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Outline of the expansion of women's Education in Nadia district (1800-1900)

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ABSTRACT

The District of Nadia forms the North - Eastern portion of the presidency Division and lies between north latitude 24°11' and 22°53' and East longitude 89°22' and 88°09'. This region has occupied an important place in terms of politics, religions and culture since ancient times. Although no initiative was taken for women's education before the 19th century, it prepared the ground for the Bengal Renaissance. This paper explores how much of the efforts of the transition from traditionalism to modernity were initiated by private enterprise, missionaries and the colonial Government's rhetorical stance in favor of progress. The focus of the development of education in Nadia district.

I want to propose to study the various historical phases in the evolution of women's education in Bengal and also to take of the overall status of women in society during 19th century. I want to say the position of women in society during the ancient and medieval periods. I will concentrate on the history of women's education and changing status during the 19th and 20th centuries. Our concern will be to show the spread of formal education among women received impetus from various 19th century social reform movements, followed by nationalist movement from early 20th century on word.

KEYWORDS: Nadia, Bengal Renaissance, transition from traditionalism, evolution of women's education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Now I am went to say the position of women in Vedic age. The women enjoyed an honourable status in society. No distinction was made between a son and a daughter in matter of education¹. The girls had opportunities of receiving education and sharing the different branches of knowledge. Many women rose to become vedic scholars, debators, poets and teachers². The names of Lopamudra, Ghosha, Apala, Vak and Visavara are worth mentioning³. They used to move freely in society. It may be said that they enjoyed an equal status with men.

But late vedic age the society in changed women not to be able her position. This position is not to be applicable to women of all strata of society. As Kalpana Dasgupta rightly observes , “while we must acknowledge the contribution of modern historians in discovering considerable information regarding the position of women in earlier periods of our history, it has to be emphasised that all this information relates to the elite sections of society viz. The high caste, upper strata. Very little material is available on the lives and conditions of the large majority of women. Who are not members of the elite group”³.

The status of women gradually deteriorated. Ruled by the infamous code of Manu, women rights deprived of all their basic human rights and treated as mere objects for the satisfaction of men’s lust and greed. The right to secure education became an exclusive prerogative of the menfolk. Absolute subjugation of women to father during childhood, to husband during youth and to son at oldage, was prescribed. This different treatment was due to the fact that women devoid of education had no knowledge of their previous right and privileges.

The same figure can be observed in medieval period. During the medieval period, some women made their mark in different walks of life. Mention may be made of Raziyya, Nurjahan, Chandbibi, Padmavati among others. But here again, they represented only the exceptional few. In general, no attempt was made to fight out various social evils, like early marriage, polygamy, purdah or satidaha. Neither the rules nor the religious. Preachers took any initiative to spread education among women. As a result for more than 2000 years, there was practically no education for women. During this period women’s status was too much inferior to men both in the family and in the society. The women’s could not assert their rights and privileges in the society.

Needless to say, during the early stage of the British period female education was practically unknown in Bengal. Only a few women of upper classes could read and write Girls belonging to rich families received education from private tutors at

home. The East India company’s Government remained indifferent to female education in India during the early period of its empire building. The british government did not want to interfere with the religious sentiments of the Indian people. It believed that any effort to encourage female education might be interpreted as undue interference in the social and religious practices of the Indians.

The aristocratic families of Bengal lost their influence with the firm settlement of the British rule in Bengal and a new class arises in the society. In this period we also see the advent of a new educated class, commonly known as ‘Babu class’. These Hindu educated persons also tended to gratify the English officials to secure Govt. service under the British Raj. In this book named ‘Ramtanu Lahiri : Tatkalin Banga Samaj’, Shibnath Sastri portrayed the abominable practice of this class of people.

But in first half of the 19th century the book of James Mill was published. The western educated elite and the newly emerged Bengali middle class were deeply influenced by mill’s doctrine. The 19th century Bengal Renaissance was started. The social reformation movements and the left deep marks in the Bengali society. The Bengalies started their journey to wards modernity. Movements were initiated to build up a faultless society driving away the blind orthodoxy of the society. Religious, social and political movements continued spreading for the whole of the 19th century. Rammohan, Vidyasagar Derozio etc took the leading role in this part of reform movements. The enlightened newly made Bengali middle class had taken seriously James Mill’s scathing criticism of how the Hindus treated their women in his 1817 treatise ‘The History of British India’ Mill noted : “The condition of women is one of the most remarkable circumstances in the manner of nations.... A state of dependence more strict and humiliating than that which is ordained for the weaker sex among the Hindus Can’t be easily concived”⁴.

The society that looked upon women as a mean to fulfill their personal and sexual need, the people of that very society felt the need to make women educated and modern. The more the educated Indians came into contact with the western thoughts and beliefs the bigger became the question of women’s rights. The reason was that the western philosophers pointed out again and again to the down falling condition of Indian women for India’s dependence and backward condition. Hence to the programme of works of the welcomes of modernity of the 19th century intellectual Indians, the main objective was to keep up the dignity of women, although the question of equal rights of women in society remained unheeded to them.

Government Policy

Now I will discuss how education through vernacular languages spread to rural areas outside at Calcutta. Before discussing this, let's talk about policy of government education. For the first 60 years of its dominion in India, the East India company, a trading and profit making concern took no interest in the promotion of education. But the company introduced the charter act of 1813. The act incorporated the principle of encouraging learned Indians and promoting knowledge of modern science in the country.

The act directed the company to sanction one Lakh rupees annually for this purpose. However even this petty amount was not made available till 1823, mainly because of the controversy raged on the question of the direction that this expenditure should take. Few years later Lord Macaulay's Minute (1835), this famous minute settled the row in favour of Anglicists the limited government resources were to be devoted to teaching of western sciences and literature through the medium of English language alone.

The wood Despatch of 1854, realized the need for the education of women. The wood Despatch was the first recognition made of the colonial government of its responsibility for female education. It was beyond doubt the outcome of a protracted course of movements initiated by the 19th century modernized of Bengal for spread of education of women.

The Indian commission of 1881 had also championed the course of female education. It had advocated a policy of liberalization grants in aid to girls schools and providing educational assistance to teacher's training.

According to the 1881 census returns for every 100 boys in schools the number of girls under instruction was 46 and while one adult male out of 16 could read and write only one adult woman in 433 could do so.

The Hunter commission of 1882 also recommended aid for girl's education from provincial and municipal funds. The implementation of the recommendation of the hunter commission and other policies of colonial rulers made a positive impact on women's education during the first quarter of the 20th century.

Role of Missionaries

From the early days of British Raj, various Christian Missions had come to Bengal with the purpose of spreading Christianity. Though this was their main objective pursued different welfare initiatives which were beneficial for many common

people, mostly Indian Christians. Nadia district being one of the stations with the highest number of Indian Christians was suitable for this mission. For this reason many missions had chosen Nadia for their work like education spreading which later benefitted not only Indian Christians but a part of the Hindu community also. Church Missionary society was one of the most well known missions to take the education spreading initiative in Nadia. The Mission set up many schools, the details of which are given below

In 1832, Mr Rev W Deerr who was stationed at Kalna in the Burdwan district went to Krishnagar and opened two schools in the town of Nabadwip and one in Krishnagar. The school at Krishnagar is named as C.M.S. saint Johns school and Mr Deerr was its first principle. Colesworthey grant gave an evidence of his work in his writings about the works of Christian Missionaries as well as the churches of Nadia. It has been known from the important letters of Grant that seven kurtavaja families who gave up Hindu-Muslim religious and later accepted Christian religion joined the initiative of Mr Deerr.

By 1843, free boarding schools had been started in which 42 boys and 22 girls were being fed and taught. In 1850, the school at Chapra was commenced. In the following years of 1863 the training and the normal school, which had first been established solo, then transferred to Kapasdanga, then located for a time at Santipur was finally moved to Krishnagar. In 1891, the Church Missionary society Girls school was put on a satisfactory basis and has done excellent work since. According to the returns for 1907, there was one boarding school for girls at Krishnagar attended by 76 pupils all Christians and maintained at an annual cost of Rs 5700. Though out the district 43 day schools were maintained at a cost of Rs 10717 (Rs 1400 being provided from public funds) and were attended by 1241 boys (including 200 Christians) and 412 girls (including 282 Christians). It shows that, a large proportion of the expenditure of the society in the district goes towards providing secular education to non-Christians. In 1895, a small school was started in connection with the mission at Ranaghat. In 1860, Father Limaau, with the help of another fathers and four sisters of charity founded a boarding school for boys and another for girls, in Krishnagar. At Krishnagar there is a boarding school for Bengali boys. At Bhabarpara, the sisters of Charity maintain a school for Bengali girls. There are many Primary school attached to the Mission in Nadia district, some of which receive stipends from the district board.

Despite all their efforts the Christian Missionaries could not gain popularity among the upper strata of Indian society. It was noted that the majority of non-Christian pupils of Missionary schools

were drawn from lower ranks. The lower classes (i.e. those who were not much under the bonds which orthodox Hinduism had imposed on society) were attracted to these institutions for a few pice or other gifts occasionally given to the girl students for ensuring their attendance at schools. The primary motive of the Christian Mission was to inculcate the Christian doctrine in the minds of the young girls. So, the majority of the Hindus did not like these schools. In 1855 one Dr Thomas Smith was reported as making a candid confession in the following words; "we will not conceal the fact, that our own earnest desire is that India were thoroughly Christianised and we regard our female education as an important means toward their that end"⁵.

Such overt proselytizing motive of the Christian Missionaries quite naturally all enated Hindu upper caste women from such educational institutions. Even women belonging to lower casts gradually withdraw themselves from these missionary schools.

The establishment of Calcutta female school (Bethune school) at the initiative of Bethune in an important event in the history of the spread of women's education in Bengal. Encourged by the example of this school, many came toward to build the school on their own initiative. Their initiative is being implemented not only in Kolkata but also in Burdwan, Dhaka, Kushtia, Basirhal, Howrah, Pabna, Jessore, Nadia, Midnapur etc.

The women education movement infensified in the 19th century. Apart from the young Bengal, brahmo samaj and some scholars also support women's education at this time. Under the pressure of this movement the attitude of the government changed drastically 1854 Wood's Despatch allege to support women's education and help to build schools.

Impressed by this generosity of the government, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar took special initiative to established a girls school at the suggestion of the lieutenant Halide. Vidyasagar was the founder of the Bangladesh women's education movement. Vidyasagar was associated with Bethune school from the beginning. In 1856, he was appointed secretary of the managing committee of the Bethune School.

Encouraged by the support and co-operation of the Government , Vidyasagar established 35 girls schools at Hooghly, Nadia, Burdwan, Midnapore between 1837 Nov - 1858 May.

Vidyasagar first came to Krishnagar in 1847. Ha was an assistant inspector of schools in south Bengal. According to that source Vidyasagar has come to Nadia many times. Although we can not give details of it due to lack of evidence, it can be said that

Vidyasagar established many Bengali medium schools in Nadia district. The list of model schools established by Vidyasagar in given below :

Name of Village	Foundation day
Belghariya	22.08.1855
Maheshpore	08.09.1855
Bhajanghat	01.09.1855
Kushdaha	11.09.1855
Debogram	12.09.1855

(Source : Nadia Unish Shatak : Mohit Roy)

Vidyasagar built a girls school in 1st may in 1858 at a cost of only 28 rupees. Students used to study here without pay even arranged to give their textbooks, pencils, paper etc. The head of the education department Mr. Young had to opposed the spending.

Wealthy people and Zaminder also took an enterprising role in the establishment of schools at this time. Girl's schools are being set up in villages and districts during this period of the education of women. The news was published in contemporary news paper like Bamabodhini, Education Gazette etc. Below is a list of schools established in Nadia at that time based on this news paper :

S. N.	Name of school	District	Year	Source	Founder
1	Krishnagar	Nadia	1859 July	Education Gazette Ashar 1177	Mitilal Dutta
2	Shantipore Ramnagar Para	Nadia	1863 July	Edu, Ashar 1283	-
3	Shantipore	Nadia	1271	Bama, Bhadra 1271	-
4	Nabadwip	Nadia	1872	Edu, 1872 January	-
5	Ranaghat	Nadia	1874		-
6	Goswami Durgapore	Nadia	1875	Edu, Bhadra 1282	Radhika Prasanna Mukherjee

Tarapada Bandhyopadhyay built a girl's school in Krishnagar on his own initiative. He was a member of the national congress and Brahmo Samaj.

Tarapada's daughter passed away at a very young age. He named the school Mrinalini Girl's school in memory of her daughter. At the present time the school is a reputed educational institution in Krishnagar.

Jessore, a southwestern district of eastern Bengal presently in the Khulna Division (Jessore was first in the Nadia Division and then in the presidency Division during colonial times), was quite advanced economically and culturally. The Magistrate of Jessore, in his annual general report for the year 1865-66 observes that there are fifteen schools for girls in the vicinity of the district headquarters of which 5 are aided by Government and there are also three schools for adult femals. (Because it is so interesting the observations of R. B.)

Kushtia, which is presently in Bangladesh, was a district of the Nadia Division in colonial times. As early as 1854 in Kumarkhali of Kushtia, Kanganal Harinath Majumder established a vernacular school adjacent to the local temple, where the Hindu girls of the area presumably studied with the boys.⁶ nothing else is known about the school. The Kumarkhali area truly pioneered girls school which has remained till today as a legacy of the Philanthropy of the local Zamindars. It is a government high school today and is called Charulata Government High school.⁷

The Bamabodhini Patrika (journal for the Enlightenment of women)⁸ also reported in its October issue of 1865, citing Dacca Prakash⁹ that girls school were established in Durgapur, Dhanputa, Mangalpaut, Azmatpur Mathurapur. Agrali, Khajura, Majiali, Goherpur and Nebutala of Jessore district and that each school had an average of ten to fifteen students sixteen ladies were said to be studying in the adult female schools.¹⁰

In the D.P.I report of 1870-71 the head of the education department Mr Grisly told that on the important role of society in the spread of women's education . He told "He is of opinion that female education cannot be forced, and that we must look to the educated natives to initiate all progressive measures, with out whose through support Government attempts will prove abortive such supports will be given as soon as it is the interest of the educated classes to give it and not till then"¹¹

However, it is clear from here contemporary statistics that the participation of women in education has increased. The list is given below :

Year	No of Schools	No of Students
1862-63	15	530
1863-64	35	1183
1864-65	95	2486
1865-66	181	4116
1866-67	-	3307
1867-68	-	3746
1868-69	-	4011
1870-71	-	-
1871-72	342	9400
1872-73	-	-
1873-74	-	-
1874-75	-	-
1875-76	403	9690
1876-77	464	10,492
1877-78	519	11,964
1878-79	543	12,497
1879-80	-	-
1880-81	657	14,870
1881-82	840	19,693
1882-83	1398	58,622
1883-84	1785	65,622
1884-85	-	-
1885-86	2296	78,000
1886-87	2198	81,054
1887-88	2247	83,828
1888-89	-	-
1889-90	-	-
1890-91	2238	78,865
1891-92	-	-
1892-93	-	-
1894-95	-	-
1895-96	3216	2,02,125
1896-97	3356	1,02,530
1897-98	2817	95,613
1898-99	2732	95,700
1899-1900	-	99,607

This paper shows that it was not enough Govt initiative that spread female education in Bengal. Instead it was the private initiative of local philanthropists which made a huge contribution to the promotion of girls education in Bengal. This initiative can also be noticed in Nadia. Overcoming this obstacle of education, the present time women are now reaching the peak of improving education.

II.

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