# The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905

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## SIX

# Domestic Life: The Role of the *Bhadramahilā* as Housewife

> Men recall pictures of homely households in earlier times, and imagine that such things are, or might be, going on still. They forget the prosaic fact, that the continually increasing use of all sorts of machinery for the supply of household wants has completely altered the aspect of our domestic interiors. The rounded life of our grandmothers, full of interest and variety and usefulness, is a thing of the past. Some of us may look back upon it with regret, but it can never be recalled. How can women, living in towns where they can buy almost every article in domestic use cheaper than they could make it, unless they reckon their time and eyesight as worth nothing at all, work with spirit at tasks which are obviously futile? It is not in human nature. It is not in *women's* nature even, mysteriously inconsequent as that nature is believed to be.[1]

The frustration underlying the words of English feminist Emily Davies, speaking for women of the English middle class, could also have applied to a growing number of women in Bengal by the late nineteenth century, when the stereotype of a "new woman" who was disdainful of domestic skills and inept at housework was current. This was usually contrasted with an

[1] "On Secondary Instruction as Relating to Girls," read at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Sciences, 1864; in E. Davies, *Thoughts*, p. 69.

idealized portrait of the woman of the past, the perfect housewife. In all those areas of the housewife's role which came under criticism, namely, the employment of servants, the arrangement of the house and domestic hygiene, cooking, household medicine, and the management of finance, extremely complex changes were taking place, a result of the transformation of the world of the *bhadralok* rather than of any faults of character in the "new woman."

## Financial responsibility

In 1891-1892, the minimum taxable income was 500 rupees per annum, and one in every thirty-one people in Calcutta was paying income tax. A majority of the urban *bhadralok*, professionals and salaried government employees, would have fallen into this taxpaying category.[2] Although they must be considered affluent when compared with the 97 percent of the population whose incomes were below the taxable level, in fact they were often struggling to make ends meet. In traditional society, conspicuous consumption in the form of occasional lavish expenditure on feasts and festivals was an accepted indication of social status. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the urban *grihastha bhadralok* were adopting a lifestyle that placed less value on grand displays of wealth. Instead of spending money in sporadic outbursts, they had to maintain a constant level of expenditure on newly perceived areas of importance such as education and health.

On account of the scarcity of available figures, and the wide variations in wages over the course of a career, it is difficult to determine an average wage for the urban *bhadralok*. A salary of 150 rupees a month seems to have been considered reasonably comfortable. The fluctuations in salary and in employment experienced by many *bhadralok* are illustrated in the career of Srinath Datta. When he returned from studying

[2] B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes. Their Growth in Modern Times* (Delhi, 1978 [1961]), pp. 243-244, 363-367. These groups were only brought under the operation of the Income Tax Act from 1886.

agricultural science in England, he could only get part-time employment as professor of mathematics at Albert College, earning 100 rupees per month. Then he was appointed manager of a tea estate in Assam at 150 rupees per month, which increased to 300 rupees after some years. During this time he paid off the debts he had incurred in England, but found it a struggle to maintain his growing family. Returning to Calcutta, where the rent on their house was 80 rupees a month, he had to supplement his meager teaching income by selling the milk of the family's cow, and by pawning all of his wife Harasundari's gold ornaments. His next position was as settlement officer in Mayurbhanj, on 200 rupees per month. After five years there, with eight children, they were in debt again. He took up a position as settlement officer for the Raja of Kanika for 150 rupees, and in 1891 was made assistant manager of the Burdwan estate on a salary going from an initial 300 rupees a month to 500. He held this position for eleven years. Afterwards he again held short-term posts in various places.[3] Srinath Datta was not a very successful member of the *bhadralok*, but his earnings were probably typical of most. His case also represents the particular difficulties that would have been encountered by a reforming or Brahmo family with a distinctively "progressive" lifestyle. Their expectations and aspirations were always higher than their means.

In Bengal, a lifestyle in accordance with progressive attitudes was only possible for the wealthier *bhadralok*. The material prosperity that made possible the changing mode of life of the English middle class was only found among the *bhadralok* elite. An article in *Abalābāndhab* drew attention to the rising cost of living in a *bhadralok* family.[4] Not only was there the expense of education for boys—ranging from an average of 100 rupees a year, to 1,000 rupees for education in England—but also the even higher cost of female education. Food had become more elaborate, and the reformed woman's dress,

[3] Harasundari Datta, *Swargīya Srīnāth Datter, passim.*

[4] "Abasthānusāritā," *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 5 (March 1879). See also "Eto rog o akāl mrityur kāran ki?" *BP*, 3:2, 250 (November 1885).

including petticoat, chemise, and often shoes, was far more costly than a simple sari. Houses had more furniture—pictures, basins, couch, piano, sofa, easy chairs, and reading lamps. Servants were employed, and the cost of doctors and medical treatment was high. There were also obligatory subscriptions to progressive causes, and to newspapers and journals. Apart from this there were other expenses such as rent, for those who had left the family home, and the obligation to send money back to the family if one was a breadwinner.[5]

Newspaper advertisements help to give an idea of the cost of purchasing some fashionable and prestigious items. Advertisements in the *Indian Mirror* in the 1870s show that "harmoniflutes" were priced from 40 to 55 rupees, while harmoniums were 80 rupees each. Bronze kerosine table lamps cost from 48 to 70 rupees, cut-glass models went from 85 to 130 rupees, and reading lamps from 27 to 86. Clocks ranged from 40 to 100 rupees, and watches varied from 35 for a "railway guard" keyless watch to 200 for one in a gold case. Solid gold watch chains could be bought for 50 to 250 rupees. A magic lantern cost 85 rupees, and the slides that went with it were 1 to 5 rupees each—alternatively, a "show" could be hired for 6 rupees for two hours. In 1878, a subscription to the *Indian Mirror* itself was 24 rupees annually for town-dwellers, and 32 for *mofussil* subscribers, with an extra charge for the Sunday edition.[6]

In a review of *Surucīr kutīr* by Dwarkanath Ganguly, an archetypal middle-class moralistic novel on the virtue of thrift, a Brahmo writer summarized the problem thus:

> Western civilisation has created many domestic wants; we now aspire to a mode of living which is more costly than the one we were used to. The mind of our young men and women have been filled with western ideas about clothing and living which are leading us fast into extrav-

[5] Prakascandra Ray sent 30 of the 80 rupees per month that he earned in 1875 back to his mother. Prakascandra Ray, *Aghor-prakās*, p. 33.

[6] See the advertisement section of the *Indian Mirror* in the 1870s.

> agance. Our young women have learnt to wear costly dresses before learning the science of domestic economy. Our desire to live in good, comfortable and well-ventilated houses leads us to cast our eyes on some of the big houses in, what are called English quarters, the rents of which are exceedingly high, but we do not care to learn the art of making a house, wheresoever located, comfortable, neat, clean and well ventilated. We always set before our eyes the residence of a well to do European without caring for our means, and we would often times go to spend every pice that we earn to live according to our ideal. But an Englishman would never exceed his means, but would try to save something out of his earnings and yet live better—have better and more substantial food. The secret of all this is the English wife. She is well versed in domestic economy. Thrift is a part of the education of an English wife. She knows how to make her husband and her children comfortable and yet to save something.[7]

On such a small margin, a woman's role as consumer and as financial manager was crucial.

In most households, the husband gave his wife a portion of his earnings to manage according to her own judgment of priorities. The ability to keep accounts was a quality sought after in the new housewife. In the past, women may have had some control over household finances, but the ability to keep accounts and manage money in a rational fashion was seen as a benefit of female education.[8] Women had to learn the need for a rising middle class to maintain its position through thrift, in contrast with the traditional way of establishing sta-

[7] " 'Surucheer Kuteer' or Thrift in Indian Homes," *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 19 February 1880. *Surucīr kutīr* was first published in 1878, and went into a second edition of 1,000 copies by 1881. *Bengal Library Catalogue*, 1881, I.

[8] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 8, 104 (April 1872); "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 11, 145 (September 1875). Swarnamayi Gupta, *Ūsā-cintā* (Calcutta, 1888), p. 73.

tus by lavish expenditure on festivals and ceremonial occasions. They were frequently lectured to on the need for thrift, economy, and living within their means.[9] This capacity would have been essential for the management of finances in lower-income *bhadralok* families. An article in the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* in 1876 gave instructions on the correct method of keeping precise accounts. It drew up a sample balance sheet, with categories of food, clothing, education, wages, customs (festivals), charity, and medicine on the expenditure side. These categories were then subdivided. For instance, education included the cost of fees, books, paper, and so on. Under income, the suggested categories were savings, rent, interest, salary, and commercial profit.[10] The whole process was one of rationalization of expenditure for long-term gain.

Articles advised readers of various ways of saving money. It was supposed to be cheaper to hire a gardener to grow vegetables for four rupees a month than to buy them in the market, and to be more economical to buy paddy and husk one's own rice.[11] Women were warned against extravagant purchases. If a man gave his wife twenty rupees a month for household expenses and she only spent sixteen rupees, she was to save the rest instead of spending it on a "wool box."[12]

Although she had no earnings, a woman's role in the household economy was a contributing factor to a family's wealth. Unaccounted for even now, there was the "hidden" value of her housework. The gold jewelry she brought with her on marriage was regarded as an investment. In addition, women were often able to save money of their own through careful management of the household allowance. They were advised to invest this in gold ornaments, company shares, moneylending, or business capital. It was stressed that apart from

[9] Ramtanu Gupta, *Strī-siksā*, p. 16; "Abasthā o sangsār," *BP*, 3:3, 261 (October 1886).

[10] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 12, 154 (June 1876).

[11] "Ādarsa hindu paribār," *BP*, 400.

[12] Jogendranarayan Ray, *Banga-mahilā* (Chinsurah, 1881), p. 64: "Banga mahilār sangsār jātray sahāyta."

this self-advancement, a portion should be spent on charity.[13] Women were able to carve out some independent means through this form of saving.

Biographical evidence confirms that women played a very important role in family finances. By "judicious economy," Shib Chunder Deb's wife made a small fortune out of the household allowance her husband gave her. She used the money for charitable works—a bathing *ghāt* with covered landing place in memory of her father, and a charitable homeopathic dispensary.[14] Her savings gave her an opportunity to establish and promote her own area of interest. Kailaskamini Dutt saved some money and pawned some of her gold ornaments—a woman's main source of capital—to buy land and build a house.[15] She was a clever business woman, managing the finances of the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* and paying her husband his salary as editor. When they went into debt to buy a printing press, she pawned more of her ornaments to keep the journal afloat.[16] Harasundari Datta was also a better financial manager than her husband Srinath. She saved from the monthly housekeeping allowance without letting him know. He used to spend his own portion and then ask her for money, but fear of going into debt made her tell the lie that she had none. Eventually her determination was rewarded, and they were able to buy some land in Calcutta from her savings.[17] Similarly, Kumudini Sinha sold her ornaments and costly clothes to help her husband raise the sum of more than 800 rupees needed to build a house on land in the Brahmo Mangalpara that he had purchased for 600 rupees.[18] When her husband's family became insolvent, Brahmo Atarmani Debi sold her ornaments to help pay the debt. In 1903 she decided to economize by moving the whole family to Giridi, a hill station

[13] "Byay," *BP*, 5, 79 (March 1870).
[14] M. N. Ghosh, ed., *The Life of Grish Chunder Ghose*, p. 62.
[15] Her brother shared in the purchase. *BP*, 6:3, 401 (June 1898).
[16] *BP*, 6:3, 402 (July 1898).
[17] Harasundari Datta, *Swargīya Srīnath Datter*, pp. 103-104.
[18] *Kumudinī-caritra*, pp. 24-25.

much favored by Brahmos, where the cost of living was lower than that in Calcutta.[19]

Women were gratified by the responsibility of keeping accounts and the chance for financial independence it provided. It was also a recognition of their capabilities, and constituted a position of trust. Prakascandra Ray used to do the monthly estimates himself, until Aghorekamini asked him why he could not trust her with this task. He replied that he had not done so because he thought it would be too complicated for her. She took up the challenge and handled the accounts very competently from then on.[20]

Women's position as financial managers meant that they were able to make decisions on the adoption of various new methods of performing old tasks in the household. Their main purchasing power was in basic items like food, but they would also have had a part in buying household furnishings. Labor-saving devices, which were already beginning to change the nature of housework in England in the nineteenth century, were barely evident in India. The main item under this category was the sewing machine. It was a product of the new technology, used increasingly by housewives in Victorian England.[21] For the Bengali housewife, it represented a potential money-saving rather than labor-saving item. Ordinarily she would have had her children's and husband's clothes sewn by a tailor, at some cost, but now she was urged to sew them herself to economize.[22] The idealized heroine of *Surucīr kutīr* bought a sewing machine and started a tailoring company. The *pārā* women who worked with her were supposed to be able to earn 5 or 6 rupees per month, which she invested for them with a return of 100 rupees per annum.[23] Sewing ma-

[19] Amritalal Gupta, *Punyabatī nārī*, pp. 60-61.

[20] Prakascandra Ray, *Aghor-prakās*, p. 65.

[21] P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, chapter three, "The Modern Homemaker."

[22] Kumudini Ray, "Hindu nārīr gārhasthya dharmma," *BP*, 5:3, 359 (December 1894).

[23] See the plot summary given in " 'Surucheer Kuteer' or Thrift in Indian Homes," *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 19 February 1880.

chines first appeared in Calcutta in 1853.[24] An advertisement for Singer sewing machines in 1878 offered an instruction booklet with every machine purchased, and, for "lady purchasers residing in Calcutta," free personal instruction was given as an added incentive.[25] Harasundari Datta was given a sewing machine, costing 84 rupees, by the wife of an English estate manager in Mayurbhanj. She sewed all of the family's clothes on it, from the children's cotton wrappers to her husband's overcoat.[26] The high initial cost of purchasing a machine would have prevented many *bhadramahilā* from benefiting from the long-term economy. As consumers, women wanted to partake of the novel goods and services available in Calcutta and urban centers, yet their financial control over a limited income and the continual injunctions to thrift would have held them back from spending on items other than minimal necessities.

## The ideal of the *sugrihinī*

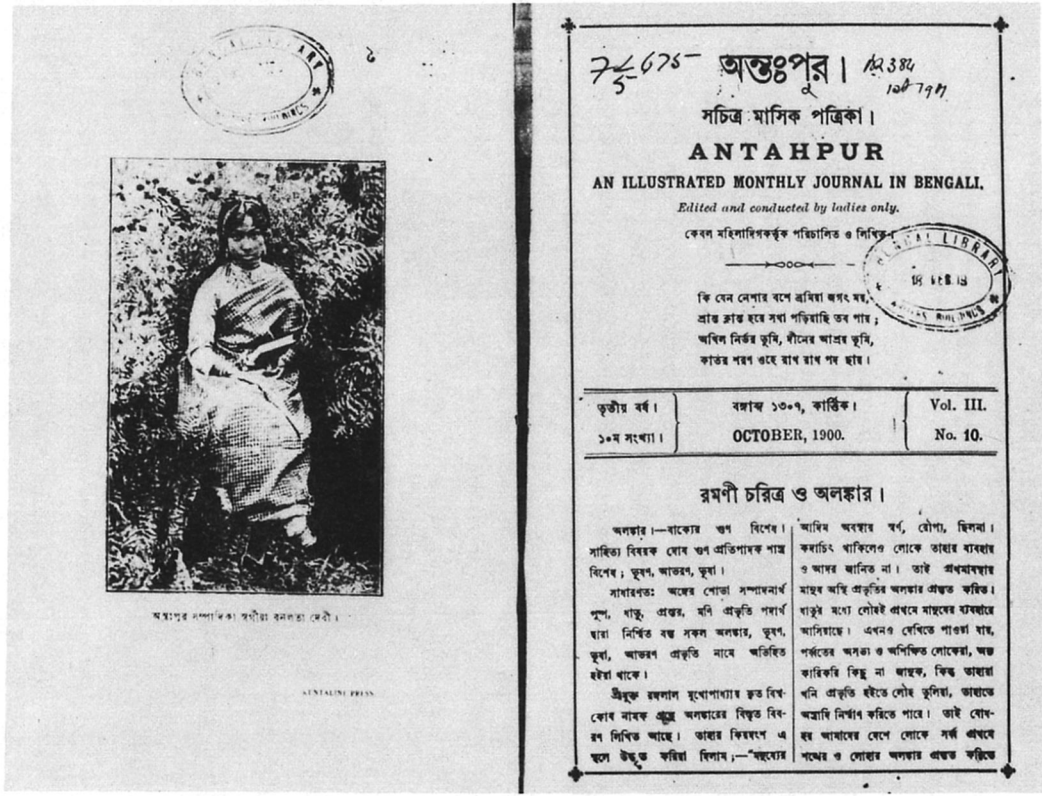
The *sugrihinī*, or good housewife, was presented as an ideal in all literature directed toward women. She was one who toiled ceaselessly from morning till night, delighting in such labor.[27] Mindful of others' comfort and not preoccupied with her own, she was hospitable and generous without being extravagant, skilled in the culinary and medicinal arts and able to control a large household. Banalata Debi, daughter of Sasipada Banerjea, was described as an *ādarsa grihinī*, or ideal housewife. It was said that she supervised the most minute details of the household even while seriously ill. She kept an eye on the accounts and the kitchen, and saw to it that her husband and young son were properly looked after and that

[24] Six machines were imported from America by the wealthy Rajendra Datta in 1853. Their speed and efficiency was marveled over in an article "Selāiyer kal," in *Sangbād Prabhākar*, 18 June 1853, in B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part i, p. 91.

[25] Advertisement section, *IMS*, 1 December 1878.

[26] Harasundari Datta, *Swargīya Srīnāth Datter*, pp. 39-40.

[27] "Subhabibāhopalakse kanyār prati upades," *BP*, 3:2, 237 (October 1884).



অন্তঃপুর সম্পাদিকা স্বর্গীয়া বনলতা দেবী।

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সচিত্র মাসিক পত্রিকা।

## ANTAHPUR

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## রমণী চরিত্র ও অলঙ্কার।

অলঙ্কার।—বাক্যের গুণ বিশেষ। সাহিত্য বিষয়ক দোষ গুণ প্রতিপাদক শাস্ত্র বিশেষ; ভূষণ, আভরণ, ভূষা।

সাধারণতঃ অঙ্গের শোভা সম্পাদনার্থ সুবর্ণ, ধাতু, প্রস্তর, মণি প্রভৃতি পদার্থ দ্বারা নির্ম্মিত বস্তু সকল অলঙ্কার, ভূষণ, ভূষা, আভরণ প্রভৃতি নামে অভিহিত হইয়া থাকে।

শ্রীযুক্ত রজনীকান্ত মুখোপাধ্যায় কৃত বিশ্বকোষ নামক গ্রন্থে অলঙ্কারের বিস্তৃত বিবরণ লিখিত আছে। তাহার কিয়দংশ এ স্থলে উদ্ধৃত করিয়া দিলাম;—"মনুষ্যের আদিম অবস্থায় স্বর্ণ, রৌপ্য, হিরণ্য। কদাচিৎ থাকিলেও লোকে তাহার ব্যবহার ও আদর জানিত না। তাই প্রথমাবস্থায় মানুষ অস্থি প্রভৃতির অলঙ্কার প্রস্তুত করিত। ধাতুর মধ্যে লৌহই প্রথমে মানুষের ব্যবহারে আসিয়াছে। এখনও দেখিতে পাওয়া যায়, পর্ব্বতের অসভ্য ও অশিক্ষিত লোকেরা, অন্য কারিকরি কিছু না জানুক, কিন্তু তাহারা খনি প্রভৃতি হইতে লৌহ তুলিয়া, তাহাতে অস্ত্রাদি নির্ম্মাণ করিতে পারে। তাই বোধহয় আমাদের যেণে লোকে সর্ব্ব প্রথমে শঙ্খের ও লোহার অলঙ্কার প্রস্তুত করিতে

6. Banalata Debi (1879-1900), an "ideal housewife" or *ādarsa grihinī*.
The daughter of Brahmo reformer Sasipada Banerjea, Banalata edited the women's journal *Antahpur* from its inception in 1898 until her death in 1900.

order was maintained. A week before her death, even though she was very weak, she was not satisfied unless she made out the marketing list and supervised the cooking herself.[28]

The topic set by Sasipada Banerjea for a prize essay in 1881 was "*Ādarsa grihinī*." The winning entry, by Parbati Basu, described her as one who woke early and cooked the morning meal. In the "free" time she had before beginning to cook the evening meal, the *ādarsa grihinī* would not be idle: "Any shirt without a button, any torn clothing, can be worn again for some time if mended; any pillow without a cover, any dirty sheet, any things that haven't been moved and need dusting—she attends to all these things with care."[29]

Yet, in the eyes of numerous social commentators, the *nabīnā*, or new woman, of the later nineteenth century was not living up to the rigorous standards set by the *prācīnā*, or woman of old. It was repeated endlessly and became a matter of conventional wisdom that the new woman disdained housework.[30] Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote an article comparing the two types. In contrast with the hardworking *prācīnā*, he satirized the *nabīnā* as utterly lazy, floating on the surface of the water like a lotus, admiring her own reflection. He expressed concern that her attitude would have disastrous results, such as the deterioration of women's health, because housework was a form of exercise; a decline in the health of children, because they were born and reared by weak mothers; and a loss of skills needed for housework. To him, "the woman who, coming into the world, spends her time rolling out of bed, arranging her hair in front of the mirror, doing carpet work, reading *Sītar banabās*, and having children, contributing to no one's happiness but her own, may be a little better

[28] *Antahpur*, 3, 12 (December 1900). Supplement on the death of editor Banalata Debi.

[29] Parbati Basu, "Ādarsa grihinī," Bāmāracanā, *BP*, 2:2, 194 (March 1881).

[30] "Nārīcarit," *BP*, 5, 76 (December 1869); *BP*, 10, 129 (May 1874); "Grihinīganer grihakārjya karā cāi," Jogendranarayan Ray, *Banga-mahilā*; Tarakanath Biswas, *Bangīya-mahilā*, p. 18; "Grihakarmma karibār kathā," Candranath Basu, *Gārhasthyapāth*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, 1887).

than an animal, but her birth as a woman is in vain."[31] Rajnarain Bose echoed him, claiming that women of "those days" were far more hardworking than the housewives of "these days," who were educated and looked down on physical effort.[32] Swarnamayi Gupta, a critical and analytical female writer, agreed that women were no longer as competent in domestic skills, but questioned whether it was not the method of education, rather than education itself, that was to blame.[33]

The past time referred to was not clearly located, but by inference it was a time before women had any interests outside the house. The "new woman" not only had the audacity to dislike hard work, but she preferred to read novels or do woolwork. In effect, the perfect past time was before the spread of female literacy. The criticisms by earlier writers of the laziness of women of former times and the futile manner in which they spent their leisure time had been forgotten.[34]

The positing of a "golden age" when women were better than in the contemporary age was not a phenomenon peculiar to Bengal. An English woman wrote in 1883 that "things are getting worse not better, and our young women are less useful than their mothers, while these last do not as a rule, come near the housekeeping ladies of older times, who knew every secret of domestic economy."[35] The generality of this kind of outcry indicates that the anxiety was not necessarily caused by particular changes in women's attitudes to housework, but by a nebulous panic at the rapidity of social change, and an uncertainty as to how to adapt to it. Women became symbols of stability, tradition, and continuity, and therefore any change in their role or mode of living was interpreted as a threat to the social order.

[31] Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, "Prācīnā ebang nabīnā," *Bibidha prabandha* (Calcutta, 1964), p. 156. First published in *Banga Darsan* in 1874.

[32] Rajnarain Bose, *Se kāl ār e kāl*, p. 86.

[33] Swarnamayi Gupta, *Ūsā-cintā*, pp. 67-69.

[34] For some of these criticisms see Chapter One.

[35] E. Lynn Linton, *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London, 1883), quoted in P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, p. 23.

## The employment of servants

One important element of social change, not caused by women but affecting them closely, was the increased employment of servants. Traditionally, only *zamindari* families or large urban households employed a retinue of servants. In most cases these were not internal household servants, but external servants expected to do menial work or help with *zamindari* affairs. The *ginnī* directed the women of the household in the domestic chores, which included cooking enough food to feed the servants as well as the family. Rassundari Debi described this kind of arrangement from her experience.[36] Servants were considered to be part of the extended family, and enjoyed with its members a relationship of mutual obligations of service in exchange for patronage and maintenance. Apart from this, particular caste and occupational groups performed certain essential services—for instance, sweepers removed refuse and *dhobās* washed clothes. In rural areas, the *jajmani* relationship was operative, and artisan castes were bound by ritual ties to give their services.

Unfortunately, there is little information on the subject of servants, wages, and incomes in Bengal. Available evidence indicates that there was an increase in employment of servants among the *bhadralok*. In England, the middle class had the material wealth enabling them to afford to employ servants, although frequently aspirations to higher status were ahead of the financial capacity to hire domestic help.[37] In theory, the employment of servants left the mistress of the house unoccupied. Women were severely castigated for the purely imaginary vice of laziness:

> A young girl complains now-a-days that she has nothing to do? Nothing to do! . . . Why, if a girl will do it, she has plenty to do! Not if she will leave all to servants—not if she be afraid to soil her fingers—not if she think

[36] Rassundari Debi, *Āmār jīban*, pp. 27-29.
[37] P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, pp. 53-57.

> it vulgar to attend to household duties—not if she deem it derogatory either to make a pudding or to nurse a sick person—not if she consider a young lady ought to be a drone in this busy hive of England.[38]

In practice, even if she could afford to employ enough servants to do all the work, in order to direct them the mistress of the house needed to know as much about domestic skills as would have been necessary if she had to perform their duties herself.[39]

In Bengal, the *nabīnā* was accused of being a drain on family finances because she had withdrawn her labor and forced the family to hire servants in her stead. In 1892, a writer in *Banganibāsī* claimed that missionary teaching had encouraged girls to spend all their time in reading, writing, and needlework, and that therefore the cost of living had increased because servants had to be engaged. This increase in cost was said to threaten the viability of the joint family unit, which had relied on the contribution to household work by the women of the family.[40]

The increase in employment of servants by the *bhadralok* was partly due to a concern with establishing social status. This was indicated by a writer in 1887, who criticized both men and women for laziness and for abrogating their household responsibilities:

> Now many of both men and women amongst us, inclining to refinement and affectation, are employing servants to do the housework. Now many women think it degrading to wash plates, sweep, or cook. And many men think it is an insult to have to do the marketing or pour a glass of water from the water-pot themselves.[41]

[38] P. H. Chavasse, *Counsel to a Mother*, pp. 161-162.

[39] T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution. The Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820-1920* (New York, 1976), p. 28; P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, chapter two.

[40] *Banganibāsī*, 19 August 1892, in *RNNB* 27 August 1892.

[41] Candranath Basu, *Gārhasthyapāth*, "Grihakarma karibār kathā," pp. 63-64.

A woman writer in 1898 severely criticized other women for living above their means in order to enhance their status by hiring servants and giving up housework. She said that in some families, the wife hired a servant or a cook as soon as her husband earned twenty-five to thirty rupees a month. She cited the case of a Brahmo family with six or seven children where the husband, earning only eighteen rupees a month, still insisted on hiring a servant for six to seven rupees of his salary. Disapprovingly, she commented that the housewife was perfectly healthy, and could have saved family finances by doing everything herself.[42] Jnanadanandini Debi recollected that in the 1860s the wages of a maidservant were around two rupees a month, and those of a manservant around two and a half rupees, but that the cost of employing servants gradually rose above this.[43]

In nineteenth-century England, there was a proliferation of manuals on how to deal with servants because of the novelty of the employer role for middle-class women.[44] In Bengal there were also numerous articles in magazines and manuals on dealing with servants. It seems unlikely that the role of mistress and employer was entirely unfamiliar to the *bhadramahilā*, who occupied a superior position in the caste hierarchy and therefore were used to dealing with subordinate service castes. Advice may have been needed, however, because of the changing nature of the relationship between mistress and servant. Change was taking place in the composition of the servant population, as well as in the status of their employers. Formerly servants had been "old retainers," an integral part of

[42] *Mahilā*, 3, 6 (January 1898).

[43] Reminiscences of Jnanadanandini Debi in Indira Debi Caudhurani, *Purātanī*, p. 27.

[44] See T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, chapter one; P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood*, chapters two, three. E. Ellis, *The Wives of England, Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (London, 1843), chapter two, "Treatment of Servants and Dependants," gives an idea of the way in which obligations and rights were formalized. F. P. Cobbe, *The Duties of Women*, 2nd ed. (London, 1882), pp. 149-151, discussed the change from patriarchy to contract in the master-servant relationship.

the larger family structure. In the nineteenth century, both the increased pressure on land and expectations of employment in urban areas brought an assortment of people into the towns and cities of Bengal. They were hired as servants on a contractual basis, and nothing was known about their background. Housewives were warned to be very careful when hiring servants. In order to find out more about the prospective servant's character, it was desirable to have a reference from their previous employer about their abilities and their reasons for leaving the job.[45] Protap Chunder Mozoomdar advised prospective employers that to get a good servant they would have to be prepared to pay competitive wages. If they did, the servant would work harder and be more likely to stay on. He cautioned against employing "all those people from Monghyr and Gaya, decrepit gluttons from the trail of the tea estates, or expelled from the jute factories, who have come seeking jobs in Calcutta: they are utterly stupid workers, who devour like Yama and sleep like Kumbhakarna. Keeping that kind of person on would be like trying to teach a camel to read the *smritisāstra.*"[46]

The manuals instructed housewives to treat servants with affection, and to speak nicely to them. They should give their servants an exact idea of their duties and how to perform them correctly, and should reward them when they had worked well.[47] Banalata Debi, the *ādarsa grihinī* mentioned earlier, never addressed even young servants by the familiar pronoun *tui.* Tears came to her eyes if anyone spoke harshly to the cook.[48] Subodhbala Debi never raised her voice to give orders to servants, yet managed to retain a firm authority.[49] Other women were less exemplary, and their behavior perhaps re-

[45] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 8, 115 (March 1873).

[46] Yama is the god of death. Kumbhakarna is the second brother of Ravana in the *Rāmāyana*, who kept awake for one day after sleeping six months. P. C. Mozoomdar, *Strīcaritra*, p. 102, "Dāsdāsī."

[47] Sibnath Sastri, *Grihadharma*, pp. 64-66, "Prabhu-bhrityer sambandha"; "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 115.

[48] *Antahpur*, 3, 12, special supplement.

[49] Subodhbala Debi, *Nīrab sādhanā* (Calcutta, 1913), p. 6.

flected the mistress-servant relationship more realistically. An article in *Paricārikā* complained that although it was considered *abhadra*, or unladylike, to fight with the maidservant, it was hard to avoid it when she stole one paise in every three. In jest, a *Cākarāni Hitakārinī Sabhā*, or benevolent association for maidservants, along the lines of the Brahmo Samaj or the Indian Reform Association, was suggested as a solution to the problem. The writer declared that, without some improvement in the situation, it would be impossible for the *bhadramahilā* to remain *bhadra*.[50]

In a paternalistic fashion, writers stressed that servants were also human and needed sympathy and love, and that in many respects they were like children, who needed moral instruction. The English practice of including servants in regular family worship was commended.[51]

Despite the outcry over women's laziness, the great majority of the *bhadramahilā* continued to be closely involved in the work of the household. Koilasbasini Debi wrote in 1863 that among the *madhyabitta griha*, or middle-class households, the wife did the work of cook, maidservant, and midwife.[52] In 1873, a correspondent of the *Indian Mirror* who was proposing a change in the timetable at the Bharat Ashram Ladies' School gave further credence to this. He said that the times were inconvenient for "every middle class female" who was not a boarder there. Whereas in the Bharat Ashram housework was done systematically and with the aid of "menials," "in families of insufficient income no such aid can be obtained and the poor ladies having performed all the works themselves find very little time at their command to devote to the acquisition of knowledge."[53]

Biographical evidence suggests that in many *bhadralok* families the housewife had to do all the work herself because they

[50] "Āmāder jhī," *Paricārikā*, 16 July 1878.

[51] Sibnath Sastri, *Grihadharma*; "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 115.

[52] Koilasbasini Debi, *Hindumahilāganer hīnābasthā* (Calcutta, 1863), pp. 54-55.

[53] *Indian Mirror*, 16 October 1873. Letter from P.K.R. Chowdry, Calcutta.

could not afford to employ a servant. A paid servant was not taken for granted, but was a sign of well-being. For example, when Sasipada Banerjea lost his job in the post office, he had to dismiss their servant, and his wife Girijakumari had to take over all the housework.[54] Similarly, when Srinath Datta returned from England in 1876 he could only get part-time employment, earning 100 rupees a month. His wife Harasundari did all the cooking, and a friend who shared their rented house did the marketing. They could employ only an occasional maidservant and a *darwan*. However, when he got a position as settlement officer for the maharaja of Mayurbhanj in 1884, on 200 rupees per month, the family went to live there and employed a maidservant. Harasundari continued to do the cooking and sewed all the clothes for their large family.[55] Families would often start out unable to employ servants, but would gradually become employers once their position and income improved.

The first generations of Brahmo women went without servants for some time for social as well as financial reasons. Traditional servant castes would no longer serve them because they had been ostracized by the Hindu community. In most cases the ostracism eventually broke down,[56] as it would have been difficult to maintain such sanctions in urban areas with a mobile servant population. Keshub Chunder Sen's wife Jaganmohini did most of the housework and cooking throughout her life because of continued difficulty in getting servants. This was especially so when they lived in the joint family house, where the servants showed the same contempt toward them as the rest of the household.[57]

Even with servants, the housewife often continued to do much of the work herself. Despite the popular image of the

[54] Rajanikanta De, *Caritamādhurī*, p. 15.

[55] Harasundari Datta, *Swargīya Srināth Datter*, pp. 17, 37-39.

[56] Rakhal Chandra Ray, *Jīban bindu*, pp. 69-71; Dwarkanath Ganguly, *Jībanālekhya*, pp. 22-24; Prakascandra Ray, *Aghor-prakās*, p. 25; Sibnath Sastri, *Ātmacarit*, pp. 58-59.

[57] [Priyanath Mallik], *Brahma-nandinī*, pp. 91-99, 117.

*nabīnā*, good housekeeping remained a mark of virtue, and the good housewife was extolled as an ideal woman.[58] Most *bhadramahilā* still aspired to the ideal of the *sugrihinī*. When Umesh Chunder Dutt was principal of City College, his wife Kailaskamini still did all the housework. They did not employ a maidservant or a cook.[59]

There are many explanations for the trend toward increased employment of internal household servants by the *bhadralok* in nineteenth-century Bengal. One is that traditional patron-client relationships could only function in a small-scale rural setting, and servants had to be employed on a contractual basis for the same services to be performed in cities and towns. The spread of female education left women with less time to devote to household work. More importantly, the capacity to employ servants was an indication of social status. The rapid pace of urbanization and change created a confusion of mind that linked the high cost of living, including the added cost of servants' wages, with the supposed idleness of the educated female.

## Domestic order

In fact, the educated *bhadramahilā* was being schooled in a different range of domestic duties, and had to bear the burden of responsibility for the smooth functioning of the household even if there were servants. In the traditional family structure, the *ginnī* was responsible for household organization. It was not to her, however, but to younger women who may have been setting up their own homes, or marking out their own domain in a larger household, that the household manuals and magazine articles on domestic organization were addressed. Subjects discussed ranged from the location of the house to the layout of rooms within it and the arrangement

[58] Nalinikanta Cattopadhyay, *Nabakānta Cattopādhyāy*, p. 20; *BP*, 6:3, 402 (July 1898).

[59] Rajanikanta De, *Caritamādhurī*, p. 18.

of furniture in each room. The theme underlying all instructions was the importance of order, routine, and cleanliness.

The proper use of time, central to the Victorian work ethic, exercised an influence in Bengal through colonial administrative practice and Brahmo puritanism. In some "progressive" households, each day was rigidly divided into separate activities by a timetable. The schedule prescribed for inhabitants of the Bharat Ashram typified this concern for precise allocation of time.[60] The list of activities in an average day in the life of Aghorekamini Ray showed a similar concern with marking out boundaries for each activity. Her routine was set out thus:

> 1) Supervise the children's meal. 2) Study. 3) Worship. 4) Look after the sick. 5) Go to school. 6) Give clothes to the washerman. 7) Supervision. 8) Make a quilt. 9) Visit a new friend. 10) Arrange for shoes. 11) Make estimates and give out wages.[61]

Hygiene was also a governing principle. In this respect, Bengal did not lag far behind Britain, where the discovery of germ theory was still recent and not widely known among the general populace. Most accounts of the typical traditional house commented on the disregard for hygiene and cleanliness it exhibited. Although the outer apartments were usually reasonably commodious and airy, the *antahpur* was dingy, and

> cooking-rooms without proper chimneys, and smoky outlets generally, form part of these dwelling apartments; in addition to which source of mischief is the *aus takoor* [sic], or place for throwing the refuse of the cooking-house. It may be easy to imagine the noxious quality imparted to the atmosphere by stagnant water and decaying vegetables and animal matter. It is now generally acknowledged, that this noxious quality is in reality a subtle poison, which acts on the human system through

[60] See Chapter Two for an account of this schedule.
[61] Prakascandra Ray, *Aghor-prakās*, p. 172.

> the medium of the lungs, producing fevers and other epidemics. . . . There are also the odious privy-houses, one sufficing for a whole family. They are seldom or never cleared, and are a perennial source of disease and unhealthiness. . . . It is now also generally known, that tanks, and collections of water of every kind, are dangerous beneath or near a house, because, unless their contents be constantly in a state of change, which is rarely the case, their tendency is to send up exhalations of a noxious kind. But to a native house, contiguous to the female apartments, is generally attached a tank, in which the women perform their ablutions, wash their cooking utensils, and the water of which they use for culinary and domestic purposes. It is, however, nothing better than a kind of millpond, into which every kind of refuse is thrown.[62]

The correct locality for a house was a place where there had never been a tank; a clean cowshed beside the house should have a sloping cement floor.[63] In the cities it was also necessary to have, at some distance from the house, or at least away from the kitchen and dining areas, a toilet that should be cleaned daily with water and disinfected with lime.[64] The bedrooms needed to be airy, and the kitchen was to be at a distance from the living rooms, with a storeroom beside it.[65]

The interiors of Bengali houses were contrasted unfavorably with English houses, where cleanliness was almost an obsession.[66] Although Bengali women swept their houses twice a day, they were accused of neglecting the overall cleanliness,

[62] Kanny Loll Dey, sub-assistant surgeon, in an address to the Bengal Branch of the British Medical Association in March 1866, quoted in M. Carpenter, *Six Months*, I, 62-63. See also the opening paragraphs of Peary Chand Mitra's novel *Bāmātosinī* (1881) in Asitkumar Bandopadhyay, ed., *Pyāricād racanābalī*, p. 559, and P. Chapman, *Hindoo Female Education*, pp. 2-3.

[63] "Grihasthālīr kathā," *Antahpur*, 5, 5-6 (September-October 1902).

[64] In villages a hole in the ground, with dry earth to be put on after each use, was considered sufficient. "Nārīr kartabya," *BP*, 4:1, 268 (May 1887).

[65] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 10, 133 (September 1874).

[66] *BP*, 2:2, 195 (April 1881); Pyaridas Sarkar, *Strīsiksā*, p. 29.

and of contributing to unsanitariness by wiping their fingers on the walls, floors, or pillows after preparing betel, or by spitting on the wall or floor.[67] In the interests of better health, women were advised to wash and air all bed linen, and to clean and dust twice daily, even under the bed.[68] Drinking water was to be purified, either by collecting rain water, boiling well water, or putting it through a filter.[69]

The new sense of order showed a preoccupation with the adage "a place for everything and everything in its place." One writer on "Women's Duties" complained of the inconvenience of never being able to find things in the disorder prevailing in a Bengali household. A towel might be placed over the water-pot in the morning, hung on the door at midday, left in the kitchen in the afternoon and then placed on the bed at night, leaving a dirty and wet mark. Things would be much better if the housewife told everyone to put objects back where they found them, so that they would always remain in the same place.[70] All items in the storeroom were to be listed and labeled for increased efficiency.[71]

Order and hygiene were not the only considerations. The *bhadralok* displayed a new kind of taste and aesthetic style. In general, Bengali homes were simply and sparsely furnished, the only decoration being the traditional *ālpanā* designs on the floor or walls. An article written in 1892 noted that the traditional house plan was changing, especially in the towns. The most fashionable type of house had drawing rooms in the inner and outer apartments; dining rooms were coming into vogue, and separate "suites of apartments" were provided for each married couple in a large household. The women's drawing rooms would include such items as a piano or har-

[67] Candranath Basu, *Gārhastyapāth*, pp. 1-5, "Griha pariskār rākhibār kathā."

[68] "Nārīr kartabya," *BP*, 2:3, 196 (May 1881).

[69] Kumudini Ray, "Hindu nārīr gārhasthya dharmma," *BP*, 5:3, 359 (December 1894); "Swāsthya raksā," *BP*, 2:2, 188 (September 1880).

[70] "Nārīr kartabya—bās bhaban," *BP*, 3:3, 265 (February 1881).

[71] "Nārīr kartabya," *BP*, 196.

monium.[72] Wealthy *bhadralok* imbibed the Victorian predilection for heavy furniture. One writer commented on the tendency for "Anglicized baboos" to go to excess, cramming their houses full of chairs, tables, and sofas, covering the walls with wall-shades and mirrors, and hanging chandeliers from the ceiling.[73] The apparent lack of organization in a Bengali house disturbed British visitors, who had their own fixed Victorian ideas of taste. Annette Akroyd felt "heartache" at the sight of the discomfort and untidiness of Dr. Annada Charan Khastagir's house. The "complete absence of order" baffled her. When she visited Brahmamayi, wife of Durga Mohan Das, she noted that her house was just being furnished in the English fashion. Her verdict was that W. C. Bonerjea, Monomohan Ghose, Dr. Goodeve Chuckerbutty, Dr. Ghose, and Dr. Russic Lal Dutt, among non-Brahmos, and Dr. G. C. Roy and Durga Mohan Das among Brahmos, were the only Bengalis living in an "enlightened" way, which she defined confidently as the preference for comfort, convenience, and individual liberty over the "disgusts" of a genuine Bengali family home.[74]

It is not surprising that Bengali housewives lacked the skills needed for coping with the new *bhadralok* house. They were not used to so much furniture or to the accumulation of household ornaments, and therefore they did not realize the need for dusting them, either.[75] Traditional household skills were of little use when dealing with the new paraphernalia. The

[72] Guru Proshad Sen, "The Hindu Family," *CR*, 95, 190 (October 1892), 307-308.

[73] J. Kerr, *The Domestic Life*, p. 166.

[74] Annette Akroyd, *Diary and Notebook in India 1872-1878*. Entries for 28 December 1872 and 16 March 1873. Letter to Fanny Mowatt, her sister, 9 May 1873, in Akroyd-Beveridge Papers.

[75] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 11, 141 (May 1875) complained that Bengali housewives did not dust regularly, as Englishwomen did. M. Urquhart, *Women of Bengal*, noted that westernization meant houses were encumbered with heavy furniture and carpets that rotted and became dusty because women were not trained to cope with them. "Emancipated" women, she said, had more modern houses and a better idea of how to keep them in order (pp. 20-21).

articles in manuals and journals therefore fulfilled the important function of teaching women how to manage their changed environment. For instance, oil paintings were a novel decorative item in wealthier households, and required special care and handling. One household magazine, *Gārhasthya*, gave instructions on how to clean oil paintings.[76] Women also had to be educated in the new aesthetic. To this end, they were lectured on such topics as "The Arrangement of Household Furniture."[77] Household manuals recommended that the home should be decorated with flowers, in garlands or in vases, and with pictures and paintings on the walls.

Despite Miss Akroyd's condemnation of his own home, Dr. Annada Charan Khastagir gave some lectures on health and hygiene to the Native Ladies' Institution. Kailaskamini Dutt attended these, and was so impressed that she made an effort to observe the rules of health in her own home, in such matters as ensuring that the water was pure and clean.[78] The modern *ādarsa grihinī* was to be imbued with both a notion of hygiene and a decorative sense. A biographer of Girijakumari Banerjea praised her for being a skilled housewife, arranging the house so that it looked beautiful as well as clean.[79]

Sarojini Ghose, a Hindu *bhadramahilā*, was a perfect example of the modern *ādarsa grihinī*. When she moved into a new house with her husband and children in 1896, she put a table, chairs, and pictures in the drawing room and a clothes-horse in the bedroom. The bed was brought out, placed in the sun, and cleaned with hot water to get rid of bugs, before being put back in its place. Necessary articles were placed on a table beside the bed. The *almirah*, clothes trunk, mirror, and comb were all put in suitable places. All provisions in the

[76] *Gārhasthya*, 1, 7 (1884). In some cases the instructions would have been passed on to servants. The *Indian Mirror* in 1880 commented disapprovingly on the lascivious pictures of women in the drawing rooms of houses of educated natives. *IMS*, 23 May 1880.

[77] Lecture to the Sunday School for Girls in Bhagulpore, *Liberal and New Dispensation*, 7 September 1884.

[78] *BP*, 6:3, 401 (June 1898).

[79] Rajanikanta De, *Caritamādhurī*, p. 14.

storeroom were labeled and arranged. The kitchen was spotlessly clean. The toilet had clean water, and a lump of clay for handwashing, as well as soap; the bathroom had a bucket, basin, wooden stool, soap, and oil. The kitchen had its own separate bucket and basin, which were not to be mixed up with those used in the bathroom.[80]

## Culinary skills

Cooking was another area in which the capacities of the "modern" woman came under attack from the 1870s onward. It was said that the *nabīnā* was no longer able to cook, and relied on the skills of professional cooks to perform a function she would formerly have handled herself.[81] A chorus of voices proclaimed that the *bhadramahilā* would not cook because she regarded it as beneath her dignity, and had to hire a cook. In 1876, one writer remembered wistfully that in his childhood all *bhadramahilā* could cook, but claimed that this was no longer the case. Now women hired cooks, no matter how low their husbands' incomes.[82] Rajnarain Bose agreed, commenting caustically that things would only change in the wake of changes in England, as Bengalis always followed the English. He thought it fortunate, therefore, that in England cooking was being actively promoted by lectures, societies, and royal patronage.[83]

Traditionally, girls learned how to cook from their mothers or from other older women. Early in the nineteenth century, Rassundari Debi learned from an old woman living nearby,

[80] Renuka Ghose, *Sarojinī carit*, pp. 22-23.

[81] D. N. Pal, *The Hindu Wife*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, 1911), p. 45: "It is a modern innovation that cooks are retained in some Hindu households." A woman writing in 1878 said that in the past, in both rich families and those not rich, the women of the family did the cooking but that now in all educated families there was a cook. *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 9 (July 1879).

[82] "Strīsiksā," *Tattwabodhinī Patrikā*, 394 (June 1876) in B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part 2, p. 441.

[83] Rajnarain Bose, *Se kāl*, pp. 86-87. See also "Supakka grihinī," *Paricārikā*, 1, 8 (January 1879). The writer remarked that even the Queen of England taught her daughters how to cook.

by helping her with preparations and watching her cook until she picked up the skills herself.[84] Sudaksina Sen learned to cook when she was seven or eight, in order to cook for her grandfather when he visited places as a Brahmin priest.[85] Bamasundari Debi learned cooking as a game, by playing with toy utensils in imitation of her mother, until she was old enough to be entrusted with real ones.[86] Punyalata Cakrabarti, at the turn of the century, learned to cook by making miniature copies of the dishes her mother prepared.[87]

The increasing prevalence of formal schooling for girls of *bhadralok* families undoubtedly disrupted the organization of traditional learning. Recognizing this, an article written in 1887 suggested to mothers that they teach their daughters to cook during the school holidays.[88] The normal routine of school between 9 a.m. and 3.30 p.m., followed by a period of rest and then further study, did not leave any time for learning domestic skills.[89] It seems unlikely, however, that most mothers would not still have found some time to transmit cooking skills to their daughters. Whatever the reality, it is significant that a decline in cooking ability was perceived, and seen as a result of "modernization" and women's education.

However, the laments about the incompetence of modern women were supplemented by some attempts to deal with the problem. There were calls for cooking to become part of the school curriculum for girls, thus institutionalizing the transmission of a traditional domestic ability.[90] Schools in Bengal were urged to follow the precedent of some schools in England, where cooking had already been added to the curriculum.[91] The Utterparah Hitakari Sabha included cooking in its

[84] Rassundari Debi, *Āmār jīban*, pp. 15-16.
[85] Sudaksina Sen, *Jīban smriti*, pp. 39-40.
[86] Candrakanta Sen, *Bāmāsundarī*, p. 13.
[87] Punyalata Cakrabarti, *Chele belar din guli*, pp. 101-102.
[88] "Nārīr kartabya," *BP*, 4:1, 270 (July 1887).
[89] Priyambada Debi, "Strī-siksā," *Antahpur*, 4, 5 (May 1901).
[90] *Somprakās*, 25 July 1887 in *RNNB* 30 July 1887.
[91] *Bhāratbāsī*, 23 July 1887 in *RNNB* 6 August 1887; "Randhan kārjya," *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 8 (June 1879).

list of subjects for study, and a cooking prize was awarded by the Madhya Bangla Sammilani in 1889.[92]

What made these lessons necessary was as much a change in taste and food habits as a loss of competence. As the *bhadralok* became less insular, through moving to different parts of India and through contact with non-Bengalis and Europeans, greater experimentation in cuisine became the rule. The modern *sugrihinī* was one who was skilled in the new ways of cooking as well as the old.[93] Girish Chunder Ghose noted of Bengali women in 1868 that

> in the art of cooking they are remarkably advancing. It is no longer a simple soup or a dish of porridge which establishes the fame of a Hindu woman as a cook; she must master the mysteries of pillaos and know exactly the true colour of a kabab in order to pass for learned in the art; some even aspire to the glory of preparing fowl curry and cutlets in exact imitation of the Great Eastern Hotel.[94]

Formerly these exotic foods would have been prepared by specialist cooks, or brought in from outside. Different kinds of food were an added expense, so housewives could economize by learning to prepare these delicacies themselves. A writer in the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* in 1874 enumerated the types of cooking a *bhadramahilā* should learn:

> native Brahmin dishes of rice and curry; meat in the Moghul style; sweetmeats made from *chānā*, coconut, semolina, lentils, pumpkin, and thickened milk; western-style pickles and jams, cakes, biscuits, puddings, and bread; and Indian *roti, luchi*, and *puri*.[95]

[92] *IMS*, 7 July 1878; *BP*, 4:3, 296 (September 1889).

[93] It was said in praise of Girijakumari Banerjea that she was a skilled housewife who knew how to cook both old and new ways. Rajanikanta De, *Caritamādhurī*, p. 14.

[94] G. C. Ghose, "Female Occupations," in B. Dutt Gupta, *Sociology in India*, pp. 58-59.

[95] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 10, 130 (June 1874); "Grihasthālīr kathā," *Antahpur*, 5, 5-6.

They also needed to know how to prepare special diets for children, nursing mothers, and invalids—the latter included broths of sago, arrowroot, barley, or Benger's Food.[96]

There were no established channels for transmitting foreign recipes. Articles urging the need to cook bemoaned the lack of cookbooks to instruct women.[97] The first Bengali cookbook, *Pākrajeswar*, appeared in 1874. It was brought out by the raja of Burdwan, and was therefore not suitable for use in ordinary *bhadralok* homes.[98] The gap was soon filled. *Pāk-prabandha*, a Bengali book of "well-tried recipes for the preparation of rare and delicate Mahomedan, Hindu, and other dishes," by "a Bengali Lady" was advertised at a price of five annas in 1879.[99] In 1889, Bipradas Mukhopadhyay brought out *Soukhīn-khādya-pāk*, part one, which included instructions on the cooking of *khecāranna* (rice, lentils, spices, and fat), pullao, rich curry, korma, shish kebab, kofta, cutlets, and chops. The author's stated purpose was to revive the lost art of cooking. Part two included English food.[100] It became standard practice for books on general household topics to include recipes for special cooking.[101]

From 1883, Bipradas Mukhopadhyay also edited *Pāk-Pranālī*, a monthly magazine devoted entirely to cooking. Its aim was not only to teach women the culinary skills they were said to have lost through education and refinement, but also to help them to keep up with changing tastes in food, to teach

[96] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 130; "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 10, 131 (July 1874); Manorama Das, *Antahpur*, 5, 8-9 (December-January 1902-1903); Swarnamayi Gupta, *Ūsā-cintā*, p. 97.

[97] "Gārhasthya darpan," *BP*, 130; "Randhan-kriyā," *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 8 (June 1879).

[98] *Bengal Library Catalogue*, 1874, II. It was in its third edition by 1881. "Randhan-kriyā," *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 8. There were some cookbooks in English, one of which—*Dainty Dishes for Indian Tables*—was even translated into Urdu for the use of servants. These were of no use to the *bhadramahilā*. See, for example, the advertisements in the *Indian Mirror*, 31 July 1879.

[99] *Indian Mirror*, 21 March 1879.

[100] Bipradas Mukhopadhyay, *Soukhīn-khādya-pāk*, part one (Calcutta, 1889). He also wrote many other cookbooks.

[101] See for instance *Soi*. It had recipes for sweets, fifty vegetarian, and fifty non-vegetarian dishes, pulaos, and puddings.

them new cooking methods, and to enable them to save money by preparing food at home themselves.[102] The journal was illustrated, and recipes were clearly set out, with a list of ingredients followed by the method, and often gave a brief history of the dish, as well. A very wide range of recipes was covered, from local dishes using the banana flower, to duck egg moglai kofta, Jewish pulao, Portuguese sweets, Swiss cake, German coconut pudding, and Italian meatballs. Inevitably there was a large proportion of English recipes, including fried fish with white sauce, mutton chops, custard, omelette, bread, and, ironically, the recipe for Arnott's curry powder, to make "English curry."[103]

Women's journals took up the duty of teaching women different ways of cooking. *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* had an occasional recipe column from 1884, and *Mahilā* had one from 1895. *Punya*, which was not specifically for women, carried recipes by the editor, Prajnasundari Debi, from its inception in 1897. She had achieved such mastery over the new cooking that she invented her own variations, naming them after eminent men. Her inventions included the "Rammohun pulao" and the "Vidyasagar barfi."[104] Her recipes always listed the price of the ingredients. For instance, "Lady Canning" sweets could be made at home for about three rupees, and a Bombay curry for one rupee.[105] *Antahpur* also had a regular cookery column from 1900, written by women contributors.[106]

Women felt strongly about the cooking columns in these journals. They became the subject of a minor controversy when the editor of *Punya* criticized a recipe for guava jelly published in *Antahpur*. She said that readers would be better off buying it for eight to ten annas in the market than following

[102] *Pāk-Pranālī*, 1, 1 (Calcutta 1883).
[103] *Pāk-Pranālī*, 1-6 (1883-1903).
[104] *Punya*, 1, 2 (November 1897); 2, 1-2 (October-November 1898).
[105] *Punya*, 1, 4-5 (January-February 1897); 1, 12 (September 1898).
[106] See, for instance, Saralabala Sarkar, "Randhan—kumud phuler byānjan"; Sarayubala Ghose, "Ilis māch porā," *Antahpur*, 3, 4 (April 1900), and Kamalekamini Gupta, "Randhan—chicken pulao and Irish stew," *Antahpur*, 7, 7 (November 1904).

the recipe in *Antahpur*. Her criticism of the recipe was that it had said that the guava seeds should be thrown out, when they could have been saved to make "guava cheese," an expensive item in the marketplace. "A reader of *Antahpur*" replied spiritedly that there was no need to give the recipe for cheese in a recipe for jelly. She also said that because all the contributors to *Antahpur* were women, all their recipes had been tested, whereas although the editor of *Punya* was a woman, the fact that it was mainly written by men explained the ignorance it displayed in domestic matters.[107]

A woman writing in *Abalābāndhab* in 1878 about women's surrender of cooking to professional cooks did not see it as a difficult problem to solve. In her view, elementary cooking skills sufficient to make a few kinds of *tarkārī* could be picked up within a few days, and subsequently improved upon. She did not think a cookbook would be of any use.[108] Her observation, coupled with the fact that all the recipes published in books and articles were for exotic dishes, indicate that the literature was used for widening the repertoire of women's cooking rather than for teaching them basic proficiency. Biographical evidence supports this. Sarojini Ghose learned how to cook some English dishes from the Madrasi cook of the English headmaster of Kanchantola school. She was very glad when *Pāk-Pranālī* and other cookbooks appeared. She invited some English ladies, the wives of local district officials, to try her attempts at English cooking, for which they praised her highly. In exchange for learning how to cook English dishes, she showed them how to cook Bengali ones.[109] Dayamayi Sen used to send her own recipes to *Pāk-Pranālī*. In return for her interest, the editor gave her a complimentary subscription to the journal.[110]

[107] The disputed recipe was given in "Randhan," *Antahpur*, 4, 1 (January 1901), and the response to criticism of it came from "Janouk Antahpur pāthikā," "Samālocanā khāti noi," *Antahpur*, 4, 3 (March 1901).

[108] "Randhan kārjya," *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 8.

[109] Renuka Ghose, *Sarojinī-carit*, pp. 52-60.

[110] Saracchandra Datta, *Dayāmayī Sener*, p. 9.

It had always been the mark of a *sugrihinī* to be able to cook well, and to cater for large numbers and diverse occasions. Although standards were said to be dropping as the nineteenth century progressed, the evidence suggests the contrary. In fact, the culinary skills expected were becoming more exacting to suit different social requirements.

## Medical expertise

Medicines and medical treatment were other areas in which modern women were said to have lost the skills and knowledge of their predecessors. In the past, women had been conversant with local herbal remedies for common ailments, and were able to treat themselves and their families. It was claimed that by the later nineteenth century women no longer knew these remedies, and called the doctor for even the simplest complaints.[111] Remoteness from the family home and the increasing amount of time spent on education played a part in creating this disjunction, but it was only partially connected with the changes in women's situation. A bewildering array of methods of treatment was available—not only folk medicine, but also the Hindu *kabirāji* system, the Islamic *hākimi*, and the recent discoveries of homeopathy and allopathy. In addition, the growth of the modern medical profession in the nineteenth century, and the resultant professionalization of medical knowledge, helped to encourage a dependence on doctors and eroded the self-reliance that had characterized past generations of Bengali women.

It was often said, both by Indians and by Englishmen, that Indian women would not agree to be treated by male doctors. The accuracy of this assertion for Bengal is doubtful, as there are records of numerous cases in which doctors were called in to treat women. A writer in the *Doinik-O-Samācār Candrikā* in 1892 declared that

[111] "Strīsiksā," *Tattwabodhinī Patrikā*, 394; Lilabati Mitra, "Grihaswāsthye ramanīr drısti," *Antahpur*, 7, 9 (January 1905); *Paricārikā*, 1 (16 September 1878); Rajnarain Bose, *Se kāl*, p. 87.

> there is no respectable Hindu family which will deny an elderly *vaidya* admission into its zanana [sic]. At no time were such *vaidyas* denied such admission. . . . As a general rule physicians are men who can be safely trusted. But it may be objected that this is true of villages only. . . . As regards towns, too, we can say that our maternal grandfather, who was a very famous *kaviraj* of his time, had access to the zanana of many high families in Calcutta.[112]

Although women consulted doctors frequently, the degree of actual contact between the doctor and a female patient was often limited. Apparently it was not uncommon for a male doctor to have no contact with his female patient, but to use an intermediary such as a male relative or maidservant to enquire after symptoms, and to prescribe drugs on the basis of that information.[113]

The cost of medical treatment was high, and evidently some men had to be persuaded that proper medical treatment for their womenfolk was a necessary expense.[114] In 1878, the normal fee was from three rupees to as much as ten rupees a visit for a native doctor, and sixteen for a European doctor.[115] Lady doctors charged ten rupees a visit.[116] Within the Brahmo community there were a number of prominent doctors who often treated their coreligionists for a reduced fee.[117]

[112] *Doinik-O-Samācār Candrikā*, 19 May 1896 in *RNNB* 23 May 1896. Unfortunately, the author's bias was evident. His eagerness to show that women accepted male doctors stemmed from his horror at the prospect of female doctors. This attitude was shared by many. See also *Nababibhākar Sādhāranī*, 30 May 1887 in *RNNB* 4 June 1887.

[113] *Indian Mirror*, 13 August 1878. This came up in the 1878 Bose versus Bose adultery case, in the evidence given by an assistant surgeon who had been asked to treat Ksetramani Dasi for leukorrhea. She denied having it.

[114] Swarnamayi Gupta, *Usā-cintā*, pp. 73-75.

[115] "Abasthānusāritā," *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 5. The well-known Dr. Jadunath Mukherji advertised that he charged four rupees a visit. It is not clear whether this meant a home call or a consultation at his surgery. *Indian Mirror*, 2 February 1878.

[116] *Sanjībanī*, 22 February 1890 in *RNNB* 1 March 1890. This referred to lady doctors of the Lady Dufferin Fund, but may not have been the general rate.

[117] Dr. Annada Charan Khastagir treated the wife of Brahmo missionary

Despite this, biographies indicate that in cases of serious illness of any member of the family, male or female, doctors were called in.[118] Even the high cost of European doctors did not deter people from making use of their services in serious cases. They seem to have been considered more proficient and better qualified than Bengali doctors. Saratkumari Deb wrote in a biographical account of her family that she and her husband Satyapriya were treated by an English surgeon, at considerable cost, for postpartum illness and piles, respectively.[119] When Kailaskamini Dutt dislocated her thigh while living in the Bharat Ashram she was not treated by the regular Brahmo doctor but by a European doctor.[120] The *bhadramahilā* did not use hospitals, but were treated at home.[121]

A striking feature of the period was the variety of medical treatment people availed themselves of. When Dayamayi Sen, a Hindu *bhadramahilā*, fell ill, she was treated first by a doctor, then by *kabirājes*, as well.[122] After Saudamini Ray was treated by doctors without success, the village *ojhā* was called in. On a later occasion she was attended by a European doctor.[123] On one occasion Aghorekamini Ray became seriously ill. The doctors who examined her diagnosed a disease of the womb, but could do nothing for her. *Kabirājes* were then called in, who said that she had an incurable abdominal tumor. Her husband was advised to bear the further expense of consulting a European doctor, and summoned the well-known surgeon Dr. Charles. He correctly diagnosed that she was six months pregnant and had no other ailments.[124] Both Kumudini Sinha

Kedarnath De (Swarnalata Debi, *Mātri-tarpan*, p. 7), and many others. Dr. Dukuri Ghose was the doctor attached to the Bharat Ashram. Sudaksina Sen, *Jīban smriti*, p. 93.

[118] Prabhabati Debi, *Amal-prasūn*; Amritalal Gupta, *Punyabatī nārī*, p. 41; Harasundari Datta, *Swargīya Srīnāth Datter*; Gurucharan Mahalanabis, *Atmakathā*.

[119] Saratkumari Deb, *Āmār sangsār*, p. 29.

[120] *BP*, 6:3, 401 (June 1898).

[121] *Sanjībanī*, 22 February 1890 in *RNNB* 1 March 1890.

[122] Saracchandra Datta, *Dayāmayī Sener*, p. 18.

[123] Rakhal Chandra Ray, *Jīban bindu*, pp. 42-43, 123-129.

[124] Prakascandra Ray, *Aghor-prakās*, pp. 39-41.

and Srinath Canda's nephew were treated by the famous homeopathic doctor D. N. Ray after they felt that allopathic treatment had been unsuccessful.[125] Surgery was only used occasionally, and with varying results. Girijakumari Banerjea had a kidney stone surgically removed. The operation brought temporary relief, but she did not survive.[126]

Writers accused women of having lost the expertise in native folk medicine held by women of previous generations. The problem was not as simple as they made it appear. Loss of skill in native medicine had not been succeeded by a void. The nineteenth-century *sugrihinī* had a far wider choice of types of medicine and treatment than was available to her predecessors. Apart from folk medicine, women were expected to know a little about each of the four forms of treatment current in the later nineteenth century: allopathy, homeopathy, *kabirāji*, and *hākimi*.[127] In 1871 there were still relatively few books putting this knowledge into simple Bengali for the purposes of a housewife, so *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* undertook to include a regular feature on elementary medical remedies.[128] Household manuals and other women's magazines often included a section on native medical remedies,[129] which were widely promoted as the cheapest form of treatment available. Women who had mastered basic native medicines could save the family a lot of money in doctors' fees and expensive prescriptions. Remedies given included the use of the leaves of the *bisatārak*, or a paste of *hābalamālī*, for clearing sinuses. The leaves of the *tulsī* plant, or basil, relieved symptoms of malaria. The juice of the leaves mixed with honey and fed to a child every morning would cure a cough. If a child fell over and hurt itself, the leaves of the *gādā phul*, or marigold, ap-

[125] *Kumudinī-caritra*, pp. 37-43; Srinath Canda, *Brāhmasamāje callis bathsar*, pp. 259-261.

[126] Rajanikanta De, *Caritamādhurī*, p. 13.

[127] Bharatcandra Bandopadhyay, *Susrusā pranālī*, p. 27.

[128] "Gārhasthya cikitsā pranālī," *BP*, 8, 100 (December 1871).

[129] *Soi; Gārhasthya*, 1, 2, 1884. *Antahpur* had an occasional medical column.

plied to the injured part would stop the bleeding.[130] Native medicine had itself absorbed modern principles. A health manual by a *kabirāj* stressed the need to restrict the number of people allowed in the sickroom, to allow air and light into it, and to change clothes daily and bedding regularly.[131]

Homeopathic medicines were popular, and were recommended as being much cheaper than allopathic medicines. In the smallpox outbreak of 1895, the homeopathic medicines Vaccineus and Lactose Tinctura were recommended, along with vaccination and the eating of a paste of *kantakarī* root mixed with black pepper.[132] A treatise on menstruation also gave information on how to prepare and dilute homeopathic medicines for any menstrual complications.[133]

Although allopathic medicine was also very widely used, there was some criticism and suspicion of its effects. One writer claimed that women had greater longevity than men because they took fewer western medicines. He said that quinine affected the bones.[134] Rajnarain Bose said that recent generations of children were weaker than in the past because their mothers treated them with western rather than native medicines.[135]

Despite these dissenting voices, most women had learned the rudiments of treating common ailments with western medicine. The well-equipped house of 1885 was supposed to have measuring glasses, scales and weights (for measuring grains of medicine), a wooden syringe, and a thermometer, as well as a long list of basic drugs including quinine, bromide of potash, diluted sulphuric acid, diluted nitric acid, soda, mustard, castor oil, magnesia carbonate, and carbonate of ammonia.[136] Women had to learn to dispense new drugs using

[130] "Grihacikitsā," *BP*, 5, 77 (January 1870); 'Sahaj musti jog," *Antahpur*, 3, 4 (April 1900).

[131] Kabiraj Candrakısor Sen, Ayurvedic Vidyalay and Osodhalay, *Rogicarjyā* (Calcutta, 1895), pp. 37-38.

[132] *BP*, 5:3, 363 (April 1895).

[133] Kedarnath Sarkar, *Ritu-raksā*, pp. 12-13.

[134] "Grihacikitsā," *BP*, 77.

[135] Rajnarain Bose, *Se kāl*, p. 87.

[136] Pulin Sanyal, *Saral sisu pālan*, p. 120.

a different system of measurement. Many of the remedies given in journals and manuals assumed a familiarity with western medicines. For instance, to treat convulsions in a child, a woman was first to administer castor oil, then put cold water on its face and sit it in a tub of warm water. If this was not effective, then she was to rub chloroform liniment on its back and spine. If the condition lingered, a dose of bromide of potassium was recommended.[137] Girish Chunder Ghose graphically portrayed the kind of confusion women must have felt in coming to grips with the new form of medicine: "When English medicine is had recourse to, with its perplexing programme of mixtures and pills and embrocations alternating in constant whirls by the hour, the mother is generally the sole dispenser of doses, for the father is absent on his outdoor work."[138]

Lilabati Mitra was an example of someone at the end of the nineteenth century who had acquired confident mastery over all types of medicine. She advocated the "common-sense" observance of certain rules of hygiene, with the use of cheap native medicines where possible, as well as the use of western drugs. Her suggestions for prevention of malaria included sleeping under a mosquito net, drinking boiled water, and taking regular doses of quinine. Once malaria was contracted, eau-de-cologne or cold water on the forehead could be used to allay the fever. The area surrounding the house should be free from jungle, and pits and pools had to be covered to prevent them from becoming breeding grounds for mosquitoes. She recommended regular exercise, because she had heard of a *saheb* who had cured himself of malarial attacks by going horseback riding wearing a flannel coat to make him sweat; after coming home and resting in a closed room for an hour, he was cured.[139]

Occasionally women were confident enough to bypass all systems and follow their own judgment. One woman wrote

[137] "Grihacikitsā," *BP*, 8, 106 (June 1872).

[138] G. C. Ghose, "Female Occupations," in B. Dutt Gupta, *Sociology in India*, p. 58.

[139] Lilabati Mitra, "Grihaswāsthye ramanīr dristi," *Antahpur*, 7, 9.

to the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* saying that for eczema, allopathic and homeopathic medicines had proved useless. Her son had had it for two years, and doctors had been unable to help him, but she had eventually found her own cures. These were either to bathe the child with soap, then dry it and cover its body with arrowroot, in which case the rash would disappear in seven or eight days; or to bathe the child in a salt lake or river, and rub it with coconut oil one or two hours later, which would clear the rash in two weeks.[140]

From the 1870s the book market was inundated with books on all types of medicine, many written specifically for women. Dr. Khastagir wrote a health primer in 1882, based on lectures he had delivered to the Native Ladies' Institution. Their efficacy was proved by "the fact that many of the fair hearers of the author have completely changed their modes of household management after hearing them."[141]

Women were also bombarded with advertisements for medicines and patent remedies of all kinds. An average monthly number of *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* contained a high proportion of medical advertisements, such as Binod Batika for malaria and fevers connected with the spleen; Sarbbamangala Ghrita for ringworm and skin diseases; cough mixture for curing asthma; Gajasinghe for all fevers; Dr. Sitalacandra Pal's Santan Raksak oil for preventing miscarriages, ensuring safe births and healthy children; and Kabiraj Nagendranath Sen Gupta's oils for epilepsy, earache and skin disease. Mahalanabis and Company, druggists of Cornwallis Street, advertised that besides their patent remedy for rheumatism, "all allopathic medicines, spectacles and surgical instruments" were available. Mitra and Company was a homeopathic library and dispensary in College Street advertising a cheap range of medicines. Lahiri and Company, a big homeopathic firm with six branches other than the central one in College Street, advertised among its wares a small "box" for the treatment of cholera, which

[140] "Griha cikitsā—ekjimā nāmak carmmarog o tāhār cikitsā," *BP*, 6:2, 393 (October 1897).

[141] "Notices of Books," *Liberal and New Dispensation*, 3 December 1882.

was made up of twelve phials of medicine, a book, and a phial of special medicine, all for five rupees. A larger version of this box, with twenty-four phials, a book on home medicine, camphor, and a dropper, cost eight rupees. Some advertisements were accompanied by testimonials from eminent people, guaranteeing the genuineness of the various healing properties.[142]

Advertisements for doctors and medicines also appeared in English and Bengali dailies. A typical issue of *Brahmo Public Opinion* had advertisements for Dr. M. M. Bose, M.D., L.R.C.P., whose consulting hours were between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. daily; for Hari Charan Roy Kobiraj's dispensary with genuine native medicines and drugs, and for Mahalanabis and Company, established in 1862, with its "far-famed patent remedies" such as "Dr. Rubini's Spirit of Camphor," a specific for cholera, selling at twelve annas for a one-ounce phial, or one rupee six annas for *mofussil* orders.[143] The *Indian Mirror* advertised Dr. B. M. Sircar's Arroma Augustum, for curing dysmenorrhea and bringing on conception, for three rupees eight annas.[144] Doctors advertised their own patent remedies. Dr. Annada Charan Khastagir listed his qualifications—prompt cures of recent and acute fevers, holder of Lord Northbrook's first prize on Burdwan Epidemic Fever and its treatment, and successful operations on "thousands of urinary stones, tumours of testicles" with "charge for treatment suited to circumstances"—in order to launch the following patent medicines:

> for acute fevers, first medication eight annas, second and third medications one rupee each; for malarious fevers with spleen or liver, one rupee each for first or second medication; one rupee each for medicine for coughs, looseness of bowels, dysentery; and eight annas each for

[142] Advertisements in *BP*, 6:4, 417 (October 1899). The sampling is a good indication of the kind of advertisements printed in most journals.

[143] *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 7 August 1879. Mahalanabis and Company was run by Gurucharan Mahalanabis, a prominent Brahmo. Dr. M. M. Bose was the brother of Ananda Mohan Bose.

[144] *IMS*, 17 October 1880.

> sweet and tasteless medicine for children for fevers, coughs, looseness of bowels and dysentery.[145]

Not all patent medicines were from so reputable a source. Many were sheer quack remedies, sometimes dangerous, prepared by shrewd but unscrupulous racketeers. There was no legislation governing the sale or advertising of patent medicines.[146]

The widespread use of patent remedies and doctors' services by the later nineteenth century indicates that the medical and pharmaceutical professions had secured a place in the consumption patterns of the average *bhadralok* household. Much of the advertising of these goods and services was directed to women, in recognition of their importance as consumers. In such circumstances, women may easily have been pressured into losing confidence in their own medical skills. In addition, in an urban setting patent medicines would have been more readily available than the ingredients for folk medicines, and therefore were more convenient for the housewife. The prevalence of manuals of instruction in folk medicine showed that the conditions for this kind of expertise to be handed down no longer existed for many *bhadramahilā*, who had to resort to self-education from books. To accuse the nineteenth-century *sugrihinī* of ignorance of folk medicine was to ignore the familiarity with modern medical knowledge that she had acquired.

The educated woman of the second half of the nineteenth century had been accused of having lost touch with housewifely skills. The assertion contains an element of truth, yet overlooks the complexity of her situation. With much of her youth spent in formal education, then marriage, which was

[145] *IMS*, 28 November 1880.

[146] The *Samay*, 25 August 1893, called for legislation to restrict the sale of patent medicines, and to check the practice of fraudulent doctors and *kabirājes* numerous in the *moffusil*. *RNNB* 2 September 1893. The *Nabajug*, 19 September 1903, gave names of a number of people who had been selling patent medicines in Calcutta under assumed English names. *RNNB* 26 September 1903.

often followed by a break not only with her own family but also with that of her in-laws, a woman would have had little opportunity to pick up domestic skills. Dayamayi Sen lamented that she had lost touch with some traditional skills when she had to set up a separate household with her husband, on his official duties.[147] Annette Akroyd commented that the "advanced" wives of England-returned husbands, separated from their families, had no means of learning household skills.[148] A Hindu woman educated at Loreto House at the turn of the century, Miss J. Bose, admitted that she was not trained to do anything domestic. Neither she nor her mother could cook ordinary food.[149] Educated women also developed interests other than housework. It was said disapprovingly that one such educated *bhadramahilā* used to tie her child to the veranda post with a string while she read a book.[150]

Despite the fact that opportunities for training were less, the expectation that the *bhadramahilā* would perform the traditional domestic role remained. As the *bhadralok* developed a distinctive lifestyle, a woman's duties became more complex. It was no wonder that she showed some confusion. By the later nineteenth century, the idea that the home was a woman's "kingdom" was a cherished belief.[151] Traditionally the home had always been her sphere, but education created rising expectations that had to be fulfilled, without going to the extent of providing alternative roles. In response to this, household servants were employed increasingly to elevate the function of housewife to a managerial plane. The transmission of skills was institutionalized in "modern" forms to suit changed circumstances—through lectures, books, journals, and school curricula instead of through imitation of existing models in the home. Another reason for institutionalization was that

[147] Saracchandra Datta, *Dayamayī Sener*, p. 9.

[148] Annette Akroyd, *Diary*, 5 May 1873.

[149] However, her mother could cook sweets and other special dishes. Interview with Miss J. Bose, Calcutta, 10 March 1978.

[150] Gurucharan Mahalanabis, *Ātmakathā*, p. 74.

[151] "Ramanīr kārjyaksetra," *BP*, 7:1, 424 (May 1900).

women had not simply lost certain skills, but were required to master a whole new set of household abilities that were part of maintaining the *bhadralok* image.

In nineteenth-century England, the concern for order in the house was connected with the beginnings of industrialization. The consequent rationalization of housework, attempting to increase its efficiency, followed the industrial work pattern.[152] In Bengal, the order that was part of the English middle-class lifestyle may have been reflected in the functioning of the British administration, and therefore had some influence in moderating the lives of those who worked under its discipline. Apart from that, however, society continued to operate in a traditional way, unmarked by the middle-class concerns of thrift, order, efficiency, and absolute cleanliness. The *bhadramahilā* was supposed to perform the difficult task of "modernizing" a sphere that was more integrated with a traditional society that functioned in a collective, cooperative manner than with a mechanized industrial society. Even in Europe, the abundant supply of servants for the middle classes limited the necessity for rationalizing housework. In Bengal, this was even more the case, indicating that the advice on modern housewifery was not given only because of the pressure of economic necessity, but because of the need to elevate and professionalize the role of housewife.

The professionalization of housework in the nineteenth century through institutional channels was directed both toward satisfying the expectations and making use of the talents of literate and educated women, as well as toward the creation of a new lifestyle. To make female education worthwhile, and its benefits apparent, the educated woman had to keep house differently from her forbears. Much more was expected of her than of her illiterate predecessors. In view of the responsibilities and new choices faced by women, the attempts to contrast the incompetence of modern women with the ideal women of a past golden age seem unfair and fatuous.

[152] See T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution*, chapter one.

Women mounted a staunch defense of their position in response to the barrage of attacks. After Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's article "Prācīnā ebang nabīnā" appeared in *Banga Darsan* in 1874, three replies from women were printed. The first, from Candikasundari Debi, turned the argument back onto men, comparing them unfavorably with men of old. Laksmimani Debi, the second respondent, accepted the criticisms but argued that men's egotism had forced women to adopt these "faults." The third writer, Rasamayi Dasi, scathingly challenged men to reverse roles:

> If we die, you can perform *ekādasī*, eat vegetarian food, and wear coarse white cloth; if you die we'll have a "second family"—you can give birth to children, and supervise the kitchen—if there is a marriage in the house you can cover your moustache with your sari, carry the ritual articles on a tray on your head, perform women's rites, and keep the bride awake with ribald jokes in front of the bride-chamber. Your happiness will know no bounds. As youths, we'll go off to college, books in hand—as we grow older, we'll wear our hair in a Firingi bun, topped by a turban at a jaunty angle, and go to the office—make speeches in the Town Hall with our nose rings dancing—arouse the audience with charming yet penetrating looks from behind our spectacles. . . . Come to the *antahpur*—we'll go to the office. It is these men, who have been oppressed by conquerors for seven hundred years. Doesn't this shame you?[153]

[153] Letter from Rasamayi Dasi, in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Bibidha prabandha*, p. 162.