some individual women of the early twentieth century are so different in their lifestyles, behaviour patterns, values and self-perception that it is hard to comprehend the change. In education and accomplishments, in her attitudes towards her husband, in-laws and family, in work roles and social activities, the modern woman had moved quite a distance from the traditional woman. That she had redefined her life in the light of new ideas, and that she had an opinion of her own which she was ready to express separated her from tradition. I have used the word " modernization" to describe this change.

The term "emancipation" did not seem to me appropriate; because whatever meaning it originally carried, it now refers to a kind of modernization of women that Bengali women had not reached early in the present century. It is doubtful if they have reached that stage even now; although there may be a handful of Bengali women who can be called emancipated. To some feminists "liberation" means even more radical change. Despite their long exposure to modernization, educated Bengali women are still quite traditional in some respects. For example, they are not sexually "liberated", and most of them would not be aware of such a concept. Premarital and extramarital sex is still regarded as extremely exceptional. In married life, a woman probably remains satisfied with her sexual experiences irrespective of quality and quantity; in any case, she would neither complain to any one nor seek satisfaction elsewhere. Most probably she would not even know of a higher level of sexual experience. Therefore, she is not fully aware of sexual rights, let alone the idea of sexual liberation. Similarly although she has social, legal and political rights theoretically on a par with men, she would seldom exercise them. Therefore, both "emancipation" and "liberation" seemed unsatisfactory to me to describe the kind of change Bengali women had undergone; I chose " modernization" instead, because it is a relative term and has a wider connotation.

Ancient Sanskrit sources suggest that some Brahman and Kshatriya women were educated. Besides, there is nothing against educating women in Hindu scriptures. Nevertheless, female education was considered forbidden during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, if not during earlier centuries as well. Although a handful of English educated *bhadralok* started to educate their women privately in the 1830s and 1840s, it was not until 1849 that the first school for girls belonging to *bhadralok* families was established. However, it took quite a while before the *bhadralok* decided to break female seclusion and send their daughters to school. Therefore women's writings in any significant number did not come out until the 1870s. The women who published during the 1860s were mostly educated at home. Extremely shy and diffident, these women would not express their opinions, not to

speak of publishing articles. However, *Bamabodhini Patrika* (1863-1923), *Abala-bandhab* (1869-1873), *Banga Mahila* (1875-1877), *Bharati* (1877-1926) and such other periodicals, which had regular sections for women's writings, encouraged these women to publish their writings. Apart from this, there were exceptions, like that of Kailasbasini Debi, whose immediate inspiration was her husband, a publisher and printer.

Except through secondary sources, it was not known what attitudes Bengali women had towards their position in the family and society during the first half of the nineteenth century and how they responded to the *bhadralok* efforts to elevate them until their writings started to come out. However, it is not clear how far the opinions expressed in these writings were genuinely their own. Even if they wrote on social problems, they did not expose either their private life or their own views. In any case, these writings of women were highly influenced by male-defined values. However, as time passed, they acquired more self-confidence and expressed some of their genuine views. Their attitudinal and value changes are to some extent reflected in their later writings.

Only a small number of studies have so far been published on nineteenth century Bengali women. These are mostly accounts of what men such as Rammohan Roy, Gouramohan Bidyalankar, Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar, Akshay Kumar Datta, Pearichand Mitra, J. E. D. Bethune and Dwarkanath Ganguli did for the introduction and expansion of female education. Patchy accounts are also available on major women writers in some of these studies. It is not known why these accounts are based primarily on secondary sources, and why women's writings have not been explored. However, to find out women's response to the process of modernization, I have had naturally to rely on women's writings, published during the period under review, a substantial portion of which I have brought to light.

If the writings of these women offered me a better view of their roles and status and particularly their self-perception, they imposed a limitation as well. The periodicals mentioned above and the women who wrote in them were predominantly Brahmo in character. While editors of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, *Abala-bandhab* and *Paricharika* as well as those of later *Bharati, Bharati O Balak* and *Antapur* regularly initiated Brahmos, the editor of *Banga Mahila*, Bhuban Mohan Sarkar, was Brahmo-influenced. As for the women who published in these periodicals, they were mostly Brahmos or English educated Hindus such as Krisnabhabini Das, who came into close contact with the Brahmos. Thus this book is actually a study of women of *bhadralok* families, especially Brahmos. The views of some traditional Hindu women and a few Muslim women such as Taherannessa and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein have been included and evaluated, nevertheless this book represents the transformation of a small segment of Bengali women, even less than one percent. However, as a wider section of women were exposed to modernization in the twentieth century, they followed the examples of and modelled their lives after the earlier women. The nature of their modernization is not significantly different. Therefore, despite its limitations, this book might help to throw light on evaluation of a much bigger section of Bengali women.

In chapter 1, I trace the growth of a new consciousness regarding women and the family among the *bhadralok*. Led by this consciousness, the *bhadralok* introduced female education, which they considered a precondition of women's modernization. How this gave rise to a conflict between tradition and modernism and was reflected in the attitudes of women are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters 2 and 3 show how men, as the second step towards elevating women's condition, uncaged women from the *zenana* and later encouraged them to involve themselves in social activities. They also allowed a small number of women to play an economic role. These efforts were even more strongly resisted by traditional society. It was thought that women were losing all their womanly qualities as a result of their exposure to the process of

modernization, which, in the opinion of traditionalists, was nothing but Westernisation. As seclusion became less rigorous and as they could now take part in roles outside the four walls of the zenana, women, for the first time, got the taste of limited "emancipation". In Chapter 4, I further analyse how women's status in the family was elevated and how their work and social roles as well as their self-perception underwent significant change.

In chapter 5, women's response to the social reform movement is investigated. Since nineteenth century social reform movement was both the cause and effect of modernization, women's response to modernization as a whole cannot be determined without evaluating their attitudes to the social reform movement. How with the emergence of nationalism the reform movement soon ebbed away and how this adversely affected the cause of women is also shown in this chapter. Moreover, in all the chapters the limitation of the male-initiated movement for the elevation of women, particularly how men reacted to women's emancipation after a certain degree, are discussed. Finally, I analyse how, despite all opposition, women continued to modernize, slowly but surely.

CHAPTER ONE

"Lead kindly light": The beginnings of female education and women's attitudes towards it

For long before the advent of the English, Bengal had been under foreign rules. If British rule had any novelty, therefore, it was not in its alien character, but in the ideas, which it brought with it. The same Bengal, which apparently underwent little or no change and upheld its medieval character during the five and a half centuries of Muslim rule, suddenly responded positively to these modernizing ideas. The impact of the West brought about not vitalization alone, but also a significant change in the very attitudes of its middle class educated elite, or the *bhadralok*. These people redefined their deep-rooted values as well as their hopes and aspirations in the light of Western liberalism and rationalism.

The discussion below shows how a new consciousness regarding women and the family emerged among the *bhadralok* and how they later tried to modernize their women by giving them some education. It also shows how women responded to male efforts to educate them and how their values, attitudes and even self-perception were modified.

Rise of a new consciousness

After the establishment of British rule in1757, Bengal experienced a slow but appreciable social change, particularly centering on its capital city, Calcutta. There were a number of urban centers such as Murshidabad and Dacca during the time of the Muslim *nawabs* and *subahdars*. They were, however, predominantly administrative in nature. The kind of trading and commercial activities in that thrived in Calcutta were unknown to them. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, some industries also flourished in and around Calcutta. All these attracted a vast population from isolated rural communities, who came to Calcutta for the most part to earn their livelihood. A distinguished litterateur and editor of the 1820s, Bhabani Charan Bandyopadhyay referred to Calcutta as the abode of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. He wrote his book *Kalikata Kamalalay* (1823) to introduce Calcutta and the manners of the inhabitants of Calcutta to the great number of village people1 who were flocking to the unknown city with high hopes of making fortunes and then returning to their ancestral homes.[1]

As a result of their economic activities and of the social interaction between the different sections of people, a certain amount of social mobility and transformation of traditional values became imminent. Moreover, a number of other factors influenced the newly educated Bengalis. For instance, they resented the attempts of the Christian Missionaries to proselytize Bengalis, but undoubtedly found some truth in the latter's criticism of Bengali socio-religious customs and institutions. The endeavours of English orientalists to rediscover India's "glorious past", coupled with their criticism of contemporary institutions as vulgar travesties of ancient practices, further encouraged these Bengalis to analyse and re-examine the existing social norms.[2] Above all, the interaction of two cultures-British and Bengali-in which British

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1. B.C. Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata Kamalaly* (1823), quoted in B. N. Bandoypadhyay, *Bhabanicharan Bandoypadhyay* (5th ed. ; Calcutta : Bangiya Shaitya Parishat, 1960) , p. 24.
The Sanskrit word *Kamalalay* means "the abode of Laxmi".

2. D. Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, pp. 22-24,178-214.

culture, being the culture of the rulers, was the dominant one, profoundly affected some of the values that Bengalis had maintained for centuries.[3]

During the period under review, Bengali women occupied a very inferior social position. In his second pamphlet on *suttee*, published in 1819, Rammohan Roy observed that a woman was considered to be no more than a useful creature who could be at once a cook, a sexual partner and a faithful housekeeper.[4] That a woman was inferior to a man was a popular belief, at that time, not only in India, but all over the world. As late as 1845, an official report, published in Russia, thus defined women's subordinate status:

> Woman, as a lower creation appointed by nature to be dependent on others, must know that she is not fated to rule but to submit herself to her husband and that only through strict fulfillment of her responsibilities to her family can she assume her happiness and gain love and respect both within the family circle and without.[5]

The status of women in Bengal, as defined by men, was similar if not inferior to that of women in Russia.

A handful of Bengali women were exceptions to the general rule of female illiteracy. These include the few middle-class childless widows who learnt how to read in order to read religious literature, and a few *zamindars* who learnt how to keep accounts and manage their estates.[6] Men did not recognize the need to educate women. Worse still, men held an extremely poor opinion of women maintaining that women were devoid of all intellectual abilities and could never be educated.[7] If popular male opinion in England, at that time was not so severe, some men still held that women were intellectually inferior to men. A physician and a surgeon of some fame, Sir A. E. Wright wrote a letter to the editor of *The Times*, published on March 28, 1912, saying that women were intellectually much less developed and that they had a distorted mental picture.[8] However, as English education and Western ideas permeated a segment of urbanized middle-class men, that segment, though small, came to question the existing status of Bengali women. These men compared the position of their women with that of European women and found a great difference in that the latter were not secluded in their homes nor were they kept completely illiterate. On the contrary, they found that English women were given some education and were encouraged to acquire such accomplishments as singing and dancing. Even if they still believed that women were intellectually inferior to men, they were convinced that women could be educated. They also became conscious of the very subordinate position of their women and started, at first differently, a movement for their elevation.

Rammohan Roy was the earliest to expose the deplorable condition of the womenfolk of Bengal. No one knows exactly how he became conscious of the very low position of women. Since he was a friend of Jeremy Bentham[9] and of Robert Owen,[10] both of whom advocated

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3. J. N. Gray, 'Bengal and and Britain : Culture contact and the Reinterpretation of Hinduism in the Nineteenth Century ' in *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, ed. by R. V. M. Baumer (Hawaii : The Univ. Press of Hawaii, 1975), pp. 99-103.

4. *Raja Rammohan Ray-Pranita Granthabali* (Collected Works of Raja Rammohan Roy), ed. by R. Basu and A.C.Bedantabagish (Calcutta : Adi Brahmo Samaj, 1873-74), p. 205.

5. Quoted in R.T. Evans, *The Feminists : Women's Emancipation Movement in Europe, American and Australia* (London : Croom Helm, 1977), p. 114.

6. W. Adam, *Report on the State of education in Bengal 1835 & 1838* ed. by A. Basu (Reprint, Calcutta: Calcutta Univ., 1941),p. 147 ; Kailasbasini Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler Bidyabhyas O Tahar Samunnati* (Calcutta : Gupta Press, 1865), pp. 13-14.

7. Roy strongly deplored this popular attitude. Raja Rammohan etc., pp. 205-06.

8. C. Rover, *Love, Morals and the Feminists* (London : Routledge & K. paul, 1970), p. 149.

9. The letters exchanged by J. Bentham and Roy indicate that they had great admiration for each other. When Roy went to England , Bentham came to visit him, although he had not called on anyone for about 15 years. For details see , S. D. Colette, *The life and Letters of Raja Rammohan Roy* (3rd ed. ; Calcutta : Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1962), pp.313, 488-93.

better social status for women, it is quite possible that he got the idea from their writings. Besides, he read James Mill's celebrated work *History of India* (1818)[11] in which it was argued that among rude people the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted ... As society refines upon its enjoyments, and advances into the state of civilization, the condition of the weaker sex is gradually improved.[12] Voracious reader as he was, it is not unlikely that he also read about the contemporary debate on women's emancipation that had started with the publication of M. Wollstonecraft's famous book in 1792.[13] Whatever, his sources of inspiration, he severely attacked the male-dominated Hindu society, saying that it was selfish and hypocritical and that it denied to them (women) those excellent merits that they are entitled to by nature.[14] When he went to England, he was most impressed by the female virtue and excellence in this country.[15] Indeed he realized the need to educate and thereby raise the status of Bengali women. By the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, quite a few people, including such friends of Roy as Dwarkanath Tagore and Prasanna Kumar Tagore, became convinced that a woman should be given some education.[16] Even the great leader of the orthodox Hindus, Radhakanta Deb, realized that women should be educated. In spite of the fact that Gouramohan Bidyalankar's book *Strishikshabidhayak* (Arguments in Favour of Female Education, 1822), the first of the hundreds of booklets later published on female education, was based mainly on Roy's arguments and materials, it was Deb who encouraged Bidyalankar to compile his book, which he thought would pave the way towards female education.[17] Whether or not people like Deb were prepared to educate their women and raise their status, this was the beginning of an era when a cross section of Bengali men became aware of the need to educate and thus "emancipate" their women.

The highly Western-influenced students of H. V. L. Derozio, who emerged as a radical group called Young Bengal in the late 1820s, were more articulate and demanded equal status for women. Such thinkers as Tom Paine, who was a friend of Mary Wollstonecraft, was their philosopher and guide.[18] They were acquainted with Richard Carlile's writing as well. Carlile, who advocated birth control, was one of the supporters of radical feminism. Carlile's *Every Woman's Book* (1826) and William Thompson's *Appeal of One Half the Human Race Women against the Pretensions of the other Half Men* (1825) were the two publications that

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10. From Roy's letter to owen's son, it seems he was very much impressed by Owen's social ideas. For the text of this letter, see Collect, pp. 494-95.

Owen advocated equality for women and easier marriage laws. Owen's disciples, such as Emma Martin and Catharin Watkins, came to be konwn as radical feminists in the 1840s. See for details, C. Rover,op. cit., p. 23 and B. Tailor,'The women-Power', in Tearing the Veil ed. by S. Lipshitz (London : Routledge & K. Paul, 1978), pp.127-32.

11. Roy referred to Mill's book in his *Preliminary Remarks-Brief Sketch of the Ancient and Modern Boundaries and History of India* (1832).

12. J. Mill, *The History of British India*, Vol. 1 (2nd ed. ; London : Baldwin, Cradock and Jay, 1820), p. 383, 385.

13. Though such books as Dr. J. Gregery's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters and Her Own Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) had been published before, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the rights of Woman* (1972) was the first significant protest by a woman and with this began the early efforts to improve the social position of Englishwomen.

14. *The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy*, Vol. 2, ed. by J. C. Ghose (Calcutta : S. Roy, 1901), p. 177.

15. *Ibid*., p. 9.

16. B. B. Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise* (Berkley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), p. 183.

For Prassanna Kumar Tagore, see Editorial notes, *Sangbadpatre Sekaler Katha*, 2 Vols., ed. by B. N. Bandyopadhyay (4th ed. ; Calcutta : Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1971-77),1, 367-68 (Hereinafter SSK.) .

17. Deb's letter to J. E. D. Bethune, 20 March 1851. For full text see J. C. Bagal, *Women's Education in Eastern India* (Calcutta : World Press, 1956), pp. 102-04.

18. Particularly *Age of Reason* became very popular among them. A. F. S. Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal*, p. 42.

most profoundly influenced the later feminist movement in England.[19] Apart from them, Young Bengal had their ideas from the Benthamites, the Owenites and the romantic poets who led the anti-establishment movement in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

The Unitarian movements also have its impact on Bengal. The Unitarians efforts to raise the condition of women as well as that of the industrial proletariat caught the imagination first of Rammohan Roy and his friends and later of Akshay Kumar Datta, Pearychand Mitra, Kissory Chand Mitra, Durgamohan Das, Sibnath Sastri and even of Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar later, Mary Carpenter and Annette Akroyd helped the diffusion of female education in Bengal.[20]

All these factors gave birth to a new concept of civilization and to a regard for a new set of values, especially in relation to women. Men who had for so long been satisfied with illiterate wives and who had never bothered about husband-wife relationships felt, for the first time, a communication gap between their wives and themselves. Despite his extraordinary reforming zeal, Roy, for example, could not and possibly would not reform either of his two wives. Not only did his modern ideas and social activities fail to appeal to his orthodox wife, who lived with him in Calcutta, but she carefully kept herself aloof from him so that she might not lose her caste and religious "purity".[21] Dwarkanath Tagore's wife was afraid of losing her caste and kept herself away from her unorthodox husband. In fact his family life was marred by the insularity and piety of his wife.[22] He was therefore forced to live away from the harem in a house he had built to receive guests. He also developed intimate relationships with European women.[23] Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar, who was a champion of the cause of women, could neither educate his wife nor make her share his success and failures in public life. Frustrated and unhappy, he wrote to his wife that his relationship with her was one of supporting financially.[24] Prasanna Kumar Tagore too felt this communication gap, but as a solution to the problem, he started giving proper education to his wife.[25]

In fact, newly educated Bengalis soon developed this sense of the inadequacy of domestic relationships. A Brahman from Chinsura pointed it out as early as 1838 in a letter published in *Samachar Darpan*:

> Bengali men are now receiving education and consequently their minds are being enlightened. Under the circumstances how can they get on with their unlettered wives? Can they expect from these wives the sort of company they require after a long day of physical and mental labour? Will they be able to communicate their real feelings to these women?[26]

Another reformer voiced the same feeling but in more specific terms. In his opinion educated men had become very unhappy in one respect - their wives did not give them peace of mind and happiness.[27] Yet another went on to give a true picture of this unhappiness:

> His wife, amiable good-natured, thoughtless, foolish, is a veritable chatterbox, whose talk is as unprofitable and unless as if it were nothing more than an embodiment of a series of inarticulate sounds. She tries to

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19. C. Rover, *Love, Morals and the Feminists*, pp. 21-23,27.

20. Roy was attracted by the Unitarian ideas before 1817. With the help of W. Adam and his Bengali friends like D. N. and P. K. Tagore, both of whom contributed large sums, he established a Unitarian society in Calcutta . It seems only natural that the Unitarian ideas of raising the condition of women would appeal to him along with their religious ideas. See D. Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, Ch. 1.

21. *Samachar Darpan*, 3 Nov., 1832, SSK, 485-86.

22. B. B. Kling, p. 183.

23. *Ibid*., pp. 182-83.

24. Bidyasagar's letter to his wife, Nov.,1869 in *Biyasagar Rachanabali*, Vol., 4, ed. by D. K. Basu (Calcutta : Mandal Book House, 1969), p. 66.

25. SSK, Editorial notes, l, 367-68.

26. Letter from a Brahman, *Samachar Darpan*, 3 Mar., 1838, in *SSK*, ll, 99.

27. 'Edeshe Swamir Prati Strir Byabahar', *Bamabodhini Patrik*a, Ap.-May, 1873, p. 15. (Hereinafter *BBP*.)

please her beloved husband, but she succeeds only in adding to his sense of vexation and wretchedness. She sits on the floor beside him; she relates the occurrences of the day, the incidents of her domestic life, with a volubility, which can not be admired. She describes graphically how the cat got into the kitchen, overturned the brazen jug and threw down the milk, how a beautiful but brittle vessel, given her by her dear old granny, bless her! has been broken through the carelessness of her stupid housemaid; how she has been literally frightened out of her wits by the sudden fall of a lizard on the bed; and lastly how bitterly she has wept to think of the calamities which the sudden pain she feels in her left eye is calculated to portend! But she is not, good soul, altogether selfish, and so after having exhausted the indigents of the house, extends her generous concern to the affairs of other persons and so begins the work of the relating the gossip of the neighbourhood. The Babu has been shrewd to imitate his Anglo-Saxon cousin, and to take to beer to drinking with a view to balance and counteract the sorrows of life. The Babu's life is entirely destitute of poetry and romance, it is the very essence of dullness and monotony.[28]

The sort of young men described above contended that education and an amount of modernization could give their wives the desired refinement and accomplishments and turn them into better wives.

Aprt from this, as another contemporary writer claimed, English ideas had caused an increase in affection and sympathy for daughters, who had for so long been much neglected and looked down upon.[29] Thus Western influence brought a remarkable change of attitudes towards womenfolk among Bengali literati from the 1820s onward. At the initial stage of this change, men like Rammohan and Mrityunjay Bidyalanker became aware of the inhuman cruelty of such socio-religious institutions as *suttee*, but later Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay became conscious of the debased nature of husband-wife relationship,[30] whilst many others, as already mentioned, were concerned about women's illiteracy. In fact, a new ideal was gradually emerging in the 1820s and 1830s according to which Bengal would become civilized only if its women were educated along with its men.[31]

Further away from tradition, the radical Young Bengal questioned not only the degree of subordinate of women, but also the principle of subordination itself. They declared: 'God created both men and women's equal'. He never intended that one would be subordinate to another. Women therefore must be treated as equal to men in every respect'[32] The ancient law-givers, in their eyes, were hypocritical in that they, in the name of religion, did sheer injustice to women.[33] The plea for equality of women was indeed radical at that time not only in Bengal but in England as well. Consequently, Young Bengal, who were only a handful compared to the whole population and who had alienated themselves from the society as a whole by their unorthodox life style, were unable to impress their ideas upon society at large, notwithstanding the forcefulness of their ideas in their own circle.[34]

The question of giving elementary education to women might possibly have attracted the attention of wider circle if reforms closer to traditional society had worked from within. This was partly achieved during the 1840s and 1850s by Akshay Kumar Datta, Madan Mohan Tarakalankar. Dwarkanath Roy and, of course, Bidyasagar. Akshay Kumar Datta, as editor of *Bidyadarshan* (1842) and *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (1843-55), argued that women were not by any means inferior to men, rather they were superior in many respects.[35] Bidyasagar in his articles published in *Bengal Spectator* (1842). *Sarbasubhakari Patrik*a (1850) and

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28. A Hindusthani ' The Great Want of the Babu Community', *Bengali Magazine*, Vol. 3 (Feb., 1875), pp. 326-30.

29. 'Banga Mahilar Abastha', *Tamoluk Patrika*, Vol 1 (1874-75), p. 220.

30. This can be found in his books *Naba Babu Bilas* (1825) , *Duti Bilas* (1825) and *Naba Bibi Bilas* (1831).

31.Letter from a Brahman , *Samachar Darpan*, 3 Mar, 1838, SSK II, 99. Also see Chapter 2.

32. Jnananveshan, quoted in *Samachar Darpan*, 16 Dec.1837, SSK, II, 262-63.

33. Jnananveshan, quoted in *Samachar Darpan*, 5 Jan., 1833, SSK,II, 96.

34. S. N . Ray, ' From Derozio to Nazrul : Radicalism and the Bengali Intelligentsia'. *New Quest*, No. 5 (Dec.,1977), p. 6 .

35. For example, *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, 1 Push 1766 Shakabda (Dec., 1844), p. 134.

Bibidhartha Sangraha (1854), and in his first pamphlet in favour of widow remarriage, (1855) expressed his profound sympathy for the oppressed women of Bengal. Through their publication during the 1850s and 1860s, Madan Mohan, Pearychand Mitra, Peary Charan Sarkar and Dwarkanath helped to promote that concept of civilization according to which a nation could claim to be civilized only if its women enjoyed an exalted social position. They also helped to create a deep sense of sympathy for the womenfolk.

The beginnings of female education

The belief in education as a precondition of and the first step towards women's modernization was common to all reformers, from Roy, G. Bidyalankar and the Christian Missionaries, to the radical Young Bengal and the later liberals like Datta and Bidyasagar. But it was an English man, Robert May, of the London Missionary Society, who in 1818, established the first girls' school in Bengal, at Chinsura.[36] Later, the Calcutta Baptists (1819) and the Church Missionary Society (1823) took up the cause of female education with remarkable zeal. Miss Mary Ann Cooke, under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society, established as many as 30 girls' schools between 1823 and 1828. Contemporary sources suggest that these schools were attended by quite a few native girls'.[37]

However the number of these schools does not by any means reflect the Hindu attitude of that period towards female education. There was indeed a gulf of difference between what the Hindu leaders thought was good and what they practiced. For example, R. Roy, so well known for his liberal ideas, wrote a long letter to the Governor-General regarding the desirability of English education[38] and argued in favour of the spread of female education. R. Deb, as we have already seen, encouraged G. Bidyalankar to compile his book on female education, and later requested the Calcutta School Book Society to publish it. but he too was very much opposed to the idea of sending girls to schools. In his words, 'all classes of respectable Hindus have thought it derogatory to allow their daughters to attend the schools established by Miss Cooke.[39] Thus even people who realized the need for female education did not send their women to school, not to speak of the others those who were clearly hostile to female education. In the face of this apathy even hostility,[40] on the part of the Hindu elite, these girls' schools were attended only by girls belonging to such low castes as Bagdi, Byadh and Bairagi, and by daughters of prostitutes, [41] and that too for cash rewards.[42] Moreover, it appears that these girls learnt little or nothing at all.[43] Consequently, the schools were gradually closed during the first few years of the 1830s.

Apart from the *bhadralok's* hostile attitudes towards breaking the seclusion of girls by sending them to school, there was, of course, the fear of proselytization. This fear increased quite considerably with the sharp increase in the number of converts.[44] Thus, partly owing to

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36. M. A. Laird , *Missionaries and Education in Bengal* (London : Oxford U. P., 1972), p. 134.

37. 37 *Samachar Darpan*, 8 Mar., 1823, and 28, Jun., 1828, SSK I, 14, 16.

38. This letter was written on 2. 12. 1823. For the text of the letter see *The English Workers of Raja Rammohan Roy*, II, 323-28.

39. Deb to Bethune, J. C. Bagal, p. 103.

40. A striking exception is the case of Raja Baidyanath Ray, who donated a large amount of money -20,000 Rupees - for the support of these schools. See *Samachar Darpan*, 31, Dec., 1825 SSK, I, 15.

41. *Bangadut*, quoted in *Samachar Darpan*, 25 Jun., 1831, SSK, II, 91-92.

42. W. Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal 1835 & 1838*, pp. 452-53.

43. *Ibid*., pp. 41-49.

44. More Hindus were converted to Christianity during 1823 to 1832 than during 1793 to 1822. For details see 'Results of the Missionary Labours in India', *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 16 (1851), p. 255.

the fear of proselytization and partly owing to the strict adherence to seclusion' early attempts to institutionalize female education in Bengal failed.

A few liberal Hindus of the 1830s who really felt that their women should receive education, arranged it privately. P. K. Tagore, for example, with the help of *Baisnabis* and Missionary women, educated his wife and daughters. His eldest daughter, Surasundari, is said to have attained a high standard of education,[45] including proficiency in English. Harasundari, daughter of Sibchandra Ray and a niece of Raja Baidyanath Ray, Drabamayi, daughter of Chandi Charan Tarkalankar, and the daughter of Ashutosh Deb (whose name is not known) were also educated at home.[46] Even R. Deb is said to have established in his own house a private school for the female members of his family.[47]

Although these private efforts yielded some positive results, they had some definite limitations as well. First they remained confined to the small circles of either the Brahmos or the Christians. Secondly, most of these efforts were carried out secretly and therefore had no effect on the hostile attitudes of conservative society. Thirdly, the small numbers of teachers, especially female teachers, available at that time were unable to educate women from a large number of families. Fourthly, middle or lower middle class families could not afford the luxury of retaining private teachers. Hence the establishment of girls' schools and their acceptance by the *bhadralok* were essential for the expansion of female education.

The milestone was reached when, in May 1849 the Victoria Girls' School later known as the Bethune School was founded by J. E. D. Bethune.[48] Unlike the earlier schools run the Christian Missionaries, the Victoria Girls' School was intended for only the upper class Hindu girls[49] and had no proselytizing objectives. It was managed by a committee consisting of renowned Hindus who reflected both conservative and liberal views.[50] The syllabus included nothing that could hurt the feelings of the Hindus and the teachers were all Hindus.

The Bethune School thus threw a challenge to the *bhadralok* : would they send their daughters to school, now that the fear of proselytization was not there ? However, only a few accepted this challenge. Men like Haradeb Chattopadhyay who sent their daughters to this school had to bravely face the fear of being ostracized by traditional society.[51] Debendranath Tagore, Rabindranath's father, who had so many times ignored the social customs relating to religious rites, hesitated for some time before sending his daughter, Saudamini, to the school.[52] Bethune himself wrote of how conservative Hindus were totally opposed to sending girls to his school and how , at the death of an influential leader of these Hindus (whose name he did not mention), the number of students rose.[53] Many still maintained that education would spoil the womanly qualities in the womenfolk and bring disgrace on their families. For example, Ishwar Gupta, who strongly supported the establishment of the Bethune School in 1849, soon became hostile towards female education. In his poem "*Durbhiksha*", he deplored the fact that women were losing their virtues as a result of the expansion of female education:

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45. Kailasbasini Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler Bidyabhyas O Tahar Samunnati* (Calcutta : Gupta Press, 1865) , p. 30.

46. *Samabad Bhaskar*,31 May 1849 and 19 Apr., 1851, SSK, I, 367-68.

47. SSK, Editorial notes, I, 396.

48. Surprisingly, it was an Englishman again who took this bold step. Bethune (1801-51 was a brilliant student at Oxford University . He came to India in 1848. He donated everything he had for this school. After his sudden death, the Government of India financed the school.

49. See the prospectus of this school as published in *Samabad Bhaskar*, 3 Jan. , 1857, quoted in *Samayikpatre Banglar Samajchitra*, Vol. 3, ed. by B. Ghosh (Calcutta : Bikshan, 1964) , p. 450.

50. This included men like Kalikrisna Deb, Harachandra Ghosh and Bidyasagar.

51. K. N. Thakur , *Arya Ramanir Shiksha O Swadhihnata* (Calcutta : Elgin Press, 1901), p. 128.

52. Debendranath's letter to R. Bose, Jul., 1851, *Debendranather Patrabali*, ed. by P. Sastri (Calcutta : Adi Brahmo Samaj , 1909), p. 40.

53. Bethune to Lord Dalhousie, 29. 3. 1850, in *Selections From Educational Records*, Vol. 2, ed. by J.A.Richey (Calcutta : Bengal S. Press. 1922), pp. 52-53.

The women were, in the older days, virtuous ,
They used to observe the rituals and abide strictly by the religious codes,
Bethune alone has destroyed all their womanly qualities.
Don't you expect to get them as before.
Ignoring everything around them, the girls are holding books,
They must learn ABC and speak the language of England.....
Most certainly they will themselves drive their carriage and go to Garer Math for an airing .
Perhaps they will also wear boots and smoke cigars![54]

Ishwar Gupta wrote this poem during the early 1850s when there had been virtually no expansion of female education. This poem, therefore, does not reflect what was actually taking place, it rather shows what the conservative people were thinking of female education. The Bethune school started with 11 students, but soon the number fell to seven.[55] At one stage, only three girls attended the school - two of them being the daughters of Madan Mohan, a teacher at that school.[56] After 15 years of labour and zealous service rendered by Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar and his friends, the number of students rose to 64. The standard of education was still very low- only 21 of the 64 students could read and understand a simple story.[57] The success therefore was not remarkable by any means. But the Bethune School undoubtedly assisted the development of female education in Bengal in the sense that the *bhadralok*, by sending their daughters to this school, publicly broke the age-long custom of strict seclusion, and female education was thus institutionalized.

Following the example of Bethune, Joykrisna Mukherji established a girls' school at Uttarpara, near Calcutta, in the same year,[58] and Kissorichand Mittra soon established another school at Rajshahi.[59]

Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar was an ardent supporter of female education and devoted much of his time and energy to the management of the Bethune School during the first 20 years of its existence. Encouraged by its success, albeit limited, he wanted to spread female education in rural Bengal. Between November 1857 and May 1858, he established as many as 35 Girls' schools in the district of Hugli, Burdwan , Midnapur and Nadia.[60] But the schools were soon closed when the Bengal Government withdrew financial support.

Spread of female education

Female education had only limited success in the 1850s and 1860s. The orthodox Hindus were still overwhelmingly opposed to it and ostracized the parents who sent their daughter's to school.[61] The establishment of girls' schools faced great opposition. When Sibnath Sastri's friends founded a girls' school at Majilpur near Calcutta the local *zamindar* did every thing he could to close it. One night, the schoolhouse was destroyed. The founders were threatened with physical assault and were finally implicated in a criminal case.[62] Many people who supported female education did not approve of girls being taught by male teachers. This made the spread of female education almost an impossibility, because, at that time, there were only

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54. "Durbhiksha," *Kabita Sangraha*, Vol I, ed. by Bankimchandra Chatterji (Calcutta, 1885) , pp. 121-22.

55. *Selection from Educational Records*, II, 52-53.

56. K. N. Thakur p. 128.

57. *General Report on Public Instruction in Lower Provinces of Bengal Presidency*, 1863-64 (Calcutta: Government of Bengal, 1865), p. 59.

58. *Selection from Educational Records*, II, 48-49 ; N. Mukherji, *A Bengal Zamindar : Joykrisna Mukherji*, p. 154. N. Mukherji argues that Joykrisna established his school earlier.

59. M. N. Ghosh, *Karmabir Kissorichand Mitra* (Calcutta : Adi Brahmo Samaj, 1927), pp. 73-74.

60. *Bidyasagar Rachanabali*, Vol. 4, editorial notes, pp. 63-65.

61. According to Sibnath Sastri, this fear of being ostracized continued even as late as the 1870s . See his article 'Shastra Deshachar O Dharma' *Nabya Bharat*, Aug.-Sep.,1884, p. 229.

62. *Tattavabodini Patrika*, Magh 1785 (Jan.-Feb., 1864), p. 173 ; S. Sastri, *Atmacharit* (1st Signet ed. ; Calcutta : Signet Press, 1952), pp. 58-60.

a handful of female teachers and they too were half educated. Moreover, in those days girls used to be married when they attained the age of 10 or 11.[63] They could, therefore, attend school only for a brief period and were unable to learn even simple reading, writing and arithmetic.[64]

The best educated women at this stage (1850s and 1860s) were the ones who had their education privately at home from either their husband or, in some cases, from their parents. This type of education, known as *zenana* education, gradually came to be widely approved by traditional society.

The success of zenana education during the 1850s and 1860s was largely due to the young Brahmos and the Brahmo-influenced Hindus. They took up the cause of women's education with almost religious zeal. Brahmo leaders such as Keshab Chandra Sen, Bijoy Krisna Goswami, Sibnath Sastri, Aghore Nath Gupta and Umesh Chandra Datta, who were imbued with the newly emerging Western ideas of husband -wife relationships, found it essential to give some education to their partners to turn them into better wives and better companions.[65] These Brahmo as well as enlightened Hindu leaders had their contributions too. They were "progressive" in the sense that they wanted to educate their wives, but they were quite traditional in the sense that they could not and possibly did not want to break the social custom of seclusion and send them to school . None of the wives of the above-mentioned Brahmo leaders, including Keshab Sen's, attended any school. We will later see how disillusioned Miss Annette Akroyd was when she found that Keshab, so "progressive" outside , had been unable to educate his wife properly.[66] Admittedly, the wives of these Brahmo leaders and women of other Brahmo and "progressive" Hindu families started to receive education privately in their homes and later to sit for examinations conducted by the Bamabodhini Sabha, which launched a scheme of *zenana* education in 1863.[67] Many young Brahmo men began to educate their wives and sisters secretly without the knowledge of the old fashioned parents and other members of the joint family. Moreover, their daughters did not remain uneducated.

The name of Kailasbasini Debi can be mentioned here. Kailasbasini (b. 1837), when married to Durga Charan Gupta in 1849 , did not know how to read or write. She even despised the idea of women being educated. But , at the instance of her Brahmo husband , she learnt how to read and write,[68] gradually reaching a standard hardly attained by any one else of her sex at that time. In India, she became the first authoress of a book of essays when she published her book *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha* in 1863.She went on to publish two other books and a number of periodical articles during the next six years.[69] Similar were the cases of Kumudini (c.1840-65),[70] Nistarani Debi (1840-60),[71] Brahmomayi (1845-76),[72]

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63. *General Report on Public Instruction in Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1863-64*, p. 59 ; *Abodh - Bandhu*, Aug.-Sep., 1869, pp. 116-17.

64. *General Report on Public Instruction in Bengal for 1871-72* (Calcutta: Bengal S. Press, 1873), p. 81.

65. How men like S. Tagore, M. Ghosh, K. M. Datta, W. C. Bonnerji and S. Banerji "reformed" their wives by giving them education can be seen in the third chapter as well.

66. W. H. Beveridge, *India Called Them* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1947), pp. 88-89; p. Barr, *The Memsahibs* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976), p. 163.

67. Bamabodhini Sabha was established by some followers of Keshab Sen, headed by Umesh Chandra Datta. They published the monthly magazine, *Bamabodhini Patrika*, in 1863. The magazine continued for 60 years and had made a significant contribution to the emancipation of Bengali women. The scheme of *zenana* education was conducted through its magazine. For details see appendix 2.

68. K. Debi, *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha* (Calcutta: Gupta Press, 1863), pp. 1-11.

69. The other two books: *Hindu Abalakuler* etc. and *Bishvashova* (1869).

70. For an account of her life, see *Kumudinicharit* (Calcutta, 1867; A. C. Chakrabarti, *Naricharit* (Mymenshing, 1866), pp. 70-115; 'Kumudinijibani,' *BBP*, Jul.-Oct., 1868; 'Kumudinijibani', *BBP*, Apr.-Jul., 1865.

71. A. C. Chakrabarti, pp. 47-58: 'Nistarini', *BBP*, May-Jun., 1864.

Manorama Majumdar (1848-1936),[73] Jnanadanandini Debi (1852-1941),[74] Saudamini Debi (?-1874),[75] Swarnalata Ghosh[76] and Hemangini Debi.[77] They were all illiterate before their marriage and were educated by their husbands. The following table may give some idea of how the first handful of Bengali women received education in their homes in the absence of school education.[78]

TABLE 1

Name and year	*How educated*	*Background*
Drabamayi, 1837-?	At father's *tol*	Father's only child
Kailasbasini Debi, 1837-?	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Bamasundari, 1838-88	Self educated	Brahmo-influenced
Kumudini, 1840?-1865	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Nistarini Debi, 1840-60	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Brahmomayi, 1845-76	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Annadayini Lahiri, 1848-?	Privately & at school uncle Ramtanu,	Christian father & Brahmo influenced
Manorama Majumdar, 1848-1936	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Jnanada Debi, 1852-1941	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Rajmumari Banerji 1852-76	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Saudamini Devi, ?-1874	Under husband's guidance	Brahmo husband
Swarnakumari Debi, 1855-1932	At home	Brahmo father
Taru Dutta, 1856-77	At home and later in England and France	Christian father

Notwithstanding its considerable success in a small sphere, the *zenana* education programme of the Brahmo could not alone popularize female education among Bengalis in general. Actually a number of factors contributed to the gradual diffusion of women's education in Bengal. The publications of the 1850s which aimed at women's emancipation in general and female education in particular significantly helped this cause. Written by such scholars as Bidyasagar, Madan Mohan and Tarashankar Tarkaratna, and such English educated scholars as Akshay Kumar Datta, Pearychand, Dwarakanath Ray and Peary Charan, these writings had a liberalizing effect on the conservative Hindus who became conscious by degrees of the need to educate their women.[79]

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72. D. N. Gangopadhyay, *Jibana Lekhya* (2nd ed.; Calcutta, 1879. Ist ed.; 1876).

73. A biography of Manorama, in 2 Vols. was published by M. R. Guha-Thakur in the 1930s. Copies to which I have access lack publication details.

74. Her autobiography: ' Smritikatha', in *Puratani*, ed. by I. Debi Chaudhurani (Calcutta: Indian Associated Publishing, 1957). For details see Appendix I.

75. R. C Ray, *Jiban-bindu* (Calcutta, 1879).

Saudamini died in her early twenties. The two articles she published in *Bamabodhini Patrika* indicate that she received a high standard of education. Rajnarayan Bose narrates, in his autobiography, how Saudamini would render devotional songs during the weekly services at the Bowbazar Brahmo Samaj, established by the progressive faction of the Brahmo Samaj of India, in 1872. See R. Bose, *Rajnarayan Basur Atmachrit* (Calcutta: Kuntaline Press, 1909), p. 197.

76. Swarnalata was illiterate when married to Manomohan Ghose. Imbued with Western ideas, Manomohan returned from England, in 1867, as a barrister. To turn Swarnalata into a better companion. Manomohan sent her to a convent. She came out as a changed person. Later, Ghose took her to England on a couple of occasions. See also Chapter 3.

77. As a child wife of W. C. Bonerji, Hemangini was illiterate, but later became a highly educated and accomplished woman. For details see Chapter 3.

78. Some of these women were born after the Bethune School had been established. But, excepting Swarnakumari, they lived outside Calcutta or in some suburbs of Calcutta from where it was impossible to attend this school.

79. K. Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler* etc., p. 34.

Besides, the periodical like *Masik Patrika* (1854), *Bamabodhini Patrika* and *Abala-Bandhab* (1869) which were solely devoted to the elevation of the condition of women, greatly helped them to educate themselves.[80] Furthermore, instances of the women writers of the 1860s, like Kailasbasini Debi, Taherannessa,[81] Saudamini Debi, Madhumati Ganguli and Krisnakamini, demonstrated the good effects and the necessity of female education. It may be mentioned here that, although orthodox Hindus were hostile towards female education, the early women writers were welcomed and even praised. Ishwar Gupta, the editor of *Sambad Prabhakar,* was well known for his conservatism. In his opinion, as we have already seen,[82] female education would destroy the feminine virtues of the womenfolk of Bengal. Nevertheless, when Krisnakamini Dasi sent her poems to him, he readily accepted them for publication.[83] Krisnakamini soon came to be known as the first poets of modern Bengal. Kailasbasini and Kaminisundari (under the pen name of Dwijatanaya) published in all five books in the 1860s. They were quite well received by the reading public.[84] *Abodh Bandhu*, a monthly journal, while reviewing Kailasbasini's book *Bishvashobha* (1869), remarked that it was an excellent work. The Bengali word for authoress is *granthakartri* (with feminine ending), but *Abodh Bandhu* used the masculine form, granthakartri, with a footnote saying that it did not consider that the use of the feminine ending was reasonable, because qualitatively there should not be any difference, between writers - men and women.[85]

By the 1870s, whether in practice or not, a section of the educated urban elite of Bengal recognized the good effects of female education. The demand for educated wives was on the increase, as a contemporary writer pointed out :

> The educated young men want to get educated girls as their wives. Why will they not ? If you educate your boys, you must educate your girls as well. Soon it will be difficult to get bridegrooms for girls of upper and middle class Hindu families, unless these girls are given some education. These days the relatives of girls look for college-going bridegrooms and the college -going bridegrooms are looking for school -going brides. A marriage between an educated man and an illiterate girl cannot be a happy one, discord and disagreement will naturally be the result of such a marriage.[86]

As a result of this value change, it was becoming increasingly difficult to get an educated and well-placed bridegroom for an unlettered girl.[87] Conservative Hindus, too, were, therefore, constrained to give some education to their daughters.[88]

The ideal of an attractive women was indeed changing fast in the 1860s and 1870s. This was clearly reflected in contemporary Bengali literature. Almost all the heroines of Dinabandhu Mitra, Jyotirindranath Tagore and Upendranath Das, who excited the admiration of the reading public and of the theatre-goers, were educated. Even Bankim Chandra Chatterji, who was conservative in his social outlook, portrayed his heroines as educated. These plays and novels, especially the novels of Bankim, had a tremendous influence over

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80. The contribution of *Bamabodhini Patrika* was acknowledged by women themselves. See, for example, Sreemati.... Chattapadhyay, *BBP*, Mar.-Apr., 1867, p. 481; Anon., 'Bamarachana', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1869, p. 140; Mankumari Basu, 'Amar Atit Jiban', quoted in B. Bandyopadhyay, *Mankumari Basu* (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Bangyia Sahitya Parishat, 1962), p.7.

81. Taherannessa was the first Bengali Muslim woman to publish an article in Bengali prose, See my article ' Taherannessa: Pratham Muslim Gadya Lekhika' in *Bangla Academy Gabeshana Patrika*, Magh-Asharh, 1383-1384 (B .S.) , pp. 71-77.

82. *Supra*, p. 34.

83. Krisnakamini Dasi's anthology of poems *Chittabilasini* was published in 1856.

84. Kaminisundari published two plays and a reader for girls during the years 1866 to 1871. Later she published four more books.

85. *Abodh Bandhu*, Jun.-Jul. , 1869, pp. 60-63.

86. 'Strishikha,' *Jnaankur*, Sep.-Oct., 1875, p. 524.

87. Anujanandini Ray, ' Mahilaganner Bidyabhyaser etc.', *BBP*, Oct-Nov., 1883, pp. 223-24; 'Edeshe Swamir Prati Strir Byabahar,' *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1873, p. 15.

88. A lady, 'Bengali Strilokdiger Bartman Abastha,' *BBP*, May-Jun., 1892, p.40.

the educated Bengalis who almost unknowingly accepted the idea of female education.[89] Describing this change, Umesh Chandra Datta, the editor of *Bambodhini Patrika*, wrote that people who were previously very opposed to female education and would even refuse to hear this topic being discussed before them, were then sending their daughters to school.[90]

The following table indicates how, as a result of this overall social consciousness, female education was accepted by the *bhadralok,* if at first reluctantly, later quite earnestly.

TABLE 2

Number of girls' schools and girls attending them

Year	*No. of Schools*	*No. of girls attending*
1863	95	2,486
1871	344	6,717
1881	1,042	44,096
1890	2,238	78,865

Source : *General Report on Public Instruction in Bengal for the years* 1863-64, 1871-72, 1881-82 and 1890-91.

The *zenana* education Programme, as well as the establishment of adult and female normal schools, gave basic education to a good number of older women who, in their turn, were able to serve as female teachers. This apparently was a factor that helped the spread of female education. Moreover, in 1871-73, under the Campbell scheme, the Bengal government decided to give more financial assistance to private schools. This soon encouraged the establishment of hundreds of schools especially in the mofussil. This was the most significant reason for the establishment of about two thousand girls' schools in the 1870s and 1880s. By 1901, female education had considerably spread among the upper caste Hindus, as the following table suggests:

TABLE 3

Rate of literacy among upper caste Hindu women

Caste/Sect	*% of literacy*	*% of literacy in English*
Baidya	25.9	.8
Brahman	5.6	.1
Brahmo	55.6	30.9
Kayastha	8.0	.4

Source : *Census of India, 1901, Vol.* VIA, pt. II (Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902) , pp. 60-61, 100-04, 106-11.

89. See my published Ph. D. thesis 'Hindu' Samajsanskar Sachetanatar Itihas Ebong Bangla Natya Rachanay Tar Pratiphalan' (Rajshahi University, Bangladesh, 1977), p. 305-06.

90. 'Bamabodhinir Dasham Janmotsab' , *BBP* Aug.-Sep., 1873, p. 132. Also see K. Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler* etc. p. 34;'Strishiksha', *Jnanankur*, Sep.-Oct., 1875, p. 571.

The high rate of literacy among the Brahmo women was comparable only to the native Christians (particularly the ones who had formerly belonged to upper caste Hinduism). Unfortunately, the census reports did not treat their figures separately. How earnestly female education was accepted the by the Brahmos and the Christians mentioned above becomes quite apparent from two examples: one that of Sitanath Tattvabhushan's (Brahmo) family and another that of Bhuban Mohan Basu's (Christian) family. Sitanath Tattvabhushan had a rural background and his ancestors had held female education in abhorrence. However, all his six daughters received good education. While four of them became graduates, the other two passed the FA examination.[91] Bhuban Mohan Basu had four daughters. The eldest of them, Chandramukhi, was the first female MA in India, the second, Bidhumukhi, one of the first two MBs, the third, Bindhyabasini, a brilliant medical student, and the fourth, Rajkumari, an M. A.[92]

The state of female education

The men who introduced female education were not initially sure whether girls were to have the same kind of education as boys. Some thought that textbooks particularly suitable for girls should be written. Madan Mohan's *Shishushiksha* and Bidyasagar's *Bodhoday* are said to have been written exclusively for girls.[93] But these books have nothing which could differentiate them from the text books meant for boys.[94] In the 1860s, however, these men were gradually convinced that girls should be taught subjects like housekeeping, cooking, needlework and childcare. (So were the women, as will be seen below.) Indeed the question of "womanly" education created a lot of confusion as well as a lively debate at that stage. The following reading list will give an idea of what the women of the 1860s were supposed to read:

Grade I- Bengali: *Bodhoday*; Arithmetic.

GradeII- Bengali: *Akhyanmanjari*, *Padyapath*, pt. 1; Bengali Grammar; Geography: *Bhugolsutra*; Arithmetic.

Grade III- Bengali: *Charupath*, pt. 3, *Padyapath*, pt. 2; Bengali Grammar; Geography: *Bhugalsutra*; History: *Banglar Itihas*; Elementary Physics: *Bastusar*; Arithmetic.

Grade IV- Bengali: *Telemekas*, *Sadbhbshatak*; Bengali Grammar: Geography; Hygiene: Swasthyarksha Arithmetic.

Grade V-Bengali: Raghubansha (Bengali tr.), *Meghanadabadhakabya*; Bengali Grammar; Geography: *Patrika Bhugal*; History: *Bharatbarsher Itihas;* Science: *Patrika Bijnan*; Arithmetic.

In addition, they were to learn some drawing and, of course , handwriting.[95] At that time, this syllabus was considered by many to be too arduous.[96]

The syllabus worked out by the School for Adults and Female Teachers (established by the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1871) in the next decade, although more demanding, was based more or less on the same principles. The following was the reading list:

Grade I- Bengali: Charitabali; English: *First Book of Reading*; Arithmetic.

Grade II - Bengali: *Akhyarmanjari*, pt. II, *Padyapath*, pt. I; Geography; Elementary Physics: *Bastubichar*; English: *First Book of Reading*; Arithmetic.

GradeIII- Bengali: *Charupath*, pt. III *Padyapath*, pt. III; History; *Banglar Itihas*, pt. I; Geography; English: *First book of reading*; arithmetic.

Grade IV- Bengali: *Rachanabali*, *Meghanadabadha kabya*; English: *Rudiments of Knowledge*; History: *Bharatbarser Itihas*; Geography ; Elementary Physics; Arithmetic.

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91. S. Tattvabhushan, *Autobiography* (Calcutta: Brahmo Mission Press, n. d.), passim.

92. See *Calcutta University Calendar*, 1910, pt. II (Calcutta: Thacker Spincks, 1910) and *BBP*, different issues.

93. This was claimed in the introduction of *Shishushiksha*. See I. C. Basu, ' Strishikshar Bibaran', Nabyabharat, Feb-Mar., Dec, 1893-Jan., 1894, p.566.

94. These books were later widely used as textbooks for boys as well.

95. *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1866, pp. 343-44.

96. *BBP*, Dec., 1855-Jan., 1866, p. 164.

Grade V- Bengali: *Meghanadabadhakabya*, *Narijati Bishayak Prastab*; English: *McCulloch's Course of Reading* ; English grammar; History; Arithmetic.[97]

Despite the fact that both Umesh Chandra Datta and Keshab Chandra Sen, the former editor of *Bamabodhini Patrika* and the latter the founder of the School for Adults and Female Teachers, were strongly in favour of " womanly" female education, the above reading lists did not include subjects like childcare, cooking, needlework and housekeeping, due possibly to lack of publications. However, the debate over whether women should receive the same kind of education as men became sharper. The question of higher education also provoked a lively discussion. In 1872-73, the members of the Brahmo Samaj of India, who were known to hold a "progressive" social outlook, stood divided on these two questions. While Sen and his close followers thought women were not required to learn "manly" subjects like Geometry and Philosophy, the more liberal members like Sibnath Sastri, Durga Mohan Das, Dwarkanath Ganguli, Annada Charan Khastagir and Sasipada Banerji claimed that women were entitled to every branch of human knowledge and to the highest level of education.[98] For this, they were ridiculed and defamed by conservative Hindus.[99] These conservative Hindus, including some women themselves, argued that women were becoming lax in their housekeeping and even in the bringing up of children and that this was the bad effect of "manly" female education.[100] Even Tattvabodhini Patrika, the organ of the Adi Brahmo Samaj of Debndranath Tagore, declared:

> We are no against female education. Women should, of course, receive some education and thus free themselves from the clutches of superstition. Moreover, we except that education will give them such refinement of character as will make them acceptable as well as respectable to the educated men of Bengal. However, we are against the kind of education now being given to women ... The books women are asked to read are either translation from English or are English-influenced. Consequently, our women become denationalized. We believe women should read only those books that will help them to become better wives and better mothers. This is an age of luxury. Most of the women are luxurious and indifferent to housekeeping and to the bringing up of their children.[101]

With the establishment of the Hindu Mahila Bidyalay under the supervision of Annette Akroyd, the debate concerning higher education and the possibility of girls taking university examinations became shaper. Annette Akroyd started the School with the help of her Bengali friends, such as Manomohan Ghose, Dwarkanath Ganguli and Durga Mohan Das. This was the first girls' school where teenaged Bengali girls were able to receive a higher education, which , for all practical purposes, meant higher primary or lower secondary education. In any case, this was the beginning of secondary education for Bengali girls. It was first from this school that a girl, Kadambini Basu, was officially allowed by the Calcutta University to appear at a public examination.[102] This school also marked the beginning of boarding schools for girls. Only handfuls of Brahmos, however, were brave enough to send their daughters to this school. As Annette married H. Beveridge in April, 1875, the school temporarily closed down. However, the Brahmos especially Dwarkanth Gangali, revived it in 1876. Later in 1876 , it was merged with the Bethune School.[103] During the next two decades , this School

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97. *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1873, p. 24.

98. S. Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, p. 266, 289; *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1974. First published in 1910-11m pp. 163-64; *Atmacharit*, pp. 114-15.

99. See, for example *Modhyastha*, 20 Jyaistha 1279 (June 1872), p. 127.

100. Kundamala Debi, 'Bidya Shikhile etc.', *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1870, pp. 176-77; 'Nabya Banga Mahila' *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1873. pp. 352-53; Anon., 'Bengali Strilokdiger etc.', pp. 165, 215, 279-80; Kulabala Debi, 'Hindu Ramandiger etc.', *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1892, p. 30.

101. 'Strishiksha O Striswadhinata', *Tattavabodhini Patrika*, Nov.-Dec., 1878, pp. 154-56.

102. J.C. Ghosh, 'Bishvabidyalaye Strishikshar Pattan,' *Bharatbarsha*, Nov.-Dec., 1943, p.494.

103. See for details, B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay* (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1962), pp. 12-13; W. H. Beveridge, *India Called Them*, pp. 92-93; p. Barr, *The Memsahibs*, pp. 166-67; D. Kopf. *The Brahmo Samaj* etc, pp. 36-41.

and its college section, Bethune College, played a very significant role in the development of higher education among Bengali women. However, men continued their propaganda against women's higher education and against Bethune College, which symbolized women's education in Bengal.

This kind of hostility was, however, not unique to Bengal. In England, men's prejudice against women's higher education was much more vigorous. A women's committee, with Emily Davies as its secretary, was formed in London in 1863 to promote the cause of women's higher education. There were many women who had attained a high proficiency, but they were not allowed to sit for any university examinations. Therefore, petitions containing the signatures of hundreds of women were sent to universities and to the Parliament, asking for the admission of women to degrees. Moreover, male academics urgued university senators to allow women to sit for public examinations. Some university professors even permitted women to attend their lectures. These women performed much better than they were expected to. Notwithstanding all this, no British University allowed women to any official degrees until 1878.[104] While the "modern" London University gave this permission in 1878, the more traditional Oxford did so in 1920 and Cambridge in 1923. Apart from this kind of general hostility, some teachers were so prejudiced that the papers of a number of women, like Sophia Jex-Blake and Annie Besant, were unfairly judged and they were failed.[105] However, women themselves fought this long struggle of gaining women's rights. One of the reason for male opposition was the apprehension that men's job opportunities would suffer.[106]

In Bengal, like other colonies such as Australia and New Zealand,[107] opposition was much less strong . In fact, the official attitude was, on the contrary, quite favourable, and women got the right without any struggle at all. When Chandramukhi Bose, a native Christian girl from Dehra, asked the Calcutta University through her Headmaster to permit her to take the Entrance Examination of 1876, she was, after some hesitation on the part of the Calcutta University authority ,put through the question papers to see whether she had attained the expected standard. Chandramukhi proved herself worthily of the permission. In view of this, the Syndicate of the University asked a sub-committee to frame rules of women candidates on 27th January, 1877. The Syndicate adopted these rules on 27th March and the Faculty of Arts on 12th May. The faculty also appointed a sub-committee to frame rules for women candidate who might ask permission to sit for FA, BA and MA examinations. These rules were approved by the Syndicate on the 23rd February, 1878 and by the Senate on the 27th April, 1878.[108]

These rules were similar to those for male students except that women were to sit in a separate hall and were allowed to offer Political Economy because, in those days, it was believed that they were weak in Maths. In 1879, the Syndicate extended permission to

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Also see *Bethune College Centenary Volume* 1849-1949, ed. by K. Nag & L. Ghose (Calcutta: West Bengal Government, 1951).

104. R. Strachy, *The Cause* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1969. First published in 1928), pp.132-84, 246-60.

105. *Ibid*., p. 184; A. H. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1960), p. 182.

It happened in Bengal as well. It is said that a Begali professor of the Calcutta Medical College was against women's admission to that College. When the first girl student of that College, Kadambini Ganguli, appeared at the final examination, he failed her in one of the practical papers. However, the Principal of the College was convinced that she was too good a student to fail and, therefore, gave her a certificate of proficiency. Like Sophia Jex-Blake, she later got deplomas from other universities.

106. R, Strachy, p. 263.

107. See, for details, R. T. Evans, *The Feminists*, p. 59.

108. *Hundred Years of the University of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Calcutta Univ., 1957), pp.121-22; J. C. Ghosh 'Bishvabidyalaye Strishikshar Pattan', pp. 493-94.

Chandramukhi to appear at the FA examination. Chandramukhi and Kadambini Basu passed the BA examination in early 1883.[109]

With this official recognition, the people who were against women's higher education lost their case. But they continued to fight a lost battle, as their prejudice did not wane for a long time. When they found no other plea against higher education they alleged, both that excessive “brain work” badly affected the delicate health of women and that competition between male and female was undesirable.[110] Liberal minded people, however, hailed these decisions of the University of Calcutta as having opened the way to progress for the whole society.[111]

Changing attitudes of women toward education

In the absence of any sanction through the ages, education had been tabooed for women. The belief that education would cause widowhood was very popular among women themselves.[112] This was why older women became angry if they ever found even a piece of paper in a girl's possession.[113] They believed that a girl who drew a line with ink would bring misfortune for her family.[114] Moreover, they maintained that educated women would become unchaste[115] and disobedient to their in-laws and husbands.[116] With the instances of the "unruly" Young Bengal of the 1830s, the orthodox Hindu women of the mid-nineteenth century feared that, as a result of growing modernization, educated women would also become Westernized in their life style and would lose respect for their religious traditions, if not becoming totally irreligious.[117] The attitude of women in general was very hostile towards the few widowed women who had some education. They looked at these women with fear, regarded them as witches, and carefully protected their children from them.[118] Owing to these hostile attitudes, the women wanted to learn how to read and write would do so secretly. Rasasundari Debi gave a detailed account of how, in strict secrecy, she started reading a page from the *Chaitanya Bhagabat*.[119]

With the rise of an English educated middle class, Bengali women's attitudes also began to undergo a slow but steady metamorphosis. In a predominantly male defined society, women's attitudes are subject to change with the change in men's attitudes. As English education did not permeate the whole of Bengali society evenly or at the same time, all the shades of female opinion were therefore, not affected equally or at the same time. By the middle of the nineteenth century, only the Brahmo and Christian women reflected a favourable attitude towards education and, as we have seen, a large portion of them started to

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109. *Hundred Years of the University of Calcutta*, pp. 121-22.

110. See, for example, *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Feb.-Mar., 1881; Nov.-Dec., 1878; K. N. Thakur, passim.
The same happened in England as well. See R. Strachy, pp. 134-35, 251.

111. *Banga Mahila*, Mar.-Apr., 1877 pp. 271-72.

112. K. Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler* etc., p. 7; *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha*, p. 65; P. C. Mitra, *Ramaranjika* (Calcutta: D'Rozario & Co. 1860), p. 2.

113. Rasasundari Debi, *Amar Jiban* (2nd ed. ; Calcutta: S. L. Sarkar, 1898. First ed. 1876), p.57.

114. K. Debi. Hindu Abalakuler etc, p. 7.

115. *Ibid*; *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha*, p.65.

116. Premamayi, ' Banga Mahilar Bartaman Hinabastha' in *Bamarachanabali* (Calcutta: Bamahitaishini Sabha, 1872), p. 27.

117. K. Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler* etc. p. 37.

118. *Ibid.*

119. Rasasundari Debi, pp. 60-65, 79-81.

receive education , although mostly at home. In a few decades, traditional Hindu women too were becoming aware of the need for female education.[120]

Women's writings first appeared in the 1850s.[121] Almost all of the earlier women writers were of the opinion that, lacking education, Bengali women's minds were uncultivated and uncouth and there was little difference between these women and beasts.[122] Some of these women who had educated husbands suffered from a sense of inferiority. They thought that they were being looked down upon by their husbands as animals or as household pets.[123] The women who acquired some education and refinement immediately recognized the state of ignorance and lowliness in which they were living . They found around them an entire female population who had neither the refinement nor the accomplishments for which their modernized husbands were looking. The newly emerging Brahmo women looked at the traditional Hindu women with contempt and regarded them as superstitious and idolatrous. They held lack of education to be responsible for this debasement of mind and soul.[124]

For the first time in Bengal's history, the newly educated women evaluated themselves with a yardstick long inapplicable to them . Some of them, like Madhumati Ganguli, declared :

> Dear Bengali sisters ! We have been created by the same God who created men. He has given men and women the same organs, feelings and faculties of mind. Men are acquiring learning and wisdom and are meeting with His blessings by doing every thing according to His will. Why should we disprove ourselves of all these ? God certainly does not wish that only men would enjoy the pleasure of learning and women the agony of ignorance. On the contrary, He has given men and women the same physical and mental abilities so that both can enjoy endless happiness by acquiring the wealth of learning.[125]

While asking the womenfolk to raise themselves, some women even accused men:

> Why should men keep us in such deplorable condition? Aren't we the daughters of God? Isn't it unjust to deprive women of education, which alone could give them the “heavenly” pleasure now being enjoyed by men alone? [126]

An articulate women, Rajbala Debi directly accused men:

> Only men are to be blamed for the deplorable condition of women. They are the one who do not allow us to receive education and thereby enlighten our minds. They keep us shut in the zenana as animals.[127]

Explaining the reasons why women were left uneducated, Kailasbasini Debi wrote :

> According to all religious beliefs , whether Hinduism , Islam or Christianity, a wife is a man's better half and is supposed to share half of his happiness or sorrows, but Indians, in practice, have only given their share of sorrows, not happiness. Otherwise why should they forbid education to their women ? Actually they wanted to keep their women in perpetual slavery and were afraid of imparting education to them, which , as men feared, might elevate them to men's level.[128]

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120. Rasasundari was the most striking example of this. She was born and brought up in a traditional Hindu family in a Bengal village. Her husband was also a traditional Hindu, unlike the Brahmos. Also see N. Debi, ' Strishiksha Bishaye etc', *Anthapur*, Aug.-Sep., 1901, p.175.

121. A few letters were published earlier. But these were probably written by men. *Bamabodhini Patrika* published women's writings after proper verification.

122. Sarala, 'Bangadesher Lokdiger etc.' *BBP* Oct.-Nov., 1866, p. 387; K. Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler* etc., p. 1; Kamini Datta, 'Strishiksha', Bamarachanabali, p.64; A Lady of Dattapukur, 'Strishiksha Hitaishiganer Prati', *Bamarachanabali*, p.86; Gopalmohini, 'Bidyashikshar Sange etc.', *Bamarachanabali*, p. 103; R. Devi, *BBP* Feb.-Apr., 1874, p.395.

123. Premamayi, p. 26; R. Devi, p. 395.

124. Ramasundari, ' Edeshe Strishiksha etc.', *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1855, p.73; Sarada, 'Bangadeshiya Lokdiger etc.', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1866, p. 384; Kshhiroda Mitra, 'Dushita Deshacharer etc.', *BBP* , Aug.-Sep., 1866, p. 341.

125. Madhumati Ganguli, ' Bamaganer Rachana', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1864. p. 229.

Also see Taherannessa, *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1865, pp.276-77 ; Anujanandini Ray,' Mahilaganer Bidyashiksha etc.',*BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1883. p. 221.

126. Saudamini Debi, *BBP*, May-Jun., 1865, p.40.

Also see Anon.,*BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1869, p.140; Anujanandini Ray, p.221.

127. Rajbala Debi, p. 395.

128. Kailasbasini Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler* etc., pp. 11-12.

Basantikumari, moreover, deplored the fact that Indian people, who were otherwise so loyal to religious customs and codes, had little or no respect for the *shastric* precepts relating to the bringing up of their daughters and giving them some education.[129] Some other women too accused men of hypocrisy and selfishness.[130]

Taherannessa argued from yet another angle. In her opinion, men and women together constituted the whole society. Therefore, men alone could not give it the desired prosperity. Women had definite role to play in the society but they were unable to do so. owing to their ignorance and backwardness.[131] If Taherannessa failed to put her argument convincingly in an easy to understand language, four decades later Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein gave the same argument in a powerful diction.[132] Indeed more and more women came to believe that Bengali society would never be able to make any advancement with only its men receiving education and enlightenment.[133] An anonymous lady argued that a person could not be termed healthy if half of his or her body was diseased. She therefore opined that, for the welfare and upliftment of society itself, women were to be raised from the darkness in which they were immersed.[134] In short, quite a few women became aware of the needs for education and held men responsible for their backwardness.

Objectives and ideas of female education

One can here pose a simple question: What did these women want to achieve by education? Despite a few exceptions, the overwhelming majority of newly educated women, like their male counterparts, considered that the chief aims of female education were to get educated and well-placed bridegrooms and to produce better wives. However, at that time , these were the chief aims of female education possibly everywhere in the world. In England, for example, parents wanted that kind of education that would enhance a girl's chances of achieving matrimony. Subjects such as Mathematics would not do this. Consequently, people used to attach more value to accomplishments than to education.[135] Bengali women had similar objectives. Premamayi, for instance, expected that education would improve marital relationships, which, at that time, lacked understanding and were a constant source of suffering.[136]

In an extraordinary passage written in an apparently light mood, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein gave examples of how , in the absence of proper female education, the husband-wife relationship made both the husband and the wife extremely unhappy. She thus presented the problem:

> Girls are not given such an education as will make them worthy companions of their husbands. Consequently, a highly educated husband has to live with a wife who has received only an elementary education. In such cases, when the husband calculates the distance between a star and the sun, the wife measures the length and breadth of the pillow-case (in order to see it). While the husband, in his imagination, moves in the far-away solar system , surrounded by innumerable heavenly bodies - - -and finds

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Also see Hemangini Chaudhurani, ' Striloker Bidyabhyaser Prayojaniyata', *Anthapur*, Vol.IV, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb., 1901), p.13.

129. Basantikumari Basu, ' Strishiksha O Tahar Bartaman Abastha.' *Anthapur*, Vol.II (1899), p.109.

130. See, for example, Premamaya, p. 26; Kamini Datta, p.65.

131. Taherannessa, pp. 275-77.

Also see Kulabala Debi, ' Strishiksha ', *Antapur*, Vol.I (1898), p.52.

132. R.S Hossein , ' Strijatir Abanati', in Rokeya Rachanabali , ed. by A. Qadir (Dacca ; Bangla Academy, 1973.First pub.1904), pp. 17-31.

133. Nagendrabala Debi, p.175.

134. -----Debi, 'Ekti Prastab ', *Bharati*, Apr.-May, 1885, p. 14.

Also see Krisnabhabini Das , ' Ingrej Mahilar Shiksha O Swadhinata', *Bharati O Balak*; Jul.-Aug., 1890, p.202.

135. R. Stracy, *The cause*, p. 125.

136. Premamayi, p. 26.

the motion of a comet, the wife move in her kitchen, measures rice and lentil, and watches the movement of the cook. Hello, Mr. Astronomer ! Why isn't your wife by your side? Are you afraid that you might vanish in the intense heat of the sun if you want to approach it along with your wife? Is it because of this that you think she should better stay in?[137]

That in the absence of proper education the husband-wife relationship had become a constant source of suffering was maintained by Jnanadanandini Debi, Krisnabhabani Das and Kamini Datta as well. While K. Datta felt that an uneducated wife was ignorant of her duties to her husband[138] J. Debi contended that education alone could turn women into the right kind of companions that modern husbands were looking for.[139] A distinguished poetess of her time , Priyambada Debi, even claimed that the best female education , was one that made a wife her husband's mistress, guide, friend and disciple.[140]

The advocates of female education, both men and women, in those days argued that education alone could make better mothers. With the examples of English mothers before their own eyes, these Bengalis realized that educated Bengali mothers would be able to bring up their children properly. Uneducated mothers neither had the knowledge of everyday hygiene nor the much desired ability to impart elementary education. These writers therefore believed that education alone would better equip them to be better mothers.[141] They further argued that a child would only become free from superstition if his or her mother were educated and had a cultivated mind.[142] Some of them even mentioned examples of great men like Scott, Johnson and Washington, who, they claimed, had their best education from their mothers.[143]

The joint family system was the ideal of the nineteenth century *bhadralok*. These women therefore thought that education would enlighten and broaden the minds of the "mean and quarrelsome" Bengali women, so that they would become better mistresses of big joint families, whilst their relationships with members of families into which they were married would improve.[144] Moreover, they believed that they would be better organized to do housework if they had education.[145]

Apart from these benefits relating to their every day life, the educated women were conscious of the fact that education could elevate them from the inglorious social position they were occupying. Although totally unjust,[146] it was a popular belief during the last century that women were fickle-minded and devoid of all scruples regarding sexual matters. The Bengali proverb which says women had double the hunger, four times the cleverness and eight times the sexual desire of a man is a typical example of this belief. Whether this owes its origin to Manu who described women as having no sense of morality and no scruples regarding sexual matters and as being always ready to sleep with any man, young or old, learned or ignorant, handsome or ugly,[147] cannot be ascertained. However, the belief was so popular that even women themselves conceded that there might be some truth in it. They therefore argued that, given proper education, women would become conscientious and

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137. R. S. Hossein, ' Ardhangi ', in *Rokeya Rachanabali*, p. 39.

138. Kamini Datta, p.66.

139. J. Debi, ' Strishiksha ', *Bhrati*, Jun.-Jul., 1881, p.263.

140. P. Debi, 'Strishiksha', *Antahpur* , Vol. IV (1901), p.105.

141. Radharani Lahiri, 'Striloker Shiakshyaniya' etc., *BBP*, May-Jun., 1875,p. 62; Sarad, p. 384; Ramasundari. pp. 71-72; Shialajakumari Debi, p. 68; Kamini Datta, p. 64.

142. Shilajakumari Debi, p. 69; Madhumati Ganguli, p.56.

143. R. Lahiri, pp. 63-64; Hemangini Chaudurani, p. 12.

144. Ramasundari, p. 72; K, Devi, *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha*, pp. 55-58.

145. Shialajakumari Debi, p. 68 ; J. Debi, ' Strishiksha', pp. 163-65.

146. *English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, II, 178; *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Paush 1766, p. 34.

147. *Mannusamhita*, ed. Bhrat C. Shiromani (Calcutta: Arunoday Press, 1866), C. 9, verses 14,15,17 and 18, pp. 522-24. There are many other verses derogatory to women.

religious and would give up the vices for which they were notorious[148] Besides, they reasoned, education would develop their mental faculties as well as womanly virtues.[149] That education would bring them some fame and earn a reputation for their families was another argument.[150] Basantikumari observed that enlightened and accomplished ladies like Taru Datta, Ramabai, Kamini Sen and Mankumari Basu had emerged as a result of the spread of female education.[151]

By the end of the century, women of *bhadralok* families regarded education as invaluable and the life of unlettered persons as not worth living.[152] They had by then not only accepted that education was a necessity, but had also developed an ideal of education. Most of them contended that the centre of women's activities was certainly their home,[153] and hence, that the education which was desirable was that which might make them better wives and better mothers and equip them better of housework. J. Debi and Krisnabhabini Das, for instance, considered that women's first and foremost duties were to do such work as childcare, cooking and nursing and to make the members of their family happy.[154] Kulabala Debi thought that the existing female education in Bengal had failed to produce ideal women. She therefore advocated that kind of education, which would develop womanly virtues.[155]

Radharani Lahiri observed that men and women had distinctly different natures and were destined to play different roles. She therefore suggested:

> Of all the subjects that women might learn, housework is the most important. Whatever subjects a women may learn, whatever knowledge she may acquire, she cannot claim any reputation unless she is proficient in housework. She must also learn childcare, because nothing is more important to her than this.[156]

Priyambada Debi (herself a graduate of the University of Calcutta) and Kulabala Debi were more articulate. They termed the existing female education as “manly” and therefore unsuitable for women.[157] Kulabala emphasized the need for education which helped to develop such womanly virtues as chastity, self-sacrifice, submission devotion, kindness, patience and the labours of love.[158]

The Limited nature of women's consciousness

Although women of Bengali *bhadralok* families had widely accepted female education by the end of the last century, their ideal of education was quite different from that of modern feminists. They still adhered to traditional values established by men and only wanted to become the kind of women that educated men were trying to find. They considered that they had no other option but to have education and to become "modern" wives and better mothers in a male-defined world.

At that stage, they did not think that education would help them to develop into individuals, nor was personal liberty any of their concern. They still preferred the joint family to the nuclear family.[159] Since matrimony was the main objective of education, all they

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148. S. Debi, p. 40; Shailajakumari, p. 68; Kamini Datta, pp. 63-64; B. Devi, ' Bangabasini Bhagnider Parti', *Bamarachanabali*, p.81.

149. K. Datta, pp. 63-64; Taherannessa, pp. 276-77, Kulabala Debi, p. 54.

150. Taherannessa, p.276; Upendramohini, *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1865, pp. 18-19.

151. Basantikumari Basu, pp. 110-11.

152. S. Debi, p. 40; Nagandrabala Debi, pp. 175-76.

153. P. Debi, p. 105; Krisnabhabini Das, ' Striloker Kaj O Kajer Mahatmya', *Bharati O Balak*, Aug.-Sep., p.247.

154. J. Debi, ' Strishiksha', pp. 263-73 ; Krisnabhabini Das, ' Striloker Kaj etc.', p.248.

155. Kulabala Debi, p. 51, 52,55. Also p. Debi, pp. 105-106.

156. R, Lahiri, pp. 62-63. Also Kulabala Debi, p.53.

157. P. Debi, p. 106 ; Kulabala Debi, pp. 52-53 ;

158. Kulabala Debi, p. 55.

159. I found only one exception to this. Sharatkumari Chaudhurani, in 1891, wrote that the nuclear family was better in the sense that it at least helped to improve husband-wife relationships. Educated outside Bengal and wife of a highly

wanted in the name of education was a kind of training that would enable them to be more accomplished and to live up to the standard of a society which, although basically traditional, was progressively modernizing with the penetration of alien ideas from the West.

Though a handful of women, like Chandramukhi Basu, Kamini Sen and Kumudini Das, had accepted salaried jobs during the last two decades of the 19th century, Bengali women still did not contend that education would give them an economic independence.[160] In England, on the contrary, a large portion of women had acquired their education in the second half of the 19th century with the objective of getting jobs.[161]

Despite their deplorable social status and the extreme male-dominance over them, Bengali women were far from conceiving themselves as an oppressed group. That consciousness had not developed in them at that time. Consequently, there was no organized movement on their part to educate the female population of Bengal and/or the elevate their position in society by new enactments (like the Married Woman's Property Act or a Divorce Act). On the contrary, they still prayed to men to give them the light of learning and thereby raise them to men's level. They were quite content with and eager to receive the kind of education that men arranged for them to turn them into better wives and better mothers, or, in other words, to play their traditional roles and to be exploited as wives and mothers by men.

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educated Westernized man, she herself had tasted the fruits of the nuclear family and hence her support for such a system. See her 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', Bharati O Balak, Sep.-Nov., 1891,pp.391-92, 394. For details see Chapter 3.

160. This was not unique to Bengal alone. In many other countries such as Russia women wanted education with no economic objectives. See R. T. Evans, The *Feminists*, p.123.

161. R. Strachy, pp. 94-98, 185-241.

CHAPTER TWO

Unlatching the Cage: Male Efforts to Free Bengali Women

A woman writer of some reputation, Nagendrabala Mustafi, described, in 1895, the condition of Bengali women as that of “caged birds”. She observed that Bengali women were kept in strict seclusion from their childhood. Consequently they could neither receive any education nor develop their mental faculties.[1] The social position of middle class Bengali women, as we have seen in the earlier chapter, was indeed one of complete subordination. There is evidence to suggest that the degradation of women was at its worst during the first half of that century and that this situation was part of the accepted norm.[2]

The lower classes of women, however enjoyed considerable freedom in that they were not locked up in the *zenana* nor were they subject to sati, *Kulin* polygamy, the joint family system and other means of female oppression. They also had a voice in the decision making of the family. The most significant reason for this was their contributions to their husbands' incomes and their participation in economic activities. The women of *bhadralok* families were, on the contrary, not supposed to take part in economic activities and thus not required to come out of the seclusion. They were more like ornaments and helpmates who had the responsibilities of childbearing, childrearing and of keeping company, and at most, of doing housework. Lacking economic and social roles, they lost whatever freedom they might have enjoyed in lower class families, H. A. D. Phillips, an officer in the Bengal Civil Service of that period rightly observed:

> As any caste or portion of a caste becomes wealthy or influential, the seclusion and jealous appropriation of the weaker sex becomes stricter... The upper classes of cultivators are introducing the purda system more and more and a low caste man, on becoming well-to-do, invariably builds his pucka (masonry) house, with a brick wall surrounding it, constructs a private privy, and has a well dug in his yard, so that his women shall not have to go out..[3]

The seclusion of women was not a Bengali or an Indian invention. In fact, both Greek and Roman women in ancient times were very much kept in seclusion, as were Muslim women. But nineteenth century Bengali women experienced possibly the worst kind of seclusion. Married women, including child wives, were to keep their faces hidden under a long veil. Rasasundari Debi, the first Bengali woman to have written an autobiography, described in some detail how immediately after her marriage, at the age of 12, she was obliged to obey the rules of *purda*. Before her mother-in-law and other female relations; she was to put on the veil and was expected not to talk to them. Even years later when she had a number of children and had become the mistress of the house at the death of her mother-in-law, she would carefully protect her 'womanly virtues" by observing the *purda* among her female relations including her three widowed sisters-in-law.[4] Jnanadanandini Debi's autobiography suggests that the position of wives had not changed even three decades later, in the 1860s. She was married in 1859, at the age of seven. Very affectionate and sympathetic, her mother-in-law would sometimes feed her by making her sit in her lap. But Jnanadanandini Debi would all the time keep on her long veil and remain silent. As Jnanada would not talk, let

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1. Nagendrabala Mustafi, ' Abarodhe Hinabastha', *BBP* Apr.-May, 1865, p.30.

2. T. Raychaudhuri, ' Norms of Family Life and Personal Morality among the Bengali Hindu Elite, 1600-1850', in *Aspect of Bengali History and Society*, ed. by R. V. M.Baumer (Hawii : The Univ. of Hawii Press, 1975), pp. 17-20.

3. H. A. D. Phillips, *Our Administration of India with Special Reference to the Work and Duties of a District Officer in Bengal* (London: W. Thacker & Co.,1886), pp. 128-29.

4. Rasasundari Debi, passim.

alone protest, the mother-in-law, in her zeal, would feed her more than she could eat and consequently as soon as Jnanadanandini found the opportunity she would be off to vomit.[5]

As years went by, the rigorousness of the *purda* was certainly relaxed nevertheless, it appears that, as late as the 1890s, the newly married wife was required to observe the rules of *purda* even with her mother-in-law. This was even true in the cases of some English educated and Brahmo-influenced families as well. Nirad C. Chaudhuri describes in his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* how his mother, married towards the end of 1887, was to abide by the rules of seclusion:

> My mother did not speak a word to her mother-in-law for five whole years after her marriage, nor could she uncover her face. She had to carry on her intercourse with the mistress of the house with the help of only two movements of the head, the up-and-down positive nod and the side-to side negative shake. If she wanted anything she had to go without it until the other young girls of the family discovered it and made representations to the old lady.[6]

If *purda* was so strict in an educated Brahmo-influenced family like that of the Chaudhuris, it can be guessed how faithfully the traditional Hindu families adhered to it.

Among the *bhadralok* Muslim families, female seclusion was even stricter. In these families, the unmarried daughters were also to abide by the customs of *purda*. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein describes how, during a visit of a few of their female relations for several days, she was asked to observe *purda*. She went on hiding herself now behind the door, then under the cot and then in the garret. As she remained hidden in these places, her mother forgot on a number of times to give her any food. Consequently she was almost starving. This happened in the 1880s when Rokeya was only about five.[7] Decades later, when Begum Shaista Ikramullah was a child, *purda* had become less rigorous. Nevertheless, she was put under *purda* when she attained the age of nine. However, her mother considered this age to be too late.[8]

If female children were to observe *purda* so fastidiously among women themselves, it can be imagined how strict it was when they confronted men. For the wives to go outside their houses at any time during the day or night was prohibited. They were not allowed to talk to men, even if they were their near relations or close friends of their husbands.[9] Until the wife became the mistress of the family, usually after the death of the mother-in-law, she was not even allowed to talk to her husband during the day.[10] Rasasundari Debi did not see her husband during the day even after she became the mistress.[11] In the fourth chapter, we will see how the custom of female seclusion was a great obstacle to the healthy growth of marital relationships.[12]

This custom was so deeply rooted among woman that they were extremely embarrassed at the contravention of it. Jnanadanandini Debi's husband, Satyendranath Tagore, was an ardent supporter of the upliftment of women. He wanted his wife, at that time only about 10 or 11, to meet his close friend, Manomohan Ghose. However, no men other than the members of the family were allowed to come into the *zenana*, nor were any women to go out. Therefore, one night Satyendranath and Manomohan came into the *zenana* walking and if any one would ask who it was, Satyendranath would reply. After entering Jnanda's room, Satyendranath pushed

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5. Jnanadanandini Debi, 'Smritikatha', in *Puratani*, p. 21.

6. N. C. Chaudhury , *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (6th Jaico Impression; Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1976); p.140.

7. Rokeya S. Hossein, *Aborodhbasini in Rokeya Rachanabali*, pp. 488-89.

8. Begum Shaista S. Ikramullah, *From Purdha to Parliament* (London: The Crescent Press, 1963), pp. 24-25.

9. A lady, 'Lajjia', *BBP*, Nov.-Dec., 1865, pp. 159-60 J. Debi, 'Smritikatha', pp.24-25.

10. P. C. Sarkar, 'Paribarik Sanskar', *Hitasadhak*, Jan.-Feb., 1868, p. 234.

11. Rasasundari Debi, passim.

12. Chapter 4, Section 1 and 3.

Manomohan into the mosquito curtain along with Jnanada. But Jnanada was so overcome with shyness that she was unable to speak a single word to Manomohan. The “interview” nded after a while and Satyendranath and Manomohan marched out again in unison.[13]

Several years later, Jnanada was living in an enlightened Parsi family in Bombay. She was, at first extremely shy and would not speak to any male members of that family. Satyendranath described her condition like that of a caged bird recently released.[14] Manekji, the head of the family, named her ‘ugimasi’ meaning dumb.[15] One day, Sir Bartle Free, the Governor of Bombay, came to see her, she being the wife of the first native civil servant. The Governor endeavoured for quite some time to talk to her, but she would not speak a single word.[16] In the first dinner party arranged by Satyendranath, her experience was rather unpleasant. When her partner came and held her arm to lead her to the table, she ran away.[17] Like most of the child wives, she did not talk to her husband for quite a long time after she was married. How Satyendranath finally made her talk is, indeed, interesting. One day, he promised that he would give her any thing she wanted if she talked. Being tempted, she broke her silence and according to her wish, Satyendranath gave her a watch, a rare thing for a Bengali woman of that time.[18] Talking to men was certainly a difficult thing for women to do when we consider the fact that talking to female relations was also disfavoured.[19]

Far more serious than talking either to men or to women was an almost unbelievable incident that Begum Rokeya narrated. The incident took place during the first decade of the present century. It gives an idea of how religiously women used to observe *purda*. Accompanied by a maidservant and veiled by a heavy *burkha*, an upper-class Muslim woman, a relation of Rokeya, was boarding a train at Kiul station. She accidentally fell down in the space between the train and the platform. The maidservant pulled her by the *burkha*. But the *burkha* caught and the woman was unable to rise. Some porters present there offered to help, but the maidservant would not allow them to do so. The train was due to leave. However, it waited for about half an hour and at last ran her over.[20] The other forty-six incidents that Rokeya mentioned in her book were not as horrifying as this but they were also cruel examples of female seclusion.[21]

The example of how Sarada Debi. Rabindranath Tagore's mother and Debendranath's wife, used to take a bath in the “holy” water of the Ganges may seem bizarre, but it clearly reflects the strictness of female seclusion. Whenever Sarada Debi wanted to take a bath in the Ganges; the palanquin bearers were obliged to immerse the whole of her palanquin while she remained sitting within it.[22]

Apart from this physical seclusion, which was, for all practical purposes, comparable, if not to imprisonment, at least to the condition of a caged bird, women of *bhadralok* families were not permitted to ride carriage or to wear shoes.[23] They had also no “mental” freedom.

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13. J. Debi, Smritikatha , pp. 24-25.

14. S. N. Tagore, *Bombi Chitra* (Calcutta: Adi Brahmo Samaj, 1889) p. 106.

15. J. Debi, 'Smritikatha', pp. 29-30.

16. *Ibid*., p.30

17. *Ibid*., p-34.

18. *Ibid*, p-25.

19. 'Abagunthan', *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1870; p.431; B.K. Goswami 'Unnati O Swadhinata', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1871, p. 69; Rasasundari Debi, p. 41.

20. R. S. Hossein, *Aborodhbasini* in *Rokeya Rachanabali*, p. 482.

21. *Ibid*.,pp. 473-512.

22. Swarna Kumari Debi, ' Amader Grihe Antahpur Shiksha O Tahar Sanskar', *Prodip* , Aug.-Sep., 1899, p. 318.

23. *Ibid*., P. 38, 319; Saudamini Debi, 'Pitrismriti', *Prabasi*, Feb.-Mar., 1912, p.75; 'Banganganaganer Paricchhad', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1874, p.152 JJJ. Debi, 'Smritikatha ', passim. For details see Appendix 3.

The Brahmos of the 1860s moreover argued that they had no spiritual freedom either, since they were supposed to follow blindly the idolatry and superstitions of their husband.[24]

Consciousness regarding unlatching the cage

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the problems of female education and female seclusion were dovetailed, the expansion of female education was not possible because women could not be sent to school and women could not be sent out, nor would they themselves come out, because they were not educated. By the 1850s, a section of the *bhadralok* realized the need to educate women. However, none except a handful of men, like Madanmohan Tarkalankar and Haradeb Chattopadhyay, ventured to send their very young daughters to school and thus break the female seclusion.[25] The question of breaking the seclusion of wives and older women did not at all concern these reformers at that stage, let alone the question of allowing women any personal liberty.

The 1860s saw an important change in the attitudes of a small segment of educated men towards women's "liberation" in general and towards female seclusion in particular. These men were the young members of either the Brahmo Samaj or the native Christian Society. There were also some Brahmo-influenced Hindus. The change among the Brahmos was in the most part due to Keshab Sen who became the undisputed leader of the young "progressive" Brahmos. His followers and friends, like Satyendranath Tagore, Durgamohon Das, Dwarakanath Ganguli, Sasipada Banerji, Manomohon Ghose and Woomesh Chandra Bonnerji even went a few steps further. Until the end of the 1850s, the emphasis of the Bengali reformers was on female education. But in the 1860s, they realized that the greatest hurdle to women's education and to the development of their mental faculties were the custom of female seclusion. They also noticed that this custom was a hindrance to normal relationship between men and women. Kaliprasanna Ghose published his book, *Narijati-Bishayak Prastab*, in 1869. This was one of the most significant nineteenth century Bengali publications on women. Ghose argued:

> If murdering a woman by not giving her any food and water is considered a sin, then depriving her of all education can be regarded as a greater sin....Like education, she has a natural right to personal liberty and freedom. Without this right, female education becomes meaningless....There are some men who think that women have no scruples and that women's freedom will cause a great deal of social evil. God has created women equal and free, therefore, men have no right either to give them any freedom or to rob them of it.[26]

Kissori Chand Mitra, moreover, argued in a lecture given at the Bethune society, that the social status held by women in any country was the true test of its civilization. He therefore asked his countrymen in the name of their country as well as for the sake of justice and freedom to put forth all their energies for the emancipation and elevation of their women and to their rightful position.[27] In a lecture given at the Jnan Prakashani Shaba in 1873, Nabin Krishna Bose also argued more or less on the same lines.[28]

On the one hand, these modernized men became conscious of the need to break the seclusion of their women and thus pave the way towards women's emancipation; on the other, they considered female seclusion to be less than civilized, and therefore to have been introduced by the Muslims; female seclusion having been, in their opinion, unknown in India before the advent of Muslims in the 10th Century. Although the scant evidence of the modern historians suggests the contrary, the Bengali reformers, even women themselves, repeatedly

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24. K. P. Ghosh, *Narijati Bishayak Prastab* (Calcutta: Kabyaprakashan Press, 1869), p. 138.

25. *Supra*, p. 33

26. K. P. Ghose, *Narijati Bishayak Prastab* pp.60-61, 151,156,198.

27. K.C. Mitra, 'Hindu women and their connection with the improvement of the country', *The Proceedings and Transactions of the Bethune Society* (Calcutta; Bishop's College Press,1870), p.XXV.

28. N. K. Bose, *Female Education* (Calcutta; J. P. Sabha, 1873), p.7.

argued that the Hindu introduced the *purda* partly in imitation of the rules and partly to protect their women from the lust of these rulers.[29]

Despite this kind of criticism which undoubtedly showed a change in the attitude towards female seclusion and female upliftment, no one was brave enough to start the process of modernization of the women locked up their own harem, except for the giving of some education to them and that too, in most cases, was given privately. Some one had to break the ice. Then suddenly it all began, in 1862, Keshab wanted to take his wife to Debendranath Tagore's house, where the ceremony to appoint him the *acharya* of the Brahmo Samaj was to be held. It was possibly the most significant occasion of his life till then. Profoundly imbued with European ideas as he was, it was only natural that he would expect his wife to witness the celebration and to share the success of his public life. But Keshab's near relation could not conceive that a *bhadralok* should take his wife to a house other than that of a close relation. They tried, even with the help of a Bhojpuri gatekeeper, to prevent what seemed to them an indiscreet and impertinent act on his part.[30] But Keshab took his wife out of the four walls of the *zenana* in the following years; so did a number of his followers.

Keshab had set the first example of taking his wife out from the harem, but was not much of a radical so far as breaking the *purda* of Bengali women was concerned, in fact, he had, like most of the other reformers of his time, his contradictions. He inspired his followers to free the womenfolk, but that freedom was to be partial only. As we have already seen, he only partially freed his wife.[31] Indeed, Keshab only set the ball rolling, and it was through the collective efforts of many others that Bengali women were modernized to some extent.

Satyendranath Tagore was one of the bravest men who, in the 1860s, took some steps that later came to be recognized as milestones in the history of Bengali women's modernization. Educated in England, and the first native member of the Indian Civil Service, Satyendranath translated J.S. Mill's celebrated work *Subjection of Women*.[32] As his father wished, Satyendranath married the seven year old Jnanada Debi when he himself was only 17. He went to England in1862 and was most profoundly influenced by the position of English women in society, which he considered much higher than that of Bengali women. He was also influenced by the contemporary movement for the emancipation of women in England. The letters he wrote during this time to his child-wife show how concerned he was to educate and "emancipate" his wife. Unlike most of the reformers, he sincerely wanted his wife to develop her individuality and to become his true companion. He also wanted to base his relationship with his wife on equality and mutual respect. As early as 1863, he wrote to her from London:

> I have written to father. I expect him to send you to England.....I have written that you were just a child when you were married to me, that you and I could not marry of our free will, and that our guardians arranged our marriage....Until you attain the proper age and education, and you can acquire a sophistication in every respect, we will not enter the husband-wife relationship ....Your body and soul are still dry within the four walls of the zenana, you will find a new world when you come to England.[33]

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29. See, for example, 'Edeshiya Bamaganer Bahirbhraman', *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1871,p.185; 'Aborodh-prathar Utpatti', *BBP* jul.-Aug.,1891, pp. 107-08; Krisnakamini, 'Strilokdiger Sambhram', *BBP*, Jul.-Aug.,1873 p. 139; Mrinmayi Sen, 'Bharatmahilar Shiksha', Anthapur, Aug.-Sep.,1902, p. 92.

30. P.C. Mazoomder, *The Life and Teachings of Keshab Chunder Sen* (Calcutta : Baptist Mission Press, 1887), pp. 138-42: U.G. Ray, *Acharya Keshab Chandra*, Vol.I (2nd ed., Calcutta; Brahmo Samaj, 1938), pp.180-81.

31. Supra, p. 37.

32. It is not known when this translation was published, nor, in fact, whether it was published at all. B. N. Bandyopadhyay has given to understand that it was published before 1868. But that is impossible, because the original work of J. S. Mill was not published before 1869. See, B.N. Bandyopadhyay, *Satyendranath Thakur, Amritalal Basu, Biharilal Chattopadyay* (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat , 1960), p. 28.

33. S.N. Tagore to Jnanadanandini Debi , letter dated 11.1.1864, Puratani, pp. 48-49.

No one is known to have written such things to his father or to his wife at that time. In another letter he wrote to his wife that she was like a bird in a cage and that at the Jorasanko house there was no place where her body and soul could develop.[34] Disappointed and dejected, in yet another letter he wrote to his wife that his father wanted him to abide by the conventions and customs of the *zenana* and he should keep her caged. But, he declared, he would never be happy keeping her chained.[35]

Satyendranath came back from England in 1864 and was appointed as the Assistant Collector and Magistrate of Ahmedabad (Bombay). While he was in England, he could not get his wife to join him there, because his father, on whom he was totally dependent economically, would not allow to do so. But now that he had a good job, he wanted to take her to Ahmedabad. Debendranath reluctantly consented. However, he asked Satyendranath to take her to the ship in a palanquin of in a carriage, because going by carriage was taboo to a women at that time.[36] As we will see in the fourth chapter it was forbidden for men to take their wives to the places of their work. It was, therefore, a very bold step on Satyendranath's part to have taken his wife to Ahmedabad. No Bengali *bhadralok* of their status had previously done so.[37]

Two years later, in 1866, when she returned to Calcutta, Jnanada Debi went to the Tagore house in a carriage. This aroused noisy disapproval among the members of the family, as well as among the neighbours. Debendranath was also very annoyed and could not for a long time forgive Jnanada Debi for what he saw as an unbecoming behaviour. In fact, Satyendranath and his wife became outcastes in their own house.[38]

Undaunted, a few months later, Satyendranath sent his wife to a party given by the Governor-General at his residence in Calcutta. Satyendranath being ill, he sent his wife alone. She was the first Bengali lady to attend such a party. The Indians and the Europeans were all taken by surprise at her presence. Prasanna Kumar Tagore, as we saw in the preceding chapter, was in favour of female education and gave some education to his wife and daughters, but he too was so upset and pained by her presence that she immediately left the party.[39]

Satyendranath's examples naturally encouraged other young Brahmos who wanted to free their wives from the *zenana* but had not the courage to ignore the popular social custom of seclusion. For instance, in 1866, two brothers, Rakhal Chandra and Biharilal Roy, who were two enthusiastic members of the Barisal Brahmo Samaj, went in carriages round the roads of Barisal with their wives, creating a commotion among the local people.[40] On another occasion soon afterwards, they invited the local European officers to a dinner party at their house in which their wives participated.[41] The Lt. Governor of Bengal, Sir C. Beadon, was so impressed by this incident that he wrote a letter to the Collector of Barisal praising the Roy brothers for their fearlessness.[42] It should however be mentioned that such examples were at

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34. Letter dated 18.2.1864, *ibid*, p.53.

35. Letter dated 2.7.1864, *ibid*, p.58.

36. Swarna K. Debi, pp. 318-19; S.N. Thakur, *Arya Ramanir Shiksha O Swadhinata*, p. 178; J. Debi, p. 29.

37. See next chapter.

38. Swarna K. Debi, pp. 318-19; S. N.Tagore to Jnanadananadini Debi. letters 31, 50,52 and 72 in *Puratani*, p. 90,109,112 and 133.

39. *Grambarta Prakashika*, Jan.,1867, quoted in B.N. Bandyopadhyay *Satyendranath Thakur* etc., p.18; J. Debi, 'Smritikatha', p. 33; K.N. Thakur, *Arya Ramanir* etc., p.179.

40. *BBP*. Oct.-Nov., 1866, p.378.

41. *Ibid*., p.377. The party was given in the 2nd week of Aug., 1866.

42. *Ibid*.

For the text of the letter see, L. Ghose, *The Modern History of the Indian Chiefs, Rajas, Zamindars*, etc., pt.II (Calcutta: Presidency Press,1881), p.13.

that stage exceptions. Owing to hostile public opinion, it was extremely difficult to break female seclusion, even if modernized young men sincerely wanted to free their women from the harems. Satyendranath and the Roy brothers could venture to do such unorthodox things because they held high positions in the society, had independent incomes and as members of the Brahmo Samaj, had alienated themselves from traditional society. Thus it was possible for them to ignore social disapproval.

Most of the young men, on the contrary, as members of joint families, were closely bound to many familial and social obligations. Some of them were even dependent for their living on the incomes of the other members of their families. They were therefore unable to do anything as spectacular as Satyendranath and the Roy brothers did. Nevertheless, many other members of the Brahmo Samaj of India gradually violated the custom of female seclusion in a less conspicuous way. All these helped Bengali women to modernize in general and to come out of the purda in particular. Two incidents that took place during Mary Carpenter's visit to Calcutta in November- December, 1866 were very important in this connection. They reflect the changing attitudes of both men and women, especially men belonging to the Brahmo Samaj, towards female seclusion.

At the threshold of a new era

In the last week of November, 1866, a number of Brahmo men and women arranged a reception in honour of Miss Carpenter. After the reception was over, the men and women present there were introduced to each other. The men were so exalted at this that one of them delivered an address. Congratulating the women, he said:

> Ladies! Henceforth do act according to the spirit of freedom that you experienced today. From this moment shake off the mean and impure sense of shyness that always gets the better of the women of our country. You are neither inanimate things nor just animals so that you will do whatever your husbands order you to do.....You too have the right, as men have, to think and to act freely. Do what you consider good, we men have no right to object. We cannot do everything according to your wish, nor can you do everything as we want you to do.[43]

Although the leader of these men, Keshab Chandra Sen, when later informed of what had happened, could not quite approve of it,[44] this kind of social gathering and conversation between men and women again took place when Miss Carpenter invited the same set of men and women to her place on the 25th December, 1866. The editor of *Bamabodhini Patrika* on this occasion expressed his happiness and wrote an encouraging editorial asking women to taste the fruit of "pure freedom". Moreover, he urged the women to be brave if their husbands are afraid of "opening the doors of freedom", to overcome the "meanness of their husbands" and wear around their necks the garlands of freedom that God had given them.[45]

This kind of social contact between men and women of *bhadralok* families was unknown in Bengal at that time. According to Tapan Raychaudhuri, “men’s contact with women unrelated to them consisted only in visits to prostitutes of brief encounters with young women of the neighbourhood.” On the other hand, women could enjoy the pleasure of conversing only with the bridegroom either in their own family or in the family of relatives in the neighbourhood'.[46] In his autobiography, Kartikeya Chandra Ray claims that, when some

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43. 'Brahmikader Abhinandn' *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1866, p.376; Nov.-Dec.,1866, p. 390.

44. U. C. Ray, *Acharya Keshub Chandra*, Vol. 1. pp. 34-647.

45. 'Miss Mary Carpenter', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1866, p.376.

46. T. Raychaudhuri , 'Norms of Family Life etc.’, p. 20.

Raychaudhury based his remarks on Kartikeya Chandra Ray's autobiography, *Atmajibancharit* (New ed.; Calcutta: Indian Associated publishing, 1956), pp.36-37.

Atmajibancharit was first published in the monthly Sahitya, 1896-97.

of the Western educated young men, including himself began to meet one other's wives, they and their wives were deeply gratified.[47]

These women had no previous experience of conversing with men other than their husbands and close relations. Most of them were therefore shy and uncomfortable at first, later, however, they became used to it. For example, Jnanada Debi, as described earlier, was very shy and ill at ease among men. She soon became very sophisticated and fashionable.[48] She learnt not only to talk gracefully to men in a number of languages, but also ventured to take part in theatrical performances.[49] She also visited England and France without any male companion. Brahmomayi Debi, Durga Mohan Das's wife, was born and brought up in the *mofussil* and was very traditional in her behaviour. As will be shown below, she was one of the first women to take part in religious services with men.[50] She also began to sing devotional songs in such services. Saudamini Roy (Rakhal Chandra Roy's wife), Rajkumari Banerji, Radharani Lahiri, the Bose sisters (Swarnaprabha, Subarnaprabha, Labanyaprabha and Hemaprabha) and many other Brahmo ladies turned into "social" women in the late 1870s.[51] A number of such "enlightened" Brahmo ladies can be seen not only in Rabindranath Tagore's novel *Gora*, but several women of the Tagore family were also examples of such a change among women during the last two decades of the 19th century. For example, Indira Debi, Hiranmayi Debi, Sarala Debi, Pratibha Debi etc. became well known as "emancipated" women. They were all sophisticated and accomplished, and could freely mix with their male friends. Indira and Hiranmayi became intimate with Pramatha Chaudhuri and Phani Bhushan Mukherji respectively and later married them. Sarala's close friend was Loken Palit with whom she could, in her own language, discuss politics and literature and share her happiness and amusements.[52] Manomohan Ghose, a young poet, was another of her close friends. Sarala claims that her desk was filled with his poetical and emotional letters.[53] This kind of social contact between men and women was totally unknown to Bengal before.

When the following facts are considered, it has to be admitted that Bengali women who had never been in public before 1866 went a long way towards "emancipation" within a single decade. Not only were they going abroad (as will be shown below), but they began to attend public meetings as well. Possibly the first incident took place on the 26th January, 1871, when two or three women, including Annette Akroyd, attended a meeting addressed by Keshab Chandra Sen.[54] Within a month or so, more women attended the convocation of the Calcutta University, held at the Town Hall.[55] Even people who were trying to break female seclusion did not expect that women, for so long secluded in the *zenana* would attend public lectures so soon. Men's reactions were therefore mixed, mostly unfavourable. In the March-April (1871) issue of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, the visit to the Indian Reform Association was praised on the ground that it would *enlighten* them, and the attendance of the convocation meeting by the aforesaid women was termed to be injudicious on the ground that the proper

47. K. C. Ray, *Atmajibancharit*, p. 37.

48. Mary Carpenter, Six Months in India, Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868), pp. 32-33.

49. A. N. Thakur, Gharoa, in *Abanindra Rachanabali*, Vol. I. (Calcutta: Prakash Bhaban, 1973), pp.137-42; P. K. *Mukhopadhyay, Rabindrajibani*, Vol.1 (4th ed.; Calcutta: Viswa Bharati, 1971), p. 349, 511; P. B. Sen, 'Satyendranath Thakur', in *Puratani*, pp, 200-01.

50. See next chapter.

51. The two younger Bose sisters were only children in the 1870s.

52. Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata* (Calcutta :Sahitya Sangsad, 1958), p.96.

53. *Ibid*., p. 178.

54. Annette Akroyd's diary, quoted in W.H. Beveridge, p. 90.

55. *BBP*, Mar.-Apr., 1871, p. 365.

time had not come.[56] Indeed, popular attitudes were so offended by their attendance of public meetings that a man like Pearichand Mitra, who was an ardent supporter of the upliftment of womenfolk, criticized Ramtanu Lahiri for having taken some of his female relations to a meeting of Keshab Chandra Sen.[57]

In December, 1875, when the Prince of Wales came to visit Calcutta, Jagadanada Mukherji, a Calcutta High Court advocate, arranged a reception in his honour. The Prince was warmly received in the *zenana* by quite a few traditional Hindu women belonging to the Mukherji family.[58] The Brahmo women had started to become unorthodox several years earlier, but this was the first well known example of traditional Hindu women disregarding the custom of female seclusion. Jagadanada and his family were severely criticized by both the traditional Hindus, for having violated *purda* and by educated young men who had recently become imbued with a strong sense of nationalism, for having invited the Prince into the *zenana*.[59]

Women, most probably prostitutes, started to take part in theatrical performances on the public stage in August, 1873.[60] Public opinion was very hostile towards the inclusion of women in such performances. Even Vidyasagar and Sibnath Sastri, two champions of the cause of women, were so angered by it that they never again went to a public theatre.[61] However, in the next decade, women of the Tagore family were taking part in private theatrical performances and a section of men who had earlier disapproved of women's participation in such activities expressed praise for the Tagore women.

Far beyond the four walls of the zenana

In the face of increasing modernization among the “progressive” section of educated Bengali women, traditional values were crumbling. Bengali women who were, only a decade ago, expected not to leave their husband's homes for any place other than their paternal homes, started to go abroad in the late 1860s. This first happened in 1869, when Govinda Chandra Dutta, a native Christian of a conservative but well-known Hindu family of Calcutta, took his wife and two daughters to Europe,[62] because he considered the custom of female seclusion and the low standard of female education in Bengal were both obstacles to his daughters' education and mental development. As already mentioned in the first chapter, his two daughters, Aru and Toru received a very good education in France and England and bloomed into promising poets. Although both of them died in their early 20s, they earned quite a reputation for their literary talent. Taru, particularly was well received by the literary critics for her two volumes of novels-one in English and the other in French.[63]

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56. *Ibid*.

57. *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, p. 289.

58. B. Bandyopadhyay, *Bangiya Natyashalar Itihas* (4th ed.; Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1961), p.172; A. Choudhuri, 'The Theatre, in *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* ed. by A. Gupta (Jadavpur; National Council of Education, 1958), pp. 301-02.

59. B. Bandyopadhyay, *Bangiya Natyashalar Itihas*, pp. 172-73

A farce ridiculing Jagdananda was written and performed immediately. This farce, entitled Gajadananda O Yubaraj, was so applauded by the nationalists to the embarrassment of the Government that the Governor-General soon promulgated an ordinance banning the performances of all plays considered "scandalous, defamatory, seditious, obscene and otherwise prejudicial to the public interest ." For details see P. Pundit, 'The Dramatic Performances Bill'. *Mookerjee's Magazine*, New Series, Vol. V. Nos. 36-40 (Jan.-Jun.,1876).

60. Women appeared on the public stage on the 16th August 1873. See *Madhyastha*, 14 Bhadra 1280 (Aug., 1873), pp. 405-06.

61. S. Sastri, *Atmacharit* (First Signet ed.; Calcutta: Signet Press, 1952), P. 90; Indra Mitra, Sajghar (Calcutta; ,1960), p. 40.

62. *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1869, p. 137; 'Notes on Govin Chunder Dutt' Calcutta Review, Vol. CXV (1902), pp. 400-02.

63. For details see H. Das, *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. (Oxford : Oxford U. P., 1921).

The Dutts being Christians, these instances may be regarded as exceptions. However soon Brahmo women were to visit Europe. Sasipada Banerji, a distinguished social worker and a young Brahmo leader, asked his wife to accompany him on his European tour in 1871.[64] Possibly he hoped that such a tour would broaden the outlook of his wife and "modernize" her. The result was almost immediate. After having lived with different English families for eight months, Rajkumari, his wife, returned to Bengal with a changed outlook and personality.[65] Satyendranath Tagore sent his wife, Jnadanandini Debi, to England in 1877. In Jnanada's own language, her husband 'so profound an admirer of English civilization' had expected that their visit to England would help to learn both the English language and manners.[66] Satyendranath sent her and the three children aged 5, 4 and 2 accompanied by an English family... this he thought would compel her to learn English even sooner. Jnanda lived in England for about two and a half years and in France for a few months. She and her children learnt not only English but picked up a bit of French as well.[67] (Later their daughter, Indira, got first class Honours in French from the Calcutta University.) Besides, Jnanadanandini turned into a fashionable and sophisticated women.

The examples of women visiting Europe were not limited to the Brahmo and Christians alone. Traditional Hindu women too followed. Manomohan Ghose was undoubtedly very much influenced by the Brahmos, but he never formally accepted Brahmoism.[68] After having returned to Bengal from England in 1867 as a barrister, Ghose realized the need to "reform" his uneducated and unsophisticated wife. He immediately sent her to a convent where she received a good English education. She also learnt English manners and adopted Western dress.[69] Not satisfied with this, Ghose took her to England twice with him. The apparent result was, in the eyes of a contemporary biographer, that 'she is able to mix in English society like any English lady'.[70] Yet another striking example was that of W.C. Bonnerji's wife Hemangini Debi. Bonnerji, later a President of the Indian National Congress, was a member of a traditional Hindu family. One of his ancestors was the renowned Sanskrit scholar Jagannath Tarkapanchanan. While studying law in England during the years 1864-68, Bonnerji realized the need to educate womenfolk. Immediately after his return to Bengal as a barrister, he started to educate his wife. To further this, he sent his wife to England. Later she turned into ' an accomplished lady'.[71] It seems that English education had shaken her religious belief and the accepted Christianity, although Bonnerji himself stuck to Hinduism. However, both of them became ardent supporters of female education and determined to give their daughters a medical education.[72] Bonnerji educated his sisters, Mokshadayini as well. Mokshadayini published a fortnightly, *Bangamahila*, in 1870.[73]

Of the four books, only one-*A Sheaf Gleaned in France Fields* (1876) was published before her death. Her other books are: *Binaka* (published in *Bengal Magazine* in 1878); *Le Journal de Mademoiselled Arvers* (1879); and *Ancient Ballades and Legend: of Hindustan* (1882).

64. *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1871, p.334.

65. A. R. Banerji, *An Indian Pathfinder: Memoris of Sebabrata Sasipada Banerji* (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,1973), passim.

66. J.Debi, *Smritikatha,* p.38

67. Ibid., pp. 38-39.

68. According to D. Kopf. Ghose was a Brahmo. See *The Brhmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, p. 97,259.

69. J, Debi 'Smritikatha', p.29.

70. R. G. Sanyal, *A General Biography of Bengal Celebrities Both Living and Dead* (Reprint: Calcutta Rddhi, 1976; First ed. 1889), p.24.

71. *Ibid*., p.48.

72. *Ibid*., p.49.

73. B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Bangla Samayikpatra*, Vol. II (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1952), p. 11.

Krishnabhabini Das was possibly closer to traditional Hinduism than all the other women who went to Europe during the 1870s and 1880s. However, she had a strong desire to see the world outside the zenana and to visit Europe. In the introduction to her book on her journey and experience in England, she said:

> (Female) readers! I was locked up in the *zenana* just like you and I had no connection with anything of either my country or the world. I used to keep myself satisfied with the few things I found in the small world of the *zenana*, but I could do so with difficulty. I longed to know all I could about my country. I would almost become crazy whenever I heard that someone was going to or returning from England. If I ever met anyone coming from abroad, I used to ask him a lot of questions about the countries he had visited. However, I would never express my desire to visit these countries, because I knew that such desires of Bengali women were not be fulfilled.[74]

She wrote more about her desire to get out of the *zenana*.

> For years I cherished the hope that one day I would go to England, the abode of liberty and freedom,
> I would go to that country where there is freedom in every house,
> To that country where people live in the open air of freedom.
> O Mother Bengal! Many of your sons go there in order to receive education,
> Why then, Mother, can't we, your daughters, go there?
> And illuminate our heart with knowledge?
> We too are human beings, and have eyes;
> But we are blind, and live in cages.
> With what difficulties have I come out of one of these cages!
> I have come out, Mother, to fill my heart with the nectar of knowledge.[75]

After having lived in England for about a decade (1882-1890), she was, indeed, a changed women. She herself was aware of this change. In an interesting passage she thus described this change:

> There is popular saying that even a slave becomes free as soon as he steps on the soil of England. I myself can feel it very well that there has been a significant change in my attitudes and values since I started to breathe in the open air of England and to live with the free people of that country. I am unable to describe this change to the brothers and sisters of my country. I did not know anything of this while I was in India. I even did not think that the life of a person could be so different. I used to read about other countries-some independent, some under the rule of others, some democratic and some autocratic- but was unable to realize the significance of all these terms. I can now see that I used to imagine all other countries more or less like mine, because at that time, I was like a blind person to whom day and night had no difference.[76]

A *purdahnashin* (one who observes the *purda*) woman with elementary education, she soon immensely enhanced her knowledge. This was reflected in her writings which she started to publish while she was still in England. Her book on England came out in 1885 and her articles soon started to appear in different magazines including *Bharati*. The ideas of women's modernization expressed in her writings were most certainly "modern" and remarkable. She was the only women writer of that time who introduced the contemporary English women's movement for emancipation to Bengali readers and advocated the upliftment of Bengali women on the same lines.[77]

A visit to Europe may not mean anything today, but it was quite significant a century ago. Sea voyage was prohibited to Hindus. One would lose one's Jati or caste if one went on a sea voyage. Earlier, Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore had gone to Europe.[78] But they were able to do this because they were wealthy and influential and could possibly disregard social customs. Most of the ambitious young men of that period who went to England for

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74. Also see my article on Krisnabhabini Das, *Englande Banga Mahila*, p. 2. Krisnabhabini in *Jijnasa*, Vol.3, No. 2 (Oct.-Dec., 1982), pp. 128-43.

75. *Ibid*., pp.19-21.

76. *Ibid*., pp. 253-54.

77. For example, see her article on English women's education and emancipation: 'Ingrej Mahilar Shiksha O Swadhinatar Gati', Bharati O Balak, Jul.-Aug., 1891.pp.198-202. Also see her *Englande Banga Mahila*, Chapters X and XII.

78. Roy went in 1880, Dwarkanath in 1832 and 1845.

higher studies and later earned considerable fortunes, had to perform atonement for crossing the *kalapani*, or sea (literally "dark water"), after they had returned home.[79] The journeys undertaken by these women were, therefore, extraordinary acts of disobedience towards society and, as is evident from the above instances, had a tremendous impact on their education and personality.

Decline of female seclusion and its impact on women

From the preceding discussion, it has possibly become apparent that only a small segment of the urbanized educated people, in the most part the Brahmos, the Brahmo-influenced Hindus and the native Christians, were brave enough to ignore the strict rules of seclusion. Of course, they did not, and perhaps could not, totally ignore the tradition of female seclusion. They did so only on particular occasions and only among their own friends and relations. How significant then was this? From the limited amount of freedom that these women started to enjoy as a result of this change, it may not now seem to be all that radical. But one must remember that the examples of these modernized women exercised a seminal influence on an increasing number of Bengali women–both Hindus and Muslims.

Besides, the breaking of female seclusion was the first tentative step towards a wider degree of freedom that the later women inherited. Unless the earlier women were first allowed to come out of the four walls of the *zenana*, it would have been impossible for them to conceive of and clamour for the freedom that they later did. In the next chapter we will notice how women's concept of their own freedom underwent a considerable degree of change as a result of the gradual decline of female seclusion.

79. The prejudice against sea travel was quite strong until the end of the nineteenth century. A committee consisting of the leaders of the traditional Hindus was formed in Bengal in order to fight against this prejudice. This committee was still working in 1894. See P. Sinha. *Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965), pp. 139-41, 157-59.

CHAPTER THREE

In the Wide World : Women's Changing Concept of Freedom

Although during the first half of the nineteenth century the condition of Bengali women was not at all enviable because they were uneducated and licked up in the *zenana*, they were perhaps no less happy than the later women who received some formal education and were also allowed to move beyond the four walls of the *zenana*. While the earlier women were, since their childhood, taught to remain content with the kind of life-style prevalent at that time, later women gradually acquired a set of new values which they found were totally unacceptable to most people around them. They were slowly but surely overcome by a sense of dissatisfaction relating to the fulfilment of their own lives within the context of the *zenana* or of the family. Once they had some education, they could no longer think in the same way as the women of the preceding generation. Moreover, the ones who had tasted a life outside the *zenana* found it impossible to shut themselves again inside it. They therefore started to look beyond the domestic chores for the realization of their hopes and aspirations. They for the first time came to nurture the idea that like all men, women were also born free and equal and that it was a traditional male-defined society that had kept them chained. Indeed they not only conceived of women's rights, but soon developed their own concept of freedom as well.

Social Activities

As female education spread, and female seclusion became less rigorous among the *bhadralok*, particularly the Brahmos, there was an increased amount of women's participation in social activities outside the context of the family. Apparently it all started with their attendance at religious services. The first example was that of about 50 Brahmo women of Calcutta who attended the annual religious festival of the Brahmos, called the *Maghotsab*, at the Jorasanko house of Debendranath Tagore in January, 1866. After the men had left the function, women were allowed to sit behind a curtain and hear Debendranath's sermon.[1] A few months later, Brahmomayi Debi, Durgamohan Das's wife, and another woman of Barisal (whose name has not been mentioned) attended a religious service of the local Brahmos. They were one step forward in the sense that they attended it with the other male members of the local Samaj.[2] The Barisal Brahmo women, being only a few, were unable to do anything other than attend religious service, but the Calcutta Brahmo women organized during the same year the first women's association of Bengal, called the Brahmika Samaj. In November that year, as we already saw, they gave a reception to Miss Mary Carpenter and later started to organize monthly meetings.

Although the Brahmika Samaj's objectives were predominantly religious in nature, this was a test case of how far men were prepared to allow women to come out of *purda* as well as to participate in social activities. The conservative *Adi Brahmo Samaj* of the Tagores had already rejected the idea of women's participation in social activities even in the name of

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1. *BBP*, Feb., Mar., 1866, pp. 216-17.
2. *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1866, p. 302.

In 1867, a number of Brahmo men and women assembled at the house of Kissorilal Maitra in Calcutta, where they Jointly took part in religious service on the occasion of the annual Maghotsab, *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1867, p. 444.

religious services.[3] Even the so-called "progressive" Brahmo Samaj of India, under the leadership of Keshab chandra Sen, stood divided when, in January, 1872, a number of women tried to sit outside the curtain with the male members of their families during a religious service. These included Durgamohan Das's and Annada Charan Khastagir's families. Keshab, well-known for some of his progressive ideas, would not allow the women to sit outside the curtain, because, he argued, this would distract the attention of the other male members.[4] Offended by this, Das, Khastagir, Dwarkanath Ganguly and some others organized a separate service at a Bowbazar house. Debendranath Tagore and Rajnarayan Bose, both of whom were conservative with regard to women's modernization, encouraged this faction to set up this separate Samaj, most probably because they welcomed a split in the Brahmo Samaj of India.[5] When, within several months, Keshab conceded to the demand of this faction, the weekly services, the attendance of women at the services, however, did not tremendously improve as a result of this.[6] The women were actually fighting for a right. When they got it, their enthusiasm started to ebb. This, of course, shows growing awareness on their part. Whether or not they coveted increased social contact with men, they certainly found a life outside their homes and desired to mingle with fellow women.

This temporary split among the "progressive" members of the Brahmo Samaj on the question of women's right polarized the difference between the two groups of the Brahmo Samaj of India-one in favour equal rights of men and women and another in favour of limited rights for women.[7] In 1874, the issue of women's rights to higher education further divided the Brahmo Samaj on India, and Sibnath Sastri, Das, Khastagir, Ganguly, Sasipada Banerji, etc., emerged as a separate faction named the Samadarshi Dal.[8]

It is difficult to say whether women were losing their keen interest in religion, but there is no doubt that their attention was being channelled in other directions as well. Knowingly or unknowingly, men themselves were helping women to look at other issues For example, with renewed reforming zeal, Keshab returned from England in 1870 with certain ideas, such as elevating women and industrial labourers. He soon started the Indian Reform Association and a ladies' school under that association.[9] Keshab then organized the first "social" association of women, named the Bamahitaishini Sabha, with the teachers and the students of this school, he himself being the President. Apart from two European women–Miss Pigot and Lady Phear, Mrs. Manomohan Ghosh, Mrs. Durgamohan Das, Mrs. W. C. Bonnerji and a number of other women were on the committee. The association decided to meet every alternate friday.[10] In its second meeting, 30 women attended and four read papers.[11] Keshab was,

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3. Although Debendranath allowed women to participate in religious services on the occasion of the annual Moghotsab in 1866, he refused to allow them to do so in 1867. *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1867, p. 444

4. *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, p.270.

5. Debendranath, as a mark of his encouragement, gave a sermon at this Samaj in March, 1872 (*Tattvabodini Patrika*, May-Jun., 1872, pp. 27-30). Rajnarayan Bose agreed to act as the *acharya* at the request of Debendranath (Rajnarayan Basur Atmacharit, p. 197).

6. *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1872 p.168.

7. *Madhyastha*, the conservative Hindu perodical, sarcastically named the Keshabites the "progressive". See *Madhyastha*, 20 Jyaistha, 1279 (June,1872), p. 127. *Halisahar Patrika* named them the "lectures" and the "feminists" respectively.

8. S. Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (2nd ed., Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1974), pp. 163-64.

Samadarshi Dal published a monthly journal named Samadarshi in 1874 with Sastri as its editor. It was a bilingual Journal. Surprisingly enough, it did not publish anything on the contemporary movement for the emancipation of Bengali women, during at least the first year.

9. *BBP*, Dec., 1870-Jan., 1871, p. 273.

10. *BBP*,Apr.-May, 1871, pp. 392-93.

Whether a woman's association could be started was first discussed at a meeting of the Brahmo Samaj of India in October, 1870. The meeting was presided over by Pratapchandra Mazumdar, Keshab had not till then returned from England. (*BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1870, p. 224.)

therefore, at the same time encouraging women to get involved in social activities and mingle with male members of the Samaj and trying to prevent them from sitting with male members during the weekly services. This contradiction resulted, as we have seen, almost in a schism of the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1872.

Although they got valuable support from men such as Sibnath Sastri and Umesh Chandra Datta, women themselves established and ran the Banga Mahila Samaj. Soon after the schism of the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1878, the women members of the newly formed Sadharan Brahmo Samaj felt the necessity of having their own association and they finally started the Banga Mahila Samaj in August 1879.[12] Radharani Lahiri, Swarnaprabha Basu, Kadambini Basu, Kailas Kamini Datta, Saraswati Sen, Kamini Sen, etc., who were previously associated with the Bamahitaishini Sabha, were the most prominent members of the Banaga Mahila Samaj during the first few years. The association started with 41 women . But it soon attracted more. The annual meeting of 1880 was attended by about 100 women.[13] *Bamabodhini Patrika* claimed that only those women who believed in the principles of Brahmoism were eligible for membership of this association,[14] but it appears that, unlike the Bamahitaishini Sabha, it was based on a broader principle and paid little attention to religious matters. The papers read at its meetings included subjects like ethics, men-women relationships, science and hygiene, but none on any institutionalized religion. Before long, it enlisted the support of some European woman. It published at least two books -one by Radharani Lahiri and another by Ramasundari Ghosh-during the first three years of the existence.[15] Encouraged by the success of the Bamahitaishini Sabha and the Banga Mahila Samaj, the native Christian women started their own association in 1881, with Kamini Shil as its secretary. It had 35 regular members and the first annual meeting held on 12th November, 1881, was attended by about 300 men and women. Like the Banga Mahila Samaj, it also started organising regular monthly meetings where papers of different subjects were presented. However, it went a step further when it launched its monthly magazine, *Khristiaya Mahila*, edited by Kamini Shil, in 1881.[16] This periodical came to be known as the second monthly to be edited by a woman, the first one being *Anathini* (1875), edited by Thakamani Debi of Dhulian.[17]

Now that women belonging to both the Brahmo Samaj of India and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj as well as to Bengali Christian society, had their respective associations, the women of the Adi Brahmo Samaj felt the need to have a similar association. In the early 1880s, they were occupied with the popular theosophical movement led by Col. H. S. Olcot. But as the theosophical movement lost much of its popularity, the Adi Samaj women felt this need for an association even more strongly. At last, Swarnakumari Debi started her Sakhi Samiti (Friends' Association) in 1886. However, she included women of the other two factions of the Brahmo Samaj as well as of educated Hindu families. The Sakhi Samiti aimed to bring about better understanding among women belonging to different social and religious groups. It also aimed to educate helpless widows and unmarried girls and thus make them economically self-supporting. Further, the Association aimed to organize exhibitions of

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11. *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1871, p.392.
12. *BBP*. Jan.-Feb., 1880, p. 116.
13. *BBP*. Jan.-Feb.,1881, p. 317.
14. *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1880, p. 28.
15. *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1881, p. 319
16. *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1881, p. 3; Dec., 1881-Jan., 1882, p.264.
17. The other periodicals edited by women in the 1870s were *Hindu Lalana* (1878) & *Banga Mahil*a (fortnightly, 1870).

handicrafts collected from districts of Bengal.[18] This, it hoped, would encourage women to make more of such things. According to Sarala Debi, the Sakhi Samiti also offered legal aid to raped women.[19]

Whether or not it could bring about a better understanding among women belonging to different segments of society, it certainly educated quite a few women through its *zenana* education programme, and its exhibitions too proved successful. Moreover, it seems, the Sakhi Samiti was able to attract far more women to it than the other women's associations. In 1888, for example, 162 women contributed an amount of Rs 2,405 to its fund.[20] The contributions the others associations received annually were about one tenth of this amount.[21] The list of the members of the Sakhi Samiti published in *Bharati* indicates that most of the members were Brahmos, but there were also many Hindus, several Christian and a few Muslims, and these members were from different parts of Bengal.[22] The Sakhi Samiti did not publish its own magazine, nevertheless it had its organ in *Bharati* as it was being edited by Swarnakumari Debi at this stage. Swarnakumari so efficiently edited this monthly magazine that it inspired a number of women to start magazines such as *Antapur and Janhabi* (1904).

By the middle of the 1890s, both the Banga Mahila Samaj and the Sakhi Samiti lost much of their enthusiasm, not because women were becoming uninterested in social activities but, possibly, because there was no one such as Swarnakumari Debi, who could constantly look after the working of the associations and thus sustain their activities. In fact, socially speaking, the women mentioned above were becoming more and more active and at the same time were enlarging the sphere of their activities. They realised that they certainly had some social roles to play outside the sphere of their families, without which their lives would remain unfulfilled.

It was at this stage that some women were politicised. This first began during the Ilbert Bill agitation in 1883. The Calcutta *bhadralok* were very excited about the Bill and the opposition of the Europeans towards it.[23] Some of them influenced the girls attending the Bethune School to participate in the agitation. Sarala Debi describes how girls' participation in its turn influenced many reluctant members of the *bhadralok* to take part in the agitation.[24]

When later, the Indian National Congress was founded, in 1885, some Bengali women soon joined it. In the annual conference of 1889 Dr. Kadambini Ganguli and Swarnakumari Debi attended as delegates from Bengal. Dr. Ganguli even addressed the conference.[25] Admittedly, this did not mean that women in general had become highly politicised, but it showed that at least some Bengali women were being increasingly influenced by a political awareness. Sarala Debi's involvement in politics, for instance, was much deeper than that of most of the moderate *bhadralok* politicians. She was convinced that agitational politics was

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18. 'Sakhi Samiti Uddeshya O Niyamabali', *Bharati O Balak*, Dec., 1891-Jan,1892, p. 508.

19. Sarala Debi, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p.59.

20. 'Sakhi Samiti Uddeshya O Niyamabali', *Bharati O Balak*, pp.509-15.

21. The income of the Banga Mahila Samaj during the 5 months on its existence was only 91 rupees. During the second year, its income was 252 rupees.-*BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1880, p. 119. The income of the Khristiya Mahila Samaj during the first year was 281 rupees. -*BBP*, Dec., 1881-Jan. 1882, p. 264.

22. The list of members can be seen in Appendix 4.

23. For details see A. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Reprint; Cambridge : Cambridge U. Press, 1970), pp.165-69; B. Martin, Jr., New India (Bombay: Oxford U. Press,1970), passim.

Annette Akroyd, who was so devoted to the cause of the native women, was opposed to the proposed Bill.-P.Barr, p. 186.

24. Sarala Debi, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p. 28.

25. J.C. Bagal, *Jatiya Andolane Banganari* (Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1954), p. 2; P. C. Gangopadhyay, *Banglar Nari-Jagaran* (Calcutta; Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1946), p.87.

not sufficient for freeing the country from the clutches of alien rulers and that a militant nationalist movement, including terrorism, was essential. She reached this conclusion before, or at the same time, as Tilak. Whether or not her conclusion was valid, she was a forerunner in this sphere of Indian politics. The way she encouraged young men to take physical training, as well as to undergo a political orientation, helped to organize the later terrorist movement in Bengal. She also successfully started the Pratapaditya festival and the Beerastami Brata and these aroused a strong sense of nationalism among the Bengalis,[26] even if these were to some extent communal in nature. Although women like Sarala Debi were exceptional, the writings of Krisnabhabini Das and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain suggest that, albeit moderate, a political consciousness was permeating a section of the educated women.[27] After the partition of Bengal in 1905, the number of women who took part in active politics soon multiplied.

Economic Activities

During the period under review, among Bengali women mainly maidservants, illiterate midwives and prostitutes had independent incomes. Besides, women of working class families participated in economic activities by helping their male relations by doing such work as feeding the domestic animals, milking cows, husking rice and selling fish. Some women even helped men by taking part in planting and harvesting. In short, low class women played a significant economic role, whether or not they earned any money. In order to do this, they were naturally required to ignore the *purda*. Moreover, as already mentioned, this meant that they held a higher status in their families than women of the *bhadralok* families. The latter women did not play any economic role, and, in any case, they did not earn any money. Indeed, there was a strong prejudice against any economic activities being undertaken by such women. It will be shown in Appendix 1 that, even as late as the 1930s, Rabindranath Tagore, so well known for his advanced ideas and so sympathetic to women, was opposed to women's acceptance of any salaried jobs. Even in the popular novels of Sharat Chandra Chatterjee, published during the first forty years of the twentieth century, the women characters like Rajlaxmi and Sabitri who have their own incomes are depicted as either prostitutes or maidservants. None of the educated women in Chatterjee's novels look for any jobs even if they are in desperate poverty. One might remember Kiranmayi of *Charitraheen* in this context.

From the scant evidence available, it is almost impossible to tell why with the passing of the time women in growing number started to involve themselves in economic activities. However, it seems, as a result of the spread of female education and of the overall social change that was taking place in the nineteenth century including increased economic pressure on families, women started to accept jobs in the last two decades of that century. Especially, the expansion of female education invited a new set of problems for the educated women. These women, particularly the ones having college education, had tasted a life so long unknown to them and wanted to play some social roles in addition to their traditional roles within the family. Moreover, since they had been unorthodox with regard to social customs such as female seclusion, female illiteracy and early marriage, it became difficult for them to find husbands. They possibly chose to take up jobs until they were married, albeit a stop gap arrangement for many. One might mention the name of such highly educated women in this category as Chandramukhi Bose and Jamini Sen, Kumudini Khastagir and Sarala Debi who

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26. Saral Debi, *Jibaner Jharapata*, pp. 125-62, passim.

27 See my articles on Rokeya and Krisnabhabini in *Jinjasa* Vol. I, No. 3 (Oct.,-Dec., 1980) and Vol. 3, No. 2 (Jul.-Sep., 1982).

accepted teaching positions, and Bidhumukhi Bose and Jamini Sen who began to practise medicine. Later, some of these women, willingly or not, gave up their jobs when they were married. It is, however, difficult to tell why the aforesaid women chose to ignore the social opprosition and accepted the jobs. It is known that Kamini's father strongly objected when he heard that Kamini would like to take up a teaching position at Bethune College. Kamini's father, a junior judge, was not particularly rich, but he did not expect Kamini to augment his income and thus help him support his family. Yet Kamini persuaded her father to allow her to accept the job. Several years later her younger sister, Jamini, came out of the University as a qualified physician. She also accepted a job. Perhaps this was because brilliant and successful students as they were, the prospects of a life of inactivity after the completion of their college years, were unacceptable to them. And the other time honoured alternative of getting married, doing housework and bringing up children did not appear to them extremely rosy. Perhaps all the other educated women since then faced more or less the same problems.

One of the factors which encouraged moderately educated women, mostly married, to take up teaching jobs, salaried or honorary, was the rapid expansion of female education. Men had by then realised that female education would not become popular unless female teachers could be found out. This put a pressure on the aforesaid women to take up teaching.

The Calcutta Campbell Medical School introduced a nursing and midwifery course for women in the early 1880s. It also admitted women students to its degree course in 1883. To encourage women, the government next year declared a scholarship for all the women students to enrol in the course.[28] The response of women to the nursing and midwifery course was more than what people had earlier expected. But few ventured to enrol in the degree course. It may be mentioned here that when the Calcutta Medical school was first established in 1835, few Hindus attended it, because the dissection of human corpse was taboo to them. Apart from this, Hindu attitudes towards Western medicines and medical treatment were also hostile.[29] Calling a doctor during pregnancy and childbirth was out of question. Infant mortality and death of both the mother and the child during childbirth were therefore very common, even in educated middle class families.[30] As Western ideas progressively influenced urban society, these popular attitudes were gradually replaced. Therefore, when qualified nurses and midwives started private practice, people did not ostracise them, rather they were quite often called in to help during pregnancy and childbirth. However, owing to reasons not clear, most people were still hostile towards qualified physicians like Kadambini Ganguli and Bidhumukhi Bose. To discredit Kadambini, the then popular Hindu periodical, *Bangabasi*, started a slandering campaign which resulted in a legal suit.[31] In the face of this kind of hostility, no women were brave enough to take up medicine during the next two decades. Between 1890 and 1910, Jamini Sen was the only Bengali woman to have come out of the Medical College. Bindhyobasini, younger sister of Bidhumukhi, was a brilliant student of this College. And for inexplicable reasons, she too discontinued her studies. Whether the hostility of the Hindus towards the qualified physicians was because all the five women were either non-Hindus (Brahmos and Christians), or whether it was promoted by male jealousy because Kadambini, Bidhumukhi

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28. *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1884, p.36.

29. The first lady who came out of the Calcutta Medical College was , as we have already seen , Kadambini. She was failed , but given a certificate to practise. She took her examination in 1889. The first two ladies to pass the MB examination were Bidhumukhi and Virginia Mary Mittra, both native Christians.

30. For details see M. Borthwick's unpublished PhD thesis on Bengali women (Australian National University, Canberra, 1980).

31. *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1891, p.106; D.Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj* etc., p. 126.
Kadambini won the case. The editor was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and to pay a fine of 100 rupees.

and Jamini were holding jobs that paid much more than most of the jobs that Bengali men occupied at that time, cannot be ascertained.

Possibly the first known case of a woman of a *bhadralok* family accepting a paid position was that of Radharani Debi of Dacca. An elderly women (most likely a widow), she was offered a teaching position in early 1866 by the Sherpur Strishiksha Bidhayini Sabha at a monthly salary of Rs 30. This was so unique an incident that the Lt.Governor of Bengal asked the Commissioner of Dacca to arrange to take her photograph, which the former intended to send to England. *Bamabodhini Patrika* too was apparently very much impressed. Not only did it publish the news item, but it also mentioned therein the only thing it knew about the woman that she used glasses while reading.[32] In the 1870s, Radharani Lahiri, Rajlaxmi Sen, Mahamaya Basu etc., were teaching at the Female Normal School founded by Keshab Sen.[33] But it is not known whether they held salaried positions or not.

The next decade saw a major change when women were offered government positions having handsome salaries. The first such appointment was that of Manomohini Wheeler, daughter of Krisna Mohan Banerji. Manomohini was appointed Inspector of School in 1879.[34] Next year, Radharani Lahiri was appointed teacher of Bethune School. But the first significant appointment was that of Chandramukhi Bose as assistant superintendent of Bethune College in 1884. Her initial salary was Rs. 75. This undoubtedly was the highest salary that any Bengali woman received till then. Nevertheless, *Bamabodhini Patrika* was critical. It claimed that she was an MA and that she deserved a higher salary of at least Rs. 100.[35] However, she was made superintendent of Bethune College in 1886 and her salary more than doubled.[36] Kamini Sen was offered the position of an assistant teacher at Bethune School in 1886 and later of a lecturer at Bethune College. Kumudini Khastagir, who was appointed a teacher in 1890, became the 2nd Headmistress in 1891 and a lecturer in 1896. She later rose to the position of the Principal of Bethune College in 1902. By 1907, she was made a full professor, a position that only Chandramukhi Bose earlier held. Hemaprabha Bose, Surabala Ghosh, Surabala Mitra etc. were also appointed teachers at Bethune College.[37] Dr. Kadambini Ganguli was made the superintendent of Dufferin Hospital in 1893. Jamini Sen, the younger sister of Kamini Sen, worked as Medical Officer in different Northern Indian towns as well as in Kathmondu.

Sarala Debi's appointment at Hydrabad Girl's School in 1895 deserves to be mentioned for at least two reasons. First, she was offered an almost incredible a salary of 450 rupees for a woman at time.[38] Second and more important, of all the women mentioned above, she was the only one to have explained in writing why she took up the job. In her autobiography, she claims that all her relations were opposed to her accepting a job. However, she persuaded her parents - Janakinath Ghosal and Swarnakumari Debi to allow her to take up the position. Later Debendranath Tagore, her maternal grandfather, also reluctantly consented. Sarala argues that she accepted the job because she wanted to establish her right to earn her own

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32. *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1866, p. 216.

33. *BBP*, May.-Jun.,1875, pp. 56-58.

34. *Unabingsha Shataker Banglar Katha O Jogesh Chandra Bagal* ed. by M. Mitra & K. Datta (Naba Barrackpore: Jogesh Chandra Smirtiraksha Committee, 1974), p. 413.

35. *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1884, p. 164.

36. In 1891, she was still the Superintendent of the Bethune College. But later she first became the Principal and then a full professor of that College. See, for details , *Calcutta University Calender* for the years 1891, 1896 and 1901 (Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co. 1891-1901), p.271, 246, 314 respectively.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *BBP*, Nov.-Dec., 1895, p. 251.

bread as her male relations did.[39] While describing why she gave up the job in six months following an attack on her by a young man at night, she explains :

> I was overcome by a strong “fancy'” to work, when I accepted my job. Of course, one of my objectives was to establish women's right to earn their own bread; but this was, I suppose, only superficial. Indeed, my "fancy" was very strong and that was the principal reason why I accepted my job. When people have a "cause", they can fight to the finish -that reflects their greatness as well. However, a fancy has only a weak foundation, like that of sand. It soon gives way. As in most cases, fancies are satisfied in no time. My fancy too was gratified within a period of about six months.[40]

Indeed, as we will later see, it was too early for Bengali women to conceive of economic independence and popular opinion was too hostile. The animosity of traditional Hindus becomes apparent when we consider the fact that these working women were almost all either Brahmos or Christians. There were, of course, a handful of Hindus and Muslims, but they were rather exceptions to the general trend. However, it is not clear why all these Brahmo and Christian women confronted some difficulties in connection with their matrimony. Was it because they were overqualified in the eyes of men? Was it because men still believed that educated women would not make submissive wives? Or was it because men thought that being economically independent these women would be too arrogant to be ideal wives? Whatever be the reason, none of these women, excepting Kadambini,[41] succeeded in finding a husband before the age of 30. Chandramukhi was still unmarried at the age of 41,[42] while her younger sister, Bidhumukhi, who was one of the first women MBs, remained so throughout her life. Bidhumukhi's friend, Virginia Mary Mitra passed the MB examination the same year (1890) and topped the list. She married Purna Chandra Nandi in 1904, at the age of 39. Kamini Sen, who earned quite a reputation as a brilliant student and later came to be known as one of the best poetesses married when she was 30. But after her marriage, she was to give up her job. More important, she almost gave up writing poems. Her younger sister, Jamini Sen, who had a medical degree from the Calcutta University and later diplomas from England, remained unmarried.[43] So were Hemaprabha Bose (Jagadish Chandra Bose's younger sister) and Lajjabati Bose (Rajnarayan Bose's daughter). Hemaprabha was an MA and Lajjabati a BA. Lajjabati was known as a poetess as well. Radharani Lahiri and Surabala Ghosh also seemed to have remained unmarried. In any case, Radharani was still unmarried in 1891 and Surabala in 1910.[44] These women were all highly educated and members of well known families. The only thing that separated them from the rest and the educated Bengali women was that they were working women, and this possibly complicated the matters relating to their matrimony.

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39. Sarala Debi, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p. 107.

40. *Ibid*., p. 124.

41. Kadambini (1861/62-1923) married Dwarkanath Ganguli immediately after she passed her BA examination in 1883. They knew each other for many years. Dwarkanath was Kadambini's teacher while the latter was a student of the Banga Mahila Bidyalaya. Dwarkanath was a Brahman by caste and many years older than she . In fact, he was a widower and his daughter, Bidhumukhi, was only a few years younger than Kadambini. Kadambini was unmarried and *Kayastha* by caste. Dwarkanath's friends such as Sibnath Sastri, Umesh Chandra Datta and Ananda Mohan Bose strongly dispproved of this marriage and refused to attend the wedding ceremony. (The news of this marriage was not published in *Bamabodhini Patrika*, although news of most Brahmo marriage used to be published in it.) Most probably Dwarkanath and Kadambini had developed a close relationship before their marriage.

42. Chandramukhi married Pundit Kesharananda Mamagayen after 1901. She was mentioned to be a "Miss" in the *Calcutta University Calendar*, 1901 (p.314).

43. Jamini passed the LMS examinaton from the Calcutta University in 1896. She went to England twice for higher education She was made a fellow of Royal Society of Surgeons and Physicians.

44. *Calcutta University Calendar*, 1891, p. 271; *Calcutta University Calendar*, 1907, p.697; *Calcutta University Calendar*,1910, p. 904.

Surabala passed her BA examination in 1893.

However, despite the opposition of traditional society towards women's acceptance of jobs, the above mentioned examples encouraged several hundred educated women of Bengal to work by the turn of the century. In 1901, there were 1,156 female teachers and 151 female medical practitioners (with diplomas, licences and certificates) in Bengal.[45] The census reports do not give the details of how many of these women were Europeans. Even supposing half of these were Europeans, the number of Bengali working women, compared to the earlier decades, was significantly increasing. However, one thing becomes apparent that women were, at that time, accepting only such "respectable" professions as teaching and practising medicine.

Changing attitudes of men towards women's freedom

The process of modernization of women, as can be seen, was limited, at that stage, to a small circle consisting of the Brahmos and the native Christians. However, it was, on the one hand progressively influencing a wider segment of Bengali society and, on the other, antagonising the traditional Hindus as well as those educated men who had earlier supported the cause of women. The process of women's modernization as a whole saw the same kind of reaction that hardened popular attitudes towards female education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as we saw in the first chapter. Men had wanted to educate women only as much as would enable the latter to become better wives and to be able to write letters and keep daily accounts. But some women were having higher education and becoming "denationalized". With the emergence of nationalism in the 1870s, this was resented. Even "radicals" like Keshab Sen refused to concede women the right to higher educaton.[46] Exactly in the same manner, men who had earlier wanted to relax the rigorousness of the *purda* and turn women into better companions, objected to women's "excessive modernization" and "shameless behaviour".

The modernized women's unorthodox behaviour, particularly their reluctance, even refusal, to obey the custom of female seclusion, their acceptance of jobs and the gradual development in them of personal liberty in defiance of society antagonized the attitudes of these men. Moreover, as will be shown in some detail in the next chapter, modernized women's intimate relationships with their husbands and children and their preference for the nuclear or at least the extended family system to the joint family system further hardened the popular opinion. The rise of nationalism which glorified everything traditional contributed to this change of attitudes. Besides, the so-called reformers were prepared to allow women only "limited" freedom, the kind of freedom that would not substantially minimize men's authority over women. When signs of "real freedom became apparent in some women, men immediately reacted and changed their strategy. For example, in articles published in the 1870s, Umesh Chandra Datta, editor of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, who devoted much of his energy and time to the upliftment of women, and Bijoy Krisna Goswami, a "radical" leader of the Brahmo Samaj of India, criticized and ridiculed both modern men and women and those who supported women's modernization.

Datta, Goswami and such other men argued that the condition of Bengali women was not as bad as was popularly believed. In their opinion, the lower class women were not subject to seclusion and women in general had a great deal of influence over their husbands. They deplored the educated men for exposing their women to reckless Westernization. They said that since Bengali women had no experience of conversing with men and of going outside the zenana, they (women) therefore behaved strangely when introduced to men or taken out by

45. *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. pt.II (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), p.428,431.
46. *Supra*, pp. 46-47.

their husbands. They argued moreover that common men who had no sense of decency or propriety ridiculed and insulted women they saw at public places. They, therefore, suggested that these women should not be allowed to go outside their homes until they were properly educated and had acquired the proper etiquette, and developed their personalities. They claimed, and rightly so, that Bengali women's dress was extremely inadequate and that it must be reformed before they could be allowed to break the seclusion. They gave a new definition of emancipation, according to which breaking the seclusion or economic independence did not constitute women's emancipation, but actual freedom meant mental and spiritual development.[47] How these women could get the experience of going out and of conversing with men without going out and conversing with men, they did not explain, nor did they make it clear how these women could be given some education unless they broke the seclusion to attend school. Whether a woman who had received some education and developed her individuality could retain the behaviour of traditional women was another question they did not answer. But these were the popular attitudes of by far the largest section of Bengali society.

Women's changing concept of freedom

Bengali women's concept of freedom or of emancipation is rather a modern phenomenon. Although they were totally secluded and even abused, early nineteenth century sources suggest that they were quite content with their position in the family as well as in society. Possibly the example of European women and the teachings of the modernized Bengali young men made them conscious of the world outside the four walls of their *zenana* and of the minimum social and legal rights they were entitled to as human beings. The first woman who indicated women's rights was Kailasbasini Debi. In her two books on the degraded social position of Bengali women and on female education, published respectively in 1863 and 1865, she claimed that God had created men and women as equal and that men had put women in chains. She further claimed that it was to perpetuate women's slavery that men kept them ineducated.[48]

Kailasbasini, as already mentioned, was unlettered when married to Durgacharan Gupta, at the age of 12, in 1849.[49] As a follower of the Brahmo movement, Durgacharan Gupta was highly influenced by the growing concept of civilization, according to which the position or women reflected the degree of civilization attained by a particular nation. He also believed that happier husband-wife relationship depended heavily upon the intellectual development of the wife. He therefore started to educate his wife privately, and, within a decade, Kailasbasini came to be known as the first Bengali authoress. So were the later cases of Jnanadanandini Debi, Mrs. Monomohan Ghosh and Mrs. W.C. Bonnerji. The Brahmo movement reached its climax perhaps in the 1860s and 1870s. During these two decades a number of other women, almost all belonging to the Brahmo Samaj, voiced their strong disapproval of their subordinate position and seclusion.

Ramasundari Dasi, for example, analysed the situation in which Bengali women were living and concluded that it was one of complete subordination and that they were like caged birds, thoroughly under bondage. She therefore considered that their lives were not worth

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47. See, for example, B. K. Goswami, 'Unnati O Swadhinata', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1871, pp. 68-69; "Abala-Bandhab',*BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1871pp. 96-97; 'Naranari', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1873, pp. 336-38; 'Strijatir Aswabhabik Unnati', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1873, pp. 69-72; 'Bangiya Mahilar Khedokti', Nov.-Dec., 1873, pp. 265-66; 'Strishiksha O Striswadhinata', *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Nov.-Dec., 1878, pp. 154-55; Y. 'Stri O Purusher Adhikar Ki Saman?', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1892, pp. 79-80.

48. Kailasbasini Debi, *Hindu Abalakuler Bidyabhyas* etc., pp. 11-12.

49. *Supra*, p. 37.

living and prayed to God for their emancipation.[50] While giving the probable reasons for keeping them caged, Sarda Debi argued more of less on the same lines. In her opinion men regarded women as low as animals. Men, she claimed believed that women would become unchaste and consequently bring disgrace on their families unless they were kept in cages. She called this contention baseless and ridiculous and demanded that women should be given their rightful position in society.[51] Rajabala Debi accused men of being responsible for the deterioration of women's social status.[52] Kamini Sen, regarded as the best poetess of Bengal till now, was unable to conceive that women's position had always been so low. She said innumerable educated women like Gargi and Lilabati would be produced if women were restored to their rightful position. She further declared that India would never awaken unless its women were freed.[53]

That these women were becoming aware of their subordinate position can be seen in these writings, but what they understood by freedom or emancipation is not clear. They felt the agony of being kept in bondage, but failed to define exactly which things they wanted to be free from and which things they wanted to be free to do. What a woman from Rajshahi wrote in an article published in 1871 is more specific, whether or not her concept of freedom was the best is a different question. She wrote:

> In the absence of any freedom, the women of our country live as persons bereft of any sensations.....They always live at the same place and know the same set of people. Consequently they are unable to converse and communicate with honest and educated people and visit beautiful places. There are places by visiting which one can benefit both in this world and in the world after and there are people conversing with whom we can have invaluable instructions, but Bengali women can have none of these. They are deprived of the excellent things that this world has to offer.....It cannot be considered as a matter of disgrace if women are allowed to go out with their husbands or other relations. Now they can go neither to the Brahmo Samaj for attending the services nor to school for receiving education. They are like caged birds who can only toss about in their small world. Consequently their intellect remains absolutely undeveloped.....Women have neither any freedom of action nor any freedom of choice. Alas! Men have so unlimited authority over women, they can do whatever they want to, but women have no rights.[54]

As can be seen, to the writer of this passage, freedom more or less meant the right to go outside the four walls of the zenana and the right to converse with other people. To another women, Mayasundari from Calcutta, freedom meant even less. Aggrieved, she wrote:

> Women have no right to see anything at all. The giant Howrah Bridge was constructed some time ago. Every one who saw it, spoke highly of it. We only heard about it, but could not free ourselves from doubts about what we heard by witnessing the Bridge itself.[55]

It was in these circumstances that a section of Bengali women argued in favour of breaking the seclusion. They pointed out that women in most families were allowed to go to the Ganges or to the open ponds for bathing and that they returned home in their wet cloths, thus revealing the forms of their limbs and that they were allowed to talk to their male servants.[56] They were allowed to take part in the shameless rites connected with the bride-chamber and the functions on the occasions of a girl's attaining her puberty and after being pregnant.[57] However they said, when properly dressed and properly behaved women of *bhadralok* families went outside with their husbands or other relations and when they conversed with close relations like their fathers-in-law or elder brothers of their husbands,

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50. Ramasundari Dasi, 'Etaddeshiya Striganer Bidyabhab', *BBP*, May-Jun., 1868, pp. 39-40.
51. Sarada Debi, 'Bangadeshiya Lokdiger Ki Ki Bishaye Kusanskar Achhe', Bamarachanabali, pp. 9-11.
52. Rajabala Debi, 'Bamarachana', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1874 p. 395.
53. Kamini Sen, 'Uddipana' (Poem), *BBP*, Mar.-Apr., 1880, pp. 186-88.
54. A lady from Boalia, 'Bangladesher Mahilaganer Swadhinata Bishay', *BBP*, May-Jun., 1871, pp.62-64.
55. Srimati Maya Sundari, 'Narijanma Ki Adharma', *Banga Mahila*, Jul.-Aug., 1875, p. 94.
56. Saudamini (Later Mrs B. L. Gupta), 'Lajja', *Bamarachanabali*, p. 24.
57. Madhumati Gangopadhyay, 'Abaidha Lajja', *Bamarachanabali*, pp. 20-21.

people became very critical.[58] They disapproved of the dress that most Bengali women used to wear. It consisted only of a fine sari, with no blouse or petticoat underneath. To an European lady, Fanny Parks, this dress seemed strange and inadequate. She wrote that both the figure and the colour of the skin would become apparent when one wore a sari, because nothing else was worn beneath the *sari*.[59] A Bengali man, in 1863, described Bengali women as naked although wearing a 5 yard long sari.[60] The modernized women admitted that their dress must be reformed, but claimed that they should not be kept closed in the harem on this ground. (See Appendix 3)

Jnanada Debi and Krisnakamini Dasi, who had been to Bombay, wrote that women in Western India had considerable freedom and that they could visit any place or converse with any one without the objections of traditional society. They also mentioned that men there had a sense of decency and would not stare at women as if the latter were peculiar animals nor would they insult these women.[61] The same attitudes were shared by another woman who had come to Bengal from a different and supposedly a superior culture–Miss Annette Akroyd. While attending a meeting addressed by Keshab Sen soon after she had arrived in Calcutta, she noticed the reaction of the men towards the presence of women at the meeting. A section was staring at her with apparent desire in their eyes. She was neither astonished nor offended by this, because this was common to all cultures, she knew. But the vast majority of the audience looked at her as if she was a peculiar animal. She felt embarrassed at this and was genuinely offended.[62]

Some women questioned the validity of the popular belief that breaking seclusion or talking to men would mean that women would become unchaste. They claimed that it was a baseless allegation. They pointed out that, despite the fact that European women did not abide by the custom of female seclusion, not all of them were unchaste.[63] Krisnabhabini Das, who lived for quite a few years in England, moreover, claimed that most Englishwomen could truly be called chaste. She reasoned:

> Those Englishwomen who are chaste can rightly be proud of their chastity, because they remain chaste in spite of the fact that they mix freely with men. It is doubtful whether those women (of our country) who have never seen a man's face or mixed with any man can at all be proud of their chastity.[64]

Krisnabhabini argued in favour of freeing women from the zenana. She said that breaking female seclusion or allowing women to mix with men would not make them unchaste. She asked her countrymen to free their women.

> Indian men do not allow their women any freedom, because they consider them fickle-minded and irresponsible. They think that women, for so long locked up in the zenana, will not be able to protect themselves, it they are now freed from there. They further claim that their women are not properly educated and, therefore, not fit for any degree of freedom. But everyone has got to learn some day. A child does not learn how to walk in a sigle day-he falls down many times and his parents must help him time and again. The condition of our women is exactly like this. Men must sympathetically help them to rise; otherwise, they will never be able to stand on their own feet. Unless by degrees these women are given some freedom, how can they learn to restrain themselves and to behave properly?[65]

She then called Bengali women to rise:

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58. Shymasundari, Satitva Narir Ekmatra Bhushan, *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1874, p. 193; Saudamini, 'Lajja', p. 24.

59. F. Parks, *Wandering of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque, during four-and-twenty years in the East with Revelations of Life in Zenana*, Vol. I (London: Pelham Richardson, 1850), p.60.

60. R. Chandra, *Dekhe Shune Akkel Gurum* (Calcutta: publisher not stated, Sangbad 1920, 1863-64), pp. 6-7. Also see Appendix 3.

61. (J. Debi), 'Amader Bombai Bhraman', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., pp. 345-46; Krisnakamini, 'Strilokdiger Sambhram', *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1873, p.140.

62. A. Akroyd's diary, quoted in W. H. Beveridge, *India Called Them*, p. 90.

63. A lady from Boalia. 'Bangadesher Mahilaganer Swadhinata Bishay', p.63; Saudamini, 'Lajja', p. 22.

64. Krisnabhabini Das, *Englande Banga Mahila* (Calcutta: S. P. Sarbadhikari, 1885), p. 152.

65. *Ibid*., pp. 153-54.

Sisters! Come out of your cages by breaking them open,
Or convince your men to unchain you.
Come out and see how happy the women of Germany, France and England are.
There aren't any tears in their eyes!
Look! Men here do not ignore women as good for nothing.
Men do not treat them as their pets and lock them up in the zenana.
How long, sisters, do you want to remain as prisoners?
Alas! You do not know what happens around you either in India or in the world.
You do not do anything other than housework.
If you only once know what freedom tastes like,
You will never want to stay in your prison called zenana and hide your face under a veil.[66]

In the annual report of the Banga Mahila Samaj, Swarnaprabha Basu (J. C. Basu's sister) not only supported women's efforts to break seclusion and to converse with men, but she also observed that women who were previously ill at ease at social gatherings were becoming more and more comfortable in such situations. She also claimed that these women had realized that attending such functions was one of the ways to become civilized.[67] The modernized women argued that upliftment of women was synonymous with civilization.[68]

As years passed, women were becoming more and more conscious of their rights, such as rights to higher education. They were also asking for rights to choose their husbands, as discussed in some detail in the next chapter.

However, Bengali women's concept of freedom was quite superficial in that they questioned their perpetual subordination but regarded the breaking of seclusion as their main way to freedom. The more important issues, like bearing a large number of children, endless housework from dawn to midnight, participation in social activities and complete economic dependence on husband or other male relations, remained unquestioned until recently.

In 1891, a woman suggested that the educated Bengali women could become economically independent by working as midwives and private tutors or even as physicians. However, she disapproved of the idea of accepting salaried jobs in offices. Moreover, she did not consider that economic independence was essential for women's emancipation.[69] Sarala Debi, as already mentioned, took up a paid job in 1895, not so much because she thought she would establish her right to earn her economic independence as because she was overcome by a desire to earn. She was soon satisfied and gave up the job after about six months.[70] In 1900, Binodini Sen Gupta emphasized the point that women should become economically less dependent on their male relations. But she too did not think it was a precondition of women's emancipation. She considered it desirable because, she observed, at the death of their husbands many women faced severe hardships.[71] Generally speaking, Bengali women of that period failed to appreciate the correlation between economic independence and their social status, even though several hundred of them were working and there were quite a few highly educated women among them,-by 1910 there were at least 49 BAs and 8 MAs, apart from a number of medical graduates.[72]

Even an enlightened and Westernized woman like Krisnabhanbini Das maintained contradictory attitudes regarding women's economic roles. In 1891, while comparing Bengali women with French, Swiss and Irish women, she commented that educated and accomplished

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66. *Ibid*., pp. 157-58. 160.

67. Swarnanaprabha Basu, 'Banga Mahila Samajer Barshik Report', *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1880, pp. 117-18.

68. Krisnabhabini Das, 'Striloker Kaj O Kajer Mahatmya', *Bharati O Balak*, Aug.-Sep. 1891. p. 244; 'Strilok O Parash, *Bharti O Balak*' Feb.-Mar., 1890, pp. 613, 615-18.

69. 'Bengali Strilokdiger Bartaman Abastha', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1891, p. 215.

70. *Supra*, p. 105.

71. Binodini Sen Gupta, 'Ramanir Karyakshetra', *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1900, pp. 5-7.

72. For the complete list of these graduates see Appendix 5.

as European women were, they were fully capable of helping their men in economic activities. This, she believed, established the husband-wife relationship in those countries on a sound understanding and co-operation. In her opinion, the husband-wife relationship in India was far from desirable. She further maintained that European women could become their husband's companion in the true sense of the term, because they were able to help their men in every sphere of life.[73] Earlier as well in her book *Englande Banga Mahila* (1885), she highly praised Englishwomen because they actively played their economic roles. In another article, she praised the working women of England and America. She argued that higher education and economic activities did not at all spoil the womanly qualities of the aforesaid women. On the contrary, she claimed that these women became even more beautiful because their beauty was enhanced by education and their ability to help their men in their economic pursuits.[74]

From what Krisnabhabini said in all these writings it might appear that she wanted all educated Bengali women to help their respective husbands in economic activities. But, surprisingly enough, her attitudes in this respect were quite traditional. In an article, published in 1892, she clearly denied that every educated Bengali woman must work and earn. She thus questioned; will any one believe that all highly educated women will go from one office to another in search of jobs and work there for several hours every day just because they might be able to earn some money thereby? In fact, she did not consider it desirable, in any case, for Bengali women. However, she conceded that those women who were poor and had no male relations to support them, might earn for their families and that would save them from a lot of dishonour and disgrace.[75] Krisnabhabini was a highly Westernized as well as a very modern woman, if her attitudes towards women's economic activities were so conservative , the extent of prejudice of the more traditional women can be easily guessed.

However, some development in this regard took place during later decades when women became more conscious regarding their economic roles. This possibly started with Begum Rokeya, who , in a number of articles published between 1904 and 1930, argued that women's independence depended on how much they were economically independent of their male relations.[76]

The question of equality, nevertheless , attracted their attention. Although most of them conceded that man and women were destined to play distinctly different roles, they demanded that women should not be regarded as men's toys. Mankumari Basu, for example, observed that Bengali women were expected to act according to the wish of their husbands and had no right to develop their intellect, taste and religious beliefs independently.[77] Nagendrabala reasoned that God had not intended that women's intellect and spirit should be moulded strictly in accordance with men's wishes.[78] The more "progressive" women, however, were not as apologetic as these. They claimed that women should be treated as equal to men in every respect and given all rights that men enjoyed.[79]

It has already been mentioned that with the growing modernization of Bengali women, a section of educated Bengali men, including some who were previously supporters of feminism, became, in the 1870s, highly critical of women's modernization in general and Westernization in particular. This change of attitudes could be noticed among a segment of

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73. 'Ashikshita O Daridranari', *Sahitya*, Dec., 1891-Jan., 1892, pp. 444-46.
74. 'Shikshita Nari', *Sahitya*, Sep.-Oct., 1891, pp. 289-90.
75. 'Sikshita Narir Pratibader Uttar', *Sahitya*, Jan.-Feb., 1892, p.475.
76. See, for example , 'Strijatir Abanati', in *Rokeya* pp. 29-30.
77. Mankumari Basu, 'Bigata Shatabarshe Bharat-ramanidiger Abastha', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1895, p. 326.
78. Nagendrabala Mustafi, 'Garhastyajibane Narijatir Kartabya', *BBP*, Dec., 1903-Jan., 1904, p.307.
79. As discussed by Mankumari Basu in 'Bigata shatabarshe etc.' *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1891, pp. 216-17.

educated women as well. A number of reasons were put forward by them. Some of them, for instance, observed that housework and childbearing would be hampered if women were to go out frequently. They referred to the modernized women as "manly". Some complained that the modernized women were losing the virtues of labouring for love, devotion, hospitality and self-sacrifice that former women had. Some noticed that women were increasingly becoming disobedient to their husbands and in-laws.[80] That these women were wearing Western dress, or at least a reformed dress, and shoes and using cosmetics was another allegation that some women raised.[81] Yet another criticism was that the joint family system was breaking down because of the more demanding nature of the modernized women.[82]

In fact, a conservative definition of emancipation was evolving among the women of more traditional families. In their opinion, women's emancipation consisted of mental and spiritual freedom; besides, it was under their subtle direction that the whole of society was moving.[83] These writers therefore glorified women's traditional roles which were, in their opinion, very important and declared that whatever glory Bengal had was because women held a subordinate position to men.[84]

Despite this conversation in a section of educated Bengali women, one cannot deny the fact that there had been a significant change of attitudes among women in favour of emancipation and substantial portion of women had realized by the end of the century what Mankumari Basu summarized as follows:

> Although men are still holding a superior position in society compared to women, it is absolutely unreasonable that they will abuse or oppress women and that they will enlighten themselves by education, leaving women behind in the darkness of ignorance. Childbearing, childrearing and housework are duties that God has given women to perform, but these are not the prime objectives of their lives.[85]

Limited nature of freedom

Women's emancipaton now a days means a lot more than it used to a century ago, particularly in Bengal. Bengali women's social status was, as we have seen, very low. The first problems faced by men associated with social reform were those of giving women an elementary education, breaking their seclusion, designing a decent dress for them, reforming the institution of marriage, engaging them in social activities, organizing their associations and, to some extent, encouraging them to accept jobs. Women themselves were completely devoid of education and were unable to conceive of the ideas related to modernization. Initially they had to rely for their freedom on the same set of men that had put them in chains. It was therefore more a gift that men gave them than some thing they achieved through their own efforts. In order to exploit them in their traditional roles as mothers and wives and to cope with the growing fashions of the day which, in short, were imitations of the English, men allowed them only as much freedom as was absolutely necessary for their modernization. Except to a few men like Satyendranath Tagore and Sibnath Sastri, all women's emancipation meant was some elevation of their very degraded status.

Whereas , in England, some sort of birth control had been practised since the early nineteenth century.[86] and small family came to be regarded as a condition of emancipation

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80. Ibid., pp.241-42. For details, see the next chapter.

81. *Ibid*, *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1895, pp.137-39.

82. For details, see the next chapter.

83. Nagendrabala Mustfi, 'Hindu Ramani', *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1895, pp.188-91: Mankumari Basu, 'Bengali Strilokdiger Bartaman Abastha', *BBP*, Nov.-Dec., 1891, pp. 242-43.

84. Mankumari Basu, 'Bengali Strilokdiger Bartaman Abastha', p.241.

85. *Ibid*., p. 242.

86. For details see A. H. Nethercot, *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1960), pp. 109-10.

during the last quarter of that century, neither Bengali men nor women considered childbearing and childrearing as questions related to women's emancipation. On the contrary, even modernized women like Jnanada Debi glorified these roles of women.[87] To some, these were the two best roles that a virtuous woman could play. The same was true of housework. During the period under review, it was looked upon as an essential virtue of women.

Catharine Watkin, an Owenite feminist, declared as early as 1843 that women could never be truly emancipated unless they were freed from the clutches of the institutionalized religions. She showed how religions had ritualized and perpetuated women's subordination to men.[88] On the contrary, both Bengali men and women were far from being freed from the clutches of institutionalized religions and women actually prayed to God for their upliftment and freedom. Bengali women questioned the propriety of seclusion, which had kept them behind the walls of the *zenana* and was immediately apparent, but they failed to notice the economic dependence which had kept both their body and soul in perpetual fetters. It can be mentioned here that by 1891, more than 200,000 women had entered literate professions in England, including 146,375 teachers, 53,057 trained nurses and 17859 secretaries and clerks.[89] In 1896, women constituted 70% of the total number of teachers.[90] In 1901, Bengal had only 1,156 women teachers, 749 nurses and 66 clerks, and these included a good number of Europeans.[91]

The development of personal liberty as against society and the extended family was not of their concern either. I have so far come across the writing of only one woman who directly argued against the joint family system.[92] Thus, by freedom, Bengali women understood only a partial improvement in their degraded social position; emancipation was still inconceivable.

Books on contraception started to be published in England and France as early as 17th century.

87. J. Debi, 'Strishiksha', *Bharati*, May-Jun., 1881, pp. 264-73.

88. B. Tavior, 'The Women-Power', p. 137.

A bright exception, to my knowkedge, was Rokeya S. Hossein, in an article entitled 'Amader Abanati', Bublished in Natanur, in 1904, she claimed that religion had ritualized and perpetuated women's subordination. See Editorial notes, *Rokeya Rachanabali*, p. 11

89. International Congress on women, *Women in Professions*, Vol.I (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), pp. 31-32.

90. Royal Commision on Equal Pay 1944-46 Report (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1946), p. 23.

91. Supra, p. 107.; *Census of India*, 1901, Vol. VIA , pt. II, p. 428, 431, 433.

As years passed by , particularly after the First World War, woman of some families, Brahmos and Christians, took up salaried jobs more earnestly. Sitanath Tattvabhushan's all six daughters, for instance, accepted teaching positions. See, for details, Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography*,pp. 109-10

92. *Supra*, p. 61.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Disputed Image: The Figure of Women in Society

If Bengali women's roles and status were inferior to those of men, their inferiority was reinforced by tradition and their self-perception. The introduction of female education and the breaking of the purda faced, as we have seen in the preceding two chapters a great deal of opposition from traditional society and caused quite a commotion. After half a century of sincere efforts on the part of the Westernized *bhadralok*, female education made only a limited breakthrough and the rigors of the *purda* were only partially relaxed. In any case, the impact of female education and of tearing the veil was insignificant outside the small segment of the modernized Brahmos and the native Christians. However, the overall social change that Bengal, more particularly Calcutta, experienced during the nineteenth century had a considerable influence on a bigger circle of *bhadralok* families and their women. Consequently, women's roles in these families were modified, their status redefined to an extent and their life style partially elevated. Women's attitudes towards these developments underwent an appreciable change as well, bringing about a change in their very self-perception. Moreover, the joint family system, so dear to the *bhadralok* started to crumble. Unlike the introduction of female education and the breaking of the purda, these changes went on slowly and almost silently, and were inconspicuous for some time, nevertheless their influence was irreversible.

A wife's status in the joint family

In the joint family of the *bhadralok*, the word "wife" did not always mean the mistress who generally was the mother-in-law or after her death the wife of the eldest son. If, however, the wife was still very young and without a child, someone else like the widowed sister of the father-in-law occupied the position of the mistress. Most girl at that time were married when they attained the age 10 or 12. In some cases, they were married much earlier, even when a few months old.[1] The status of, say, a 10-year-old wife was in one respect slightly superior to that of a 10-year-old unmarried daughter in the sense that she was married and thus free from a number of social and religious obligations, and in another respect slightly inferior in the sense that, secluded and always under the scrutiny of the mother-in-law, she had considerable housework to do, and did not enjoy the "freedom" that an unmarried daughter had at the paternal home. Indeed her status was that of total subordination. She was not free to do what she wanted; rather she was expected to do everything in the manner her mother-in-law, in particular and other superiors in general wanted. In her autobiography, Rasasundari Debi narrated how with her face hidden under a long veil, the childwife of the mid-nineteenth century was supposed to remain absolutely silent and to do housework from early morning to midnight as directed by the mother-in-law. Only such an "obedient" wife was praised as a good wife.[2]

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1. See, A. K. Datta, *Dharmaniti* (Calcutta; Brahmo Samaj, 1856), p. 69; 'Etaddesher Bibahapaddhati Sambandhe Bibidha Alochana', *Abohd-Bandhu*, Aug.-Sep., 1869, p. 99; *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Jun.-Jul., 1846, p.298; 'Striswadhinata', *Banga Mahila*, Jan.-Feb., 1877, p. 233.

2. Rassasundari Debi, *Amar Jiban*, p. 29, 52.

Total obedience to the mother-in-law was so widely accepted a norm that before the bridegroom left for the wedding ceremony, it was customery for him to tell his mother that he was going to bring a 'slave' for her.[3] Therefore, if the childwife did anything contray to what a slave was expected to do, she was scolded and even physically punished . Cases of wives being terribly oppressed by mother-in-law and sisters-in-law and of wives committing suicide as a result were quite frequent.[4] When the child wife was hit or abused, the young (mostly teenaged) husband generally concurred with his parents and elder sisters. This was due partly to his livelihood on the joint family and partly for lack of intimacy with his wife.

The childwife attained her puberty a few years after her marriage. The occasion was properly celebrated with rituals and she was, for the first time, asked to see and sleep with her husband.[5] It seems that after she established a sexual relationship with her husband, her position did slightly improve. This was particularly so if her husband considerably contributed to the income of the joint family, or in other words , had a higher status than a teenaged dependent son. The sudden elevation of the status of the wife was most probably because it was at this time that the husband , with a gratified sexual feeling, started to love and protect her.

The husband-wife relationship in a joint family was, as claimed by a lady, not close enough.[6] They were, we saw in the second chapter, not even allowed to talk or to see each other during the day.[7] Moreover, the parents were unhappy if they found their son deeply in love with his wife. In such a case, the son was considered "spoiled" and henpecked and the wife a witch.[8] This was due to parents' apprehension that their son might ask for more "rights" for his wife and even act according to her wishes, both of which would shake the normal relationships within the family and might even jeopardize the future of the joint family by splitting it. Because of all these, in the joint families the husband and wife seldom became companions in the true sense of the term. Relationships with the children were also less close, because the young parents were unable to take any special care of their own children or even to pay them a bit more attention as there were other children in the family and all the children were to be equally treated.

Whether or not winning the love of the husband brought about a significant change of the wife's status, she certainly attained a higher status when she gave birth to child especially to a male one. The status of the "Khokar ma" or the mother of the son was definitely higher than that of a childwife.[9] The "Khokar ma" was subject among others to less strict seclusion and scrutiny of the mother-in-law. The Hindus at that time attached great value to the birth of the first son, who was regarded not only as a successor in this world, but the agent of the deliverance in the after world. Thus the mother of the son was conceded more freedom than before.

However, until after the death of the mother-in-law, she did not generally become the mistress. The mistress was inferior in her status only to the master of the family. She had a great deal of influence upon the other male members and over policy making. The transformation of the status of the wife into that of the mistress was indeed remarkable.

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3. B. M. Sarkar, 'Paribarik Sanskar', *Banga Mahila*, Vol. I No.10 (Jan.-Feb., 1876), p. 238.

4. See, for example, Shyamasundari Bandyopadhyay, ' Manikyamayir Shochoniya Atma-hatya', *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1874, pp. 130-31.

5. 'Punarbibaha Bishayak Kathopakathan', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1865, pp. 134-36.

6. Nistarini Debi, 'Narijibaner Uddeshya', *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1884, p. 320. Also see, 'Paribarik Sukh', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1884, pp. 165-66.

7. Supra p. 66.

8. Sarnalata Chaudhuri, 'Bou-Ma', Antahpur, Vol. I (1898) pp. 76-77.

9. M. M. Urquhart, *Women of Bengal* (London; Y. M. C. A., 1925), p. 33, 40.

Rassasundari Debi's instance may again be cited, but as an exception. She became the mistress unexpectedly at an early age, as her mother-in-law suddenly lost her eyesight. She also enjoyed a much better status as a childwife. Her father-in-law was dead and her husband was the only earning member of the family. Moreover, hers was practically an extended family, if not a nuclear family, as her husband was the only son of the family and all his sisters were married.[10] The extent of the subordination of the young wife can, however, be discerned in the nineteenth century Bengali literature, including that of Rabindranath Tagore, suggests that the position of the young wife was very low. A number of short stories of Tagore such as "Denapaona", "Strir Patra" and " Haimanti" are excellent examples of how childwives were tortured by their in-laws.

Decline of the joint family and the impact of this on woman

Although its very existence prior to the late eighteenth century is doubtful,[11] the joint family system became extremely popular among the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* during the next century. However, it was not widely accepted either by the lower classes of Hindus or by the Muslims, who were mostly poor peasants. It seems likely that it became popular among the *bhadralok*, almost all of whom had some interest in land, when the new revenue laws, especially the Parmanent Settlement of 1793 complicated the Hindu law of inheritance. If this is so, then the joint family was a legacy of British rule in Bengal. However, the social change including urbanization that the same British rule initiated, started the disintegration of the joint family.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the *zamindaries*, the vast majority of which were owned by the Hindu *bhadralok*, were rapidly fragmented through sale and partition,[12] and within several decades the number of estates rose from a few hundred to more than one hundred and fifty thousand.[13] Thus the members of the landed elite could depend less for their livelihood on land. The English educated *bhadralok* were therefore increasingly looking for salaried jobs in the urban centres. Consequently many joint families split into two parts- one living in the ancestral village home and the other in the town where the educated 'son' worked. Jaykrisna Mukherji's father, for example , took a part of his family, including his mother, two wives and three children from his ancestral home in Hoogly to the Northern Indian twon of Meerut in 1820, as he had a job there under the East India Company.[14] This was , however an exception, as at that stage, it was still an accepted norm for the salaried *bhadralok* to keep their wives and children at the ancestral home and visit them a number of times during the year. Many years later, in 1864, when Satyendranath Tagore took his wife to Bombay, his place of work , it was considered quite extraordinary of a *bhadralok* of their status.[15] However, as years passed by, more and more people were moving apart from their families to the town or to where they worked. Thus work and unbanization split many families.

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10. Rasasundari Debi, *Amar Jiban*, especilly Chapter IV-VIII.

11. T. Raychaudhuri ,'Norms of Family Life etc.', pp. 14-15.
Raychaudhuri analysed such examples as those of Bidyasagar and Bharatchandra Roy and guessed that the system was not popular in the 18th century.

12. B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes* (London: London Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 130-132.

13. *Report on the Administration of Bengal*, 1881-82 (Calcutta: Bengal Secratariat Press, 1882), p. 294.
The actual number in 1881-82 was 151,934.

14. N. Muherjee, A Bengal Zaminder: Jaykrisna Mukharjee of Uttarpara and His times, p.10.

15. Supra, p.74.
Also see Appendix 1.

Besides, conversion of a good number of English educated young men to Brahmoism also forced them to live away from their families. The instances of Keshab Chandra Sen, Rajnarayan Bose. Durgamohan Das, Sibnath Sastri, Bijoy Krisna Goswami, Sasipada Banerji, Krisna Kumar Mitra, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aghorenath Gupta and others can be mentioned here. All of them were severely persecuted for having accepted Brahmoism and were obliged to leave their families. When he accepted Brahmoism and renounced the sacred thread, Sibnath Sastri was compelled to break off relations with his father, who did not see him during the next nineteen years.[16] Kshetramohan Datta and his educated wife, Kumudini, were highly influenced by Brahmoism. They refused to worship idols and abide by some Hindu rites. Kshotramohan's father and other relations were so angry with them that they were obliged to run away to Calcutta and live there.[17] Similar was the case of Bijoy Krisna Goswami[18] Rajnarayan Bose's near relations including his mother and uncle were annoyed with him because he had accepted Brahmoism. Of course, they did not force him to leave his ancestral home for this. However, when Rajnarayan helped his two cousins to marry two teenaged widows, his mother and uncle asked him to leave his ancestral home. He then lived in Midnapore with his wife and children.[19] A decade later, when returned to his village home, his uncle compelled him to build a new house some distance away from his father's house and to live in that house. His uncle was afraid that the Boses would be ostracized if he allowed Rajnarayan to live right in his father's houses.[20] Sasipada Banerji faced a more or less similar situation.[21] Yogendranath Bandyopadhayay and Upendranath Das, the former the editor of *Aryadarshan* and latter a well-known playwright, were not Brahmos. Nevertheless , they were obliged to live away from their families, because they had married widows.[22]

Moreover, Western education fostered a sense of individuality first among the urbanized young men and then, with the expansion of female education among women. They started to think as individuals. Their desire to enhance their personal well-being and their consciousness regarding their right to self-determination were growing as well. This phenomenon can be termed as the begining of indiviuality among young men and women of Bengal, and certainly constituted modernization. These men and women preferred a closer husband-wife relationship as well as a closer bond with their children in the context of a nuclear or at least an extended family.[23] They regarded the husband and the wife as companions. They felt that this companionship could really develop in the surroundings of the nuclear family and began to break away from their joint families. Contemporary traditional society however, considered young people's increasing preference for the nuclear family to be selfish behaviour, particularly on the part of the wife.

It is difficult to say exactly when the idea of the nuclear family began to gain popularity, but it was in the 1860s and 1870s when the young Brahmos, mentioned above, broke away from their families. Satyendranath Tagore did it, as already said, in 1864, Keshab in 1862, Kshetramohan around 1861, Sibnath in 1869, Jyotiridranath Tagore in the mid-1870s, Krisna Kumar and Bipin Pal in the late 1870s. However, it is not known when women were influenced by the idea of loving in the nuclear family and thus developing closer relationship

16. S. Sastri, Atmacharit, pp. 76-77.

17. Kumudini charit pp. 16-17, 51.

18. B. K. Goswami, *Brahmo Samajer Bartaman Abastha o Amar Jibane Brahmo Samajer Parikshita Ghatana* (Calcutta: S. Brahmo Samaj, 1882), Passim.

19. *Debendranather Patrabali*, p. 63; *Rajnarayan Basur Atmacharit*, pp. 100-01.

20. *Rajnarayan Basur Atmacharit*, p.111.

21. See A. R. Banerji. *An Indian Pathfinder* etc., passim, 60-61, 82-83.

22. S. Sastri, *Atmacharit*, pp. 76-78, 85-86; *BBP*. Sep.-Oct., 1869, p. 117.

23. B. M. Sarkar, 'Paribarik Sanskar', pp. 234-37.

with their husbands. Jnanadanandini Debi was the first to have written an autobiography among the Bengali women who lived in a nuclear family. While it became apparent from Satyendranath Tagore's letter to her that the relationships within the Jorasanko family were sometimes constrained.[24] and from what she wrote that she was perfectly happy in her small family away from Jorasanko and that she had a relationship with her husband based on mutual undrstanding and friendship, she did not categorically state that she preferred the nuclear family, let alone explain why she preferred it. However, they used to live in a separate house whenever they came to Calcutta during a long leave.

In 1873, *Bamabodhini Patrika* pointed out that the modern wife did not favour the joint family and that she wanted to live with her husband and children at the place of his work and thus become the sole mistress of her own family.[25] This growing consciousness shook the joint family from within. Consequently, even in closely knit and fairly conservative families such as the Jorasanko Tagores, the relationships within the family became uneasy causing its slow disintegration. It was not only Satyendranath Tagore having a decent job and an independent source of income who broke away from the family ; Joytirindranath Tagore did the same, as already mentoned , in the 1870s and Rabindranath in the 1890s. It is not known whether Jyotirindranath or his wife , Kadambini Debi, or whether both of them preferred the nuclear family. It is not known either whether one or both of them were unhappy in their joint family. However, they started to live away from the Jorasanko home. It was during this period that Jyotirindranath came to be a strong supporter of women's "emancipation``. In his autobiography, he gave his readers to understand how, at that time, his relationship with his wife became very close. At that stage, he freed his wife from the zenana and even started to teach her how to ride a horse.[26] Riding a horse on the part of a woman may not mean anything at all now, but a century ago, it was considered absolutely manly and , therefore , unacceptable The experience of Rabindranath Tagore's wife, Mrinalini Debi, in that apparently peaceful family, was far from happy.[27] In June , 1898, she wrote to Rabindranath saying that it was becoming impossible for her to live in the Jorasanko joint family.[28] In reply, Rabindranath wrote a long letter asking her to wait patiently for sometime more. He also promised in this letter, to bring her and the children to Shilaidah and live there.[29] Early next year she went to Shilaidah, never to come back to Jorasanko. After a couple of years, when it seemed impossible for Mrinalini Debi to live in the remote village of Shilaidha, Rabindranath moved to Santiniketan with his family, but did not go to Jorasanko.

By the turn of the century, the difference between the actual behaviour of the modern wife and the behaviour that the old-fashioned in-laws expected from her had become so great that relationships in many families were failed with mutual disrespect and hostility, and , as a result, the modern wife very much disliked the idea of living in a joint family. She thought, as *Bamabodhini Patrika* exprssed it, in the following manner:

> My husband will get a job; I shall reside at the place of his work ; I shall get rid of the mother-in-law and sisters-in-law; and surrounded by servants and maidservants, I shall become the mistress of my own family.[30]

Although accused of selfishness for maintaining such an ambition, the modern wife indeed coveted the ideal of the nuclear family or at least of the extended family.

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24. S. N. Tagore's letters to Jnanadanandini Debi, Nos, 31, 50, 52 and 72, in *Puratani*; pp. 90, 109, 112, and 133.

25. 'Nabya Banga Mahila', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., p. 363.

26. J.N. Tagore, *Jyotirindranather Jibansmriti*, p.138.

27. Her experience was possibly reflected in Tagore's story 'Strir Patra' (meaning wife's letter), published in 1914.

28. P.K. Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindra Jibani*, Vol. I (4th ed.; Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1971), p. 481.

29. R. N. Tagore's letter to Mrinalini Debi, no.16 (June, 1898) in *Chithipatra*, Vol.I (3rd ed.; Calcutta: Visva Bharati, 1966), p. 36.

30. 'Strishiksha', *BBP* , Nov.-Dec., 1892, p.229.

Some of the educated women of the period wrote how slowly but surely a section of the *bhadralok* started to admire the nuclear and/or the extended family.[31] Unlike the Brahmo wives of the 1860s and 1870s who had the experience of living in nuclear families, some women of the later time even recorded their own reasons for preferring the nuclear family. Susamasundari Das of Krisnagar for instance, supported the nuclear family on the grounds that the environment therein was congenial to female education.[32] Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani termed the joint family old-fashioned and unsuitable for modern times. She said the transport system was so hazardous in the olden days that people used to make wills before leaving on pilgrimages. It was therefore impossible to take one's family from the ancestral home to the place of one's work. But, she added, with the improvement of the communication system in general and of the railways in particular, the husband, the wife and the children wanted to live together away from the ancestral home.[33] Kumudini Ray also observed the growing popularity of the nuclear family. Despite the fact that she was a supporter of the joint family, she conceded that it was the origin of a great deal of feud among the members of the family, especially among the sister-in-laws.[34]

The disintegration of the joint family system as well as the overall social changes causes remarkable deviations from the customary pattern of the wife's behaviour. As a result , her roles and status as well as her relationships with the other members of the family underwent an important change. The educated wife was now more aware of her rights and refused to be completely subordinated. She was less obedient to her in-laws and was ready to do less housework. In fact, she tended to modify her own roles in the family and , above all, demanded closer relationship with her husband and the children.

Changing attitudes towards marriage and husband-wife relationships

As the joint family gave way to the nuclear and/or the extended family, the modernized husbands and wives began to reassess their relationships and even the institution of marriage itself. The principal object of the Hindu marriage until then was to have a son.[35] However, the Western influenced Brahmos developed, during the second half of the nineteenth century, a different ethic for marriage. They considered the above object to be lowly and unworthy of civilized people. In their opinion, the marriage which constituted a physical union in order to beget children and which was not based on mutual love between the husband and the wife belonged in hell. They claimed that such marriages, although approved by traditional society, were polluting the earth and its environment. Later, women also were being influenced by such ideas. A striking example of such a woman was Krisnabhabini Das. She was, as we have earlier seen,[36] a highly educated woman, and, while living, in England, was considerably influenced by Western ideas including the Englishwomen's movements for higher education and better social position.[37] She naturally looked at marriage and the

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31. Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani, 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', passim; Mankumari Basu, 'Bigata Shatabarshe Bharat Ramanir Abastha', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1895, p. 137.

32. Susamasundari Dasi, 'Antahpure Strishikshar Upay', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1889, p. 96.

33. Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani, 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', p. 392.

Sibnath Sastri too claimed that the improvement of the transport system helped the nuclear family to grow . See his 'Narir Karyakshetra, Paribarik O Samajik', *Prabasi*, Nov.-Dec., 1912, p. 135.

34. Kumudini Ray, 'Hindu Narir Garhastha Dharma', *BBP*, Dec., 1894-Jan., 1895, pp. 248-85.

35. *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1867, p. 582.

The Sanskrit saying that very briefly but clearly explains the principal object of Hindu marriage is: 'Putrathe kryate bharya'.

36. Supra, pp 85-87.

37. She wrote a number of articles in which she expressed her appreciation of the feminist movement in England- See, for example, 'Ingrej Mahilar Shiksha O Swadhinatar Gati', *Bharati O Balak*, Jul.-Aug., 1890, pp.193-202.

husband-wife relationship from an unorthodox angle. Indeed, she went a step further than most of the contemporary Bengali thinkers when she said that the idea that women were created for men and that women had no other purpose than to be used and exploited by men was uncivilized and lowly. She moreover argued that this idea was so strong among rude people (implicity meaning traditional Bengali men) that they were unable to think that women were not created for their enjoyment and benefit alone.[38] Thus modernized Bengali women were being increasingly concerned about the whole institution of Hindu marriage which, they felt, should be totally reformed in the light of secular Western ideals. They were also concerned about the husband, whose education, family background, exposure to Western ideas and attitudes towards marriage and the wife were all crucial to their happiness.

Whether or not the husband loved the wife came to be regarded as an important question among women belonging to both the joint and the nuclear families because, as we will soon see, the position of the wife in the family depended very much on this. After having lived in Simla for several years, S. Dasi came back to Calcutta in 1881. She was quite surprised to notice that young women no longer asked questions such as whteher the in-laws were good and sympathetic, they talked instead whether the husband was good and whether he loved his wife. To her astonishment, they even mentioned the names of their respective husbands which was previously prohibited. From her testimony, it becomes evident that in some families, in-laws no longer had any real hold on the young wife, rather the husband's goodness and love determined her status in the family.

S. Dasi further observed that in joint families the relationships between the husbands and their parents were becoming unhappy as the husbands could neither protest against nor tolerate the unkind treatment of their wives by their parents, especially mothers.[39] While S. Dasi did not condemn the changing attitudes towards the husband-wife relationship, her implicit disapproval is not hard to discern. But what she wrote seems to be correct. The editor of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, writing more or less at the same time, claimed that the modern husband considered his wkfe as beautiful and tender as Kalidasa's heroines such as Shakuntala, and regarded his mother as cruel when the latter asked the wife to do housework.[40] The attitudes expressed by the editor may now seem to be like those of a male chauvanist, but such attitudes were quite popular at that time and, we will later see, were even shared by women themselves.

If the wife's position in the family and consequently her happiness depended so much on her husband's love and sympathy towards her, it was only natural that she would want to have a husband of her own choice. However, at that time, only the gurdians of the bride and the bridegroom arranged the marriage without the consent of either the bride or bridegroom. In most cases, the bride and the bridegroom saw each other for the first time at the wedding ceremony. However, beginning with Akshay Datta, a number of writers realized that such a custom must not exist and that it was the root of a great deal of unhappiness in many families.[41] Within a few decades, some educated women also became conscious. They stressed the need for allowing both men and women to choose their spouses. Nagendrabala Mustafi, a prominent woman writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, deplored the fact that marriages were arranged without the consent of the bride and the bridegroom. She said the gurdians did not even consider whether the bride and the

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38. Krisnabhabini Das, 'Strilok O Purush'. *Bharati O Balak*, Feb.-Mar.,1890, pp. 615-16.

39. S. Dasi, 'Kalikatar Strisamaj', *Bharati* , Aug.-Oct., 1881, p. 223, 366.

40. *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1874, p. 13.

41. A. K. Datta, *Bidyadarshan*, Oct.-Nov., 1842, in SBS, III, 573; *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Aug., 1845, p.205; *Dahrmaniti* , p.61; K. P. Ghosh, *Narijati* etc., pp. 228-29; 'Bibaha', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1867, pp. 581-82; *Jnanankur*, Apr.-May, 1874, pp. 261-62; 'Bangiya Hindu Samaj Sanskar', *Banga Mahila*, Mar.-Apr., 1876, p.279.

bridegroom would make a good match. In her opinion, a great deal of misunderstanding and the absence of love between the wife could be avoided if society would only permit men and women to find their respective spouses.[42] Mustafi came from a traditional Hindu family and her marriage was arranged by her parents most probably without her consent. Her writings suggest that she was happy in her marriage life. However, she observed what was quite prevalent during her time. There was not much originality in what she argued-she was, in fact, echoing what Akshay Kumar Datta and Kaliprasanna Ghosh had written in their widely read *Dharmaniti* and *Narijati-Bishayak Prastab.*[43] Nevertheless, it was remarkable that traditional women like her were becoming conscious of their rights concerning their marriage as well as of the husband-wife relationships.

It was due to this growing concern that some of the educated Bengali women during the last two decades of the nineteenth century started to assert themselves in connection with their marriage. In 1881, Rajnarayan Bose arranged the marriage of his daughter, Lilabati, with Krisna Kumar Mitra, a prominent young leader of the Shadaran Brahmo Samaj. However, the negotiation failed as Rajnarayan Bose deffered from Krisna Kumar about the question how the wedding was to be performed. As a Sadharan Samajist, Krisna Kumar wanted to marry in accordance with the provisions of the Native Marriage Act of 1872, which required the marriage to be registered and considered it a social contract rather than a sacrament. On the contrary, Rajnarayan, who, as a leader of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, had strongly opposed the passing of the Act, wanted to marry his daughter according to the rites recommended by the Adi Samaj. These rites were purely Hindu except that the idolatrous practices had been discarded. During the earlier decades, Rajnarayan's decision would have been final and the marriage would have been called off. But as the attitudes of the educated women of Bengal had undergone a significant change, he gave the whole matter a second thought. He considered that Lilabati was an adult and decided to ask her about her opinion. Lilabati wanted to marry Krisna Kumar. Rajnarayan was, therefore, compelled to arrange the marriage. Despite his unwillingness, and absence from the ceremony, the marriage was solemnized. While brother represented him at the wedding ceremony, he and his friends such as Debendranath Tagore met the couple later.[44]

Chandi Charan, a litterateur and a Brahmo leader, was unable to arrange the marriage of his eldest daughter, Kamini, until she gave her consent at the age of 30, considered too high for marriage at that time. Kamini was a brilliant student and one of the first women graduates. Moreover, her anthology of poems *Alo O Chhaya* (1889), published at the age of 25, earned her the reputation of the best poetess of Bengal. She is said to have been in love with someone in the mid-1880s. Either her father did not arrange her marriage with this man or some other factors compelled the marriage to be postponed. Disappointed and dejected, Kamini did not marry until 1894. Kedarnath Ray, a civilian, whom she finally decided to marry, was one of her great admirers. Immediately after the publication of *Alo O Chhaya*, Ray wrote a detailed review of it, praising Kamini.[45] Kamini's younger sister, Jamini, a qualified physician, on the other hand , did not marry at all.[46]

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42. Nagendrabala Mustafi, 'Prayojaniya Prarthana', *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1894, pp. 191-92.

43. Both *Dharmaniti* (1856) and *Narijati-Bishayak Prastab* (1809) were included among the textbooks for the female students of the Female Normal School, established by Keshab Sen, and of the Bethune School . It seems Akshay Datta had a tremendous influence over men such as Debendranath Tagore (see his letters to Rajnarayan Bose in *Debendranath Thakurer Patrabali*), Dwarkanath Ganguli (see B. N. *Bandyopadhyay's Dwarkanath Ganguli*) and Kaliprasanna Ghosh (his *Narijati* etc. testifies to it). It was only natural that women were also influenced by him.

44. *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Aug.-Sep., 1881, p. 98; *BBP*, Jul.-Aug.,1881, pp. 125-28.
Surprisingly enough, Rajnarayan did not mention anything about this in his autobiography.

45. '*Alo O Chhaya* Rachayitri', *Bharati*, May.-Jun., 1910, p. 168.

46. For a short biography of Jamini Sen, see Kamini Ray 'Doctor Kumari Jamini Sen', *Bangalaxmi*, Apr.-Oct., 1932.

Kumudini Khastagir's instance was similar to that of Kamini Sen in that she did not marry until her early 30s. She passed her BA examination in 1887 , a year after Kamini. Disregarding the Native (popularly called 'Brahmo') Marriage Act, and causing much grievance in the Brahmo Samaj, her father, Annanda Charan Khastagir, one of the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj who fought for the Brahmo Marriage Act, married his eldest daughter, Saudamini, to highly placed Hindu civilian in 1872.[47] Saudamini was known to have possessed modern ideas regarding marriage,[48] but she was I and nobody heard what she had to say. But by the late 1880s, Kumudini came to respect a different set of values and refused to marry someone according to her father's choice.

But the most striking example of this class is that of Sarala Debi. She had developed close friendship first with Loken Palit and then with Manomohan Ghosh. Either she did not consider that they would make good husnands or she knew very well that because of the caste distinction (Loken and Manomohan were Kayasthas and she Brahmo) her guardians would never agree to marry her to any one of them.[49] She therefore decided not to marry. Her grandfather, Debendranath Tagore, had a tremendous influence over his close relations as well as the members of his own family. He too failed to arrange the marriage of Sarala. Traditional as he was, he knew that, in the eyes of society, it was a matter of great shame for girls to remain unmarried. Therefore he suggested that a token marriage, as sometimes practised by kulin Brahmans, with a sword be arranged, and this would save her from the social stricture.[50] Sarala"s elder sister, Hiranmayi Debi, and her cousin, Indira Debi, were courting with Phani Bhusan Mukherji and Pramatha Chaudhuri repectively, both of whom were Brahmans and educated in England. No complications, therefore, arose in their cases and they were married to men of their choice.[51] All these examples do reflect the growing consciousness of young women regarding their marriage, and hence their relationships with their repective husbands.

How women's attitudes towards the husband-wife relationship were changing during the period under review can be seen from the writings of two renowned women writers,– Mankumari Basu and Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani. Whereas both of them were born more or less at the same time (Mankumari in 1863, Sarat Kumari in 1861), they came from two different backgrounds and represented the traditional and the modern values repectively. Mankumari was born in Jessore in a conservative Hindu family and was married to a man from another traditional family. The primary education she received in village school could hardly have liberalized her ideas. Moreover, after she became a widow at the age of only 18 and a half, she became all the more traditional.[52] In an article published in 1894, Mankumari claimed that the old values were undergoing a great change as a result of Westernization. She deplored that the modern wife considered her husband as her friend and that she had little revernce for the husband. She said the husband-wife relationship could not become an ideal

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Also see, Hemlata Sarkar, 'Swargiya Doctor Kumari Jamini Sen', *Prabasi*, Mar.-Apr., 1932 pp. 846-48; ' Swargiya Jamini Sen', *Prabasi*, Feb.-Mar., 1932, p. 738.

47. 'Shochaniya Ghatar Bibaha', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1872, pp. 223-24.

48. *Ibid*., p. 223.

49. Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, pp. 96-97, 178.

She did not hide her attitude towards Kasyasthas in her autobiography.-pp. 174-75.

50. *Ibid*., p. 107

51. *Ibid*., p. 56.

33 of the letters that Pramatha Chaudhuri and Indira Debi exchanged before their marriage were published in *Desh*, LIterary Number, May, 1980, pp. 17-50. One of Indira's letters shows that her parents, Satyendranath Tagore and Jnanadanandini Debi happily consented to her marriage and that it was not an arranged marriage at all. -Indira's letter to P. Chauhuri, dated the 15th September, 1898, pp. 24-25.

52. See B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Mankumari Basu* (2nd ed.; Calcutta, 1962), pp.5-13.

one unless the wife's love was fused with deep regard.[53] Sarat Kumari, on the contrary, argued in favour of the husband-wife relationship that was based on equality and mutual love. In her article on modern women, published in 1891, she thus compared the modern wife with earlier wife and admittedly gave her verdict in the modern wife's favour:

> Whereas the earlier woman had a feeling of awe towards her husband, the modern women has love and reverence..... (Although she is praised by traditional society in an unqualified manner), the earlier woman never hesitated to vilify her husband and did not even confide everything to him. She did not become intimate with her husband until she was quite old. The modern wife regards her husband as a friend. She is not afraid of him. On the contrary, she is very close and takes good care of him. Indeed the feeling of awe towards the husband is now-ad-ays absent.[54]

Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani was brought up from her early childhood far away from Bengal in the Punjab. Her father, Sashi Bhushan Bose, was a student of Peary Charan Sarkar, who was so ardent a supporter of femle education. Profoundly influenced by Peary charan, her father sent her to an English school. The education she received at this school was quite unorthodox. She was married at the age of only 9, but fortunately for her, to a man who was highly educated and very liberal in his ideas . Her husband, Akshay Chandra Chaudhuri, an MA BL and a successful attorney at the Calcutta High Court, earned qite a reputation as a poet. After the marriage, he employed an Englishwoman for Sarat's education. Akshay and Sarat Kumari both came to be known as lituerateurs and supporters of women's modernization. They developed an extraordinarily close husband-wife relationship based on mutual understanding and friendship.[55] Reasons for her chaged outlook can, therefore, be easily seen. But , in spite of her apparent bias, her observatons on the modern wife and modern wife's relationship with her husband seem to be fairly accurate and generally corroborate contemporary sources.

Krisnabhabini Das was another woman whose views of the husband-wife relationship were also modern. In her book *Englande Banga Mahila*, she thus compared the husband-wife relationship prevalent in English society with that of Bengal:

> Why does a man marry? Everyone will answer: To get a better half to share equally the hapiness and sorrows of his life', I have no doubts that a wife in this country does share her husband's happiness and sorrows and does help him to observe his religious rites as well as to do his work.....She even earns for the whole family in case the husband fails to do so.
>
> When he contemplates doing something , the intelligent and clever husband always consults his wife and asks for her consent. The wife who is also intelligent does not regard her husband as her master. On the contrary, she tries her best to make her dear husband happy with her genuine love. Content at home, the husnband never covet any extramarital love, in short , the English wife is her husband's mainstay.
>
> We become very sad when we realize how unhappy the couples of our country are. Locked up in the *zenana* , the wife does not know how her husnand spends his whole day. Nor does the husband know how his wife spends her time. The wife is always afraid of her husband. Sitting in the beautifully decorated outer house and smoking his *hookha*, the husband passes his time by playing cards and gossiping with his friends and also by going to different places. However, the wife is all the time busy with her house-work in the *zenana* . She certainly loves her husband and always does her utmost to make the best food for him and to make him as happy and comfortable as possible. But the husband does not behave properly with her, nor does she know how to do so with her husband. Very few persons in our country know how the ideal husband-wife relationship should be.This is the reason why, despite the fact that Indian women are strictly chaste, the Indian husband and the wife fail to appreciate the need for mutual happiness and, consequently, prove to be extremely unhappy.[56]

In another article, Krisnabhabini claimed that men and women were equal and that for a perfectly happy relationship it must be based on equality and better understanding.[57]

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53. Mankumari Basu, 'Bigata Shatabarshe Bharat Ramanir Abastha', *BBP*, Nov., 1894-Sep.,1895, pp. 107-08.
54. Sharat Kumari Chaudhuri, 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', p. 396.
55. (Swarnakumari Debi), 'Shubha-bibaha-Rachayitri', Bharati, Nov.-Dec., 1909, pp.468-69.
56. Krisnabhabini Das, *Englande Banga Mahila*, pp. 182-84.
57. Krisnabhabini Das, 'Strilok O Purush' , p.613.

How the husband-wife relationship became closer in a small circle of *bhadralok* within the span of about half a century can be seen from two contradictory examples-one that of once again, Rasasundari Debi in the 1830s and 1870s. Rasasundari Debi had at that time , a number of children. Her mother-in-law was dead and there were no in-laws to be afraid of. Despite this , she could not conceive of the idea of talking to or seeing her husband during the day. She was so afraid and ashamed of being seen by her husband that one day when her husband's horse came in the backyard of the house, she immediately hid lest the horse saw her. Since the horse was her husband's, she regarded it with a feeling of awe and considered it to be a matter of great shame to be seen by it.[58] In the whole of her autobiography, she devoted only a small section to her husband, which hardly gives her reader a glimpse of him, except that he was heavily built and very litigious.[59]

Jnanadanandini Debi, on the contrary, gave a detailed account of how her husband fell in love with her and developed a close relationship with her even before she was 12. The letters her husband wrote to her from London and Bombay do reflect this intimacy. Indeed, Jnanadanandini's and her husband's concept of the husband-wife relationship was absolutely Western in nature. Jnanadanandini came from a traditional Hindu family and was born and brought up in, remote Jessore village. It was certainly her husband who mouled her values. Both the memories of her husband she recorded in her autobiography and the manner in which she recorded them show that she and her husband developed a kind of companionship which was far beyond the scope of the rituulized Hindu marriage of that period. Her life with her husband in Bombay and her experience abroad reflect the changing atttitudes of the modernized spouses towards their relationships.[60] A generation earlier, the husband-wife relationship was different in nature, even in the Tagore family itself. Sarada Debi, Jnanadanandini's mother-in-law, did not leave an autobiography, but the numerous memoirs written by her daughters, daughters-in-law sons and others who came into contact with the family do suggest that the relationship between Debendranath and Sarada Debi was quite traditional, despite Debendranath's reforming zeal, and on the part of Sarada Debi one of awe. However, the expansion of English education and the spread of English ideas caused the later change as found in Satyendranath and Jnanadanandini Debi.

As we have already noticed, the new ideas permeated only a small section of the Western educated *bhadralok*. The vast majority still clung to traditional values including the ones regarding the husband-wife relationship and continued to glorify them. A sizeable portion of the educated women themselves emphasized self-sacrifice and tolerance as the two best virtues that women could possess.[61] In her articles, Hemangini Chaudhuri, for instance advised women to forget their own happiness for the sake of making others, especially the husband, happy. 'Even if the husband is angry and rude in his behaviour and shouts at the wife, the wife should not by any means protest or be disobedient'- she said.[62] Giribala was even more traditional in her attitudes when she gave an imaginary example of how the ideal wife should behave with her husband. She thus wrote in 1901:

> Look! That simple and devoted wife in that house is enduring in silence and good humour the oppression of her cruel husband . Look! Her drunkard husband is entering her room in an utterly wild fashion. She was eagerly waiting for him. She is now going to nurse him with great care. She is obviously sorry to see him in such a state, nevertheless there are no signs of anger and hatred in her face. The heartless husband kicks her,

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58. Rasasudari Debi, *Amar Jiban*, pp. 67-71.

59. *Ibid*., Ch. XV, pp. 127-131.

60. See Jnanadanandini's 'Smritikatha', *Puratani* passim.

61. See, for example Hemangini Chaudhuri, 'Striloker Kartabya', *Antahpur*, Vol. 2 (1899), pp. 90-92; and Giribala Debi, 'Sadhvi', *Antahpur*, Vol. 4 (Aug.-Sep., 1901), pp. 174-75; Nagendrabala, 'Prakrita Stri', *BBP*, Dec., 1897-Jan., 1898, pp. 323-26.

62. Hemangini Chaudhuri, 'Striloker Kartabya', p. 91.

but she considers it as a blessing. She fails to find any fault in his behaviour-her face is radiant with heavenly light and she is making her womanly qualities immortal by worshipping her husband's feet.[63]

This single paragraph is enough to show that the kind of selfless devotion and reverence that the Bengali proverbs such as 'the husband is the supreme teacher' and ' the husband is the supreme god' reflect seem to have been still deeply rooted among many women even as late as the beginning of the twentieth century.

Wife's changing behaviour and work role

As her attitudes towards the institution of marriage as well as towards the husband-wife relationship changed, deviations from the accepted pattern of the wife's behaviour and from her work role went on increasing . Mankumari Basu held the modern wife, not the overall social change, to be responsible for this. In her opinion, the modern wife was becoming selfish and self-indulgent as a result of Westernization. ' In a family where the wife is selfish and self-indulgent, the elderly relations do not get the regard they deserve, the husband does not get any food cooked and served by the wife, the baby is not breastfed and the neighbours do not get help in time of need.' She posed a question to her readers; 'How can the wives who are so busy with themselves and with their make-up have the time to look after others?[64]

The status of the wife in the family was , as we saw very low and she was supposed to do every thing according to her mother-in-law's wish. However, with the decline of the joint family and the rise of wife's status, her behaviour to the in-laws, particularly to the mother-in-law, changed to an extent. This was severely criticised by most people. 'The educated wife does not hesitate at all to revile her mother-in-law, if the mother-in-law does or speaks something to her disliking'-was the comment of Reba Ray, in 1891.[65] What another woman wrote more or less at the same time was still more abusive:

The modernized daughter-in-law is making the mother-in-law's life miserable . She is making the mother-in-law shed tears and do a great deal of housework. As customary to the modern wife, she is either "unwell", "a baby" or has a child to look after. It is therefore the mother-in-law who has to do all the housework....To the son who is moody and henpecked, the mother is only the wife of the father. Such an unfortunate mother cannot pass a single day without shedding bitter tears.[66]

That the wife did not do any housework at all and the mother-in-law had to do everything was possibly not an accurate statement of fact. Nevertheless, there might be some truth in this comment, at least in some cases, but the anger and bitterness there were caused by rather sudden deviations from the accepted norm in relation to wife's behaviour. S. K. Chaudhurani, however, thought that this bitterness was partly the result of the distinction the mother-in-law made between her daughter and the daughter-in-law. Traditionally prejudiced as she was against the daughter-in-law, she cooked for her daughter without any complaint whatever, but raised a noisy cry of disapproval if she had, even only on a few occasions, to cook for her daughter-in-law. Chaudhurani argued that the widowed mother-in-law was to cook for herself anyway, because she was not supposed to eat any food cooked by others, therefore she could, with only a little more effort, cook a couple of items more for her own son and grandchildren.[67]

As contemporary sources suggest, the middle class modern wife did most of her housework by herself. Nevertheless, the belief that she was reluctant, even unwilling, to do housework was widely popular. Conservative women such as Kulabala Debi and Saralabala Dasi identified themselves with the work roles of the housekeepers and cooks, which,

63. Giribala Debi, 'Sadhvi', pp. 174-75.
64. Mankumari Basu, 'Bangali Rmanidiger Grihadharma', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1890, p. 360.
65. Reba Ray of Katak, 'Matri O Shashuri Bhakti', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1891, p.158.
66. 'Bangali Striloker Bartaman Abastha', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1891, p. 165.
67. Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani, 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', p. 390.

according to them, were the first and foremost duties of a woman.[68] Mankumari Basu, in spite of her literary persuits, considered housework as the principal duty of a married woman.[69] Despite her active participation in house-work, the modern wife on the contrary, did not regard housework or childcare as the main objective of their life. A lady from Khidirpore expressed this opinion as early as 1885.[70] While conceding that housework, childbearing and childcare were the duties particularly of women, another lady, six years later, denied that they were the most important roles that women were destined to play. Krisnabhabini Das and Jnanadanandini Debi, both of whom were considerably exposed to the modern conception of women's roles, stressed the fact that housework, cooking, childcare and needlework were especially women's jobs,[71] but, at the same time, they refused to accept these as women's principal roles.[72] It appears that many of the so-called modernized women were like Krishnabhabini and Jnanadanandini, who were still midway between tradition and modernism. They had realized that for the fulfilment of their lives they were to look beyond the four walls of the *zenana*, and play important roles there but were unable to deny the traditional work roles identified with Bengali women. During the half a century that followed, the behaviour of the most of the educated Bengali women fell under this pattern.

Thus the new set of values regarding women's work roles including housework that emerged as a result of the overall social change were neither fully traditional nor fully modern. Nevertheless, they were looked upon as either good or bad by observers placed in different situations. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, for example, repeatedly expressed its disapproval of the growing tendency on the part of the educated wife to rely on servants for her housework. It also strongly condemned the modern wife's reluctance to breastfeed her baby. Some of these wives are reported to have considered breastfeeding to be disgraceful and beggarly.[73] However, in highly placed families like the Jorasanko Tagores breastfeeding was not customary, Sarala Debi claimed in her autobiography that her mother, Swarnakumari Debi, like the other women in the family, never breastfed any of her children including Sarla herself. Wet nurses were employed instead.[74] Kundamala Debi, a daughter of the renowned Sanskrit pundit, Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, was born and brought up in rather a consevative environment. Although educated, she viewed the changing roles of the educated women as grossly wrong and undesirable. The educated wife, in her opinion, did some of the housework, but under duress and with utter contempt.[75] Kumudini Ray of Jessore claimed that the modern wife so relied on the servants that even the wife of a low salaried clerk (£2 a month) was unable to manage her housework without the help of a cook. This she condemned as unforgiveable behaviour on the part of the educated wife.[76] On the contrary, Swarnakumari Debi and Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani, both of whom were surrounded by a large number of servants and maidservants were unable to find any fault with having servants. In fact, Chaudhurani argued in favour of employing servants. She said the pattern of housework had changed. The husband and the children now went to work and to school at 10 o'clock in the morning and they must have their meal before that time. In earlier days, the

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68. Kulabala Debi, 'Strishiksha', *Antahpur*, Vol.I (1898). p.54; Saralabala Dasi, 'Ramanir Jiban-Brata', *Antahpur*, Vol. I (1898), pp. 15-19; Binodini Gosh, *BBP*, Dec.,1900-Jan.,1901, pp.302-303.

69. Mankumari Basu, 'Bangali Ramanidiger Grihadharma', p. 322.

70. A lady of Khidirpur, 'Nariganer Alpashiksha', *BBP*, Jan.-Mar., 1885, p.362.

71. 'Bangali Striloker Bartamn Abastha', p. 242.

72. Krisnabhabini Das, 'Striloker Kaj O Kajer Mahatmya', *Bharati O Balak*, Aug.-Sep., 1891, p.247; Jnanadanandini Debi, 'Strishiksha', *Bharati*, Jun.-Jul., 1881. pp. 263-73.

73. 'Santan Raksha', *BBP*, Jan.-Feb., 1865, pp. 186-88; Shishuder Ahar', *BBP*, Apr.-May, 1866, pp. 247-48.

74. Sarala Debi, *Jibaner Jharapta*, p. 1.

75. Kundamala Debi, 'Bidya Shikhile Ki Grihakarma Karite Nai?, *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1870, pp. 176-78.

76. Kumudini Ray of Jessore, 'Hindu Narir Gahastadharma', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1894, p. 224.

male members of family used to have their meals in the afternoon. Therefore, she reasoned, a cook was essential for the urban family which was in most cases nuclear or extended in nature.[77]

Swarnakumari Debi moreover noticed that the modern wife was concerned not only about the servants of cooks, but about a new set of needs as well, which either unknown to or unfelt by the earlier women. These included cosmetics, fashionable dress, ornaments and, interestingly enough, doctors and a growing demand for tidiness and cleanliness.[78] It is to be noticed that she did not comdemn the modern wife for this, rather, it appears, she implicity approved of it.

Of all the modern wife's needs , the demand for cosmetics was most severely criticized by old fashioned people including women themselves, Bengali women must have used cosmetics for centries . It is, therefore, not clear why some women were so critical about it. Whether or not it was due to the fact that the new cosmetics were Western and very expensive, traditional women continued to maintain a hostile attitude towards the use of them. In 1874 , Shyamasundari, a woman writer who had written a number of prize winning essays, deplored that the modern wife assumed the appearance of a black "memsaheb" (European lady) if her husband had the money to buy cosmetics and European clothing . She accused the modern wife of being her husband's blood sucker.[79] Mankumari Basu, too, mentioned that perfumes, lavender, eau de cologne etc. were a must even for women belonging to low income families.[80] It appears that the Brahmo women were the ones most influenced by Western life style and their demands for cosmetics were the stongest.[81] The modern husband was also spending more money for ornaments, another article argued.[82] Indeed the lower middle class husband seemed to have been under more economic hardship than before.[83] S. K. Chaudhurani, however, attributed this to the rising prices of the commodities rather than to the modern wife's demands.[84]

While men and women with conservative values deplored all this in innumerable articles and in the other forms of writing such as farces, novels and verses, during the last three decades of the nineteenth century the modern wife almost silently adopted the new values. During my research, I found only a single woman, S. K. Chaudhurani, who directly supported the modern wife and justified her changing attitudes towards the work role of women. In one of her long articles, she argued that women's life style was bound to change with the change of men's life style. She gave examples of how middle class men themselves had moved considerably away from the accepted norm of life style identified with the early nineteenth century *bhadrolok*. She reasoned that women were being increasingly asked to play new roles in addition to and/or instead of the old ones. She justified both the need for sevants in urban families and the growing popularity of the nuclear family. In her opininon, the woman of earlier decades passed her time by slandering and the modern wife by reading novels and embroidering designs on carpets. 'Unlike the earlier wife, the modern wife is slightly self-conscious as well as proud of herself; she does not gossip to others about her own sorrows and economic hardship, nor does she slander her husband and children.' Chaudhurani further observed that the modern wife kept her house tidy and clean and was better equipped to look

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77. Sarat K. Chaudhurani, 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', pp. 390-91, 393.
78. Swarnakumari Debi, 'Sakhi Samiti', *Bharati O Balak*, Dec., 1891-Jan., 1892, p. 505.
79. Shyamasundari (Bandyopadyay), 'Sativa Narir Ekmatra Bhushan', *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1874, p. 141.
80. Mankumari Basu, 'Bigata Shatabarshe Bharat Ramanideger Abastha', p. 139.
81. 'Bangiya Hindu Mahilar Paricchad', *BBP* Oct.-Nov., 1901, p. 241.
82. 'Punarbibaha Bishayak Kathopakathan', *BBP* , Oct.-Nov., 1865, p. 136.
83. 'Nabya Banga Mahila', *BBP* , Sep-Oct., 1874, p, 180.
84. Sarat K. Chaudhurani, 'Ekal O Ekaler Meye', p. 396.

after the members of her small family and guests. She also emphasized the point that the modern wife had certainly a more refined taste than the earlier women and this she claimed, was what the modernized husband expected of her. The earlier wife, she added, used her sari for a towel and had the marks of lime, turmeric and carbon all over her sari and body, and looked dreadful in her make-up, ornaments and dress. On the contrary, the modern wife was neat and clean and fashionable in her manners. She thus concluded:

> The modern youngman imitates Western style as much as possible and blames his wife for not being sufficiently Western. The wife is therefore fast becoming "modern" as desired by her husband. The old-fashioned wife wearing a red Kastapere sari, a wide mark of vermilon on the parting line of her hair, a big red round mark on her forehead, a black coating of mishi on her teeth, a dark paint on her lips, a pair of bangles, made of shell, around her wrists, a pair of mals around her ankles, and putting up her hair in a bun will not be acceptable to the modern husband.[85]

Although Chaudhurani was the only one to have bravely put forward such arguments in favour of the modern wife, it seems that her claims were true. Even a traditional lady, several years latter, conceded what Chaudhurani had argued. She said in the male dominated Bengali society women's life style had always been shaped by men. When men were superstitious, women were superstitious too; when men were labourious, women were labourious as well. But the modern wife was , she observed, free from idolatry and other religious superstitions as well as lax towards housework due to the changed attitudes of her husband. She held the educated and modernized husband to be solely responsible for the changed outlook of the modern woman. She thus questioned:

> Can the Western educated job-seeking young man who is very sophisticated in his manners and life style, and recites Byron and Jayadeba be happy if she has to marry an illiterate girl who is superstitious, quarrelsome and untidy?

She went on to describe in detail the dress, make-up and manners of the orthodox Bengali woman, and claimed that she would look absurd as the wife of a highly educated and Westernized young man.[86]

Attitudes towards the wife's changed roles and style

The number of educated and so-called modernized women was very small during the last four decades of the nineteenth century; they were therefore thought to be rather exceptional. These women by their life style and changed outlook towards social customs formed a new group, until then non-existent in Bengal. Whether or not adopting a "reformed" dress including blouses, petticoats and shoes, relying on servants for housework, giving up breastfeeding, making the husband-wife relationship closer, and disregarding social customs like female seclusion constituted modernization, these were identified with Westernization. People close to tradition naturlly criticized. *Bamabodhini Patrika*, which represented the "progressive" faction of the Brahmo Samaj, was itself consedered to be quite Westernized. Nevertheless, as early as 1867, it criticized the modern woman's imitation of the West. It is doubtful if at that time there was even a dozen Bengali women who could be truly considered to be Westernized. It claimed that the 'memsaheb' or the Englishwoman was the ideal of the modern women and that she considered Westernization and progress as synonymous.[87] It expressed its concern again four years later saying the Bengali society should possibly witness the emergence of an ultra-Western group of women similar to the extremely unorthodox young Bengal.[88]

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85. *Ibid*., pp.389-91, 393, 566 (in the Jan.-Feb., 1892 issue).
86. M. 'Nabya Banga Mahila', *BBP* , Aug.-Oct., 1903, pp. 179-82.
87. 'Striya Shriyashcha Geheshu Bisheshohsti Kashchan', *BBP* , Jan.-Feb., 1867, p. 436.
88. 'Strijatir Samajik Unnati', *BBP* , May-Jun., 1871, pp. 33-35.

If the young Bengal of the 1830s called the ancient Hindu law givers as well as the conservative Hindus selfish and hypocritical in relation to their treatment of women,[89] the same terms are applicable to the later liberal reformers. While these reformers would half approve of Westernization on the part of men, because possibly they wanted for their women some education and did away with the *purda* in order to turn them into "better" women and thus to exploit them further. They had indeed two different standards-one for men and another for women. This conversatism was rooted in the very nature of the half-hearted reformism of the nineteenth century, which aimed to update society without disturbing the social institutious to any significant amount.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Annette Akroyd opened her boarding school named the Hindu Mahila Bidyalaya in 1873. It was intended for the "higher education" of Bengali girls.[90] Even before the school could be started, *Bamabodhini Patrika* once again raised a loud alarm saying that its students would most probably put on Western dress and shoes and eat with knives and forks. Thus, it claimed , some black memsahebs would be produced.[91] *Bamabodhini Patrika*'s apprehension so far as the introduction of knives and forks at Akroyd's School soon came true. Although it did not by any means spoil any of the virtues of the girls attending the school, it was severly critisized by some conservative people (none of whom had sent their daughters to this school).[92] It can be easily guessed how these people who regarded eating with knives and forks to be improper would react if women ate tabooed food like beef and pork. Whether or not the modern woman ate these and drank wine, which seems quite unlikely, *Bamabodhini Patrika*, in a sarcastic article, condemned both the people who were allegedly trying to introduce these to women and the women who were allegedly having them.[93] It appears *Bamabodhini Patrika* was fighting against its imaginery enemies who were still to be born.

As the spirit of nationalism increasingly imbued the educated people since the 1870s, they became all the more critical of Westernization particularly of women. Even such women as Jnanadanandini Debi, who herself was highly influenced by the West, began to criticize others for what she said imitating everything Western without considering its merits. Jnanadanandini was the first to introduce birthday celebrations in Bengal. Now she herself deplored the young men and women who celebrated their birthdays in Western manner, sent New Year's greetings, and even tried to make "April fools" of others on the first of April, but did not celebrate such native functions as *Bharati-dvitiya* and *Jamaishasthi*. She further observed that they were not Christians, nevertheless they bought Christmas cakes and ate them with friends, that they did not eat puffed rice and coconut on the occasion of the *kojagari purnima*, as was customery for Bengalis.[94] Mankumari Basu argued that Westernization was a harmful example for women and that it would not advance the cause of women.[95]

Despite this kind of alarm among less unorthodox and/or nationalist women, it does not appear that there was a great deal of Westernization among the educated women of the period. In fact, their slightly modified and undoubtedly better dress, use of cosmetics , improved manners and conversation, and less orthodox eating habits identified them with Westernization, whether or not these were imported from the West. The women of the

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89. *Supra*, p.29.
90. *Supra* p.47.
91. 'Miss Akroyd', *BBP* , Jan.-Feb., 1873, p. 325.
92. P. Barr, *The Memsahibs* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976), p. 164.
93. 'Bangiya Mahilar Khedokti', *BBP*, Nov.-Dec., 1873, pp. 265-66.
94. Jnanadanandini Debi 'Samajsanskar O Kusanakar', pp.131-35.
95. 'Bangali Striloker Bartaman Abastha', pp. 215, 279-80.

Brahmo Samaj of India and of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, for example, refused to worship idols. There was nothing Western about this. Nevertheless, this too was seen as an evidence of Westernization.[96] Some of these women also began to use their surnames at the end of their names in place of the traditonal Debi or Dasi. This was first introduced in the 1860s by Rasbehari Basu, a Deputy Magistrate, who used Basu instead of Dasi at the end of his wife's name- Bhubaneswari.[97] Later it was widely accepted by women belonging to the Brahmo Samaj of India and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century the use of the surname as well as the use of titles like Kumari (Miss) and Srimati (Mrs.) distinguished the Brahmo women from the rest. However, the women of the Adi Brahmo Samaj continued to use Debi.[98] There was nothing wrong in the use of the surname and the title. In any case, it did not rob women of any of their womanly qualities. However, it was looked upon as part of Westernization, and therefore condemned.[99] A debate whether it was proper to use surname and title followed and became quite bitter at one stage.[100] In some families such as Durga Mohon Das' children and women were being taught to converse in English. This too was regarded as undesirable.[101]

All this made the modernized women 'peculiar' in the eyes of conservative people. Partly owing to their prejudice against the modern woman, partly owing to their inferiority complex, illiterate woman kept themselves carefully aloof from the so-called Westernized woman.[102] Besides, the latter was considered as devoid of womanly qualities.[103] Some saw in them a lot of tomboyishness and manly qualities. these were condemned in unkind language.[104] Sarala Debi narrated in her autobiography how Sarala Ray (Durga Mohan Das' daughter and P. K. Ray's wife) would play tennis with men-relations and friends- who visited their family.[105] Sarala Debi was very close to Sarala Ray and her youngest sister, Shaila, and thus did not condemn Mrs. Ray for playing tennis. But no women of Tagore family including Sarala Debi herself had done so. She mentioned this fact because it seemed to her so extraordinary. Indeed, the modern woman's behaviour and her changed roles seemed so unorthodox even to manly educated men and women that they did not for long accept these or the women who had adopted them. The prejudice was so strong that "a graduate of the Calcutta University" claimed , in an article published in a popular perodical, that it was better to live in hell than with an educated woman.[106]

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96. See, for example, Ramasundari, 'Kashi-Darshan', *BBP*, Feb.-Mar., 1864, p. 88; 'Edeshe Strishiksha etc., *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1865, p. 73, Saudamini Ray , *BBP*, Dec., 1865-Jan.,1866. p. 180; Sarada Debi, 'Bangadeshiya Lokdiger etc.', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1866, p. 384.

97. *Brahmo Public Opinion*, Vol.I. No. 43 (Jan. 23, 1879).

98. The women belonging to Adi Brahmo Samaj were almost prejudiced aginst the use of surnames by women. This can be seen from an interesting example. In 1910, an article on Kamini Ray was publsihed in *Bharti*, edited by Swarnakumari Debi. In it Kamini was named Kamini Debi, although Kamini herself never wrote her name without her surname. See '*Alo of Chhaya Rachayitri', Bharati*, May-Jun., 1910, p. 163.

99. Anon., *Suraloke Banger Parichay*, 2 Vols. (Calcutta: Valmiki Press, 1876-77), 11,96.

100. 100 Jnanadanandini Debi 'Samajsanskar O Kusanskaar', pp. 132-33; and Anon., 'Samajsanskar O Kusanskaar'. *Bharati*, Aug.-Sep., 1883, pp. 210-16.

101. Sarara Debi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p. 83.

102. -----Debi, 'Ekti Prastab', *Bharati*, Apr.-May, 1885, p.19.

103. 'Bangali Striloker Bartaman Abastha', p.215; Strijatir Aswabhabik Unnati', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1873, p.72.

104. *Ibid*.

105. Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, pp.86.

106. "Contributed by a graduate of the Calcutta University", (Chandra Shekhar Mukhopadhyay), 'Bidya Bidambana', *Jnanankur*, Apr.-May, 1873, p. 190.

Limited change in women's roles and status

As the preceding discussion suggests, the joint family was increasingly giving way to the nuclear and/or extended family, and this had an unmistakable impact on the woman's position in the family. The wife's roles were modified to an extent as a result of the overall social change as well. Moreover, her relationship with her husband and in-laws and her behaviour patterns underwent a signigicant change. Consequently, her image in the eyes of society ceased to be what it was during earlier decades and even, possibly, during earlier centuries. Her aspirations and values as well as her self-perception altered cosiderably. This evolution among the educated women of *bhadralok* families was gradually influencing a wider segment of Bengali society which had almost imperciptibly but certainly redefined women's status and roles.

However, all this change was limited in the sense that it remained confined within a very small circle, in some cases within a few families. It was also limited in the sense that despite some degree of awareness among these women regarding their position in the family and regarding the importance of marriage based on love and mutual understanding , they did not seriously demand equality with men in every repect, nor did they challenge the inferior position of wife within the husband-wife relationship. Questions such as how much housework the wife was supposed to do, how much authority the mother-in-law had over the daughter-in-law and how much influence the wife had over the decision-making of the family were repeatedly asked, but the authority and superiority of husband were never challenged. Moreover, despite the modern wife's increasing involvement in social activities, she remained fundamentally committed to her domestic roles. As tradition resisted drastic change she had to adopt a life style that was in between tradition and modernism.

CHAPTER FIVE

In Their Masters' Footsteps : The Dependent Nature of Woman's Attitudes to Social Reform

Whether or not the awakening of Bengal during the nineteenth century could be called a renaissance, on the one hand, it modernized the Bengali language and literature and on the other, updated many of Bengal's social institutions in the light of secular humanism. Whereas the modernization of the Bengali language and liturature went on inconspicuously and achieved tangible success; the modernization of social institutions aroused many a noisy debate and achieved only limited success. However, irrespective of the degree of success, this awakening was the greatest phenomenon of that period and was instrumental in breaking Bengal away from the Middle ages. If by its colonial rule England robbed Bengal of her legendary wealth, in its turn it gave her its liberal education and ideas and transformed her into a modern society.

The same Western ideas that made educated Bengalis conscious of the need to edcate their women, made them conscious of the need to reform their social institutions. The Sikhs of North-West India, the Marathis in Western India and the Muslims in North India had started to reform their respective communities almost a century before the Bengali *Bhadralok*. But the nature of their reform and that of the *bhadralok*'s were totally different. The Sikh, the Maratha and the Muslim reformers aimed to weed out what were thought innovations from their religious practices and thereby re-establish their religions on strict puritanic codes as prescribed by scriptures. They also aimed at an increase of interest in religion. Therefore, their reform was more a religious revival than a social reform. The *bhadralok* reforms in Bengal, on the contrary, aimed to modernize their social institutions with the ideas borrowed from the West. They were concerned less, if at all, about a revival of religion.

Bengali's social reform dates back to the second decade of the nineteenth century when Rammohan Roy began to translate, reinterpret and publish carefully selected excerpts from the ancinet religious literatures such as the *Upanishads*.[1] Whether or not Roy got the idea of reforming his society by a reinterpretation and revival of ancient *Sastras* from the European Renaissance, he did not want to go back to the time of the *Upanishads*, he rather aimed to go forward. He did not even hesitate to borrow from Islam and Christianity.[2] With the polemic literature that he published for more than a decade, he proved beyond doubt that *suttee* was not sanctioned by ancient scriptures. Moreover, he expressed his opinion against the enforced

1. The first of these translations, Bedanta Grantha, was published in 1815. By 1819, he published 6 more translations of different *Upanishads*. Moreover, he published a number of other translations and three books based on Christian religious literature and one on Islamic literature.

2. How he carefully selected parts from scriptures and reinterprete them has been discussed in detail by S.N. Hay, in his article 'Western and Indigenous Elements in Modern Indian Thought : The Case of Rammohan Roy' in M.B. Jansen (ed.), *Changing Japanese Attitudes Towards Modernization* (Princeton : Princeton Univ. Press, 1965)..

celibacy of child-widows and against *kulin* polygamy.[3] That he was also the first to expose the deplorable condition of Bengali women was discussed in the first chapter.[4]

Although they lacked Roy's liberalism and "progressive" ideas, Mrityunjay Bidyalankar, Radhakanta Deb and Bhabani Charan Bandyophayay, who were the leaders of the traditional Hindus, also became aware of certain aspects of their social institutions which were hard to abide by. None of them had, for example, accepted *suttee* in their families. However, being nationalists, they were not sure if reform of socio-religious institutions with the help of alien rulers was desirable. After the anti-*suttee* act was passed in 1829, their legislation, hardened, and during the next few decades, they became too conservative to support any liberal move to reform Bengali Hindu society. For obvious reasons, they accepted English education and employment under the English, and thus partly compromised with tradition, but endeavoured to keep the age-long customs and practices as far as possible undisturbed. The difference between Roy's endeavours and those of the latter group was not so much in their nature as in degree. It was a question of how much they were prepared to accept from the West. Later, in the 1840s, the Adi Brahmo Samaj of Debendranath Tagore started to reform in Roy's fashion, but by the 1960s, had become like the nationalists.

However, the Young Bengal of the 1830s had a different ideal regarding social reform. Highly influenced by the West, they were not satisfied with partial reform or making a compromise, but advocated the acceptance of Western ideals in their totality. Being thoroughly unorthodox, some of them declared that if they hated anything from the bottom of their heart it was Hinduism.[5] They also started to disregard openly popular social customs. Unlike Roy and Deb, they were very much anthorpocentric and therefore paid more attention to redefining and reorganizing the existing social institutions. They worked for the introduction of the remarriage of widows and female education and for the abolition of *kulin* polygamy,[6] not because ancient *Sastras* so suggested, but because rational and liberal values so justified. In the later decades, the Young Bengal themselves lost much of their spirit of defiance and compromised with tradition. Nevertheless, they had introduced a new trend of reform in Bengal. This was because they were so radical, and so few in number, that they achieved little or no success.

The cause of reform was appreciably advanced in the 1840s and 1850s by Akshay Kumar Datta and Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar. Although both of them were later known as atheists, Datta and Bidyasagar apparently were closer to tradition than the Young Bengal. They were both profoundly influenced by the West, but people continued to believe for some time that they were "true" Hindus. Bidyasagar particularly had a credibility which Datta lacked. That he was first a brilliant student and then the Principal of the Sanskrit College and that he came from a traiditonal learned Brahmin family gave Bidyasagar this credibility. Datta and Bidyasagar made a seemingly impossible synthesis of Roy and the Young Bengal in that they used both *Sastras* and Western liberalism while advocating social reform. However, their methods, especially Bidyasagar's looked so "native" in character that they were in a position to win a larger segment of the *bhadralok* to their side. Since traditional Hindus had great regard for the *Sastras*, Bidyasagar chose to use *Sastras* as much as possible to popularize

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3. See a news item published in *Calcutta Journal*, 18 May 1819, reprinted in *Selections from the Indian Journals*, Vol. 1 ed. by S. Das (Calcutta : Farma K. L. Mukhopadhay, 1963), p. 159; *Raja Rammohan Ray Pranita Granthabali*, pp. 206-07.

4. Supra, p. 23.

5. This was written by Madhab Chandra Malik in a letter published in *Bengal Hurkaru*, 30 October 1831, quoted in A.F.S. Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal*, p. 49.

6. See my unpublished Ph.D. thesis 'Hindu Samaj Sanskarsachetanatar Itihas O Bangla Natya Rachanay Tar Pratiphalan, 1854-1876' (Rajshahi University, Bangladesh, 1977), pp. 22-25, 102.

reform. By bringing to light less known or unknown *Sastras* and reinterpreting the known ones, he "defeated" the pundits who were against the introduction of widow remarriage and the abolition of *kulin* polygamy.[7] The rest of the pundits contributed to what he claimed regarding these two issues. Bidyasagar's profound scholarship was so convincing to common men that even if they did not marry off their child-widows they admitted that remarriage of widows had sanctions of *Sastras*. Moreover, very influential among government offcials, Bidyasagar had extraordinary organizing ability. Consequently, he was able not only to get the Widow Remarriage Act passed in 1956, but also to popularize social reform temporarily in the late 1850s. Ideas of social reform had, in any case, beceme, by this time, a matter of fashionable lip service among the *bhadralok*.

That Bengali Hindus, despite all this, did not accept the remarriage of widows and abolish *kulin* polygamy was due to their blind adherence to social customs and practices. Uneducated and unexposed to liberal ideas as they were, this is not surprising of them. In fact, Bidyasagar's and Datta's ideas were highly Westernized, although this is not apparent. Therefore their appeal, which was secular in nature, did not last long.

However, the young Brahmos, in the 1860s, took up the cause of reform with almost religious zeal and this resulted in consisderable success within that small segment. It was among them that quite a few widows were married, and a number of intercaste marriages were solemnized.[8] Besides these Brahmos, under the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen, took steps to free the institution of marriage from rituals and replace its sacramental character by a civil contract. The first of such marriages was held in December 1866.[9] Earlier, Debendranath Tagore had "prescribed" marriage rites free from Hindu idolartry,[10] but the marriage itself was still sacramental in character. Thus the 1866 marriage was the first step towards the civil marraige which was finally achieved after a bitter debate among the Brahmos.

The Civil Marriage Act of 1872, popularly known as the Brahmo Marriage Act, because of the Brahmo association with it, was passed in early 1872, when the Brahmo Samaj of India requested the government to legalize those marriages of the Brahmos which were not solemnized according to the Hindu marriage law. However, the Adi Brahmo Samaj vehemently opposed it and consequently the name "Brahmo" was dropped from the title of

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7. Ibid., pp. 28-29, 31-32.

Bidyasagar's antipolygamy books are : 1. *Bahubibada Rahit Hoa Uchit Kina Etadbishayak Bichar*, 2 Vols. (1871-1873); 2 *Ati Alpa Hailo* (1873); 3. Abar Ati Alpa Hailo (1873); and 4. Brajabilas (1884).

8. Between 1864 and 1884, *Bamabodhini Patrika* published news items on the remarriage of 50 widows of whom 19 were among the Brahmos. Besides, *Report on the Administration of Bengal for 1882-83* (Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Press, 1883) says that of the 106 marriages held accordling to the Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872, between 1872 and 1882, 36 were widow-remarriages.

Moreover, *Bamabodhini Patrika* reports that between 1864 and 1879 at least 12 intercaste marriages were held among the Brahmos. See my unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Appendices "Gha" and "Cha".

The first of these intercaste marriages was held on the 2nd August, 1862. Keshab Chandra Sen arranged these marriages. Popular public opinion was so hostile towards this marriage that Keshab had to call the Police. See *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Jul.-Aug., 1864, p. 161; *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1864, p. 165; B.C. Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta : Modern Book Agency, 1932), p. 333.

9. 'Sanskrita Bibaha', *BBP*, Nov.-Dec., 1866, p. 400.

The bride was Rajlaxmi, the duaghter to Kishorilal Maitra. She was 14 and a student of the Bethune School. The bridegroom was Prasanna Kumar Sen. It was an intercaste marriage–Rajlaxmi being a Brahman and Prasanna a Baidya.

10. The first marriage held according to Debendranath's reformed rites was that of his daughter Sukumari in 1861.–*Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Jul.-Aug., 1861. This was so dispproved by Debendranath's relations that few of them only came to attend the ceremony.–Debendranath's letter to Rajnarayan Bose, *Maharshi Debendranath Thakurer Patrabali*, p. 33.

the Act. People who wished to get married according to the provisions of this Act were required to declare that they were not Hindus, Christians, Muslims or Buddhists.[11] This increased the gap between the Adi Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj of India, since Adi Samajists refused to declare that they were not Hindus. On the contrary, they claimed that they were reformed and, therefore, better Hindus than the Hindus themselves. The Act also alienated the Keshabite Brahmos from the rest of the Hindus, as they now categorically declared that they were not Hindus. It also hardened the Hindu attitude towards social reform as a whole. However, irrespective of its political implication, the Act definetely reformed the institution of Hindu marraige. It fixed the minimum age of the bride at 14 and that of the bridegroom at 18, required the consent of both the bride and bridegroom, legalized divorce and abolished polygamy.[12]

However, the reforming zeal of the "progressive" Brahmos ebbed away in the 1870s as Keshab Chandra Sen gradually became more concerned with spiritualism and his follwers such as Ananda Mohan Bose, Durga Mohan Das, Dwarkanath Ganguli and Sibnath Sastri focused their attention on politics.

One cannot but observe the limited nature of Bengal's social reform. Although it was known as the social reform movement, it was practically a movement for the elevation of women. The aim of nineteenth century English social reform in Bengal was very different from that of Bengal's. Whilst English reformers' primary concern was the elevation of the industrial proletariat, Bengali reformers aimed to uplift their womenfolk. Because it had not experienced anything comparable to the Industrial Revolution, Bengal had virtually no industrial proletariat. Moreover, because of their class character, the organized middle class *bhadralok* failed to see the wretched condition of the rural peasantry. However, they became conscious of the poor condition of their women. Therefore the *bhadralok* reformers' proletariat were their women, whom they tried to elevate.[13] Thus the social reform movement in Bengal was limited in its character. That the *bhadralok* reformer worked for the introduction of widow remarriage, female ecuation and a "reformed" dress, and for the abolition of early marraige, polygamy, *kulinism* and female seclusion was because they were becoming increasingly conscious of the welfare of women and of the family. They realized that men and for that matter society as a whole would benefit if their women could be educated and thereby turned into better mothers and better companions. This was the reason why the exapansion of female education and the breaking of the *purdah* went on unhindered, although from the 1870s onward the *bhadralok* reformers became fairly hostile towards the reform of socio-religious institutions.

Decline of the reform movement

Whatever success it had, the reform movement became popular or in any case fashionable among the *bhadralok* during the second half of the 1850s. It was in this atmosphere that Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote his farce *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata* (1859) ridiculing the intemperate Young Bengal, he himself being an out and out alcoholic. Many more wrote plays, verses, satires and essays advocating the introduction of widow remarriage and condemning the *kulin* polygamy and early marriage.[14] However, as nationalism and patriotism started to emerge in the 1860s, the spirit of reform waned. If the Society for the

11. See my Ph.D. thesis, pp. 238-33.

12. Ibid., p. 238.

For detail see 'The Brahmo Samaj and the Native Marriage Act', *Calcutta Review*, Vol. LIV, No. 108 (1872), pp. 286-305.

13. D. Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj etc*., pp. 14-15.

14. See my thesis, pp. 56-57, 103-04, 109, 118-19.

Propagation of National Feeling (1861), established by Rajnarayan Bose made no significant impact on the educated *bhadralok*, Nabagopal Mitra's Hindu Mela (1867) undoubtedly advanced the cause of nationalism. Contemporary Bengali literature and press accounts indicate that the Hindu Mela did inspire the *bhadralok* to identify themselves with the newly emerging concept of the Hindu nation.[15] The Jatiya Sabha or the national association, which was started in 1869, was a joint venture of the one time "progressive" Adi Brahmo Samaj and the Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha of the traditional Hindus. It definitely contributed to the growth of nationalism in Bengal. Moreover, *National Paper* (1865) of Nabagopal Mitra, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (1868) of Shishir Kumar Ghose and *Madhyastha* (1871) of Manomohan Basu began to play a role that was undoubtedly political.

Thus the stage for launching a regular political movement was all set, except for a political organization. This too was achieved in 1876 when Surendranath Banerji established, with the help of his Brahmo freinds such as Ananda Mohan Bose, Durga Mohan Das and Dwarkanath Ganguli, the India Association.[16] Henceforth the educated urbanized Bengalis more and more devoted themselves to a political movement which glorified India's past and tended to defend everything traditional. This was directly opposed to the idea of a Western influenced reform movement which aimed to criticize and thereby reform the native society and its institutions. The reform movement therefore gradually gave way to nationalism. Bengali plays and theatres which were the mainstay of the reform movement were immediately affected by this change of attitudes of the *bhadralok*. Whereas many plays advocating social reform were being written and performed until 1875, the number of such plays suddenly dropped from 1876. Plays based on mythology, India's past, Hinduism and patriotism became very popular instead.[17] The influence of nationalism was so intense that Rajnarayan Bose, who once violated so many popular Hindu customs including the taboos against eating beef and biscuits, and who was the President of Adi Brahmo Samaj, gave, in 1873, a lecture justifying the superiority of Hinduism over Christianity and Islam.[18] The lecture was arranged by the Jatiya Sabha and was presided over by Debandranath Tagore. Contemporary Bengali press reports indicate that this lecture tremendously influenced the *bhadralok* who now had no doubts about the superiority of Hinduism and consequently of the Hindus, since a well known Brahmo was arguing so.[19]

The movement for introducing widow remarraige which once stirred the *bhadralok* so vigorously came to be regarded, at the stage, not only as an event of the past, but as unclean and lowly. The same *bhadralok* who had worked for legalizing widow remarriage opposed, in 1866, the passing of an act prohibiting *kulin* polygamy.[20] Debendranath Tagore, who, in

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15. J. C. Bagal, *Hindu Melar Itibritta* (Calcutta : Moiti, 1968).

Jyotirindranath Tagore has narrated in his autobiolography how the Hindu Mela inspired him to write his four major plays including Puru Bikram (1874), Satyendranath wrote one of his most known songs to be sung at the Mela. Even Rabindranath, at that time only a teenager, wrote a couple of poems which he read at the Mela. In his autobiography, Jiban-Smriti, he describes how the Hindu Mela and later the Sanjibani Sabha made him a patriot and nationalist so early in his life.

16. This has been discussed in detail in S.N. Banerji's *A Nation in the Making* (London : O.U. Press, 1925) and in L.A. Gordon's *Bengal : The Nationalist Movement* (New York : Columbia U. Press, 1974).

17. See my thesis, pp. 440-41.

18. R.N. Basu, *Hindu Dharmer Shresthata* (Calcutta : Valmiki Press, 1873).

19. R.N. Bose, *Rajnarayan Basur Atmacharit*, pp. 88-89; S. Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj*, p. 286.

20. For details see Report of the Committee appointed by Govt. to consider the question of legislative interference for preventing the "excessive abuse" of Polygamy as practised by the *kulin* Brahmans dated 7th February, 1876 (Calcutta : Bengal Secretarist Press, 1876).

the early 1860s, strongly supported intercaste marriage among the Brahmos[21] and renounced his sacred thread, fought tooth and nail against the proposed Brahmo marrige Act, during 1869-1872,[22] and arranged, in 1873, a colourful ceremony to give the sacred thread to his youngest two sons, including Rabindranath.[23] Indeed from henceforth the *bhadralok* started to defend most of the Hindu institutions irrespective of their merits. The Age of Consent Bill gave rise to a great deal of controversy throughout the country. Whilst the Western educated elites of other parts of India strongly supported the Bill, the Bengali *bhadralok* remained almost silent. In fact, a big segment of the *bhadralok* opposed the Bill which proposed the abolition of marriage of girls under12.[24] These men, like the earlier nationalists, held that social institutions should not be reformed with the help of an alien government.[25] Instead of reforming their society, the *bhadralok*, at this stage, demanded more political rights, more posts in civil service and elected local governments. Thus the Ilbert Bill (1883) aroused more enthusiasm in Bengal than the Age of Consent (1890-92).

Apart from the emergence of nationalism, another reason why social reform movement waned was the success it had achieved. Between 1856 when the remarriage of widows was legalized and 1911, about five hundred widows were married.[26] This number was very small both in comparison with the total population in Bengal and the number of childwidows. In 1901, there were 1,290 widows under 12 among the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas. The total number of widows under 20 among these three castes was 10,891.[27] Nevertheless, the remarriage movement had its impact on the *bhadralok*. First, it inspired the reform of other institutions such as *kulin* polygamy, early marriage and brideprice. Second, despite the fact that widows were seldom remarried, the position of widows in the family was elevated to an extent. Most of the educated *bhadralok* now realized that widows were human beings and deserved more sympathetic treatment.[28] This change becomes evident from an instance that Sarala Debi narrated in her autobiography. Sarala mentioned the case of the widowed eldest daughter of Justice Chandramadhab Ghosh. She was a childless young widow of an educated and highly Westernized family. Nevertheless, she was not married off. However, she was instead given a sound English education and a very high place in the family, as if she was the mistress of the family. To Sarala, it seemed that everyone was being guided by her and every child in the family belonged to her.[29] It was in these circumstances that, in the 1880s, writers close to Hindu tradition such as Akshay Sarkar and Bankim Chandra Chatterji began to glorify both widowhood and widows.[30]

The practice of *kulin* polygamy could not be totally abolished till the end of the nineteenth century. In 1894, there were persons like Ishwar Chandra Mukerji of Barisal, who had

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21. See Debendranath's letters to Rajnarayan Bose, dated 7th Asharh, 1783 (June, 1861) and 13th Magh 1784 (January, 1863), *Maharshi Debendranath Thakurer Patrabali*, p. 32, 38.

22. For details see Dharmatatta, Sep.-Nov. 1871; *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Apr.-Jun., 1872; 'The Brahmo Samaj and the Native Marriage Act', Calcutta Review, pp. 294-305.

23. See my Ph.D. thesis, p. 236.

24. P. Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal*, p. 128.

25. Ibid., pp. 128-34.

26. Of these, 72 were married according to the provisions of the Brahmo Marriage Act of 1872, between 1872 and 1892. See *Report on the Administration of Bengal for the years 1882-83 and 1892-93* (Calcutta : Bengal Secretarist Press, 1883, 1893), p. 497, 582.

27. *Report on the Census of India*, 1901, Vol. VIA, pt. 2, pp. 292-95, 300-01.

28. See my Ph.D. thesis, pp. 52-54.

29. Sarala Debi Chaudhurani, *Jibaner Jharapata*, pp. 85-86.

30. See, for example, A.C. Sarkar, 'Hindu Bidhabar Abar Bibah Haoa Uchit Kina', in *Sabitri* (Calcutta : Sabitri Library, 1886), pp. 178-79.

married 107 times, and Kissori Mohan Mukherji of Burdwan, who still had 65 wives.[31] But the number of such cases was very small. As we will later see, even women themselves were becoming increasingly aware of the problem. Rasbehari Mukherji and Dawrkanath Ganguli, both of whom were members of polygamous *kulin* families, took part in the movement for abolishing *kulin* polygamy.[32]

The custom of early marriage too was partially checked, especially among the urban *bhadralok*. During the first half of the nineteenth century, girls used to be married at the age of 8 or 10, but by the end of the century the marriage age in most cases went up by at least three years.[33] Among the Brahmos the age was even higher. The Brahmos belonging to the Brahmo Samaj of India and Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, in fact, accepted it as a norm to marry their daughters after the latter had attained puberty.[34] The following table indicates that early marriage was becoming less popular :

TABLE 5[35]

Civil Condition of Boys and Girls under 16; number of married in every 1000

	Year 1881		*Year 1901*	
Age	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Girls*
0-5	54 (1 widower)	133 (6 widows)	9(1)	21 (1)
5-10	54 (1 widower)	133 (6 widows)	75(3)	201 (1)
10-15	238(8)	686(34)	215(3)	621 (30)

TABLE 6[36]

Married boys and girls per 1000 in Calcutta, 1901

Age	*Boys*	*Girls*
0-5	5.4	6.6
5-12	45	112
12-15	145	715

However, the Name table shows that until 1901, the problem of early marriage was so intense that in the city of Calcutta, boys and girls under the age of 5 used to be married. The 1901 census further shows that 10 Brahmo boys and 7 girls were married before they were

31. *BBP*, Dec. 1894-Jan., 1895, p. 286.

32. See, for details, my thesis, pp. 107-11.

33. P.C. Sarkar, 'Dristanter Phal,' *Hitasadhak*, Jun-Jul., 1986, p. 126; M. Basu, *Hindu Achar Byabahar* Vol. 1 (Calcutta : Madhyastha Press, 1873), p. 35; 'Balya Bibaha O Hindu Hitaishini', *Somprakash*, Sep., 1878, SBS IV, 285-86.

34. Indira Tagore was married when 26, Sarala Ghosal when 32, Kamini Ray when 30, Hemlata (Sibnath Sastri's daughter) when 25, Annadayini Labiri when 21, Abala Basu (Mrs. J.C. Bose) when 23, Kadambini Ganguli when 22, Kumudini Khastagir when around 30 and Priyambada Debi when 21. The Brahmos belonging to the Brahmo Samaj of India and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj used to marry their daughters according to the provisions of the Marriage Act of 1872 which fixed the minimum age of marriage at 14. In 1875, Sibnath Sastri and a number of other young Brahmos moreover organized an assoication the members of which took a vow not to marry any girl under the age of 18.

35. *Report on the Census of India*, 1901, Vol. VIA, pt. 1 (Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), p. 266.

36. *Report on the Census of India*, 1901, Vol. 7, pt. 3 (Calcutta : Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902), pp. 72-73.

12.[37] Even Rabindranath Tagore, who was so "progressive" in his attitudes towards women, married, in 1901, his second dauthter at the age of only 11 years and a half, because the proposed bridgroom, Satyendranath Bhattacherji, in Tagore's own language, "agreed to marry".[38] 'Possibly Tagore considered Bhattacherji to be a very good bridgroom. Bhattacherji was a qualified physician and was trying to go to America to study Homoepathic mediciine. This must have impressed Tagore; besides, he must have considered the fact that a Brahman bridgroom willing to marry in a Pirali Brahman family was hard to find.[39] Despite this kind of exception, the *bhadralok* were increasingly disfavouring early marriage. The reform movement, thus, had achieved some success.

However, the reason for the limits of this was to be found in the limitation of the *bhadralok* themselves. These people were, as already mentioned, English educated. But at that time, English education had hardly spread in area outside Calcutta, except for Dhaka and few other mofussil towns and, in caste hardly outside the small circle of the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas, who constituted only about 5% of the total population in Bengal. Hence, both English education and the social reform movement were limited to within that group of the Hindus, who were urbanized, and educated and belonged to the upper caste and the middle class. Moreover, the communication system, during those days, was extremely inadequate. Therefore, it took a few decades before the *bhadralok* reformers' agitation could permeate a wider segment of Bengali society. Consequently, reformers such as Harish Chandra Mitra, and Resbehari Mukherji, who came from the mofussil, took part in the movement during its second stage, when the organized *bhadralok* themselves had lost most of their reforming zeal in favour of politics.[40]

Women's response to the reform movement

Women's attitudes towards the reform movement, and their gradual change, reflect women's response to modernization as well. As we noticed in the first chapter, female education was hardly accepted by any one in the 1950s, notwithstanding the fact that the Bethune School was established in 1849. During the 1860s and 1870s, the number of girls' schools and the number of girls receiving education increased. The standard of female education was still very low. However, the Brahmo women who received education either from their respective husbands or from the *zenana* education programme organized by the Bamabodhini Sabha attained a better standard. Some of these women started to publish their writings first in *Bamabodhini Patrika* and later in *Abodh-Bandhu*, *Abala-Bandhab*, *Banga Mohila* and *Paricharika*.

Female education, women's position in the family and society, women's relationships with superiors, especially in-laws, and such other topics featured prominently in their early writings. Questions such as the desirability of the introduction of widow remarriage and of the abolition of *kulin* polygamy and early marriage were also discussed. However, the

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[37]. Ibid.,

These Brahmo boys and girls must have been of the Adi Brahmo Samaj.

[38]. P.K. Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindra Jibani,* Vol. 2 (3rd ed.; Calcutta : Visva Bharati, 1961), pp. 29-30.

[39]. The Tagores were descendants of an ancestor who is said to have lost his caste, because a Muslim chief, Pir Ali, ate beef in his presence. Since the number of such "polluted" Brahmans was very small and since other Brahmans would lose their castes if they married into a Pirali Brahman family, marrying the Pirali daughters was always a problem. The Tagores who chose most bridegrooms for their daughters from other Brahman families used to "buy" them with large sums of money. In some cases these men were to be housed in Jarasanko as well.

About how the Tagores became Pirali Brahmans, see P.K. Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindra-Jibani,* 1, 2-3.

Jnanadanandini Debi narrated in her *Smritikatha* that the Tagores used to 'buy" sons-in-law. Rabindranath too paid large sums of money to his sons-in-law. For details see Appendix 1.

[40]. See my thesis, pp. 438-39.

number of writings on social reform was very small, because the movement itself had ebbed away by the time the women started to publish. Particularly in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, women virtually did not write on such issues as widow remarriage and *kulin* polygamy, although the secular topics like female education, *purdah*, women's status in the family and their relationships with in-laws were repeatedly discussed in their writings.

The age of Consent Bill was directly related to women's welfare, because generally women were the greater victims of early marriage. As the great debate on the issue went on among men, the government waited for at least a couple of years before enacting the Bill and the proposed marriage age was lowered to 12. Surprisingly enough, Bengali women kept absolutely silent all the time. In one of her articles, published in 1984, Mankumari Basu wrote that the Age of Consent Act was beneficial to women.[41] During my research, I did not find any other article written by women in support of the Bill, although such articulate women as Krisnabhabini Das, Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani, Jnanadanandini Debi, Swarna Kumari Debi, Nagendrabala Mustafi and Kamini Sen published many of their writings during this period. The silence of Krisnabhabini Das, who had written on men's exploitation and oppression of women's for better social position and higher education, is especially significant. Krisnabhabini's husband, Professor Debendranath Das, was a liberal man. His elder brother, Upendranath, was a renowned playwright and producer of the 1870s. Inspired by Bidyasagar and helped by Sibnath Sastri, Upendranath married a widow in 1869 and thus incurred the displeasure of his relations including his father, Srinath.[42] Srinath was a well-known advocate at the Calcutta High Court and a personal friend of Bidyasagar. But despite this liberal atmosphere in the family.[43] Krisnabhabini was unable to take any positive stand on the question of the Age of Consent, because the *Bhadralok*, by the early 1890s, considered the reform of socio-religious institutions with the help of the alien rulers undersirable. The silence of Sarat Kumari, Jnanadanandini and Swarna Kumari was also no less significant. Indeed, at that time, women were tremendously influenced by men and consequently were unable to express any views contrary to those of men. Where men's and women's interests clashed, women were obliged to concede to men.

After the remarriage of widows was legalized, the *bhadralok* reformers who supported it expected a favourable response on the part of women, especially of widows. However, they were hoping against hope, as such a response on the part of women who were very traditional and devoid of all education would have been unnatural. Disappointed, the editor of *Sambad Bhaskar* wrote : 'After the Act was passed, I looked from house to house for widows who would respond favourably to it, but found none. No widow has, even jokingly, expressed her desire to get married'.[44] The only exception was one Bidya Debi, who said, in a letter published *Sambad Bhaskar* in August, 1856, that she was old and therefore did not want to get married, but hoped that this Act would alleviate the sorrows of hundreds of widows.[45] It is doubtful whether Bidya Debi's letter was genuine, because only a handful of women knew how to read and write at that time and the standard of their education was, in any case, very low. It was therefore very extraordinary for any one of them to have written a letter to a newspaper.

The concept of the remarriage of widows was so opposed to popular attitudes that it was absolutely exceptional for women or for that matter widows to support it. In 1870, while

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41. Mankumri Basu, 'Bigata Shatabarshe Bharat Ramaniganer Abastha', *BBP*, Jun-Jul., 1895, p. 89.

42. S. Sastri, *Atmacharit*, pp. 81-86.

The wedding was held in July-August, 1869. See *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1869, p. 117.

43. See my article on Krisnabhabini Das in *Jijnasa*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Jul.-Oct., 1982).

44. *Sambad Bhaskar*, 4 Dec., 1856, in *Samayikpatre Banglar Samajchitra*, III, 246-47.

45. Ibid., 21 Aug., 1856, III, 483-84.

analysing why widows did not want to marry again or, even if they wanted, why they did not admit it to others, a writer gave the following reasons : 1. widows considered remarriage an act of great sin; 2. society condemned the idea of remarriage; 3. at the beginning of widowhood, widows could not foresee the hardships of widowwhood; 4. immediately atter becoming widows, they received solace, sympathy and care from their relations and they thought this treatment they would continue; 5. because they knew that possibilities of marriage were remote, they did not give any thought to it; and 6. they patiently endured hardships of widowhood at the instance of other widwos.[46] Moreover, by the 1860s, when women began to publish their writings, the movement for widow remarriage was already on the wane. It was for this reason that women's participation in this movement was so limited. Nevertheless, the varying attitudes towards widow remarriage found in their writtings are quite interesting and help one to understand their attitudes towards modernization.

Kailashbasini Debi was influenced by the Brahmos. Both her association with Ananda Chandra Bedantabagish, an Adi Samajist Priest,[47] and her attitudes towards idolatry testify to this. However, her concern with the Hindu socio-religious institutions and her lack of any association with *Bamabodhini Patrika* suggest that she was not as unorthodox as the "progressive" Keshabite Brahmos. In her book *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha*, she expressed her categorical opinion on *Kulinism*, *polygamy*, early marriage, the position of women in the family and women's relationships with their husbands and in-laws. Possibly because she was not a widow, she unhesitatingly gave her opinion on widow remarriage as well. She regarded the hardship of widowhood as unbearable. With surprise and grief, she observed that the same ancient law-givers who called kindness the best human virtue, unkindly prescribed enforced celibacy, fasting and other physical hardships for widows including childwidows. She also observed that despite Bidyasagar's zealous hard work and huge expenditure, the movement for widow remarriage achieved only negligible success. She expressed her surprise as to why people did not accept widow remarriage which was approved by *Sastras*. In conclusion, she appealed to her countrymen to deliver the poor widows from their intense hardships.[48]

Another lady, in 1870, gave a detailed description of how widows were treated unkindly. Even if she did not positively advocate the remarriage as the solution to the problem of innumerable young widows, she at least tried to arouse some sympathy towards widows.

> Bengalis are traditionally hostile towards the widow. This hostility can be discerned not only among uneducated lower class people, but among the *bhadralok* as well. Parents, in-laws and other relations all the time look for faults on the part of the widow. The mistress of the house invariably becomes angry if the widow happens to wear good clothes, sleeps on a bed (instead of on the floor), sits on a good seat, eats good food and laughs with other women of her age. The widow can live in some honour only if her relations are kind and considerate, otherwise her life becomes unbearable. I have heard of and seen instances where the brother tried to cut the nose of the widowed sister, where the parents beat the widowed daughter, and the parents-in-law feed their daughter-in-law with rice and unhusked rice cooked together.[49]

However, Sarada Debi of Muzaffarpur, a "progressive" Brahmo lady, directly supported the cause of widow remarriage, as the Keshabite Brahmo men did. She argued : If a man can marry after the death of his wife and if this is not regarded as an act of sin, why then a widow should be blamed if she takes a second husband? Surely, God did not forbid the remarriage of

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46. 'Hindu Bidhaba' *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1870, p. 104.

47. In her second book *Hindu Abalakuler Bidyabhyas* (1865) a testimony by A.C. Bedantabagish was printed, Bedantabagish said that he knew Kailasbasini for a long time and that both her first and the second books were written genuinely by her without the assistance of her husband.

48. Kailasbasini Debi, *BBP*, Mar-Apr., 1871, pp. 366-67.

49. A lady, 'Bamarachana', *BBP*, Mar-Apr., 1871, pp. 366-67.

widows.'[50] There was no originality is Sarada Debi's argument. Akshay Kumar Datta. Bidyasagar and many others had argued in the same lines before. Nor was there any originality in what Ramsundar,[51] and Kshiroda Mitra[52] said in their articles, published more or less at the same time. But these articles were exceptional in the sense that not many women supported the remarriage of widows.

A lady from Barasat[53] and Brajabala Debi[54] published two remarkable poems on widow remarriage. They claimed that widows had to endure a great deal of physical and mental hardship as social customs and practices prescribed for them were so strict. being unable to stand them, some widows even went astray. Despite this and despite the fact that the remarriage of widows was approved by scriptures, the Hindus did not marry their child-widows, because they abided more by social customs and practices than by *sastric* codes. In her poem, Brajabala Debi, therefore, appealed to Bidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chatteji, Bhudeb Mukherji, Rajendralal Mitra and other prominent Bengali leaders to introduce the remarriage of widows. She questioned the Hindus : 'Do you think Hindu widows are in great agony? Why do you call the Yabanas i.e. the Muslims, butchers, when you yourselves are so unkind? She went on to term the Hindus more despicable than animals. Although no original argument can be found in these two poems, they are quite remarkable for their sincerity, vehemence and even passion.

However, as already mentioned, the spirit of reform lost much of its appeal with the emergence of nationalism. Therefore, when Brajabala Debi published her poem in 1876, women immediately protested against what she had argued. In the previous decade, whether or not many women wrote in favour of widow remarriage, at least none wrote against it. But, now that people were looking at their tradition with a sense of pride, women, even widows themselves, considered the remarriage of widows to be a matter of shame and guilt. Kamana Debi wrote in protest of Brajabala Debi that the enforced celibacy of widows was praiseworthy and that India could be proud of it. Imitating Brajabala Debi, she appealed to Bidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bhudeb Mukherji etc. not to support the movement for the remarriage of widows.[55] The other women, Kusum Kumini Debi, published her poem two months later and ridiculed Brajabala.[56]

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, women's attitudes towards widow reform increasingly hardened. It was thought that the alleviation of the sorrows of widows lay not in their remarriage but in the elevation of their position in the family. Pundita Ramabai Saraswati was herself a widow. Around 1885, she established a widow-home in order to give shelter to and educate widows and make them economically independent.[57] Sasipada Banerji established a similar widow-home in Bengal in 1887.[58] He got his idea from Ramabai. In the 1860s and 1870s, Sasipada had started to work for widow remarriage with almost religious zeal. But he saw how his remarried niece was physically assaulted before his own eyes.[59] He realized that society was highly prejudiced against the remarriage of widows. He therefore

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50. Sarada Debi, 'Bangadeshe Lokdiger etc., *BBP*, Nov.-Dec., 1866, p. 402.
51. Ramasundari, 'Edeshe Strishiksha etc.', *BBP*, Jul.-Aug., 1865, pp. 71-73.
52. Kshiroda Mitra, 'Dushita Deshacharer Nimitta Bilap', p. 341.
53. A lady from Barasat, *BBP*, May-Jun., 1867, pp. 525-26.
54. Brajabala Debi, 'Ami Ki Unmadini', *Banga Mahila*, Oct.-Nov., 1876, p. 166-67.
55. Kamana Debi, 'Amito Bidhaba', *Banga Mahila*, Nov.-Dec., 1876, pp. 186-89.
56. Kusumkamini Debi, 'Ke Likhilo', *Banga Mahila*, Jan.-Feb., 1877, pp. 235-38.
57. See my unpublsihed Ph.D. thesis, pp. 52-53.
58. 'Mahilashram', *BBP*, Mar.-Apr., 1888, pp. 371-74.

Also see A.R. Banerji, *An Indian Pathfinder : Memoirs of Sevabrata Sasipada Benerji* (Reprint; Calcutta : Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1973), pp. 84-85.

59. D. Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj* etc., p. 120; A. R. Banerji, pp. 61-62. 82-83.

decided to open this widow-home and thus try to elevate the condition of widows. His widow-home accepted widows who would not marry. However, when these widows were properly educated, 35 of them got married.[60] In the three decades that followed a number of women such as Krisnabhabini Das (1918), Abala Basu and Jyotirmayi Ganguli (1919) and Saraju Gupta established quite a few widow-homes.

In fact, with the spread of female education, women became more and more sympathetic towards widows, although they did not support the remarriage of widows. Mankumari Basu became a widow when she was only 18 and a half years old. She wrote many articles advocating better social status for women. Moreover, she claimed that the condition of Bengali widows was lamentable and emphasized the point that they deserved more sympathy and kindness.[61] But she too remained silent about the desirability of the remarriage of widows. whether or not this was due to her fear that people might think that she was herself pleading for her marriage is not clear. However, it is quite evident that women's attitudes followed the same course as that of men's. Women did not feel the need to antagonize man even when men were acting against the inerest of women. At least the change of women's attitudes towards widow remarriage so suggests.

If women were so traditional and different about widow remarriage, there was no ambivalence and vacillation in their stand on the issues of *kulin* polygamy and early marriage. *Kulin* polygamy was the problem of a very small section of the Brahmans. Nevertheless, many women, including those who were not Brahmans, wrote against the evils of this custom. Kailasbasini, a Kayastha, for example, devoted a large section of her book *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha* to *Kulinism* and its vices. She discussed in some detail how insignificant and meaningless *kulinsim* was and how *kulinism* intensified the problems of child widowhood, early marriage and marriage between a man and a woman with great difference of age.[62] Kshiroda Mitra, Sarada Debi, Yogindramohini Basu[63] and many others argued on the some lines. It is interesting to note that unlike widow remarriage women's attitudes towards Kulin polygamy were not divided. However, it is not clear why so many non-Brahman women criticized the institution of *kulinism*, when the intracaste character of *bhadralok* reformers was so predominant.[64] It is quite possible that their awareness of the evils of polygamy made them so opposed to the polygamous practices of *kulins*.

If non-Brahman women were so against *kulin* polygamy, one can guess how *kulin* Brahman women themselves became averse to the custom. Their hostility was expressed not only in their writings, but in other actions as well. In 1870, for instance, a *kulin* woman, named Krishamani, brought a legal action against her husband, Laxminarayan Mukherji, asking for her maintenance, and won it. The Court decreed that Mukherji would pay Rs. 15 per month as her maintenance. As Mukherji was unable to do this due to his poverty, he was jailed.[65] Another *kulin* woman, Haimabati won such a case in 1876.[66] Yet another woman, Lamitmohini, got a decree of almost a fortune. Among other things she spent a part of her money by giving a prize to a man who had written a book on the evils of early marriage.[67] Such legal actions against husbands may not seem significant now, but these cases were filed

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60. L.S. S.O 'Mally, *Modern India and the West* (Reprint; London : Oxford Uni. Press, 1968), p. 456.

61. Mankumari Basu, 'Bigata Shatabarshae etc.' pp. 327-28.

62. Kaliashasini Debi, *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha*, pp. 7-18.

63. Yogindramohini Debi, 'Kaulinya Pratha', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1871. p. 196. The articles of Kshiroda Mitra and Sarada Debi have been mentioned before.

64. See my Ph.D. thesis, p. 439-458.

65. *BBP*. Jun.-Jul., 1870, p. 111.

66. *BBP*, Sep.-Oct., 1876, p. 120.

67. *BBP*, Dec., 1891-Jan., 1892, p. 285.

when the idea of sueing husband was inconceivable in Bengal.[68] In fact, the accepted norm on the part of the *kulin* wife was that she would earn some money by spinning throughout the year and then tempt the husband to visit her at best once a year just for a night.[69]

A striking case of how female education made *kulin* girls conscious of the vices of *kulin* polygamy was that of Bidhuymukhi of Dhaka. In 1870, her uncles arranged her marriage with a *kulin* who had already 12 or 13 wives. Bidhumukhi had received some education. She was unable to accept this position. She therefore requested her maternal uncles to help her flee from home. With their help, she ran away to Calcutta where Durga Mohan Das, the Brahmo leader, offered her shelter. Angry and disappointed, her uncles brought a suit against her maternal uncles. Bidhumukhi explained her position before the Court and won the case.[70] At the instance of Das and other Brahmos, Bidhumukhi continued her education, most probably at the Ladies Scholl established by Keshab Chandra Sen. In 1874, she and Rajaninath Ray, a young Brahmo MA, got married.[71] Rajaninath later became the Comptroller of India. He was the first Indian to hold such a high position.[72] Instead of becoming the wife or rather a concubine of a polygamous *kulin*, Btdhumukhi thus ridically changed her life.

The *bhadralok* reformers who were themselves the victims of early marriage became conscious of its bad effects in the 1850s. The following table shows how early marriage was popular even among the educated families :

TABLE 7

Name	*Age When married*	*Age of Wife*
Debendranath Tagore	14/15	6
Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar	14	8
Rajnarayan Bose	17	11
Keshab Chandra Sen	18	9
Satyendranath Tagore	17	7
Kaliprasanna Sinha	14	
Ramesh Chandra Datta	16	
Sibnath Sastri	12/13	10
Bijoy Krisna Goswami		6
Bankim Chandra Chatterji	11	5
Jyotirindranath Tagore	19	8

Source : *Sahitya Sadhak Charitmala*, Vols. 1-6. (Bangiva Sahitya Parishat.)

However, once the *bhadralok* reformers became convinced that early marriage was a great social evil, they started a vigorous movement for its abolition. The emergence of nationalism in the 1870s slowed down the progress of the movement as a section of people close to tradition revised their opinion. For example, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, during this period, depicted a female character, Indira, who thus comments : People who say "Marry off your widows, don't marry your daughters until they are adults, and educate your women like men" will not understand the true significance of the devotion to one's husband.[73] Despite

68. Krisnabhabini Das, *Englande Banga Mahila*, p. 184.
69. For details, see my Ph.D. thesis, pp. 91-92.
70. *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1870, p. 211; Jan.-Feb., 1871, p. 313.
71. *BBP*. Apr.-May., 1874, p. 31.
72. *BBP*. Apr.-May, 1896, p. 30.
73. *Bankim Rachanabali*, Vol. 1 (5th ed.; Calcutta : Sahitya Sangsad, 1968), p. 374.

this kind of change of attutudes among a section of the *bhadralok*, educated women did not support early marriage. After all, they were the greater victims of early marriage. They had possibly realized its bad effects too well to write any thing in favour of early marriage.

Once again, Kailasbasini Debi was the one who first expressed her opinion against early marraige. She claimed that principal reason for the deplorable condition of women and society was early marriage. The husband-wife relationship, in her opinion, could never be based on perfect understanding if men and women were married so early. She added that as a result of early marriage anything ranging from the husband being a debauchee to frequent quarrels between the husband and the wife might happen. Moreover, she argued, children born to teenage parents of the parents might also suffer, the mother might even die in childbirth, and since the young husband had to earn for a big family, he would become permanently poverty- sricken. She further said that early marriage was mainly responsible for child wodowhood, because the mortality rate among children was very high. The wife's relationships with in-laws were far from satisfactory during those days. According to Kailasbasini, this too was the result of early marriage. In conclusion, she claimed, the problem of child widowhood and polygamy could never be solved unless early marraige was abolished.[74]

Many other women such as Jnanadanandini Debi, Krisnabhabini Debi, Sarada Debi, Nagendrabala Mustafi and Mankumari Basu attacked the custom of early marriage. However, they more or less argued on the same lines. As we saw in Table 5, the problem of early marriage was still of some magnitude at the beginning of the present century. Possibly this was the reason why so many women repeatedly advocated the abolition of early marriage. Since its abolition would not offend traditional society in the manner it would the introduction of widow remarriage, the emergence of nationalism could not halt its progress. True, most of the *bhadralok* did not support the Age of Consent Bill, but that was because, as already mentioned, they held that native socio-religious institutions should not be reformed with the help of government laws.[75] Indeed, with the passing of time, early marriage became increasingly undersirable both to educated men and women.

Limited nature of women's response to social reform

As might be expected, women belonging to *bhadralok* families, most of whom had received only a little education, did not feel the necessity of reforming any isntitution relating to society or the family other than the ones men were trying to reform. On the contrary, their reforming zeal changed according to that of men. They could have started the work of introducing divorce and better marriage laws, and these would have certainly alleviated some of their sorrows and raised their status in the family. But they still lacked such ideas. A comparison with Englishwomen's struggle for a better social position will clarify my point of argument. Englishwomen fought for almost half a century for married women's right to property. They brought legal suits, sent petitions to the Parliament and organized public support in favour of the proposed Married Women's Property Act. As a result of their sustained efforts, the Bill was finally brought before the Parliament in 1870, and after a great deal of opposition, was passed in 1887. The Marriage and Divorce Law also faced tramendous opposition, but at the insistance of women reformers, it was passed in 1857 and through successive amendments in 1858, 1884 and 1896, reached a shape satisfactory to women.[76] Although Bengali wives too had no right to property, they did not fight for such

74. Kailasbasini Debi, *Hindu Mahilar Hinabastha*, pp. 34, 37-43, 45.
75. Supra, pp. 173-76, 176-8.
76. R. Strachy, pp. 73-76.

rights. Nor did they fight for better marriage laws. In fact, the Hindu Marriage and Family Law was not passed until 1956, nine years after India became independent although social reformers, throughout the nineteenth century, had so ardently advocated the reform of the institution of Hindu marriage in the light of secular humanism. This reflects the lack of awareness on the part of Bengali women vis-a-vis Englishwomen. During the period under review, Bengali women were satisfied with what men kindly allowed them to enjoy, or in any case, they did not contradict male-defined society to get a better status with in it.

CONCLUSION

The movement for the "emancipation" of Bengali women was initiated by men. Therefore, in the true sense, it was not a movement for "liberating" women from the authority of men. On the contrary, men started the movement as apart of modernizing their own world. Those men who were imbued with Western ideas became increasingly aware of the subordinate position of their women as well as of the debased nature of the husband-wife relationship. They also became conscious that their women were illiterate, devoid of sophistication and accomplishments, and unable to share the success and glory of their public life. Apart from this feeling of inadequancy, they were moved by a sense of deep sympathy when they realized how social customs and practies such as *suttee*, enforced celibacy and *kulin* polygamy oppressed their womenfolk. They felt the need to reform these social institutions as well as to educate their women and thereby turn them into better wives and better mothers. In order to make them better companions and to enjoy a more significant social life, they also began to break the seclusion of their women. Thus, men's attempts to uplift their women were not meant for women's welfare alone, they were, at the same time, motivated by men's aspirations for the fulfilment of their own lives.

However, when women received some education and consequently new ideas regarding their lives and values developed some degree of individuality, and when all this altered their relationships with their husbands and in-laws as well as their roles and status in the family and society, men close to tradition began to criticize women and resisted such changes. Even a section of the Western influenced "progressive" Brahmos who had for so long advocated women's "emancipation" suddenly expressed their dispproval of unorthodoxy in women.

This sudden change of men's attitudes was caused because men had wanted to reform and thus modernize their women, but had not foreseen that as a result of this "reform" women would one day challenge the very authority of men over them. Indeed, men were alarmed by this development, however small, of a sense of individuality and personality among their women. The modernized women's relationshps with her husband and in-laws also caused a great deal of complications within the family, again because the wife's actual behaviour patterns and roles and others' expectations and conceptions of her behaviour patterns and roles largely differed. After the *bhadralok* reformers had educated their women and broken their seclusion, it was quite unrealistic for them to expect that "emancipated" women would retain their traditional behaviour patterns and values. Nevertheless, most of the *bhadralok* so expected. This, on the one hand, gave rise to a hostility among men to women's "liberation" as a whole, and on the other, strained the wife's relationships with her husband and other members of the family.

Consequently, the movement for the upliftment of women suffered a setback and, in many families, the husband-wife relationship was redefined and underwent a drastic change. For instance, Lilian Palit, who graduated from the Calcutta University in 1900, divorced her first husband and took a second husband. This was indeed unique till then in Bengal. Before this, the husband-wife relationship must have faced many a crisis, and as a result, the wife either got a good thrashing or was left for good at her parents' house while her husband married a second time. In some extreme cases, the wife solved the problem by committing suicide. That the *kulin* wife would permanently live with her parents and later with her elder brothers was an accepted norm. However, with some degree of modernization, the wife's

attitudinal and value changes were reflected in her behaviour. She was no longer ready silently to endure the unjust and unequal treatment of her husband. She therefore began to think of bringing law suits against her husband or even of divorcing him.

Apart from men's "disillusionment," the emergence of nationalism hardened the *bhadralok* attitudes towards both modernization and Westernization. The process of modernization came to be regarded as if it was infused from outside, especially from the West. As a result, the entire social reform movement, including women's upliftment, experienced a reversal. Although Satyendranath and Jyotirindranath Tagore, in the 1860s and 1870s, had set up a number of striking, even "rude" examples of how to "unveil" women, their younger brother, Rabindranath, who was in his youth known as "ultramodern" and fashionable, did not imitate them. In fact, he compromised with tradition so much that his wife could become not even half as 'liberated' as Satyendranth's and Jyotirindranath's wives. Rabindranath also chose not to give his daughters any formal education. Moreover, unlike Satyendranath (Jyotirindranath was childless), he married his daughters early.

This kind of change of attitudes was perceptible among women as well, particularly among the women who were politicized. The number of such women was almost negligible, but the change in them was unmistakable. Like the nationalist men, they, too, began to look at tradition with respect. For example, Sarala Debi, who once held radical ideas and undoubtedly developed a personal autonomy, and had refused to marry any one chosen by her parents and other relations, in 1905, agreed to marry a middle-aged widower, whom she had not met before the wedding ceremony.[1] That this man was from a well-known Punjabi Brahman family aroused Sarala's admiration so much that she could easily disregard the fact that this man was a widower. In fact, she pleaded in favour of Indian polygamous practice, saying : 'All women cannot endure it, but is it a fault if one can? Is it to be condemned if the whole nation can (endure it)'? Moreover, despite the fact that she was born and brought up in a strict monotheistic family, she readily agreed to observe the idolatrous rituals which were customary in her husband's family.[2] Although not as extreme as this, similar kinds of compromising attitudes can be discerned in Jnanadanadini Debi and Krisnabhabini Debi. Although highly Westernized, Krisnabhabini became quite traditional when she lost her husband and the only son in 1908.[3]

However, in spite of the reversal of the liberal movement for the upliftment of women, the women who were partially emancipated could neither go back into the *purdah* nor commit themeselves totally to domestic roles. They were also unable to give up the personal autonomy, the taste of which they had already enjoyed. As a result of all this, the conflict between men and these "liberated" women widened and these women became incresingly conscious of their rights.

The degree of modernization experienced by these women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was certainly small in comparison with what women's liberation means today, but quite significant in comparison with the conditions that earlier existed in the nineteenth century. That these women received some education, that they were ready to accept new ideas, that they began to express their opinions, that they developed some degree of personal autonomy and individuality, that they were concerned about their "progress," that they believed in "reformed" religious ideas, that their social relations underwent some changes, that their familial relationships were sometimes marked by such disruptive features as divorce and tension, that they established a better communication among women, and that

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1. Sarala Debi, *Jibaner Jharapata*, p. 185, 189.
2. *Ibid*., pp. 192-93.
3. For details, see my article on Krisnabhani in *Jijnasa*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Jul.-Oct., 1982).

they began to participate in social, political and economic activities, undoubtedly shows that they were exposed to the process of modernization, irrespective of its degree. Although the nature of modernization was uneven and only certain aspects of life and some individuals were exposed to it, the process of modernization changed both the self-perception of educated women as well as their image in the eyes of others. It also made the contradictions of the *bhadralok* apparent in that they were ready to accept new ideas and reform their lives in the light of these ideas, but were quite conservative in relation to their attitudes towards their family and women.

For women to write anything regarding love, their relationships with their respective husbands, and their private life was considered, at that time, indecent. Therefore, it is difficult to say in any detail how the process of modernization affected women's private life in the context of the family. However, the writings of traditional women who severely criticized the modernized women suggest that there had been considerable change in this respect. They began to abhor the dual standard of sex. Thus men's polygamous practices and extramarital sexual relationships were condemned by these women. They now expected more rights, if not equality, with their respective husbands. Such passages as the following two could not have been written earlier by any Bengali woman, and they certainly reflect the overall change that had permeated among the *bhadralok* women :

> Busy having degrees, educated Bengali men are always in search of their own happiness. The silent tears of the caged Bengali women fail to attract the attention of these men. They would possibly have heard us, if we could organize a movement for our emancipation similar to Englishwomen's movement for suffrage, if we could give up the meekness and weakness generally associated with women, and if we could express our genuine feeling and raise a hue and cry.[4]

> We must have the desire to go side by side with men in this world and believe that we are not slaves. We must be ready to do anything that will make us equal to men. If we can achieve this equality by independently earning our livelihood, then we must do that... Why shouldn't we earn? Haven't we hands? Legs? What doesn't we have? Can't we earn our living with the same labour that we have to expend in our houses.[5]

At the inital stage of the process of modernization, women prayed for their "emancipation" to the same men who had kept them in chains. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, at least some women became more aware of their rights. They therefore launched, in a modest way, a movement for the upliftment of women. The efforts of Swarnakumari Debi, Krisnabhabini Debi, Begum Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain and Sarala Debi to educate women do reflect this growing awareness on their part. Moreover, a few women such as Begum Rokeya realized that women could never be liberated if they totally depended for their living on their male relations. Rokeya's difference with the earlier women who stressed this point is that she did not consider only teaching, practising medicine and such other "respectable" occupations suitable for women, but, in her opinion, agricultural labour and business were equally suitable for them. This kind of awareness marked the beginnings of feminism in Bengal.

If after the World War I, conditions did not favour the rapid expansion of modernization of women, the 1947-Partition of Bengal which resulted in a large scale exodus of middle class Hindus from East Pakistan to West Bengal, especially to Calcutta, the increasing economic hardship faced by the *bhardralok* in general and these refugees in particular, and unprecedented expansion of education after the World War II did. The increased economic hardship on the lower middle class Bangladesh people, relying mainly on salaried jobs,

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4. Krisnabhabini Das, *Englande Banga Mahila*, pp. 300-01.

5. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, 'Strijatir Abanati,' *Matichur*, in *Rokeya-Rachanabali*, pp. 29-30.

created more or less a similar situation. Indeed a considerable number of Muslim women went for higher education and also for salaried jobs after the 1971 War of Liberation. It was due to these kind of changes that the *bhadralok*, despite their inherent conservatism towards women's modernization, were compelled to give higher education to their women and allow them to join the workforce. Consequently, not only was the custom of female seclusion totally abolished among them, but the status of the working woman was certainly elevated and her roles were redefined. Moreover, for the first time she became conscious of the size of her family as well as of the number of children she could afford to have. However, it is doubtful whether after all this, she was regarded by society as equal to man or even whether she herself claimed it.

APPENDIX ONE

Modernization of Bengali Women and the Tagore Family

Not many people worked for the modernization of Bengali women, especially at the initial stage in the nineteenth century. If any one family contributed significantly towards the cause of women, it was the Jorasanko Tagore family. The following discussion shows how a number of the Tagores, including some women, advanced the movement for the upliftment of Bengali women. It also throws light on the ideal of "emancipation" they advocated.

Satyendranth

Although his grandfather, the "Prince" Dwarkanath Tagore, realized the need to educate women,[1] and his father, Debendranath, educated all his daughters, Satyendranath was the first who came to believe whole-heartedly in the modernization of women. He advocated a kind of "emancipation" of women that was unknown to Bengal possibly even half a century later.

Educated first at the Hindu College in Calcutta and then in London, he took part in the Civil Service Examination held in 1863-64, and became the first native member of the Indian Civil Service in late 1864. He took up his position as an Assistant Judge in Ahmedabad (near Bombay) and served in different capacities until 1897, when he retired.[2] Possibly because he lived mostly outside Bengal, he did not receive the recognition he deserved as a literary figure and social reformer. He is even less known as one who worked for female "emancipation".

In his reminiscences of his boyhood and youth, Satyendranath thus claimed that he was in favour of breaking the seclusion of women :

> I have supported the cause of women since my boyhood days. Mother used to chide me, saying : 'What! Do you want to take women out to Garer Math for an airing?' I never approved of the prison-like arrangements in our *zenana*. I always considered seclusion a very harmful custom.[3]

As he grew up, his ideas of women's modernization became even stronger. He described how, in England, he found men and women freely taking part in social activities and how charming an influence women had in family life. Moreover, he found many married and unmarried women who devoted the whole of their time and energy to the welfare of society. He also noticed how stunted the lives of Bengali women were in comparision with those of Englishwomen. In his opinion, Bengali women were unable to develop either their mind or intellect because society was so hostile towards them.[4]

From what he wrote to his wife, at that time, it becomes clear now he felt for the downtrodden Bengali women :

> I now feel at home in England. However, the customs and practices of our country now make me more sick than ever before.

He further wrote :

> Whatever good fortune, progress, beauty and glory the people of this country have are due to the elevated position of their women. When will our country have this kind of good fortune? Progress is far away from a country where women have no freedom and have always to abide by the orders of their husbands and other

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1. Supra, p. 24.
2. For details, see B.N. Bandyopadhyay, *Satyendranath Tagore* etc., pp. 5-16.
3. S.N. Tagore, *Amar Balyakatha* (2nd ed., Calcutta : Baitanik Prakashani, 1967), p. 5.
4. *Ibid*.

superiors. Women are like flowers of the "garden of life". If they are kept shut for ever in their homes away from fresh air and light, how can men expect their own welfare?[5]

A big difference between Satyendranath and most nineteenth century Bengali reformers was that these reformers would advocate social reform for others while keeping their own families as close to tradition as possible, but Satyendranath would practise what he preached. He knew well that charity begins at home. In the same letter, Satyendranath further wrote : "I wish you to become an example to our women." However, he reminded his wife, "It depends mainly on how much you are prepared to and can accept change."[6]

Once he became aware of it, Satyendranath was occupied with the thought of how he could reform and thereby modernize his wife. The immediate possibility he could think of was to request his father to send Jnanadanandini Debi, to England where she might, receive a good education as well as acquire sophistication and accomplishments. How he was looking forward to her coming to England was reflected in another letter that he wrote to his wife a couple of months later in January, 1864. In this letter, he expressed his hope that she would greatly benefit from her visit to England :

Your mind and soul are now dry within the four walls of the *zenana*, but you will find a completely new environment when you come to England.[7]

He reassured Jnanadanadini saying :

I am asking you to come to England with no selfish motives, it is for your own welfare. I want you to receive education here and thereby improve yourself. I am certain you can improve your mind and soul a thousand times if you live in English society. By improving yourself you can help other women of our country, who will find in you an example to follow.[8]

Satyendranath knew that it was not easy for a Bengali woman to go to England, because her dress, her eating habits, her language, her manners, her fear and shyness and other such things would be great obstacles. Therefore he kept on persuading Jnanada in letters, assuring her that the journey would be safe and her stay in England would be enjoyable. 'Moreover', he wrote–'you do not know how significantly this visit can help you.'[9] Next month, he wrote, 'England will offer you a freedom you never experienced before'.[10]

It is not known whether Jnanada agreed to go to England. But, traditional in his social outlook, Debendranath rejected Satyendranath's proposal. Thus Jnananda's visit to England was called off. Frustrated, Satyendranath wrote to his wife :

I asked father to send you to England. But all my efforts have failed. Father wants me to abide by the conventions and customs of the *zenana*, in other words. I kept you caged for ever within the four walls of the *zenana*. I don't understand, darling, how can I act according to my father's wish! I shall never be happy if I keep you caged nor will your body and mind develop thereby. I wonder why men consider giving education and freedom to women to be the root of great evil. I, on the contrary, think our backwardness is due to the fact that we keep our women illiterate and do not give them any liberty. How a society be can really advance if its women are uplifted can be realized when one comes to England. If you live in England for only two years after having lived in the *zenana* for 25 years, you will then realize that two years in England is better than 25 years in the *zenana* so far as the development of your mind and intellect is concernd.[11]

Satyendranath was disappointed and dejected at the setback of his plan. However, he did not give up his hopes to modernize his wife and thereby make his relationship with her meaningful. After he returned from England, he took his wife to his place of work in Western

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5. S.N. Tagore's letter to Jnandanandini Debi, No. 2 16 Nov., 1863, in *Puratani*, p. 46.
6. *Ibid.*
7. S.N. Tagore to J., letter no. 5 18.2.1864, p. 53.
8. *Ibid.*, No. 3, 11.2.1864, pp. 49-50.
9. *Ibid.*, 4, 18.1.1864, p. 51.
10. *Ibid.*, No. 18.2.1864. p. 53.
11. *Ibid.*, No. 8.2.7, 1864, pp. 58-59.

India thus away from the ancestral home to the place of work. He reformed her dress and started to educate her. Later he broke one after another the customs and practices concerning female seclusion. Many of these incidents which may seem insignificant now, raised a great deal of noise in contemporary society. That Jnanada rode a carriage on her way back home from the ship, that she wore unorthodox dress, that she attended a party given by the Governor-General, that she went to England, and that she took part in private theatrical performances angered her relations and attracted harsh criticism from others.[12] But, as Satyendranath wanted her to become an "example" to other women, Jnanadanandini went on violating social practices, particularly those relating to female seclusion. Satyendranath had a high social position as well as decent independent income, moreover, he lived mostly away from Bengal. Therefore, he was neither afraid of social criticism nor obliged to abide by the conventions of the big joint family of the Tagores.

Had Satyendranath aimed only to break female seclusion, his ideal of "emancipation" would have been very limited in nature, although quite bold. However, he aimed much further. Although it is obvious that many social reformers at that time became aware of the inadequate nature of the husband-wife relationship, it is not known exactly how they felt about this inadequancy, because either they did not write about it or because no such writing now survives. Fortunately, Satyendranath's letters to his wife show clearly his attitudes towards the husband-wife relationship-both towards the existing relationship and the one he thought ideal.

In one of his letters to his wife, he thus depicted the existing married life of Bengalis :

> Most peope of our country live a life that is not worth living. They have to be satisfied with the bare minimum of food. Before they can grow up properly they get married with the "grandeur" they can afford and as a matter of course they then beget children. When the "child-wife becomes a mother, her life is fulfilled. This is how most people live and they are contented with this.[13]

Satyendarnath analysed the reason. He thought this misery was due to the overwhelming power of social customs and practices and to the inability of individuals to live as individuals. However, imbued with modern ideas, his ideal of of marraige and of the husband-wife relationship were different. He wrote to his wife, explaining his point of view :

> You were too young to understand the meaning of marriage when you were married to me. You and I could not marry of our free will, rather our guardians arragned our marraige. Tell me, darling, is this not correct? Althought I did not tell you anything regarding this, you know my feelings. Until you attain the proper age and education, and you acquire a sophistication in every respect, we will not enter the husband-wife relationship. Tell me, don't you approve of this idea? You know how dearly I love! However, I have written to father saying that I will remain waiting for you as good seeds wait to grow in a well cultivated fertile piece of land. Your body and soul are still dry ... You did not marry me, rather your father married you off to me. Don't you think we will be happy only when we enter our relationship of our free will and with genuine love?[14]

It was indeed extraordinary for a Bengali to have written like this either to his father or to his wife. It is doubtful if any one even fifty years later, including his illustrious younger brother, Rabindranath Tagore, conceived of writing such things to his wife. When compared to other contemporary reformers, his attitudes towards female "emancipation" seems distinctly different. Whereas Keshab Chandra Sen, Manomohan Ghosh, W.C. Bonerji, Durgamohan Das, Annada Charan Khastagir, etc., tried to "emancipate" women from without by relaxing female seclusion and giving them the rudiments of education, Satyendranath tried to "emancipate" them from within. He was able not only to give his wife a good education, but he tried to develop her individuality as well. It was through his invincible efforts that he

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12. *Supra*, pp. 74-75.
13. *Ibid*., No. 2 16.11.1864, p. 47.
14. *Ibid*., No. 3 11.1.1864, p. 48-49.

was able to turn his illiterate and unsophisticated wife into a lady as she later became. The letter he wrote to her from Bombay between 1866 and 1868 when she was living in Calcutta shows his great concern about what books she was reading and about whether she was taking regular lessons from a European lady. A true liberal, he showed no incongruity in his belief and action. His ideal of female "emancipation" was deeply rooted and he based his relationship with his wife according to this ideal. Another difference that distinguishes Satyendranath from other contemporary reformers is his desire to acquaint Bengalis with the Western ideal of female emancipation. His desire to do so was reflected in his translation of J.S. Mill's book *Subjection of Women*.[15]

If Satyendranath showed his remarkable zeal for female emancipation by modernizing his wife and by developing her into an individual, Jananda showed equal readiness to accept new ideas and change accordingly. Jnanda was married to Satyendranath at the age of seven. At that time she was illiterate. However, as Debendranath had by then realized the need to educate the female members of his family, Englishwomen and Baisnabis were engaged to teach all the daughters and daughters-in-law of his family. Jnanada thus started to receive some education. Satyendranath came back from England in late 1864. at that time she knew a few words in English. But in several years' time she not only learnt both Bengali and English well, but read a great deal to become an accomplished lady. She also learnt Marathi and Gujrati. Besides, when she went to France, she learned a bit of French.[16]

Her first article in the form of a letter was published in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1871.[17] She later published in such standard magazines as *Bharati*.[18] She even edited the monthly Balaka in 1885-86.

If her articles on female education and scoial reform now seem to some extent traditional, during those days they did not lack in modernism. In her life style and attitudes, she was as modern as any other enlightened Bengali woman of the 1880s and 1890s. That she did not favour indiscriminate Westernization was because politicized Bengalis as a whole were becoming nationalist and anti-west in their attitudes. That she advocated only a limited emancipation of women and that she maintained that women's principal roles were those of childcare, housekeeping and cooking[19] was because the consicousness of Bengali women at that time had not reached the stage of feminism.

Jnanada Debi ably helped her husband. Without her cooperation, Satyendranth's efforts to break her seclusion and set an example of female emancipation would have failed. She took part in theatrical performances and proved to be an excellent actress.[20] That she took on the role of an organizer of women's activities was laudable. She also designed more appropriate dress for Bengali women of that period. She introduced blouses and petticoats among Bengali women. When social reformers in the early 1870s were still discussing and designing a model dress for Bengali women, Jnanada Debi offered through the *Bamabodhini Patrika* to give advice regarding the 'reformed dress' and send photographs of it to any woman who would write to her. Jnanada Debi also innovated the present style of wearing the sari. This may not seem to be a great reform now, but when one considers that the dress of Bengali

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15. B.N. Bandyopadhyay has given to understand that this translation was published before 1868 (Sayendranath Tagore etc., p. 28), but it is doubtful whether it was published at all. *Subjection of Women* was not published until 1868.

16. *Supra*, pp. 83-84.

17. 'Banga Mahila Paricchad' *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1871. However, her name was not mentioned.

18. The first article she published in the *Bharati* was in 1881.

19. For details, see her article 'Strishiksha', *Bharati*, Jun.-Jul., 1881.

20. A.N. Tagore, *Gharoa* (Reprint; Calcutta : Visva Bharati, 1944), pp. 67-68.

women in the nineteenth century was not at all suitable for outdoors or for formal occasions, Jnanada Debi's contribution can be said to be significant.[21]

Debendranath was quite conservative in his social attitudes and had great influence over the members of his family. Therefore the customs of the *zenana* were more or less rigorously observed at the Tagore house. Nevertheless, Satyendranath was able to introduce some reforms in female education and seclusion in their family. At least in the 1870s, the female members of their family were subject to less stringent rules of seclusion. Actually, Satyendranth had a moderating influence upon some of his younger relations.

Jyotirindranath Tagore, one of his younger brothers, was intially unfavourable towards female emancipation and started his career as a playwright by writing a farce named *Kinchit Jalayog* in which he ridiculed both the advocates of female emancipation and emancipated women. Young Jyotirindranath, being the Secretary of the Adi Samj, voilently attacked Keshab Chandra Sen's Brahmo Samaj of India in this farce. Keshab was given the name Patitapaban Sen and was disparaged for his policies of women's emancipation. Neither was the portrayal of the characters of the emancipated heroine and her husband purely literary. Jyotirindranath certainly wanted to leave a moral for his readers–emancipation of women is bad.[22]

But Jyotirindranth soon changed at the instances of his elder brother. He has himself related how Satyendranath had a liberalizing influence upon him.[23] This is why inspite of its popularity, Jyotirindranath did not reprint the farce a second time. Moreover, in a few years' time, he was so opposed to the rules of seclusion that he started taking his wife out of doors. He and his wife would even go round the crowded streets of Calcutta on horseback. The people around would naturally stare at them in utter astonishment.[24]

It should, however, be mentioned here that inspite of his apparent radical behaviour, he never genuinely became as liberal as his elder brother, Satyendranath. Although he would go round the streets of Calcutta with his wife, he never tried to "emancipate" her from within. Therefore she was not able to be free in the true sense of the term. Like Purnachandra, the hero of the farce, Jyotirindranath too, as claimed by some authors including Kazi A. Wadud, had an extramarital love affair. The heroine, Bidhumukhi, only threatend to divorce her husband, but Jyotirindranath's wife, Kadambari Debi, had to commit suicide to get rid of her husband.[25] In fact, the women of that period were so dependent upon men in every respect that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to be emancipated. Giving women a bit of education and subjecting them to less rigorous rules of seclusion were becoming fashions of the day, especially among the educated urban people. Jyotirindranath was no exception.

Hemendranath, another younger brother of Satyendranath was also considerably influenced by Satyendranath. The latter used to live away from the ancestral home and it was Hemendranath who was responsible for the proper education of the female children of the Tagore family. He carefully designed a course for the children and the illiterate adults. According to his plan they were taught not only to read and write, but they were given lessons

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21. For details, see Appendix 3.

22. *Kanchit Jalayog* was published in 1872. The relationship between Adi and Keshab's Brahmo Samjas was very bitter at that time.

23. *Jyotirindranather Jibansmriti*, p. 138.

24. Ibid.

25. The reasons why Kadambari Debi committed suicide are not known for certain. Different views relating to this incident have been discussed in some detail by S. Rudra in his *Kadambari Debi* (Calcutta : Asha Prakashani, n.d., pp. 21-24) and Chitra Deb in her *Thakurbarir Andar Mahal*, pp. 72-74.

in music and dancing.[26] Most of the Calcutta Girls' Schools of that time used to teach needle work, but music and dancing were still out of their syllabus.

Rabindranath

Of all the members of the Tagore family, Rabindranath's contribution to the modernization of women was the most significant. He imbibed his liberal ideas not only from his brother, Satyendranath, but he was also greatly influenced by English society. The letters that he wrote from England during his first visit in 1878-79 when he was in his teens and the diary he kept during his second visit in 1890 reveal his admiration for English society as well as for the emancipation of women in that society. In one of the above mentioned letters which was published in *Bharati*, he thus expressed his opinion in favour of women's emancipation :

> For men and women to get together and enjoy amusements is only natural. Aren't women human beings? Hasn't God created them as a part of society? To regard such social gatherings of men and women as against social norms or as a matter of great sin is not only unnatural, but uncivil as well...We only show our disrespect to God, when we treat women who constitute half of our society as animals and consider this a divine command ... We can easily realize, when we come to England, how much of our happiness and progress we sacrifice by keeping our women "exiled" from our "world"... What is the first thing that most surprises the Indians who come to this country? It is of course the contribution of women to the progress and happiness of English society. The Indians who were previously against women's emancipation must have completely revised their views on it, after having lived in England for some time.[27]

Even if these observations are a bit precocious, there is no ambiguity about what he wanted to convey in the above passage. This reminds the reader of the letters that Satyendranath wrote to his wife from England. At that stage, he was most certainly influenced by the position of women as well as by the man-woman relationship in English society. Rabindranath's relations, including his father, were apparently alarmed when they found the eighteen year old "Rabi" writing such letters. In fact, his father soon called him back from England.[28]

Although he later ceased to be so "radical", he continued to write in favour of women's modernization. In his writings, he, on the one hand, portrayed the degradation and dishonour of Bengali women and thus tried to arouse the sympathy of his readers, and on the other, expressed his ideal of women's emancipation.

The women in his early fiction are certainly traditional. They are depicted as oppressed by cruel social customs. They silently obey their superiors and put up with all the dishonour that may befall them. In his earlier writings, one can find narrated the deplorable condition of childwidows,[29] the repression of the joint family,[30] the practice of polygamy,[31] and the evil consequence of early marriage.[32] Women are even subject to physical sufferings.[33] Unlettered and without any accoplishment, these women have not developed their personalties. Pictures of rigorous seclusion are also quite common in his fiction. Some of his heroines are not even allowed to meet their husbands during the day, or converse with near

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[26]. For details see his son, Kshitindranath's work *Arya Ramanir* etc., passim. His daughter, Prathibha Debi, was one of the most accomplished ladies of that time. See Chitra Deb, pp. 88-92, 94-100.

[27]. 'Europeyatri Kono Bangiya Yubaker Patra', *Bharati*, Nov.-Dec., 1879, p. 507.

[28]. P.K. Mukhopadhyay, *Rabindra Jibani*, p. 95.

[29]. Characters like Mohini ('Karuna', 1877-78), Kusum ('Ghater Katha', 1884), Sonamani (A'tithi', 1895), Damini and Nanibala (Chaturanga, 1914), Kusum ('Tyag', 1892) and Shailabala (Prajapatir Nirbandha, 1901).

[30]. Short stories like 'Denapaona' (1891), 'Tyag' (1892), 'Aparichita' and 'Strir Patra' (1914).

[31]. For example, the short story 'Madyabartini' (1893).

[32]. Apart from the child-widows mentioned in footnote 31, Kumu ('Dristidan', 1899), Shashimukhi (*Gora*, 1910), the heroine of the short story 'Kankal' (1891), etc., are also married during their childhood.

[33]. Nirupama of 'Denapaona' does not even get proper medical treatment when she becomes ill and dies uncared.

relations. A reader of Tagore cannot but be critical of the social customs that oppressed Bengali women.

However, in his later writings, one can find the other side of the picture. Here, Tagore has described the emergence of the first modernized Bengali women. In personality and attitudes towards life and the world his later heroines are indeed quite different. The settings are also different. Although within the context of a family, these women are mature enough to be able to think for themselves. These heroines for the first time come out of the kitchen and bedroom to the parlour where they argue with men and exchange ideas. They are individuals who reflect a set of modern values. They look at society from a standpoint which was against traditional social values.

The widows such as Binodini, Damini, Nanibala, Manjulika and Sohini,[34] are different from earlier widows such as Mohini, Shaila, Kadambini and Sonamani.[35] The later widows are not strictly traditional, nor are the child wives in big joint families, Nirupama and Brindaban's wife silently bear all the oppressions they are subject to as wives in joint families and at the end are compelled to accept death.[36] It is not even known whether they felt this oppression or not. Kusum, Haimanti and Binu[37] are also victims of the joint family system. But Mrinal of the short story 'Strir Patra' is an exception. An unhappy member of a big joint family where the development of her personality is every moment ignored, she refuses to put up with this oppression. After 15 years of married life, she leaves her home and husband and finds herself under the blue sky where she can breathe with the freedom she has desired so long.[38] Rabindranath has condemned the tyranny of the joint family in a number of his stories and poems, but what makes 'Strir Patra' different is that in this story Mrinal has developed her individuality and finally revolts against the social values so dearly preserved by the Bengali middle class.

One may question how Tagore came to write such a bold story. He was always courageous, but in his later life, especially after he received the Nobel Prize in 1913, he became even more so. It was at this stage that he ventured to experiment with colloquial Bengali and new rhymes as well as social themes. Actually, in a brief span of two or three years after *Sabujpatra* was published, he wrote the short stories, 'Strir Patra', Haimanti' and 'Aparichita', the novels *Chaturanga* and *Ghare Baire* and the *Balaka* poems.

Rabindranath himself was a member of a very big joint family and, as a highly sensitive individual, must have felt this oppression on its members. The position of women in such a family is still worse. It has already been discussed how his wife was forced to leave the Jorasanko house of the Tagores and live first in Shilaidah and then in Santiniketan.[39] While writing this story 'Strir Patra', Tagore certainly remembered the oppression that his dead wife had to endure and perhaps as a revenge wanted to attack at once his own family and Bengali society.

The response of his later heroines to female seclusion is also very bold. Some actually rejected all rules of seclusion. They are aggressive young women who freely mix with their friends and even talk about sexual matters. One can here mention the names of such women

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34. Binodini (*Chokher Bali*, 1903), Damini and Nanibala (*Chaturanga*, 1914), Manjulika ('Manjulika', *Palataka*, 1918) and Sohini ('Laboratory', 1940).

35. Kadambini ('Jibita O Mrita', 1982).

36. Brindaban's wife ('Sampatti Samarpan', 1981).

37. Binu ('Phanki', *Plataka*, 1918).

38. S.N. Ray, 'Variations on the theme of individuality : Hinduism, the Bengal Renaissance and Rabindranath Tagore', The Visva Bharati Quarterly, Vol. 41, Nos. 1-4 (May, 1975-Apr., 1976), p. 208.

39. Supra, p. 136.

as Bilbha, Ketaki, Suriti, Sohini and Nila.[40] One can also recall how Ela kisses and embraces Atin and how, immediately before she is to be killed she, on a sudden impulse, uncovers her breasts before him.[41] Her behaviour was most certainly unorthodox in the context of the then Bengali society Sohini and Nila are also no less unorthodox. Rabindranath, however, created all these characters during the last decade of his life. In fact, in the second quarter of the present century, urbanization in Bengal started to bring about some changes in the life style of Bengali women. Throughout his life Rabindranath pictured his contemporary society quite accurately. In the last decade of his life, in some instances he perhaps became even "ultra" modern.

In his personal life, he was a victim of early marriage. As a dashing young man of 23, he was compelled to marry a girl of 11 who had neither education nor accomplishments. His relations tried to educate her. They even changed her old fashioned name. She learnt Bengali and Sanskrit and a bit of English. On one occasion she is said to have taken part in a theatrical performance.[42] Not withstanding all this, Rabindranath did not find in her the companion he might have expected. He had previously known such accomplished ladies as Ana Turkhur of Bombay,[43] not to mention the names of Jnanadanandini Debi, Kadambari Debi, Indira Debi, Sarala Debi and Pratibha Debi of their family. Whether because he was completely dependent upon the income of his father or because he had not developed his personality, Rabindranath had to accept the marriage. He also apparently accepted the social norm of girls being married off in their childhood. This is why most of his earlier heroines are married during their childhood or adolescence. Such women are naturally uneducated and ignorant of premarital love. One of his heroines, Sucharita of the novel *Gora* (1910) is educated and accomplished. She is even involved in a premirital love affair. Moreover, she has fully developed her personality and talks like a mature person. But Tagore describes her as only 17 or 18. What is all the more striking is that she was described as 14 or 15 when the novel was appearing in the monthly, *Prabasi*.[45] Lalita of the same novel too seems quite mature, though she is said to be only 13 or 14.

But as years passed by, with Rabindranath's changed outlook, the marriage age of his heroines became higher. The following table can give an idea of this :

TABLE 8

Year of Writing/ Publication	*Name of Heroine*	*Novel/ Story/ Poem*	*Unmarried till*	*Remarks*
1884	Kusum	'Ghater Katha'	7	
1892	Surabala	'Ekratri'	11	
1895	Sonamani	'Atithi'	5	

40. Bibha ('Rbibar', 1939), Ketaki (*Shesher Kabita*, 1929), Suriti ('Pragati Samhar', 1941), Sohini and Nila ('Laboratory', 1940).

41. *Char Adhyay*, 1934.

42. Chitra Deb, *Thakur Barir Andar Mahal*, p. 78.

43. Daughter of Atmarang Pandurang, Ana was a highly Westernized young lady. Before sending young Rabindranath to Englachita', Kumudini from Yogayog (1927-28), and Nandini from Raktakarabi (1924).

48. 'Badnam', 1941.

49. M. Roy, Bangali Women (Chicago : Chicago University Press, 1975), p. 48

50. 'Gaurab, Swadhinata O Aparatantra', Jnanankur, Apr.-May, 1874, p. 2

0-265.

51. D. *P. Ra*ychaudhuri, 'Striswadhinat

1899	Kumu	'Dristidan'	8	
1899	Hemangini	'Dristidan'	15	Kulin
1903	Kurani	'Malyadan'	16	Immature growth
1903-05	Hemnalini	*Naukadubi*	17/18	Brahmo
1907-10	Sucharita	*Gora*	17/18	Brahmo
1907-10	Lalita	*Gora*	13/14	Brahmo
1914	Haimanti	'Haimanti'	17	Brought up outside Bengal
1914	Kalyani	'Aparichita'	16	Brought up outside Bengal
1918	Dipali	'Patrapatri'	25	Offspring of intercaste marriage
1927-28	Kumudini	*Yogayog*	19	
1928-29	Labanya	*Shesher Kabita*	20s	Highly Westernized
1932-33	Urmimala	*Dui Bon*	20s	
1934	Sarala	*Malancha*	30	
1934	Ela	*Char Adhyay*	29	

While portraying women's emotional conditioning and inner conflicts, Rabindranath naturally raises the question of marital relationships. It was the rule of the society that a marriage ceremony would give a husband the sole right over his wife's body and soul and the wife would accept this without question. But the heroines in his later fiction having each developed into an individual question this authority, his heroes also realise that the wife's heart is to be won.

One of the best examples of this can be found in the novel *Ghare-Baire* (translated under the title *The Home and the World*) The hero, Nikhilesh, like Rabindranath's brother Satyendranath, engages a European lady to educate his unlettered wife and endeavours to win her heart. He introduces his friend, Sandwip, to his wife, Bimala. She soon falls in love with Sandwip and reaches a point where she could have easily been seduced. Her relationship with her husband faces a serious crisis. But Nikhilesh, a true believer of humanist ideals and personal freedom, knows that 'risks have to be taken if the individual is to discover himself and make his relationships creatively meaningful.'[46]

The most striking feature of all the modern heroines in Tagore's writings is the development of their individuality. These women are discontent and are engaged in a search for personal autonomy. Binodini, Anandamayi, Sucharita, Lalita, Bimala, Mrinalini, Kalyani, Haimanti, Damini, Kumudini, Nandini, Ela and Sohini,[47] are all such characters. Each of these women has her own distinctions which make her different from others. All of them can challenge and, if need be, even deny the authority of their superiors and thereby of the age-long values on which the society stood. Although she has to accept defeat silently, Kumudini of the novel *Yogayog* refuses to sleep with her husband. Lalita of the novel *Gora* even refuses to abide by the codes of the religion of her family. On analysis, one can see that none of these characters were created earlier than 1901, actually one (Binodini) in 1910-03, three (Anandamayi, Sucharita and Lalita) in 1907-10, and the rest in or after 1914. By portraying such bold characters, Rabindranath was possibly able to influence and encourage the modernization of women in Bengal.

It was only natural that he considered female education as a precondition of the modernization of women. Though his earlier heroines are not engaged in educational pursuits, his latter heroines are. Some of these women like Labanya (*Shesher Kabita*) and Ela

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', Sopan, Vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1979), p. 115; 'Strishiksha', Somprakash, 30 Shraban 1289 (Aug., 1882 is SBS, IV, 576-77; S. Ra

, 'Loksankhya', Nabyabharat, Feb.-Mar., 1884, *p. 4*70.

52. R. N. *Tagore, Cre*ative Unity (London achita', Kumudini from *Yogayog* (1927-28), and Nandini from *Raktakarabi* (1924).

(*Char Adhyay*) have university degrees. Urmimala really advocates that sort of education which helps one to acquire individuality and a development of character. This is why all of the heroines of his later fiction, irrespective of the level of their formal education, have a sharp individuality and a developed character. They have definite views on life and the world. Some of them for example Saudamini[48] and Ela, are even highly politicized. Sohini's consciousness regarding science is also remarkable in the context of Bengali society as it then was.

As years passed by, Rabindranath's educated heroines also became more and more secular. The earlier ones whether Hindu or Brahmo, are quite loyal to their institutionalized religion. But it was first in the novel *Gora* that his otherwise very religious heroines like Anandamayi, Sucharita and Lalita transcend the boundaries of institutionalised religion. His later heroines are almost unconcerned with religion. These changed attitudes towards religion definitely constituted modernism.

Rabindranath has also depicted a new development in man-woman relationships. In Bengali literature, it was first in his writings that a man and a woman can be friends without being married or otherwise related, and thus work together and respect each other.[49] His pictures of extramarital and premarital romatic love are also the first in Bengali literature. Finally, the later heroines are shown as members of nuclear families and thus capable of developing their personal autonomy further than could the earlier ones.

But Rabindranath's portrayal of women's modernization is still not ideal. Basically, his women are inferior to men. In their social outlook, they are still, in the most part, traditional because they are not subject to the growing economic pressure of that period. Although almost all the women in his later fiction live in towns, the impact of urban living on their life style, except in the areas of *purdah* and education, is almost negligible. Possibly, he has also a definite dislike, if not hatred, for unorthodox dress, makeup and Westernized life styles.

Tagore undoubtedly worked for the modernization and upliftment of women, but he overlooked or possibly even hated the idea of educated women taking up jobs. Not one of his heroines is a working girl. One cannot deny the fact that for complete emancipation of women, economic independence is essential. As early as the 1870s, the editor of *Jnanakur*, wrote that a wife would not be subject to all that humiliation and dishonour including thrashing if she did not have to depend on her husband for her living.[50] In the 1880s, there was more support for this view.[51] But Rabindranath could not accept or welcome this view even in the 1930s, although he was aware of the fact that man has a sense of superiority which the power of the purse confers upon him and that he has from time immemorial dominated women by 'the powers of muscle and of money.'[52] To him, woman's search for 'her freedom of livelihood' and struggle 'against man's monopoly of business' are not important.[53] Instead of advocating "emancipation" of woman from her present subservience, he idealizes 'womanliness' which according to him meant love and self-sacrifice. He therefore glorifies the example of 'Sita who had no other reward for her life of sacrifice than the sacred majesty of sorrow.'[54]

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48. 'Badnam', 1941.

49. M. Roy, *Bangali Women* (Chicago : Chicago University Press, 1975), p. 48

50. 'Gaurab, Swadhinata O Aparatantra', *Jnanankur*, Apr.-May, 1874, p. 260-265.

51. D. P. Raychaudhuri, 'Striswadhinata', *Sopan*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1979), p. 115; 'Strishiksha', *Somprakash*, 30 Shraban 1289 (Aug., 1882 is SBS, IV, 576-77; S. Ray, 'Loksankhya', Nabyabharat, Feb.-Mar., 1884, p. 470.

52. R. N. Tagore, *Creative Unity* (London : Macmillan & Co., 1922), p. 162.

53. R.N. Tagore, *Personality* (London : Macmillan & Co., 1919), p. 181.

54. *Creative Unity*, p. 163.

There are contradictions in his personal life as well. He himself did not follow everything he wrote. Though very much against early marriage in his later writings, he married off all his children early. His eldest daughter, Madhurilata, was married when she was 14 years 8 months old; the second daughter, Renuka, when 10 years 8 months, and the third, Mira, when 14 years 6 months. His son, Rathindranath, was married when he was only 21 year 2 months old. Rabindranath himself was married when he was 22 years 9 months old. One can here compare him with Satyendranath and find that the latter had much less of contradictions.

Satyendranath's only daughter, Indira Debi, was married when she attained the age of 26, to a man she had been courting for some time. Rabindranath did not allow his daughters to choose their husbands. He married his eldest daughter, Madhurilata, to Sarat Kumar Chakrabarti, who was more than double the age of his daughter, and only several years junior to Tagore himself.[55] He married his second daughter, Renuka, to Satyendranath Bhattacherji, who was at least two and a half times older than she was. As a matter of explanation, he wrote to one of his friends why he married Renuka so early, saying 'This man, a doctor, said, "I am willing to marry", and I readily agreed.'[56] It is not known whether he at all consulted his daughters regarding their marriage. Indeed, Tagore was traditional in his outlook when he arranged these marriages. He even paid dowry money to all the three sons-in-law, besides sending them abroad for higher education at his expense.[57]

Further, he did not give any formal education to his duaghters. Although his wife, Mrinalini, was sent to Loretto School, it is doubtful whether he tried to educate his wife properly as his elder brother, Satyendranath's did. Satyendranath's daughter, Indira, graduated from the Calcutta University in 1982 with first class honours in French.

But in spite of these limitations, Tagore was able to influence his contemporary Bengali society more than any one else, possibly because he was so great a literateur. In his later writings, one can find a large number of modernized ladies such as Labanya, Ela, Sarala, Urmimala, Suriti, Achira, Bibha, Sohini and Nila.[58] These characters are not unrealistic in the sense that Tagore found such educated and accomplished ladies in the urban Bengal in the second quarter of this century. The Bengali women of today are all the more modern. The nineteenth century days of seclusion and dishonour now appear to be almost incredible.

But the change was not achieved in a single day or by a single person. Great efforts by innumerable social reformers have elevated Bengali women to their present position. The Tagore family played a significant role is this movement for the modernization of women. Through their powerful writings, Satyendranath, Jyotirindranath and Rabindanath Tagore imbued Bengali society with the ideas of female upliftment. The ideas of womanhood and of romantic love as portrayed by Rabindranath in his fiction, plays and poems profoundly influenced educated Bengali society.

The Tagores also set up many striking examples of women's "emancipation" by violating the traditional social values. Although initially these were like rude shocks, they acted as

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55. Sarat Kumar Chakrabarti was the third son of the renowned poet, Biharilal Chakrabarti. He got first class honours in two subjects in 1884, first class in his MA examination in 1895 and passed BL the next year. He was apparently very good as a son-in-law in the eyes of Tagore. His eagerness to "get" Sarat as his son-in-law can be seen in his letters written to Priyanath Sen, who was negotiating the marriage, as well as in the ones written to Sarat himself. (Some of these letters were published in the Literary Number of *Desh* [May, 1980, pp. 9-16.]). At one stage, Sarat and his relations agreed to the terms offered by the Tagores. However, they demanded 20,000 rupees (£2,000) as dowry money. Tagore was ready to pay 10,000. After several months of anxious negotiations the marriage was finally solemnized.

56. Tagore's letter to J.C. Bose, quoted in *Rabindra-Jibani*, Ii, 29-30.

57. Sarat went to England and returned as a Barrister. Satyendranath Bhattacherji went to America for a degree of homoeopathy. The third son-in-law went to America and returned with a degree in Agriculture.

58. Urmimala from *Dui Bon* and Achira from "Shesh Katha' (1940)

examples and more and more people followed them. Some female members of the Tagore family such as Jnanadanandini Debi, Swarnakumari Debi, Sarala Debi, Indira Debi, Kadambari Debi and Pratibha Debi also set a standard of revolt which Bengali women were able to follow, at first diffidently, but later confidently.

APPENDIX TWO

Bamabodhini Patrika, 1863-1923

By the 1850s, the *bhadralok* reformers had realized the need to educate their women. However, since very few were able to ignore the social customs relating female seclusion, the Bethune Girls' School attracted only a handful students. Even those girls who attended this school hardly learnt anything, because they could attend the school only for a brief period of 2-3 years before they were married. Therefore, the rformers felt the necessity of intrioducing a programme of home-education as well as of publishing a journal that would help girls to learn different things. Pearychand Mitra started his monthly magazine *Masik Patrika* in 1854. In the introduction, he announced that the magazine was quite remarkable in that a number of Pearychand's popular works were published in it. But it continued for only about four years and it was of too high a standard for the very small number of "educated" women.

Keshab Chandra Sen, who joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1859, was initially radical in his social ideas. He began his reform activities with religious zeal and soon attracted a band of young men. They ardently supported the cause of widow remarriage and wanted to rationalize the whole institution of Hindu Marriage and thereby remove some of the burden on Bengali women. In 1861, they started an association named Sangat Sabha. The members of his association considered social reform an integral part of their Brahmo ideal.

Some members of this association were especially enthusiastic about female education. They realized that they would not be able to educate, let alone modernize or "emancipate" Bengali women by simply establishing girls' schools. Therefore, in 1863, they started another association named the Bamabodhini Sabha. This association had a number of objectives. It was to publish *Bambodhini Patrika*, a monthly magazine for women, and other books and pamphlets to replace the dearth of reading materials particularly suitable for Bengali women.[1] The periodical was so planned that it would educate its readers in subjects such as Bengali, History, Geography, Elementary Science, Hygiene, Astronomy, Childcare, Housekeeping, and Religion, The elaborate discussions on social problems were attempts to free women from superstitions and even traditional values. The Bamabodhini Sabha was also to organize a correspondence course for girls through the magazine. The course was named Antahpur Shiksha or *zenana* education. The Magazine was finally started in August, 1863, with Umesh Chandra Datta as its editor and Basanta Kumar Datta and Kshetramohan Datta as its two assistant editors.

The editor and main contributor, Umesh Chandra Datta, was a young man of 23. Having lost his father at an early age and having lived away from his relations, he developed a sort of personal autonomy. Though he prosecuted his studies under extreme penury, he proved to be a very good student. In 1859, he passed the Entrance Examination from the Calcutta University and stood second among the successful candidates.[2] During this period, he was attracted by Keshab Chandra Sen and was tremendously influenced by his radical social ideas. He joined Keshab's Sangat Sabha and within a couple of years organised the Bamabodhini Sabha. Indeed, it was with a sense of dedication that he started the *Bamabodhini Patrika*. He also had an advantage over many of his friends as he was free from

1. 'Upakrmanika', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1863, p. 1.
2. Y. C. Bagal, *Umeshchandra Datta* etc. (Calcutta : Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1963), p. 8-9.

family obligations[3] and had some knowledge of science. He had attended the Calcutta Medical College for a year and a half.[4]

Bamabohnini Patrika, as already mentioned, was well planned. It covered interesting fields and was written in an easily understandable language and consequently became very popular. The first issue of one thousand copies was soon exhausted–actually it had to be reprinted.[5] It remained popular throughout its long life of 60 years. No other Bengali periodical of the nineteenth century except *Tattvabodhini Patrika* continued for so long. It had 500 to 600 regular subscribers, many of whom were women. It is rather surprising that almost half of the subscribers were from outside Calcutta.[6] Though in the main, it was a periodical of the Brahmos and by the Brahmos, a good number of its subscribers were Hindus, some were even Christians and Muslims. The religious liberalism it showed was really remarkable compared to other contemporary periodicals. Even its religious articles attacked no institutionalised religion. In this respect, it was different from the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*. *Tattvabodhini Patrika* was mainly devoted to religion, but Bamabodhini was devoted to social questions in general and to the modernization of women in particular. This is why it attracted a wider reading public.

Bamabodhini was ideally suited to those women who wanted to be educated without going to school. The correspondence course that it opened helped a good number of women, mostly married, to educate themselves. Indeed, these women got a better education than the girls attending schools where they were taught only reading, writing and arithmetic and that too for 3-4 years only. *Bamabodhini* tried to impart to its female readers a more extensive and fulfilling education. It can be guessed from the books suggested for them to read and the essays they wrote that the women who followed this course attained quite a high standard.

The most significant contribution of this periodical was that it encouraged a change in the self-perception of Bengali women. Evidence of this can be found in the pages of the *Bamabodhini* itself. Some of its readers felt encouraged enough to write in it. In many of these writings, mostly essays, the authors have clearly expressed their views on life and the world. This was possibly the first indication of Bengali women staring to think for themselves and developing their personalities. In some of these essays, they boldly attacked the social customs, including seclusion, which so rigorously bound them from all sides. The first few women's associations established during the 1860s and 1870s were formed by its readers. Through the biographies of celebrated foreign and native ladies that were published in it, examples were, set for its female readers to follow. In short, *Bamabodhini* played a very important role in the emergence of the first modernized Bengali women. The concept of ideal womanhood and marriage that it constantly advocated gradually became popular. Even its male readers became more and more sympathetic towards the womenfolk.

Bamabodhini's contribution to other aspects of the social reform movement was no less significant. It greatly favoured widow remarriage, civil marriage and inter-caste marriage. It was very much opposed to early marriage, *kulinism*, polygamy, bride-price and dowry. In fact, it fought against all irrational social customs and superstitions then prevailing in the Hindu society. By publishing regular news and innumerable articles, it enhanced the cause or social reform in Bengal.

However, *Bamabodhini* had its limitations as well. Of the 54 main contributors whose names were mentioned in its silver jubilee issue in 1887 almost all were Brahmos,

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3. He married at the age of 27 which might be considered too high for that time. This too was because he was free from the obligations of the joint family.

4. Y. C. Bagal, *Umeshchandra Datta* etc., pp. 9-10

5. *BBP*. Mar.-Apr., 1871, p. 89.

6. *BBP*, Aug-Sep., 1871, pp. 167-68.

particularly belonging to the Brahmo Samaj of India and the Sadharan Samaj. Of these contributors, not one was either a Muslim or a Christian. Most of them were again middle class urban people. Thus the opinion expressed in its pages, cannot represent the rural or the Muslim part of Bengali society.

The political views expressed by its writers were very much like the ones of the early Congressmen known as the moderates. They maintained that British rule in India was established as providence wished it. It was not until the anti-partition movement in 1905 that *Bamabodhini* became nationalist in its attitudes and started critising the Government. However, while it became nationalist, it became almost anti-Muslim as well. In spite of its liberal religious outlook, *Bamabodhini* like all other Bengali periodicals of the late nineteenth century, disparaged, at places quite incorrectly, the Muslim rule while depicting magnified image of the Hindu past.

Bamabodhini, though devoted to women's emancipation, was somewhat conservative in its attitudes towards seclusion, unorthodox dress, female employment and Westernization. Its attitude towards seclusion became clear when in 1872, the members of the Brahmo Samaj of India stood divided on the question of whether its female members should sit among the male members or behind a curtain during the weekly services. Keshab wanted the female members to sit behind the curtain while Sibnath Sastri, Durgamohan Das, Dwarkanath Ganguli, Annada Charan Khastagir, Rakhal Chandra Ray and other belonging to "female liberation faction" opposed it, Umesh Chandra sided with Keshab and for several years pushed the conservative argument. He believed that the breaking of seclusion was not a part of women's emancipaiton; on the country, it meant women's wilfulness.

During these years, he wrote a number of essays which, to some extent, upheld seclusion. He criticised the only other woman's periodical, *Abala-Bandhab*, for being radical.[7] He even ridiculed the modernized Bengali women who were slightly unorthodox in their life style.[8] This naturally antagonised many of his friends who were also his main contributors. Immediately before the schism of the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1878, he lost the sympathy of both the factions–the Keshabites and the Constitutionalists. Consequently, the publication of *Bamabodhini* stopped. However, Umesh Chandra joined the newly formed Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, along with his close friends such as Sibnath Sastri, and became its assistant secretary. With the patronage of the Sadhaan Brahmo Samaj, the periodical reappeared.[9] This time the outlook was once again progressive.

By the end of the nineteenth century a number of periodicals were published for Bengali women including *Antahpur* (1893)-?), which was edited and fully contributed to by women themselves. But *Bamabodhini* is unique in the sense that it was the first Bengali periodical fully devoted to the cause of women. This was also the first periodical in which women started publishing their writings. Actually, it is one of the invaluable sources in identifying early Bengali women's literary efforts. Soon after its publication *Bamabodhini* was able to establish a relationship with its female readers. They not only became its regular subscribers, but also started sending letters and articles for publication. Form the fourth issue women's writings began to appear in it and from the second year it had a regular section entitled Bamarachana of women's writings.

At first women contributors of the *Bamabodhini* were diffident and the quality of the writing was also rather poor. But as years passed by they started writing on a wide variety of

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7. 'Abala Bandhab', *BBP*, Jun.-Jul., 1871, pp. 96-97

8. 'Naranari'. *BBP*, Feb.,-Mar., 1873, pp. 33-38; 'Strijatir Aswabhabik Unnat i' *BBP*, Jun.-Jul. 1873, pp. 69-72; 'Bangiya Mahilar Khedukti', *BBP*, Nob.-Dec., 1873. pp. 265-66.

9. No issue of *Bamabodhini* was published between May-Jun., 1878, and Sep.-Oct., 1879. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was founded on the 15th May, 1878.

subjects and whether or not influenced by male values unhesitatingly expressed their opinion on the social questions. This section of women's writings soon became so popular that some other contemporary periodicals like the *Abodh Bandhu, Abala-Bandhab* and *Banga Mahila* opened such sections and under the same title. It indeed encouraged Bengali women to start a literary career. Some of the women like Kamini Sen, Mankumari Basu and Radharani Lahiri who first made their debut in the *Bamabodhini* earned a considerable reputation as literateurs. Of the 54 main contributors of the first twenty-five years as many as 16 were women.

The renaissance historians of Bengal have written about nineteenth century social reform movement. Although this movement in the most part was concerned with elevating the condition of women, the aforesaid historians have given little or no account of how Bengal women themselves reacted to this movement which aimed at their emancipation. Consequently, the history of nineteenth century social reform movement in Bengal has been partially and superficially depicted. A fuller and truer history can be reconstructed only when Bengali women's reaction to the movement for their emancipation can be traced and studied. How, if at all, this emancipation movement influenced the womenfolk can be found out only when women's attitudes are analysed. For such a study *Bamabodhini* can serve as an invaluable source.

In the pages of the *Bamabodhini* we can find women's attitudes are ayalysed. For such a study *Bamabodhini* can serve as a invaluable source.

In the pages of the Bamabodhini we can find women's reaction to different aspects of the social reform movement, like widow remarriage, polygamy., early marriage, kulinism, female education, seclusion and intemperance. It is interesting to note that their attitudes widely differed from one another. For example, married women, unmarried girls, widows, urban and rural women, conservative Hindu women and progressive Brahmo ladies reacted quite differently towards the widow remarriage issue. Women's writings published in other contemporary periodicals like *Banga Mahila, Paricharika, Abodh Bandhu, Dasi* and *Antahpur,* can also be compared with the writings published in *Bamabodhini*.

Bamabodhini continued for 60 years. 44 of which it was under the editorial direction of the same person.[10] This offers a singular opportunity of looking at how in the face of new social and political developments like the emergence of nationalism, Bengali attitudes towards the social reform movement underwent a metamorphosis and how the government itself took a different shape.

Bamabodhini is really a unique social document. Without using it the social history of nineteenth century Bengal, particularly feminist history, cannot be adequately reconstructed.

10. Umeshchandra Datta edited *Bamabodhini* during the years 1863 to 1907. After his death in June, 1907, it was published for another 16 years. During this period, it was edited by different persons including some of his relations. For details, see B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Bangla Smayik-Patra*, Vol. 1.pp 192-93.

APPENDIX THREE

Bengali Women's Dress

The dress of the Bengali women before they were exposed to modernization seems to have been very simple–it consisted of only a five yard long sari and nothing else. Fanny Parks' book on her Indian travels, published in 1850, suggests that saris could be very expensive, some having golden borders. Nevertheless, it was only a sari that a Bengali woman would wear. Fanny Parks especially mentioned that 'no other attire is worn beneath the sari'.[1] Jnanadanandini Debi's description corroborates this. She wrote that it was during the winter that women put on a wrapper on the top of the usual sari.[2] Wearing any other piece of clothing or a pair of shoes was absolutely forbidden.

How prejudiced people were against women's wearing any other articles, such as shoes, can be seen in Ishwar Gupta's poem quoted in Chapter 1. While describing how female education and modernization would destroy all womanly qualities that Bengali women had, he predicted that the "future" "modernized" "manly" woman might drive her own carriage, smoke cigars and wear boots[3] . If Gupta wrote this with a bias and in order to ridicule and disparage the modern Bengali women, it was true that Bengali women, at that time were not at all expected to drive a carriage, to smoke or to put on shoes. In early 1864, when Satyendranath Tagore was persuading his wife to go to England to join in him there, he sympathetically asked her : Will you find it very uncomfortable to wear socks and shoes?"[4] Unlike Gupta, he had no prejudice against women's wearing shoes; therefore, what he wrote clearly shows that popular opinion was against women's wearing shoes and that women of such aristocratic families as those of the Tagores did not wear shoes. In 1867, Bamabodhini Patrika wrote that a maidservant mistakenly thought a European lady to be a man, because the latter was wearing a pair of shoes and tailored garment.[5]

That Bengali women's dress was inadequate or indecent has been mentioned by many contemporary writers – both men and women. Concurring this Satyendranath wrote to his wife in 1863 saying that the dress Bengali women put on was such that it was as if they did not wear anything at all.[6] He did not give reasons why he thought so. However, Fanny Parks described in some detail what sort of dress Bengali women put on and what she thought of it. The texture of the sari, in her opinion, was very thin, so thin that it was rather transparent, almost useless as a veil.. the form of the limbs and the tint of the skin is traced through it.' Therefore, she wrote : 'On beholding their attire, I was no longer surprised that no other men than their husbands were permitted to enter the zenana."[7] What Rajkumar Chandra wrote in 1863 verifies Fanny Parks' observation. Chandra, moreover, gave a description of how these women looked in wet saris when they took a bath :

> The cloth they put on is almost transparent. Especially when they get up from the pond after having a bath, it becomes difficult at first to see whether they have anything on at all. However, the men who have money

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1. F. Parks, p. 89, 60.
2. J. Debi, 'Smritikatha', in *Puratani*, p. 14, 29
3. Supra, p. 34.
4. S.N. Tagore to Jnanadanandini Debi, 18. 2. 1864, letter no 5, *Puratani*, p. 54.
5. 'Rahasya', *BBP*, May-Jun., 1866, p. 276.
6. S. N. Tagore to Jnanadanandini Debi, 18.1.64, letter no. 5, *Puratani*, p. 51.
7. F. Parks, p. 89, 60.

do not consider this. They always buy the most expensive and the finest *saris* for their women and feel gratified thereby.[8]

In 1868, Bamabodhini Patrika claimed that for all practical purposes, Bengali women remained naked in their long strip of sari and that such dress was not adequate to be worn in public.[9] In another article, it said that men who did not allow their women to go from one place to another in an open palanquin and considered it a matter of shame for women to travel by train, did not object to women's wearing fine saris or to their bathing in the open. It further said that those women who were too shy to see or to talk to their fathers, fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law, did not regard it as improper to put on such saris or take a bath in the pond in the midst of men.[10]

That the dress of Bengali women must be "reformed" was felt by the same set of men who were trying to introduce female education and to uncage women from the *zenana*. It seemed to them impossible to allow women to go out or to mix with men unless they adequately and decently dressed. A news item published in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in 1864 shows that the members of the Sangat Sabha, established by Keshab Chandra Sen, discussed the need to "reform" the dress of Bengali women, although they did not suggest any particular change.[11] However, in November that year, as he was planning to take his wife to Bombay, Satyendranath Tagore confronted the problem of what dress he might get of his wife, Jnanadanandini, to put on. Whether or not she should put on Western dress bothered him a great deal. Finally, he asked a French dressmaker in Calcutta to design for her an "oriental" dress. This dress was prepared accordingly, but it was, in Jnanada's language, so complicated that she was unable to put it on, so that each time she wanted to wear it her husband had to help her.[12] Thus this dress, decent though complicated, was indeed an innovation in Bengal.

In Bombay, Jnanada lived in Parsi family for a few months. This family was so Westernized at that stage that it had two daughters who had their education in England. It was in this family that Jnanada learnt Western manners and etiquette and gradually acquired some sophistication. She gave up wearing her "peculiar" dress while with this family and began to wear her sari in Parsi style, with the difference that she threw the end over her left shoulder instead of her right shoulder, She also started to wear a petticoat underneath.[13] perhaps she adopted the blouse from these Parsi girls as well. Moreover, she had started to wear a pair of shoes since she left Calcutta. Jnanada thus set an example of a possible standard dress for women of *bhadralok* families. If later women did not accept everyring that she adopted, they at least accepted the style in which she put on her sari.[14]

Needless to say that this dress did not become popular immediately. However, in March, 1865, a 13 year old girl, Fajlaxmi Moitreya (later Sen), put on a "reformed" dress while attending the annual prize giving ceremony of the Bethuee School. *Bamabodhini Patrika* does not mention what constituted her dress, but says that it attracted the attention of the Governor-General and that he expressed his satisfaction at seeing a Bengali girl in such a dress.[15] More women were to follow these two examples. By April 1866, a dressmaker named Basu and Company inserted an advertisement in *Bamabodhini Patrika* saying that it

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8. R. K. Chandra, *Dekhe Shune Akkel Gurum* (Calcutta : n. p., 1863), pp. 6-7.

9. 'Suxma Bastra', *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., 1868, pp. 124-26

10. 'Strilokdiger Snan Pranali,' *BBP*, Jul.-Aigust., 1869, p. 72.

11. *BBP*, Dec., 1864-Jan., 1865, p. 143.

12. Jnanadanandini Debi, 'Smritikatha' in *Puratani*, p. 29.

13. Ibid., pp. 29-31.

14. It is said that Keshab Sen's daughter, Sucharu Debi, modified the style introduced by Jnanada and the current style of wearing sari is based on Sucharu Debi's – C. Deb, *Thakur Barir Andar Mahal*, p. 30.

15. *BBP*. Apr.-May, p. 18.

was ready to make and supply a newly designed dress for Bengali women and that this dress would be suitable for "progressive" and civilized society.

This advertisement may suggest that the "reformed" dress was fast becoming popular, but that was not the case. Only a handful of Westernized Bengali men had the couage to allow their women to wear this dress. Most educated men were still unable to make up their minds whether they should accept the European dress totally or to accept certain articles from the West and thus "reform" traditional Bengali dress. Manomohan Ghosh solved the problem by accepting European dress for his wife. Swarnalata (and a few other men did the same). She started to wear long gowns instead of saris.[16] Wearing skirts which would show a part of her legs and blouses which would unveil the upper chest was considered out of the question. However, unlike Ghosh, most men were orthodox. Even if they accepted European dress for themselves, they only accepted certain articles of Western dress for their women.

A controversy went on for some time during the early 1870s over how Bengali woman's dress could be "reformed", keeping the Bengali characteristics in tact. Bamahitaishini Sabha, established by Keshab Chandra Sen, discussed the problem in a meeting in 1871. Many members of this association were in favour of adopting European dress for Bengali women, but thought it too expensive for poor Bengalis. The different kinds of dress put on by women of Bombay and North Western India, by Muslim women of Northern India and by Chinese women were considered to be quite good. But they expressed their fear that if any of these was adopted, this might rob Bengali women of their Bengali looks.[17] They stressed the point that Bengali women's dress should be such as would immediately distinguish them from other women, Rajlaxmi Sen, who attended the meeting, claimed that quite a few women were wearing blouses, jackets and shoes and that these should certainly be accepted as standard articles of dress. However, she mentioned, some prostitutes were also wearing these articles of dress. Therefore, she suggested that women of *bhadralok* families should wear a wrapper in addition to all these articles to distinguish them from prostitutes.[18]

Bamabodhini Patrika praised the fact that women were becoming conscious of the need to "reform" their dress. It suggested that women could wear either pajamas, a blouse and a sari or a long blouse and a sari when at home, and extra wrapper and pair of shoes when going out. Moreover, it mentioned that those who did not like to wear shoes might leave them out.[19]

In a letter published in the periodical, Jnanadanandini claimed that the dress the women of their family, i.e. the Tagore Family had adopted was at once beautiful and suitable for both summer and winter. One could easily move in this dress. Bengalis, Europeans, the Parises, the Jews and Maharastris, whoever saw this dress, praised it. She claimed that although this dress was partly similar to English, partly to Bengali and partly to Muslim dress, it was not the imitation of a particular style. She said it was not very different from the dress many women of *bhadralok* families now wore. she further said that women of their family put on shoes, socks, a bodice, a blouse, a petticoat and a sari. Moreover, they wore a wrapper when they went out, She said that it was difficult to describe how a woman would look in such a dress. However, she volunteered to send a set of this dress or a photograph of this if any woman would write to her. She contradicted the editor of *Bamabodhini Patrika*, saying that wearing shoes was essential.[20]

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16. Jnanadanandini Debi, 'Smritikatha' p. 29.
17. Saudamini Khastagir, 'Banganganaganer Paricchad', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1871, pp. 149-50.
18. Rajlaxmi Sen, 'Banganganaganer Paricchad', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1871, p. 151.
19. 'Banganganaganer Paricchad', *BBP*, Aug.-Sep., 1871, p. 152.
20. (Jnanadanandini Debi), 'Banganganaganer Paricchad,' *BBP*, Oct.-Nov., pp. 225-26

A photograph of students of the Hindu Mahila Bidyalaya, taken around 1874, shows that all the girls were in some kind of "reformed" dress.[21] *Bamabodhini Patrika* and traditional people were hostile towards these girls' life style, eating habits and the unorthodox behaviour; however, they were not hostile to their 'reformed' dress, at least no newspaper report condemned them for their dress. This shows that popular public opinion was in favour of a 'reform' and even ready to accept certain articles from the West.

Once there was a common agreement of opinion among the *bhadralok* that women's dress should be 'reformed', women began to wear all kinds of dress. Since there was no consensus on what style should be followed, women followed different styles and even combinations of apparently dissimilar styles. In 1881, S. Dasi came back to Calcutta after a few years to see that young women were wearing widely different dresses and that no two dresses were alike. They were, in her opinion, a hotchpotch European and native styles. These women looked so different that it was hard to comprehend that they were all Bengalis. S. Dasi further claimed that the women she had seen a few years ago without a blouse, were then wearing one. The middle-aged women, she observed, still clung to rather traditional dress, with minimum modification, whilst the older women were hostile towards the "reformed" dress. They even slandered young women for wearing unorthodox dress.[22]

Since modernization permeated different segments of Bengali society unevenly and at different times, the so-called "reformed" dress too was adopted by women with different backgrounds at different stages. Even as late as 1901, some women of traditional *bhadralok* families were unable to adopt fully the "reformed" dress. An article published in *Bamabodhini Patrika* thus described the difference between the dress of modernized Brahmo women and traditional Hindu women :

> The tidiness and beauty of the dress of the Brahmo women cannot be found in that of the Hindu women. The latter is always embarrassed with her sari and wrapper which she can hardly keep in their proper place. Moreover, she cannot give up her veil. To walk to do so. People naturally laugh at her.[23]

This shows that women close to tradition did not wear shoes even at the beginning of this century.

It is interesting to note that whilst many Bengali men totally accepted Western dress. women never did. This is true even now, in the 1980s. A handful of 'ultra'- modern young women, particularly students, may wear pants and long skirts, but after their marriage, they go back to their traditional sari. This reflects men's conservative and jealous attitudes towards their women. They still do not allow women to wear such dress as will leave a part of legs and upper chest exposed. If women wear articles of dress tight enough to make the shape of breasts clearly visible, they have to cover their breasts with an extra piece of thin cloth called *orna* or with the sari. However, with the passing of time, women are increasingly becoming unorthodox in their dress.

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21. For the photograph, see W. H. Beverage, India Called Them.

22. S. Dasi, 'Kalikatar Strisamj', pp. 231-34.

23. 'Bangiya Hindu Mahilar Paricchad', *BBP*. Oct.-Nov., 1901, pp. 240-41

APPENDIX FOUR

A list of Members of the Sakhi Samiti, 1891

Swarnalata Ghose
(Mrs Manomohan Chose)
Baradasundari Ghose
Lalita Ray
Monomohini Datta
(Mrs R. C Dutt)
Saudamini Gupta
(Mrs R.C Gupta)
Thakamani Mallik
Sarala Ray
Prasannatara Gupta
Hiranmayi Debi
(Swarnakumari Debi's daughter)

Saudamini Debi
(Swarnakumari's elder sister)

Basanta Kumari Bose
Chandramukhi Bose
Girindramohini Dasi
Mrinalini Debi
(Swarnakumari's sister-in-law)

Bidhumukhi Ray
(Mrs Rajaninath Roy)
Mrs P. C. Ray
Shailabala Ray
(Sarala Ray's sister)
Mrs K.N. Mitra
Miss Radharani Lahiri
Mrs T.N. Chakrabarti
Baradasundari Dasi
Bhubanmohini Dasi
Kumudini Dasi
Pramada Debi
Chandidasi Mitra
Kusumkumari Debi
Jagatmohini Debi
Saratkumari Debi
Mrinalini Debi
Labanya Ghose

Prasannamayi Debi
(Mrs Bagchi)
Surabala Debi
Jnanadanandini Debi
(Swarnakumari's sister-in-law)
Hemangini Debi
(Mrs W. C. Bonnerji)
Jagattarini Mitra
Sushila Debi
Mrs Lalbehari Dey
Mrs Chandramadhab Ghose
Kamala Basu
Mrs A. Mitra
Saudamini Debi
Kumudini Debi
Kadambini Ghose
Hemantakumari Debi
Mokshada Debi
Kadambini Debi
(Mrs J.P. Ganguli)
Prasannamayi Debi
(Mrs Mukherji)
Mohini Ghose (Mrs P. Ghose)
Mrs. J. Sharma
Mrs P.K. Ghose
Yogendramohini Dasi
Binodmala Debi
Nalinibala Ray
Annadasundari Debi
Krisnabinodini Dasi
Prasannamayi Debi
Binodini Debi
Sushilamohini Mitra
Bipineshwari Mitra
Mrs Ghose
Kumudini Ray
Sharat Kumari Debi
Mohini Debi
Giribala Debi
Birajamohini Debi
Dakshabala Debi

Pramilasundari Dasi
Niradkali Basu
Radharani Mitra
Mrinalini Sarkar
Miss Kamini Sen
Miss Hemlata Bhattacheri
(Sibnath Sastri's daughter)
Kusum Kumari Datt
Sarojini Mitra
Kamalkamini Mitra
Kadambini Mitra
Shikharbasini Mitra
Kamini Mitra
Bhabatarini Ghose
Thakamani Sarkar
Bipinbala Sarkar
Surasundari Debi
Mrs. L.C. Mitra
Haraballabha Dey
Lalitmani Basu
Achala Basu
Banamala Pal
Swarnalata Malik
Kamalmani Rudra
Nrityakali Debi
Jadatmohini Debi
Bidumukhi Mitra
Upendrabala Sarkar
Ambika Deb
Sarojkumari Debi
Nabinkali Basu
Narayandasi Ghose
Mrs Basu
Manomohini Ghose
Prasannatara Basu
Sudakshina Sen
Haridasi Debi
Jnanadasundari Debi
Sukeshi Debi
Basanta Kumari Debi
Golapkamini Ghose
Hemangini Gupta
Chamatkarmohini Mitra
Shrishmohini Debi

Bhabatarini Debi
Saurabhsundari Debi
Hemlata Debi
Sharat Kumari Debi
Shibsundari Mitra
Nistarini Basu
Gopalmani Ghose
Mrs Umacharan Das
Subharanya Sinha
Kadambini Basu
Uttamkumari Debi
Ramasundari Ghose
Malinprabha Ghose
Saratkumari Chaudhurani
(Mrs. A. K. Chaudhuri)
Basanta Kumari Dasi
Bhubanmohini Dasi
Dr. Jamini Sen (Kamini Sen's
younger sister)
Tinkari Debi
Bidhumukhi Ray Chaudhuri
Premtarangini Dasi
Mokshadamohini Kar
Dr. Bidhumukhi Basu
Sureshwari Ghose
Sharatmohini Ghose
Manorama Dasi
Hemlata Ray
Hemanta Kumari Debi
Kshiradmohini Debi
Kshetramoni Ghose
Phulkumari Debi
Kshetramani Debi
Mrs K. C. Banerji
Mrs. P.N. Ghose
Chandimani Dasi
Binoda Bandyopadhyay
Sushila Chakrabarti
Basanta Kumari Sarkar
Annapurna Debi
Nawab Fayazunnessa Chaudhuri

Pratibha Debi
(Swarnakumar's niece)
Miss Kamudini Khastagir

Source : *Bharati O Balak,* Dec., 1891-Jan., 1892.

APPENDIX FIVE

List of Bengali Women Graduates, 1883-1910

Name	*Year*	*Remarks*
	MAs	
Chandramukhi Bose	1884	Christian
Nirmala Som	1891, 1894	Christian
Hemaprabha Basu	1897	Brahmo
Margaret Gupta	1899	Christian
Rajkumari Das (Chandramukhi's sister)	1903	Christian
Hridyabala Basu	1908	Christian ?
Victoria Mukherji	1908	Christian
	BAs	
Kadambini Basu	1883	Brahmo
Kamini Sen	1886	Brahmo
Priyatama Datta	1886	Christian
Kumudini Khastagir	1887	Brahmo
Suprabha Gupta	1889	
Lila Sinha	1890	Christian
Sarala Ghoshal	1890	Brahmo
Shorat Chakrabarti	1890	
Jibanbala Datta	1891	Brahmo
Indira Tagore	1892	Brahmo
Priyambada Bagchi	1892	Brahmo
Ellen Chandra	1893	Christian
Shashibala Banerji	1893	Brahmo?
Surabala Ghosh	1893	
Saralabala Rakshit	1894	
Premkusum Sen	1896	Brahmo
Sarala Sen	1897	
Sisir Kumari Bagchi	1898	Brahmo
Snehalata Majumdar	1899	
Lilian Palit	1900	T.N. Palit's daughter
Santa Sarkar	1901	
Saralabala Mitra	1901	
Kumudini Mitra	1903	Brahmo
Prabhabati Ray	1903	
Mabel Singh	1905	Christian ?
Basanti Mitra	1906	Brahmo
Hiranmayi Sen	1906	
Kamala Basu	1906	
Charubala Mandal	1907	
Surabala Sinha	1907	

Rama Bhattacharya	1908	
Banalata De	1908	
Bangabala Mukherji	1908	
Jyotirmayi Ganguli	1909	Brahmo
Nirbharpriya Ghosh	1908	
Rosabelle Singh	1908	Christian
Violet Hridaymohini Mitra	1908	Christian
Sobhanabala Rakshit	1909	
Bibha Ray	1910	
Jyotirmayi Datta	1910	
Marie Banerji	1910	
Sisirkumari Guha	1910	
Laura Suniti Ghosh	1910	Christian
MBs		
Bidhumukhi Basu	1890	Christian
Violet Mary Mitter	1890	Christian
Rachel Cohen	1897	Christian
LMS		
Jamini Sen	1876	Brahmo

Source : *Calcutta University Calendar*, 1911.

* Kadambini Ganguli appeared at the MB examination in 1889, but could not pass, (Many believe that she was failed.) However, she was given a licence to practise. Later she got medical degrees from England. She was a Brahmo.

APPENDIX SIX

A Select List of Women Writers, 1863-1905

Name	Remarks	Name	Remarks
Amalshashi Basu	Brahmo	Kamana Debi	Hindu
Anujanandini Ray		Kamaniyakanta	Brahmo
Baradasundari Chattopadhyay	Brahmo	Kamini Sen/Ray	Brahmo
Basanta Kumari Basu		Kamini Shil	Christian
Basata Kumari Ray Chaudhuri		Karunamayi Debi	
Bindyobasini Debi		Krisnakamini	Hindu
Binodini Ghosh		Krisnabhabini	Hindu
Binodini Sen Gupta		Kshiroda Mitra	Brahmo
Brajabala Debi		Kulabala Debi	Hindu
Dwijatanaya (Kminisundari)	Hindu	Kamudini Ray	
Giribala Debi	Hindu	Kusummala Datta	Hindu
Girindramohini Dasi	Hindu	Loabanyaprabha Basu	Brahmo
	Brahmo	Laxmimani Basu	Hindu
Hemanta Kumari Chaudhurani	Brahmo	Monomohini Dasi	Hindu
		Madhumati Ganguli	Brahmo
Hemanta Kumari Chaudhurani		Mankumari Basu	Hindu
		Manomohini Dasi	Hindu
Hemanta Kumari Sen Gupta		Mayasundari	
		Mohanmati Debi	
Jnanadanandini Debi	Brahmo	Mrinimayi Sen	
Jaykali		Muktakeshi Debi	
Kadamdini Dasi	Hindu	Muktakeshi Gupta	
Kailasbasini Debi	Brahmo ?	Nagendrabala Mustafi	Hindu
Nistarini Debi		Saudamini Khastagir /Gupta	
Nistarini Debi (of Kamarhatta)		Saudamini Sinha	Christain
Nityakali Ghosh	Brahmo	Shailaja Kumari Debi	
Priyambada Debi	Brahmo	Sarat Kumari Chaudhurani	Brahmo
Prabodhini Ghose	Brahmo	Shyamasundari (Bandyopadhyay)	Hindu
Radharani Lahiri	Brahmo	Sukhtari Datta	
Rajbala Debi			
Fajlaxmi Moitra/Sen	Brahmo	Sumati Majumder	Brahmo
Ramasundari	Brahmo	Susamasundari Dasi	Hindu
Rasasundari Debi	Hindu	Sushila Basu	Brahmo
Reba Ray		Sushilabala Sinha	Brahmo
Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain	Muslim	Swarnakumari Debi	Brahmo
Sarada Debi	Brahmo	Swarnakumari Debi/Ghosh	Brahmo
Saradasundari Ray	Brahmo	Swarnamayi Chaudhurani	
Sarala Debi	Brahmo	Swarnaprabha Basu	Brahmo
Saralabala Dasi	Hindu	Taherannessa	Muslim
Saraswati Sen	Brahmo	Upendramohini	Brahmo
Sarojkumari Debi	Brahmo	Yogamaya Debi	Brahmo
Saudamini Debi /Ray	Brahmo	Yogamaya Goswami	Brahmo

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