The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON, N.J.

Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press,
Guildford, Surrey

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data will be
found on the last printed page of this book
ISBN 0-691-05409-6

Publication of this book has been aided by a grant from
The Whitney Darrow Fund of
Princeton University Press

This book has been composed in Linotron Sabon

Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books
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Printed in the United States of America by
Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey

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Expanding Horizons: The Education of the *Bhadramahilā*

Contact with a different culture in the colonial period directed the attention of Bengalis to the condition of women in society. Faith in modern education led *bhadralok* reformers to believe that the education of women was necessary to achieve any reform, not only in the condition of women but in the state of society at large. It was the key that would open the door to all other social progress. Their conviction ran counter to existing taboos against female literacy and was thus slow to gain wide adherence. Initially, discussion focused on whether female education was permissible, but as the needs of society changed, the fact of female education became accepted and the debate shifted to the desirable nature and extent of education.

Overcoming the taboo

In the early nineteenth century, there were strong prejudices against women's education. In his *Report on the State of Education in Bengal* for 1836, William Adam recorded the belief that female education not only produced widows, but also facilitated romantic intrigue.[1] It was said that no man

[1] W. Adam, *Reports*. From the second report (Rajshahi, 1836), p. 187. These beliefs were widely held. See also discussion "Grihakathā," *Māsik Patrikā*, 1, 1 (August 1854) and "Strīlokdiger bidyār siksār ābasyaktā," *BP*, 1, 1 (September 1863). The latter points out the logical fallacy in the argument. If all educated women were widows, then a lot of English women would be widows but no Hindus would. A list of these prejudices was also given by Madan Mohan Tarkalankar in "Strīsiksā," *Sarbasubhakārī Patrikā*, 2 (Āswin 1772 [1850]) from B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre Bānglār samājcitra 1840-1905*, part 3 (Calcutta, 1964), pp. 542-554.

would marry an educated girl.[2] Male objections to female education seem to have been based on a fear of the unknown powers education could give a woman. Literacy supposedly gave women greater capacity for unfaithful liaisons through their ability to write letters of assignation. A husband's control over an educated woman was therefore less secure.

Saudamini Ray of Barisal personally experienced the effect of these beliefs. As a child, she was sometimes sent to the village *pāthsālā* along with her brothers. The teacher took no notice of her, but she was a quick learner, and absorbed his instructions as well as the other pupils did. One day he saw that she had written something very advanced. His amazement was quickly followed by an angry outburst: "For women to pursue education is a terrible sin. The education of women leads to destruction, if they are educated they will become widows, so from now on don't come to my *pāthsālā* again."[3]

Whereas education for males was directly related to the pursuit of employment, female education had no economic function. An educated girl would become a liability to her parents, as no man would marry her. The domestic role of women fostered a belief that education for girls was wasted because it could not be put to any financial use. In addition, literacy was suspected of diverting women's attentions from their domestic duties. The cost of female education, in terms of fees, materials, and so on, as well as the temporary loss of one helper in the household, and the lack of visible pecuniary return, were strong economic deterrents reinforcing the existing taboo. The education of female members of a family also involved the hidden cost of replacing their previously unpaid labor with that of hired servants.[4]

The first schemes for female education were established by missionary groups, whose main purpose was proselytization.

[2] W. Adam, *Reports*. First report (Rangpur, 1835), p. 110.

[3] Rakhal Chandra Ray, *Jīban bindu* (Calcutta, 1880), pp. 7-11.

[4] "Grihakathā," *Māsik Patrikā*, I, 1, and Krishna Mohan Banerjea's answers to questions on female education in the *Calcutta Christian Observer*, March 1840, reprinted in [T. Smith], "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, pp. 97-99.

Thus the fear of conversion became an additional reason for opposition. Another objection was that the missionaries had been most successful in the education of lower-caste women. The availability of modern female education to the *chotolok* meant that the *bhadralok* were reluctant to adopt it as a part of their own distinctive lifestyle.[5]

The earliest advocates of female education furnished historical and scriptural examples of educated women in ancient India to show that female education was not prohibited by religion. They traced the decline in female education from the period of Muslim rule. The *Strīsiksā bidhāyak*, written in 1822, provided prototypes that were used as a touchstone to prove women's capacities throughout the century.[6] The argument was not, however, a compelling one, as scriptural prohibitions were not really the issue. The strong influence of taboo and the prospect of an economic loss were sanctions powerful enough to deter people from contravening accepted practice without any recourse to *sāstric* injunctions.

William Adam's survey of education in Bengal concluded that almost all Bengali women were illiterate. Daughters of *zamindars* were sometimes given an elementary education in reading, writing, and keeping accounts, so that they could retain and manage their estates on widowhood.[7] There were also occasional examples of women pandits.[8] It was said that the fact that they were so rare made them arrogant, and even opposed to an extension of education for other women.[9] In

[5] M. A. Laird, *Missionaries and Education*, p. 138; Tarasankar Sarma, *A Prize Essay on Hindu Female Education* (in Bengali) (Calcutta, 1851), p. 51.

[6] *Strīsiksā bidhāyak* was first published by the "Female Juvenile Society for the establishment and support of Bengalee female schools" in Calcutta in 1822. It was published anonymously, but is known to be by Gourmohan Vidyalankar. Radhakanta Deb helped supply some of the materials to the author. See J. C. Bagal, *Women's Education in Eastern India—The First Phase* (Calcutta, 1956), pp. 102-103, 127.

[7] W. Adam, *Reports*. Second report (Rajshahi, 1836), pp. 187, 188.

[8] See Chapter One, and also [Gourmohan Vidyalankar], *Strīsiksā*, pp. 16-17.

[9] Koilasbasini Debi, *Hindu Female Education and Its Progress* (Calcutta, 1865), pp. 13-15.

some exceptional *bhadralok* families, women were taught basic literacy at home. Debendranath Tagore's mother-in-law was able to read difficult religious texts, such as the *Tantra Purānas*, and works on *Sāmkhyan* philosophy. In the absence of anything else, she would read through the dictionary.[10] The women of Peary Chand Mitra's family were also literate.[11]

Despite the entrenched objections of the majority, the benefits of female education were enthusiastically put forward by a vocal reformist minority. Even a writer on the native theater in 1835 included a recommendation for female education because of its potential not only for improving the performance of actresses but also for the good of society as a whole:

> Had this girl, who made such a capital figure on the stage, been educated in the study of the vernacular language, I, as a Hindu, beg my countrymen to consider how her talents would have shown! . . . Was not this display sufficient to convince the Hindu visitors that a woman, as long as she is devoid of education is a perfect blank in society?[12]

The Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjea was convinced that educated women would exert a humanizing influence on society and check its tendencies to indelicacy and "lax manners."[13] Others put forward more tangible benefits. The *Strīsiksā bidhāyak*, for instance, enumerated the advantages of education as including the ability to correspond with an absent husband, to instruct one's children, and to do household accounts.[14] With a knowledge of hygiene, women could raise

[10] Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, *Swarnakumārī Debī* (Calcutta, 1965), pp. 6-7.

[11] See the preface to his *Ādhyātmikā* (1880) in Asitkumar Bandopadhyay, ed., *Pyāricād racanābalī* (Calcutta, 1971).

[12] Bhuban Mohun Mittra, "The Native Theatre," *Hindu Pioneer*, 1:2 (October 1835). Reprinted in *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 6 (1974), 190-196.

[13] Krishna Mohan Banerjea, *Native Female Education*, p. 66. See also Chapter Two for a discussion of the notion of the civilizing presence of women.

[14] [Gourmohan Vidyalankar], *Strīsiksā*, pp. 18-19.

healthier children. They could share in part in the new worlds of their husbands, and delight them by writing poetry or prose.[15] It was argued that an educated wife, rather than neglecting her duties, would make a much better housewife than her uneducated counterpart. In an imaginary dialogue between husband and wife in the earliest women's journal, *Māsik Patrikā*, the husband spoke in favor of education to his wife, who was against it. The benefits he perceived were that if a wife could do accounts, then she would understand the family's financial situation and avoid quarrels. She would also be able to manage the property if her husband was absent or dead. The latter point convinced his wife, because she could relate it to cases among her own relatives. In one case her cousin, an educated woman, had been widowed at thirty. Her husband's elder brother tried to deceive her, but she understood the accounts so well that he was unable to do so. Another cousin was uneducated, and was therefore financially ruined on widowhood. The husband went on with the other major arguments in favor of female education—the extent of female influence on the home and on the next generation. He said that whereas in Europe a mother is her child's first teacher, in Bengal "the blind led the blind."[16]

The argument that education was necessary for the creation of an enlightened mother, and thence of an enlightened race, continued to be advanced throughout the century and therefore deserves closer scrutiny. In all societies in which women are primarily responsible for child rearing, they have a formative influence on the child's mind and body. In Bengal the tie between mothers and sons was especially close. Although the importance of enlightened mothers was a universal argument in favor of female education,[17] it would have had even greater application in Bengal, where a son's obedience and

[15] Tarasankar Sarma, *A Prize Essay*, pp. 25-36.

[16] "Grihakathā," *Māsik Patrikā*, I, 1.

[17] The idea of motherhood was also used to prevent women from using their education to enter traditionally male preserves. See A. Davin, "Imperialism and the Cult of Motherhood," *History Workshop*, 1974.

closeness to his mother continued beyond childhood, throughout the mother's lifetime. Colonial administrators wanted to harness the direction of this influence so that new ideas would be reinforced in the home environment. It was said that in the absence of female education, "the evil influence of the zenana is, in very many instances, never eradicated; and much of the good learnt by a boy at school and college, is neutralized by the habits of his domestic circle, and the absence of educated companions for his hours of leisure and repose."[18]

Uneducated women began to be perceived as a potential danger to the healthy physical development of children, as an anonymous mother pointed out to her daughter:

> Look what dangerous and useless things ignorant women do if their children fall ill. Sometimes they put *saphārid* around the child's throat, sometimes they use *mantras* to drive the disease away, sometimes they perform their own religious rituals. None of these are proper treatments, and do so much harm besides! If they had had a proper education they would not do such ridiculous things.[19]

Women were also responsible for the mental outlook of their children. An "ignorant" woman perpetuated all "traditional" social practices, which were seen as harmful. It was said that if women studied physics they would no longer believe in ghosts, and that if they studied chemistry they would cease to believe in *mantras* and magic.[20]

One writer summarized it as follows: "the existence of intelligently educated mothers, and sisters, and wives, is essential to the training of a race of intelligent and high-spirited sons, and brothers, and husbands."[21] Here the presumption implicit in many other similar statements was made clear. Women were to be educated primarily for their role in grooming men.

[18] *GRPI from 1st October 1849 to 30th September 1850* (Calcutta, 1851), p. 4.
[19] "Kanyār prati mātār dvītiya upades," *BP*, 1:2, 10 (June 1864).
[20] "Desācār," *BP*, 1:2, 14 (October 1864).
[21] "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, pp. 61-62.

Their own edification was secondary. A frequent way of illustrating the importance of the mother-function was to show how many great men attributed their success to their mothers. Among these were Napoleon, George Washington, and Theodore Parker.[22] In Bengal, a favorite example was the mother of Vidyasagar.[23] Women's task was to prepare a general climate of receptiveness to new ideas, in order to influence men, who were the initiators of specific schemes for social progress and advancement: "We cannot estimate the influence for good upon (for instance) the future landed proprietors of the country which a generation of educated and careful mothers might effect."[24]

Despite the utilitarian approach of male champions of female education, once women themselves were educated they were able to say feelingly that mothers should make sure their daughters were educated simply in order to make their lives much happier: "My humble prayer to all is that you give your own daughters an adequate education. What is the point of lamenting the fate that we had. Every mother should see that the same misery does not befall her daughters in future."[25]

It was also hoped that female education would help preserve harmony within the joint family. Many writers stated that uneducated women were the main cause of dissension.[26] Female education was seen, too, as a way of improving marital relations. The author of a didactic manual for women in 1862 described a situation in which an uneducated girl was taught by a group of educated girls to "appreciate" her husband, and to go back to his home. She was advised to apologize to him for her bad behavior, and to acquire an education herself.[27]

[22] Kumari Lahiri, "Strīloker abasya siksanīya ki?" *BP*, 11, 142 (June 1875).

[23] Pramilabala Debi, "Jananī," *Antahpur*, 7, 7 (November 1904).

[24] "Hindoo Women," *CR*, 40:79 (1864), 90-91.

[25] "Strīsiksā bisaye ardha siksitā hindu mahilādiger matāmat," *Antahpur*, 4, 4 (September 1901).

[26] Mohendracandra Gupta, *Strībodh* (Dacca, 1862), pp. 25-30; editorial in *Sangbād Prabhākar*, 7 August 1850, in Benoy Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part 1 (Calcutta, 1962), p. 320.

[27] Mohendracandra Gupta, *Strībodh*, pp. 8-9.

In the initial stages of female education, opposition was rarely stated in public debate. It came not only from orthodox males, but also from older women within the household. According to Girish Chunder Ghose, editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*, older *zenana* women were privately obdurate in their objections:

> But if even every man of wealth could be induced to listen to reason, what would their sufferance avail in educating the majority of respectable Hindoo women who constitute the middle classes of Hindoo Society? . . . The hearts of the matronhood of Bengal are harder in this matter than stone walls.[28]

His testimony was corroborated by other writers who said that elderly women had a strong prejudice against female education, and a "despotic" power over the younger ladies in the *zenana*.[29] The most prevalent obstacle was apathy:

> Native ladies of the most respectable caste in society have both sent their daughters, and in some instances have themselves expressed anxiety to obtain instruction, [at the Church Missionary Society's Girls' School]. . . . The majority of the more respectable Natives, however, still continue to manifest great apathy concerning the education of their daughters.[30]

One quarter from which no objections were reported was that of the women—girls and young married women—who were most likely to be beneficiaries of female education.

Koilasbasini Debi was one of the first women to be educated and to publish her writings. In her book on *Hindu Female Education and Its Progress*, published in 1865, she expressed the opinion that most *madhyabitta grihastha* (middle-class

[28] "Hindoo Female Education," *Hindoo Patriot*, 28 August 1856, in M. N. Ghosh, ed., *Selections*, p. 225.

[29] Replies to the enquiries of the Bengal Social Science Association on the subject of Female Education, 1869. Reprinted in B. Dutt Gupta, *Sociology in India*, Appendix V, pp. 123-124. See also "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, p. 91.

[30] W. Adam, *Reports*, First report (1835), p. 47.

householders) in the early part of the century saw no need for female education, but that the extension of British rule meant that this was no longer the case.[31]

The *bhadralok* intelligentsia were united in their support for female education. As was shown in the previous chapter, even the "conservatives" among them were in favor of it. The *Strīsiksā bidhāyak* outlined the reasons for this. The author believed that education would help women in leading a virtuous life, without necessarily upsetting the traditional fabric of Hindu society. This is evident in the final injunction:

> And whether the husband is a town-dweller or a forest-dweller, saint or sinner, prosperous or poor, virtuous or worthless, living in a mansion or in a hut, handsome or ugly, it is a wife's duty to obey him. It is said in the *sāstras* that there is no greater ornament for a husband than to have a virtuous wife. Hence, women, if you all use your leisure time to cultivate knowledge and morality you will certainly find supreme happiness in scholarship and morals.[32]

Progressives and conservatives alike believed that educated mothers would improve the physical health and mental vigor of future generations of Bengali *bhadralok*. While conservatives believed that educated women would uphold the values of traditional Hindu society, progressives hoped that they would use their influence to bring about social change.

Methods of education: home, *zenana*, and school

In the first half of the century, and even later, the debate among those in favor of female education centered on the method to be employed. The three broad types under consideration were informal home education, *zenana* education, and education in schools. Initially, more time was spent in discussing the merits of the various schemes than in executing any of them.

[31] Koilasbasini Debi, *Hindu Female Education*, pp. 12, 20.
[32] [Gourmohan Vidyalankar], *Strīsiksā*, p. 24.

Home education was probably most frequently adopted. Progressive husbands would educate their wives, brothers teach their sisters, or fathers and uncles instruct their daughters and nieces. There is a great deal of biographical evidence for this.[33] In spite of the frequency of home education, however, it was not often advocated in theory. The domestic duties of a *bhadramahilā* meant that she had a very long working day. Custom forbade her from speaking to her husband during that time; she could only see him late at night, after finishing all the household work. At such a time she was in no fit state to absorb new knowledge.[34] Household opinion did not look kindly on her education:

> While the other women in the family railed at every idea of education, the wife of an enlightened husband, could scarcely venture to act according to his better advice; . . . many are deterred from attempting to teach their wives privately from the little prospect of success that is before them.[35]

The second method was that of private tuition, known as *zenana* education. At the outset this was promoted by missionaries, and all teachers were European ladies. Although many favored the scheme in principle because it did not upset purdah arrangements or disturb domestic organization too greatly, its evangelical character tended to create obstacles that overwhelmed its obvious advantages.

The Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjea felt that nothing could be expected from schemes for public education of the

[33] See, for instance, Swarnalata Debi, *Mātri-tarpan* (Calcutta, 1914); Candrakanta Sen, *Bāmāsundarī bā ādarsa-nārī* (Calcutta, 1909); Muralidhar Bandopadhyay, *Srīmatī Saraswatī Sener sangksipta jībanī; Bāmā-carit* (Dacca, 1893); Suniti Mallik, *Akāl-kusum* (Calcutta, 1896); Girish Chandra Sen, *Brahmamayī-carit* (Calcutta, 1869); Dwarkanath Ganguly, *Jībanālekhya*; Prakascandra Ray, *Aghor-prakās* (Calcutta, 1958). See also Chapter Four.

[34] Replies to the enquiries of the Bengal Social Science Association in B. Dutt Gupta, *Sociology in India*, Appendix V, p. 124.

[35] Krishna Mohan Banerjea, cited in "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, p. 99.

"high and middling" classes, but that benefits would result if the government could sponsor a *zenana* education scheme whereby some "wealthy and influential native gentlemen can also be induced to give up rooms in their inner courts for the use of private schools, where none but ladies shall be admitted as tutoresses or visitors, nor any except girls from select families allowed to enter as pupils."[36]

The *zenana* education system presented a reasonable compromise, "combining as it does the advantages of tutorial instruction at home with those of a public education."[37] Even so, it was some time before it was accepted. The earliest case of *zenana* education was the instruction of the wife and daughters of Jay Narain Ghosal by the wife of Mr. Tracey of the Church Missionary Society. Jay Narain's aim was to enable the womenfolk to put their domestic grievances in writing instead of calling him home to settle disputes. The lessons worked well, but were discontinued because of social criticism. They were resumed two years later.[38] In 1840 Mrs. Wilson (formerly Miss Cooke, the first lady teacher sent to Calcutta by the British and Foreign School Society, in 1821) could only think of two cases of *zenana* education, in 1823 and 1829, neither of which lasted for very long.[39]

The fear of public ridicule and criticism, and of Christian influence, were the chief obstacles to success. Fears were fed by occasional conversions, as in the case of Bala Shoondaree, first wife of Gyanendra Mohun Tagore and daughter-in-law of Prasanna Kumar Tagore. When she had learned to read and write through her own efforts, her husband hired an English governess for her for one and a half years in the mid-1840s. She died shortly after she had made up her mind to

[36] Krishna Mohan Banerjea, *Native Female Education*, pp. 80-90.

[37] "Social Reformation: The Condition of Women in India," *Hindoo Patriot* (17 August 1854), from M. N. Ghosh, *Selections*, p. 188.

[38] Weitbrecht, *The Women of India*, pp. 66-69.

[39] One of which was probably to Kali Shunker Ghosal's family in Kidderpore, cited in Laird, *Missionaries and Education*, p. 136. This may even have been the same as the family of Jay Narain Ghosal.

be baptized. Prasanna Kumar Tagore's own daughter, Surasundari Debi, was also formally educated at home.[40]

Zenana education was not freely available to the *chotolok*, and therefore was compatible with the preservation of *bhadralok* status. Antimissionary sentiment was not aggravated by the fear of mixing of castes, as it was in the *bhadralok* aversion to public missionary schools. Even strict caste Hindus engaged the services of female missionaries to instruct their daughters.[41] A *zenana* education scheme proposed in 1855 cost sixteen rupees per month for those in town, and twenty-five rupees for those in the suburbs.[42] Female education of this kind was a luxury, and only the wealthier *bhadralok* could afford it.

The content of *zenana* education by untrained missionary ladies placed heavy emphasis on Biblical instruction and woolwork. Though probably of limited educational value, the lessons formed a bridge between the *zenana* and the world outside. They were a point of cultural contact with British women, providing the *bhadramahilā* with the opportunity of learning

[40] For details of Bala Shoondaree's life, see E. Storrow, *The Eastern Lily Gathered*. The education of Prasanna Kumar Tagore's daughter was not as successful as had been hoped, because of the "defective system" of her education and the "want of intercourse with European ladies." Letter from "an enlightened friend" to Krishna Mohan Banerjea, no date, appendix B of his *Native Female Education*, pp. 131-132. No names are mentioned, but it refers to the "splendid apparatus that my father had laid down for the education of my late lamented sister," and Prasanna Kumar Tagore is the best known case at that time of a father making formal arrangements for his daughter's education. See also Koilasbasini Debi, *Hindu Female Education*, p. 30.

[41] Kumudini Ghose was born in Calcutta in 1855. Her father, Kalikumar Ghose, was a strict Hindu, yet he allowed his daughter to have lessons from an English missionary woman, along with the daughter of the neighboring Brahmin family. *Kumudinī-caritra. A Brief Sketch of the Life of Srimati Kumudinee the wife of R. C. Sinha of the New Dispensation Brahma Somaj of India* (Cooch Behar, 1890), pp. 1-2, 6.

[42] Review of "Zenana and Select School Scheme," pamphlet VI in the series "Fly Leaves for Indian Homes," 1855-56 in *CR*, 25:50 (1855), xxxiv. Not all fees could have been set that high, as Mrs. Weitbrecht, *The Women of India*, mentioned women whose husbands were clerks in government offices—although their fees may have been paid for by wealthier relatives (pp. 96-99).

the habits and even the language of Europeans, a kind of "improving" contact much desired by enlightened *bhadralok* husbands. *Zenana* education must have been a palliative for boredom and frustration for women in the *zenana*, who had little novelty, excitement, or stimulation in their daily lives. It was little wonder that the possibility of conversion existed. For many women, education and Christianity were linked through the missionaries' *zenana* education schemes, and conversion would have appeared to be one of the few ways of breaking out of an unsatisfactory pattern of life.

Some members of the *bhadralok* hoped for a more rapid and thorough extension of the benefits of education. As early as 1822, the *Strīsiksā bidhāyak* argued the case for the education of young girls of less wealthy families in public schools.[43] In 1828 Raja Baidyanath Roy of Jorasanko donated 20,000 rupees to the Central Female School, run by missionaries. However, his own wife was educated at home by Mrs. Wilson, and none of the *bhadralok* would send their daughters to the school.[44] A more direct attempt to found a school for the *bhadramahilā* was made in 1845, when Jaykrishna Mukherjee submitted a proposal to the government for a girls' school at Utterparah. Not only was he willing to match the government grant, but more importantly, he also indicated that he was willing to send his own daughters there. The government did not take up the offer, and the scheme lapsed until proposed again, in more specific detail, in 1849. The government again failed to respond, this time on the advice of the educationalist J.E.D. Bethune, who wanted to observe the progress of the girls' school he had established himself as a test case.[45] Despite theoretical advocacy of the benefits of female education, of-

[43] [Gourmohan Vidyalankar], *Strīsiksā*, p. 22. Wealthy families were advised to have private tuition.

[44] J. C. Bagal, *Women's Education*, pp. 29-31.

[45] J. A. Richey, *Selections from Educational Records, part II, 1840-59* (New Delhi, 1965). Extract from Report of the Council for Education, Bengal, 1848-49, pp. 47-49 and letter from J.E.D. Bethune to the Marquis of Dalhousie, Governor-General, Calcutta, 29 March 1850, pp. 53-54. See also N. Mukherjee, *A Bengal Zamindar*, pp. 82-83, 153-155.

ficial lack of enthusiasm may have been due to the absence of any possibility of future employment for girls. Female education did not correspond with the government's educational aim of providing clerks for the imperial bureaucracy.

The distinction of being the first school for the *bhadramahilā* in Bengal went to the Barasat Girls' School, established in 1847 by the educationalist Peary Charan Sircar and others.[46] The progressive local *bhadralok* who sent their daughters to the school were persecuted by the orthodox community both physically and through legal harassment. The opposition eventually subsided, and the remaining total of twenty pupils continued to be the average number of enrolments.[47] Although the school was not very well known, it did set a precedent for the public education of girls. It may have been the inspiration for the girls' school in the village of Nibadhai, which was founded in 1848 without any opposition.[48]

All other experiments were eclipsed by the foundation of the Bethune School in Calcutta in May 1849. In his opening speech the Honorable J.E.D. Bethune, president of the Council of Education, gave his reasons for founding the school. He reiterated the need for educated mothers, and the familiar belief in the "civilizing" mission of women:

> I believed that you, having felt in your own person that elevating influence of a good education, would before long begin to feel the want of companions, the cultivation of whose taste and intellect might correspond in some

[46] J. C. Bagal, *Women's Education*, p. 77; *BP*, 6:1, 384 (January 1897); *GRPI from 1st October 1849 to 30th September 1850*, pp. 4-5, lists the names of all *bhadralok* involved.

[47] "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, pp. 77-78; J. A. Richey, *Selections*, p. 54. Bethune offered money for the building of the schoolhouse at Barasat, but the managers said that they hoped to raise sufficient funds from among themselves.

[48] "Nibādhai Bālikā Bidyālay," *BP*, 2:2, 34 (June 1864); "Nibādhai Grāmastha Bidyālay," *Tattwabodhinī Patrikā*, 116 (Chaitra 1774 [1852]), in B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part 2 (Calcutta, 1963). J.E.D. Bethune mentioned the "Neebudhia" school as predating his school. J. A. Richey, *Selections*, p. 54. See also *GRPI from 1st October 1849 to 30th September 1850* (Calcutta, 1851), p. 5.

> degree to your own; that you would gradually begin to understand how infinitely the happiness of domestic life may be enhanced by the charm which can be thrown over it by the graceful virtues and elegant accomplishments of well-educated woman; that you would be led to the reflection, in your study of the history of other nations, that in the degree of estimation in which females are held, the amount of mental culture to which they attain, and the extent of influence which they are permitted to exercise over the tastes and habits of society, the best and surest test may be found of the degree in which one nation surpasses another in civilization.[49]

To attain these goals, women were to be taught in Bengali, using English only for "subsidiary advantages" and when parental approval had been granted. Apart from more general subjects, girls were also going to learn "a thousand feminine works and accomplishments" in embroidery, fancy work, and drawing, to give them a "means of adorning their own homes, and of supplying themselves with harmless and elegant employment." In short, it was the same kind of education that was in vogue among their British middle-class contemporaries. An Englishwoman, Mrs. Risdale, presided over the institution.

The Bethune School was thus launched with all the advantages of a central location in Calcutta, government patronage, and adequate funding. Bethune had also realized that the school could only be successful if it had the support of the leaders of *bhadralok* society, not merely in an individual capacity but as the heads of the influential *dals*. He wrote to the governor-general, Lord Dalhousie, not long after the school had opened that he had "secured the promise from some of the 'Dhols' or 'clans' into which Calcutta is divided that if any are excommunicated and turned out of a Dhol for sending their

[49] J. C. Bagal, "History of the Bethune School and College," Appendix I, in K. Nag, ed., *Bethune School and College Centenary Volume 1849-1949* (Calcutta, 1949), p. 107. It was first known as the Calcutta Female School. It became known as the Bethune School after 1862 (pp. 12, 25).

daughters to my school they shall be taken into theirs."[50] Many eminent members of the *bhadralok* elite openly expressed their commitment by sending their own daughters to the school. The first pupils included the daughters of Brahmo Debendranath Tagore, of orthodox pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, and of the former "firebrand" of Young Bengal, Ram Gopal Ghose.

Education at the school was emphatically secular, and the staff was not allowed to preach Christianity at any time.[51] The girls were taken to and from school in covered carriages, but because male pandits did most of the teaching, purdah could not be fully maintained. The initial enrolment of twenty-one rose to eighty within two years, but then numbers began to drop.[52] In spite of all its advantages, the Bethune School initially was not a success. There were both apathy and the opposition of the orthodox *bhadralok* to contend with. Even many who agreed on the necessity of female education saw public schooling as offending custom and religious propriety.[53] The school continued to disappoint the hopes of its founders for some time. In 1868 an article in the women's magazine *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* lamented the failure of the educated middle classes in taking the lead in female education. The article claimed that the Bethune School was kept going solely by government assistance.[54] In 1863 there were ninety-three girls enrolled, and the annual expenditure of the school was 7,000 rupees. It was said that many of the girls were low-caste, and that the duration of their education was very brief. Attendance was irregular, and it was estimated that "only a quarter of the girls know how to read a simple tale and un-

[50] Bethune to Dalhousie, 9 June 1849, Dalhousie Papers. This letter was brought to my notice by J. McGuire.

[51] Weitbrecht, *The Women of India*, pp. 189-190.

[52] J. C. Bagal, *Women's Education*, pp. 81-95. J. A. Richey, *Selections*, p. 52; Bethune mentioned the initial enrolment as eleven.

[53] "Bhāskar pāthak hoite prāpta," *Sangbād Bhāskar*, 22 (13 May 1849), in B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part 3, pp. 411-412.

[54] *BP*, 3, 55 (March 1868).

derstand its meaning."[55] In January 1868 there were only thirty girls left at the school. Miss Pigot, superintendent at the time, was accused of mismanagement and forced to resign.[56]

Miss Pigot's inefficiency was clearly not the main cause for the decline, since after her departure the school showed no rapid improvement. The introduction of a monthly fee of one rupee in 1866 was one reason for the reduction in enrolments. Middle-income *bhadralok* families, which supplied most of the pupils, were unable to afford the fee in addition to the other costs of female education.[57]

A survey conducted by divisional inspectors of schools for the Committee of Public Instruction in 1870 provides valuable insight into the social background of pupils at the school. It showed that they were all from what the British categorized as the "upper and middle ranks." Of the 76 pupils at Bethune School at that time, 51 were from the "Small Landholder, Higher Professional, and Lower Professional" groups. The composition of other schools was more mixed. Only 1,741 out of 3,331 girls attending schools receiving government grants-in-aid in Calcutta and Central district were classed as upper- and middle-ranking, and only 89 of the 150 girls at unaided, privately run schools were so classified. It was assumed that most of the 1,327 women receiving *zenana* education in Calcutta were from the upper and middle ranks, but substantiating evidence was unobtainable because of "alleged unwillingness on the part of the ladies receiving instruction to speak of the occupations of their husbands." The social classification

[55] "The Bethune Female School," *The Bengalee*, 13 January 1863, in M. N. Ghosh, *Selections*, pp. 445-447. See also a summary of Woodrow's Report on Public Instruction for 1863-1864 in J. C. Bagal, *Bethune School*, p. 26.

[56] The charge was that she had introduced Christianity into her teachings, but she claimed it was because she wished to go beyond needlework. D. Kopf, "The Brahmo Idea of Social Reform and the Problem of Female Emancipation in Bengal," in J. McLane, ed., *Bengal in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1975), p. 46.

[57] See J. C. Bagal, *Bethune School*, pp. 23-29, for the school's history between 1857 and 1869.

TABLE I

SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE UPPER AND MIDDLE RANKS, AS DEFINED BY THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

1. Titled aristocracy
2. Large landholders
3. Small landholders
4. Higher professional (barristers, surgeons, engineers, pleaders, clergy, . . . mullas, . . . professors . . . , English teachers, university degree holders, editors . . .)
5. Lower professional (*muktear*, *amla*, writer, surveyor, overseer, native doctor, apothecary, pandit, English teacher, *munshi*, printer, *ghatak*, press proprietor . . .)
6. Higher commerce (bankers, brokers, gold merchants, *mahajan*, large traders, manufacturers of sugar . . .)
7. Lower commerce (large shopkeepers)
8. Art (musicians, photographers, portrait painters, engravers)
9. Government officers (200 rupees per month and above)
10. Government officers (50-200 rupees per month)
11. Government officers (20-50 rupees per month)
12. Government officers (less than 50 rupees per month—military officers, teachers, pandits, postmasters, *amlas*)

system used, and the results of the survey, were as shown in Tables I and II.[58]

The quality of education imparted did not appear to be a significant factor affecting enrolments. Even when the standard of education at the Bethune School was low, enrolments were still high. The school's failure to produce well-educated graduates of the same standard as male schools was not due solely to the particular problems involved in introducing female education in a society where post-adolescent purdah and child marriage drastically shortened the average time of schooling for women. Even in England, where these obstacles were not present, the Schools' Inquiry Commission of 1864-1867 found that in most British girls' schools, history, English,

[58] *GRPI for 1869-70* (Calcutta, 1870), pp. 16-22.

TABLE II

SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF PUPILS AT SCHOOLS IN CALCUTTA

Girls' Schools	*Number*	*Pupils*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*	*Total*
Government	1	76	2	2	9	14	28	3	7	—	6	5	—	—	76
Aided	90	3331	1	31	157	260	813	156	46	6	25	89	72	85	1741
Unaided*	4	150	—	—	10	21	51	5	—	—	—	—	—	2	89
Zenana	87	1327	—	8	22	27	63	49	13	7	20	16	6	—	231

* The unaided category encompassed schools as diverse as European and foreign girls' schools such as Loreto House and La Martiniere, and native girls' schools such as the Scotch Orphanage.

and general knowledge were learned entirely by rote and without an understanding of the meaning.[59]

One early pupil of the Bethune School reminisced that she had shown little interest in gaining an education while she was a pupil there. Her main pleasure was in racing to the carriage with a friend in the mornings, to try to win the coveted seating position on the side farthest from the open door.[60] Young unmarried girls, used to a large degree of freedom in their own homes, may not have liked the formality and restrictiveness imposed on them by school life. Lack of a tangible purpose for study meant that this group was not highly motivated.

The apparent failure of the Bethune School turned attention back to *zenana* education. In any case, the Bethune School had not catered for older married women, who were the group most conscious of the benefits of education and most anxious to take advantage of them. *Zenana* education was the most practical means of educating them, and their eagerness augured well for the success of this method. The Brahma Bandhu Sabha was started in 1863 by some younger members of the Brahmo Samaj, whose aims included sponsoring female education in the home.[61] The hope was expressed that a branch of the new association would be founded in every *mofussil* town where there was already a Brahmo Samaj.[62]

Zenana associations were a popular means of conducting female education. Many were operated by missionary agencies, but others were managed by "enlightened native gentlemen." They were mainly examining bodies that prescribed textbooks for home study at the beginning of the year and

[59] J. Kamm, *How Different From Us. A Biography of Miss Buss and Miss Beale* (London, 1958). They were pioneers of modern girls' education in Britain (pp. 84-87).

[60] Nabin-kali Dasi, *Kumārī siksā* (Calcutta, 1883), pp. 20-21.

[61] P. S. Basu, *Life and Works of Brahmananda Keshav* (Calcutta, 1940), p. 68.

[62] *Tattwabodhinī Patrikā*, 245 (Pous 1785 [1863]), in B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part 2, p. 432.

awarded prizes after an annual examination.[63] There was some doubt as to the efficacy of *zenana* associations. In her report for 1877-1878, the inspectress of female schools found that mission schemes for *zenana* education were preoccupied with increasing numbers to the detriment of the standard of education. In most cases, mistresses only devoted two hours each week to a house, when they would answer general questions, conduct reading lessons, teach needlework, and read Bible stories. Native *zenana* agencies were equally deficient. Teaching was spasmodic, and examinations were often unsupervised, which invited dishonesty. Husbands were suspected of giving assistance, as the inspectress often found pupils able only to read books of a lower standard than those set for the examinations that they were supposed to have passed.[64]

The debate over curriculum content

The prevalence of *zenana* education caused a controversy over the content of the curriculum. The main issue was the extent to which female education should differ from that of men. A closer examination of this debate yields a great deal of information on the role of women in society. In England, there had been a battle to rescue women's education from the purely decorative function it had performed in the early nineteenth century, and to give girls a challenging and stimulating modern education. The content of the latter was never fully agreed upon. Educationalists tended to divide into two groups, the "uncompromising," who advocated exactly the same education as males in order to prove equality, and the "separatists," who favored a modified curriculum to train women for their future role.[65] Although there was extensive debate on the mode of education in the early stages of female education in Bengal,

[63] *GRPI for 1875-76*, p. 87.

[64] *GRPI for 1877-78*, pp. 79-80.

[65] See an interesting discussion of this in "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education" by Sara Delamont in S. Delamont and L. Duffin, eds., *The Nineteenth-Century Woman. Her Cultural and Physical World* (London, 1978).

there had been little discussion of its content. The curriculum followed in the Bethune School and other girls' schools was similar to that followed in a vernacular boys' school. Yet it should not be supposed that therefore the education of men and women was seen in the same way.

There was a continued lament over the lack of suitable textbooks for girls, indicating that female education was perceived differently from that of males. Madan Mohan Tarkalankar wrote *Sisusiksā* as a text for girls in 1849, after his two daughters had started going to the Bethune School.[66] However, much of the preoccupation with distinctively female subjects was a reflection of British preconceptions. Needlework was not traditionally associated with females in most parts of India, but it formed a large part of the curriculum in girls' schools and in the *zenana*, due largely to the English predilection for needlework as a feminine accomplishment. The education of the English ladies who were responsible for teaching Bengali women had fitted them only for instructing others in such accomplishments, and therefore the quality of education imparted by them was lower than that received by boys taught by better-educated male teachers.

The *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* for January 1866 announced the Antahpur Stri Siksa scheme proposed by the Brahma Bandhu Sabha.[67] Husbands, or whoever had taken on the task of instruction, had to give a progress report to the Sabha every three months, and there would be annual examinations with prizes awarded. The curriculum included such general subjects as mathematics, geography, and grammar. It was noted that there had been objections that those subjects were too difficult and beyond women's capabilities, but the objections went unheeded because it was felt that these subjects were a necessary part of helping women to become more rational beings. In England at the same time opposition to such subjects was more entrenched. Arithmetic was seen as a dangerous addition

[66] *Kabibar Madanmohan Tarkālankārer jībancarit o tadgrantha samālocanā* (Calcutta, 1871), pp. 9-11.

[67] "Antahpure strīsiksā," *BP*, 2:1, 29 (January 1866).

to the curriculum, and science could only be safely admitted under the guise of physical geography.[68] A writer in the *Calcutta Review* in 1864 was eloquent about the need for a semi-scientific education for Hindu women:

> With reference to purely intellectual education, let everything be taught a Hindu girl which forms and exercises the habit of attention and the power of judging by the eye. Popular Astronomy will expand the mind and carry it from nature up to nature's God. History and Geography will free the mind from the prejudices of the nursery and will inoculate it with correct ideas of the seats, the causes, and the progress of civilization. . . . We would teach composition, but the themes must be drawn not from the abstractions of metaphysicians, but from the observations and actualities of life.[69]

Music and drawing were also recommended, but although the author stated that he did not want to create "a tribe of literary and scientific ladies" looking down on mundane affairs, it was also recognized that "the capacity to cook and to operate on Berlin wool are not the *summum bonum* of woman." An educated woman was declared to be better at everything, including household duties, than an uneducated one.

Although the course set for the Antahpur Stri Siksa scheme in 1866 may have been slightly less heavy than that studied by boys, it was not a noticeably "feminine" curriculum. The highest class had passed the double rule of three and decimals in arithmetic and the twelfth theorem in geometry; had studied the first part of Tarinicaran's *Bhāratbarser itihās* for history, and eight sections of a text on the science of matter, and was required to read Kalidasa's *Rāghuvamsa* and Michael Madhusudan's *Megnādbadh kābya* for literature.[70] Any girl who had

[68] J. Kamm, *How Different From Us*, pp. 55-56, 63.

[69] "Hindoo Women," *CR*, 40:79, pp. 93-94.

[70] *BP*, 2:2, 37 (September 1866). In 1865 there had been no pupils in the highest class (class 5). Of the two in class 4, Kamini Debi got 55 percent in the examination paper, but Saraswati Sen only got 25 percent, a result that elicited editorial disapproval and the expressed hope that she would be more attentive to her studies in future. *BP*, 2:3, 36 (August 1866).

reached this level would have had an advanced education by any standard.

As time went on, the number of special textbooks for females increased. Reliance on these meant that the content of female education became increasingly differentiated from that of men and probably suffered a decline in standard. One such text was the *Strī-siksā*, part one, published in 1861. This text was designed to follow on from the *Barnaparicay*, parts one and two, the basic reading primers written by Vidyasagar.[71] It was a book of short moral tales written in the simple colloquial style used in women's conversation. Many of the stories illustrated pious and good behavior. For instance, Susila was a clever girl who had won many prizes at school. She was now married and at home, but still read good books, and was able to draw a map with towns, mountains, and rivers marked on it. Another story was about Binodini's skill in sewing. Other essays proclaimed the advantages of female education, especially when continued after marriage, and the value of cleanliness. Another essay was about the earth, and undermined the old superstitions that the earth rested on a turtle's back and that men could not travel further north than the Himalayas. Such a text directed the education of women to fit them for their designated sphere. It touched on household matters, and dealt mainly with moral problems faced in daily life rather than with abstruse metaphysics.

In the 1860s there was already the beginning of a cleavage of opinion over the desirable content of female education, but it did not come to a head until the next decade. Even the most vehement British enthusiasts of female education seemed to agree on the need for some "feminine" content. After her visit in 1866, Mary Carpenter made suggestions for the education of Hindu girls. Although she was herself an exceptional case, having had the classical education of a boy,[72] her proposals included the cultivation of beautiful flowers to soften the girls' minds, music for their refinement, and drawing, as well as

[71] Ramtanu Gupta, *Strī-siksā pratham bhāg* (Calcutta, 1861).

[72] J. Manton, *Mary Carpenter and the Children of the Streets* (London, 1976).

calisthenic exercises and experiments in natural philosophy. She saw the aim of their education being to render them "fit and useful helpmates."[73] In 1876, the Committee of Public Instruction proposed to replace higher mathematics with the study of needlework and embroidery. A vernacular newspaper, the *Bhārat Mihir*, objected on the grounds that needlework and embroidery were merely of recreational benefit, whereas the study of mathematics "quickens and sharpens the intellect."[74] By the turn of the century, needlework and domestic science were a routine part of the curriculum in girls' schools.[75]

A writer in the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* for 1870 warned of the necessity for educated women to retain traditional Hindu womanly virtues. The article listed ten of these, including devotion to God, charity, self-sacrifice, faithfulness, and honesty.[76] Education was considered dangerous not because it made a woman manly, as was feared in England and America,[77] but because it drew her away from her traditional role. The concept of "femininity" in connection with a stereotyped image of physical and mental frailty was not as persistent in India as it was in the west. In India being female was defined more by role than by behavioral and personality traits.[78]

The growth of female education continued, uninterrupted by the debate over its content. Enthusiasm for female education was especially apparent in the *mofussil*, where girls' schools sprang up for the daughters of the resident *bhadralok*.

[73] Address to a meeting in Madras in 1867, cited in "Miss Carpenter's Six Months in India," *CR*, 47:94 (1868), pp. 7-8.

[74] *Bhārat Mihir*, 18 May 1876 in *RNNB* 27 May 1876.

[75] H. Sharp, ed., *Progress of Education in India 1907-1912. Sixth Quinquennial Review*, I (Calcutta, 1914), 222.

[76] "Strīlokdiger bidyāsikser sahit dharmma-siksār ābasyaktā," *BP*, 6, 82 (June 1870).

[77] S. Delamont, "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education."

[78] For a contemporary discussion of this, see M. Roy, "The Concepts of 'Femininity' and 'Liberation' in the Context of Changing Sex-Roles: Women in Modern India and America," in D. Raphael, ed., *Being Female* (The Hague, 1975).

They were rarely set up by government initiative. In 1859-1860 the government rejected a recommendation for a grant to establish girls' schools in Hughly, Burdwan, and the Twenty-Four Parganas on the grounds of "financial pressure."[79] The task was left to philanthropic individuals or to social reform associations. The Utterparah Hitakari Sabha was particularly active in sponsoring women's education. It set up a girls' school in Utterparah in 1863.[80] Regular examinations were held and scholarships awarded. Similar associations existed in other towns. Female education was one of the hallmarks of the Brahmo program for social reform. Wherever a Brahmo was posted, he would set up—often with the help of his wife—a Brahmo Samaj, a boys' school, a charitable dispensary, and a school for girls. Sasipada Banerjea was a perfect example of this type. The girls' school he established in Burranagore in 1865 began as a class for girls held in his own home.[81] Over the years the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* noted the rise of a number of schools for girls in the *mofussil*. In 1864 a small school was started by the Mallik family of Sindhuriapati, with twenty-two pupils and two lady superintendents.[82] When Mary Carpenter came to Bengal in 1866 she visited girls' schools in Konnegore and Krishnagar as well as in Utterparah, Ranaghat, and Burranagore.[83] The deputy magistrate in Ranaghat started a girls' school there in 1868, which grew from ten to forty pupils in five months.[84] The number of female pupils in schools in the Central Division rose from 999 in April 1863

[79] Government of India, *Selections from the Educational Records of the Government of India, v. I, Education Reports 1859-71* (Delhi, 1960), p. 86.

[80] N. Mukherjee, *A Bengal Zamindar*, p. 252; M. Carpenter, *Six Months in India*, I (London, 1868), 243-244. *BP*, 2:2, 35 (July 1866), said that it grew from an enrolment of eight to sixty in three years.

[81] M. Carpenter, *Six Months*, pp. 248-249; Albion Banerji, *An Indian Pathfinder* (Calcutta, 1971), p. 13; Srinath Canda, *Brāhmasamāje callis bathsar* (Calcutta, 1969); Shib Chunder Deb, "Autobiography," in M. N. Ghosh, ed., *The Life of Grish Chunder Ghose*.

[82] "Strī-bidyālay," *BP*, 5, 74 (October 1869).

[83] M. Carpenter, *Six Months*, pp. 232-269.

[84] "Rānāghāt Bālikā Bidyālay," *BP*, 5, 73 (September 1869).

to 3,307 in April 1866.[85] By 1878 there were 21,587 girls receiving instruction in the whole of Bengal.[86]

Differing philosophies: the expansion of female education in Calcutta

Keshub Chunder Sen, leader of the Brahmo Samaj of India, returned from a visit to England in 1870 fired with renewed enthusiasm for female education. The Bethune School had apparently stagnated,[87] so in February 1871 Keshub started the Native Ladies' Normal School under the auspices of the new philanthropic organization, the Indian Reform Association. The school's main aim was teacher training. A girls' primary school was added in September 1871 to give the trainees some experience.[88] The normal school was small, increasing from thirteen or fourteen pupils initially to twenty-four or twenty-five a year later.[89] Nearly all the pupils were Brahmos,[90] and the school was located for some time within the grounds of the Bharat Ashram. Pupils living outside were inconvenienced because their domestic duties left little time for study.[91]

Keshub's address on the first anniversary of the Bama Hitaisini Sabha, a discussion group connected with the school, made his limited aims for the pupils quite clear. He said that women occupied a different sphere from men, and that there-

[85] Not all schools catered for the *bhadramahilā*, but they would account at least for the 125 pupils in the Bethune School and the 610 in Zenana Associations, as well as part of the 1,877 in government-aided schools and the 103 in unaided schools under native managers. Taken from the report of Mr. Woodrow, inspector of the Central Division, in Government of India, *Selections*, p. 212.

[86] *GRPI from 1877-1878*, p. 77.

[87] The attempt to incorporate a normal school section in 1868 had failed. See J. C. Bagal, *Bethune School*, pp. 29-31.

[88] P. S. Basu, *Life and Works*, p. 276.

[89] "Bāmā hitoisini sabhār sāngbathsarik uthsab," *BP*, 8, 105 (May 1872).

[90] Only two or three pupils at the normal school were Hindus, but over twenty at the girls' school came from orthodox Hindu families. *Indian Mirror*, 28 May 1873.

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

fore their progress should be different. They should progress not only in general knowledge, but in their special duties of doing housework, serving their parents, raising children, and helping their menfolk. They should not aim at being great scholars, but at being good wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters.[92]

The running of the school embodied Brahmo principles of social reform by breaking the purdah system. Pupils were taken on excursions to public places such as the Asiatic Museum.[93] The school curriculum also demonstrated a shift in the perception of women's role by teaching English. Texts studied in the highest class included the English *Fifth Book of Reading*, and McCulloch's *Course of Reading and Grammar*. A basic knowledge of English was beginning to be seen as a mark of social accomplishment. General opinion, however, was still wary of English education for women, because of the fear that they would begin to speak English in the home and that this would lead to a gradual decline in the Bengali language.[94] By 1874 the senior girls had become very proficient in English, reading prose by Addison and Goldsmith, and such poems as Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty," Campbell's "The Mother" and Byron's "Farewell to England." A few of the girls read their English compositions in the presence of the lieutenant-governor at the prize-giving ceremony in 1875. Radharani Lahiri read an essay on "The Duties of an Unmarried Woman," replete with lofty sentiments about modesty and diligence. The ideal unmarried woman was not to be too attentive to dress, but to work hard to attain knowledge and to be modest and careful in her spiritual culture: "Such is the picture of a true virgin who is faithful to her God, and a flower of loveliness in the social circle." Mohini Khastagir

[92] "Bāmā hitoisini sabhār sāngbathsarik uthsab," *BP*, 105.

[93] A separate viewing time was, however, arranged for them. *BP*, 6, 92 (April 1871).

[94] *Bhārat Ranjan*, 21 January 1867 in *RNNB* 31 January 1867; *Bangabāsī*, 13 August 1898 in *RNNB* 20 August 1898.

read an essay on "The People Whom I Like, and Whom I Don't Like."[95]

Regular monthly, half-yearly, and yearly examinations were held. The senior classes also received lessons in vocal and instrumental music and drawing—though critics complained that the teaching of "European airs and tunes" by the European teacher was of no use to native ladies.[96] All classes were taught needlework. The school had a European headmistress, who was aided by the Brahmo preachers Aghorenath Gupta, Gour Gobinda Roy, and Bijoy Krishna Goswami in the Vernacular Department. Older girls also helped teach the younger.[97] Although the prevailing tone of education was "feminine," Sibnath Sastri, who favored a fuller development of women's intellectual capacities, gave lectures there on "mental science."[98]

When Annette Akroyd announced her plans to come to Calcutta, Keshub had expected her to teach at the Native Ladies' Normal School, but she cancelled the arrangement before she arrived.[99] She presented a very clear alternative to Keshub's ideal, and hence her arrival sharpened the debate over female education. She had been educated at Bedford College, and trained as a governess by the Home and Colonial School Society in 1871-1872.[100] Aged thirty, unmarried, and

[95] P. K. Sen, *Biography of a New Faith*, II (Calcutta, 1954). Appendix II, Annual Report of Indian Reform Association 1870-71, pp. 276-284; Appendix V, Report of the Native Ladies' Normal School and Girls' School for 1875-76, pp. 411-423.

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

[97] P. K. Sen, *Biography*, Appendices II, V.

[98] "Manobijnān," *BP*, 11, 147-148 (November-December 1875).

[99] P. K. Sen, *Biography*, Appendix II, p. 349. She fell out with Keshub. There was a heated debate during 1873 in which she was accused of belonging to the "rationalistic school of theology," and of offering her services "uninvited" to the Indian Reform Association as lady superintendent of the Native Ladies' Normal School. See *Indian Mirror*, April-July 1873. All extracts relating to this matter are collected in Catalogue Item 173 in the S. D. Collet Collection, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj Library. For more information on Annette Akroyd, see W. H. Beveridge, *India Called Them* (London, 1947), and P. Barr, *The Memsahibs* (London, 1976).

[100] Akroyd-Beveridge Papers, India Office Library.

committed to a vocation, she represented the progressive trend in female education, and came to Bengal to put theory into practice. A determined and single-minded woman, she held her theories to be universal, making no concessions to the local environment. Visiting Keshub's school on 27 December 1872, she was horrified by its remoteness from her own concept of what a school should be. The general disorder shocked her, as she was led along dirty passages into a room with dirty paint, with a rough shelf and piles of pamphlets, the only "tolerable" thing being some of the girls and an orderly table and book that showed "traces of a woman's hand"—the British feminist still equated femininity with neatness. External objections apart, she was disappointed in the lack of any real teaching method. Radharani Lahiri read a paper and Keshub discussed it, with barely any participation from the other girls.[101]

This experience increased Annette Akroyd's determination to start a school of her own. It was to be a boarding school, so that she could have full control over the social habits of her charges. She founded the Hindu Mahila Bidyalaya in November 1873 with five boarders. All the girls were Brahmos, including Indumati, daughter of Ramtanu Lahiri; the daughters of Durga Mohan Das and Dwarkanath Ganguly; and Harasundari, the wife of Srinath Datta, who was studying in England.[102] Although her feminism made her a radical in the English context, with regard to India she firmly believed that the way to improvement was by following the English ideal of civilization. She supervised the teaching herself. At mealtimes girls sat at the table and ate with spoons and forks. Although her English teaching certificate had commented that her governing power and influence over children were very good, she had little success with Bengali girls. Probably partly

[101] *Ibid., Diary and Notebook in India 1872-1878*, entry for 27 December 1872.

[102] *Ibid., Pocket Diaries 1873-75*; Dwarkanath Ganguly, *Jībanālekhya*, pp. 51-52; Sarala Ray Centenary Committee, *Sarala Ray Centenary Volume* (Calcutta, 1961), p. 93; Prabhatcandra Gangopadhyay, *Bānglār nārī-jāgaran* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 64.

on account of cultural misunderstanding, she found them capricious about food, dishonest, and hysterical.[103] Apart from the normal curriculum, her girls had their minds broadened by frequent open-air excursions—to the Burranagore jute factory, the Botanical Gardens, the Bethune School prize-giving, and the Fine Arts Exhibition. They were also taught to mix with Englishwomen, being taken to dine with Mrs. Hobhouse,[104] wife of the legal member of the viceroy's Executive Council.

Miss Akroyd had made the effort of learning Bengali even before she came to India in order to be able to speak to Bengali women, but her cultural rigidity prevented her from attaining any real understanding of their situation. Although she had come to Calcutta as a sympathizer with native complaints of British arrogance and misrule, she herself lacked the patience necessary for cooperating with Bengalis in their attempts at reform. On 6 April 1875 she married Henry Beveridge, a benefactor of the school[105] and a member of the I.C.S. stationed at Barasat, and relinquished control of the school. The responsibility was taken over by the "female emancipationist" Brahmos Durga Mohan Das, Dwarkanath Ganguly, and Ananda Mohan Bose, Miss Akroyd's former associates from whom she had parted on bad terms. They had not given her the support she had demanded, and she left the school convinced that "it was as well to have as little to do with Bengalis as possible."[106] The school ceased to operate for a short while, then reopened as the Banga Mahila Bidyalaya in June 1876.[107]

The Banga Mahila Bidyalaya was small, with only fourteen pupils in 1878, but its influence, and the controversy it provoked, were extensive. Instead of delineating a separate female sphere, its educational policy was to further the scope of ed-

[103] Akroyd-Beveridge Papers. Letters to her sister, Fanny Mowatt, 1874.
[104] *Ibid.*, *Pocket Diaries 1873-75*.
[105] *Ibid.*, list of donors to the Hindu Mahila Bidyalaya.
[106] *Ibid.*, letters to Fanny Mowatt, 14 May 1874, 17 May 1874. Her falling out with Bengali reformers was accompanied by bitterness and disillusionment on both sides. See the correspondence with Dwarkanath Ganguly in August-September 1874.
[107] *Indian Mirror*, 9 April 1876; J. C. Bagal, *Bethune School*, p. 33.

ucation for women to include any area of knowledge that interested them. Along with this, the social training of girls was unmistakably western. The girls had to speak English during school hours, and were brought up almost as if they were English girls. Apart from their academic subjects they learned music, darning, sewing, and knitting, and took turns at being kitchen monitor and keeping school accounts.[108]

The unsatisfactory state of the Bethune School was a matter for grave concern to all connected with female education.[109] Through Miss Akroyd's connections, the education personnel in the government were familiar with the advanced state of the Banga Mahila Bidyalaya. A proposal to amalgamate the two, in a union of financial and intellectual resources, was agreed upon. The *Indian Mirror* led the protest against amalgamation, commenting on the inexpediency and undesirability of uniting a "notoriously un-Hindu" with a strictly Hindu school. Its main objection was not academic, but to the imposition of "heterodox eating" (of meat) and the use of spoons and forks on orthodox Hindus.[110] The cry of orthodox Hinduism in danger was a little disingenuous, as not many of the girls already attending the Bethune School would have been from strictly orthodox Hindu families. The defenders of amalgamation argued that an essential part of being taught to be good wives, mothers, and housewives was to be taught manners enabling women to conduct themselves in civilized societies. They said that the accusation of "denationalization" had become a mania: "Is there any harm in introducing among us habits of regularity and punctuality which mark an Englishman? or the tidiness and neatness which mark an Englishwoman? Are such things to be rejected because they are European? What a sad logic!"[111]

An ambitious writer to the *Indian Mirror* in 1873 had wanted

[108] From Director of Public Instruction Report 1876-77, quoted in *Brahmo Year Book*, 1878.

[109] J. C. Bagal, *Bethune School*, pp. 31-36.

[110] *IMS*, 30 June 1878. The protest was echoed in many quarters, including the conservative *National Paper* and the *Christian Herald*. See *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 11 July 1878.

[111] "The Bungo Mohila Vidyaloya," *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 4 July 1878.

Miss Akroyd's curriculum to include arithmetic, algebra, astronomy, experimental physics, natural history, botany (creating a love of gardening and the cultivation of flowers), social and political economy "so far as to enable our ladies to show an intelligent appreciation of, and take an interest in, the topics of the day, so as to be agreeable in society," vernacular literature, English, drawing, painting and music—with native tunes adapted for the piano, harmonium, and flute—horse riding, and household management. In the latter girls were to be taught "to appreciate the beauty, ease, elegance and comfort of the European style of living, so as to be able to adopt the same in their houses when they become their own mistresses. False notions of *nationality* ought to have no place in moving in [sic] the matter."[112] Such a total Anglicization never occurred, but since the most advanced female school was also the most westernized, the issue of female education inevitably became confused with the issue of loss of national identity.

The reaction against western education for women gained in intensity with the rise of nationalist sentiment among the *bhadralok*. Hindu revivalism, with its idealization of a stereotyped all-virtuous Hindu woman, condemned the widening of opportunities for women as "westernizing." Nationalist ideology was used to preserve the status quo with regard to women's role. This was evident in the curriculum outlined by the *Naba Bibhākar Sādhāranī* as suitable for women:

> The present system of female education is in no sense a "national" system. It does not enable its incipients [sic] to develop a well-balanced character, or to make themselves worthy and useful members of their homes. The best system of education for Hindu females will be that which will take note of their character, capabilities and lifework, and implant in their minds those priceless domestic virtues which it is necessary for Hindu wives to possess. Considered from this point of view, it is not desirable that the Hindu girl should be given the dena-

[112] *Indian Mirror*, 5 April 1873.

tionalising English education which is given to the Hindu boy. After the primers and easy readers, Hindu girls should be made to read easy books on domestic economy, the bringing up of children, cookery, artistic work suited to Hindu households, and the formation of character. Biographies of noble Aryan women, such as Sita, Sabitri, Damayanti, Gargi, Durgavati, etc., and domestic tales, like Pandit Sibanath Sastri's "Mejabau" and Babu Taraka Nath Ganguli's "Swarnalata" will be wholesome reading for native girls. Advanced girls may study the Ramayan, the Bhagavat, and the Gita with great advantage, because such study will impress them with the truth, beauty, purity and grandeur of the higher principles of the Hindu religion. In this connection the great importance of *bratas* (pious vows) should also be pointed out. . . .

. . . The art work which is taught to girls in the girls' schools can hardly be called "national." Instruction in wool and silk work is not objectionable, but it is desirable that, in addition to such work, Hindu girls should be taught the sort of fancy needle-work and tracing (*alipanā*) for which Hindu women have always been famous. Miniature gardens made of catechu, paper fishes and tortoises and fruits, artistic models made of thickened milk, miniature clay houses and similar toys evince considerable artistic skill, and native girls should be taught to make them.[113]

The controversy became even more heated when it became clear that the newly amalgamated Bethune School was going to train girls for university examinations. Qualified permission was given to Candramukhi Basu, a student of the Dehra Dun School for Native Christian girls, to sit for the Entrance Arts Examination in 1876.[114] The pressure of Dwarkanath Ganguly and others on the government for full recognition resulted

[113] *Naba Bibhākar Sādhāranī*, 8 April 1889 in *RNNB* 13 April 1889.
[114] Prabhatcandra Gangopadhyay, *Bānglār nārī-jāgaran*, p. 67.

in a set of rules governing the admission of women to examinations for the degree in Arts in 1878.[115] The requirements for the Entrance Arts (E.A.) examination were to be the same as for men. In the First Arts (F.A.) examination, the differences were that they could choose among French, German, Italian, or an Indian vernacular as a second language, or substitute botany for the second mathematics paper. In the Bachelor of Arts examination they again had freedom in the choice of a second language, and could substitute political economy for mathematics.[116] As the editor of the *Brahmo Public Opinion* remarked, the University of Calcutta had gone even further than the English universities, where women were not yet admitted to degrees.[117]

This remarkable position had been arrived at without the lengthy and tumultuous storm of opposition that had attended the broaching of the subject in England.[118] Apparently, at the meeting of the University Syndicate that decided the issue there had been a division of opinion on whether university education for women should be specifically feminine or not. The editor of the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* was of the opinion that there should be differences. It was suggested that English literature be made easier, that history be offered in Bengali, the amount of mathematics be lessened, and art, midwifery, and housework be included.[119] The proposed course of study at the new Bethune School was of a high academic order. Well-known male teachers taught mathematics, physical sciences and chemistry, literature, history, and mental and moral phi-

[115] Sarala Ray Centenary Committee, *Sarala Ray*, pp. 93-94.

[116] *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 23 May 1878.

[117] London University admitted women to degrees later in 1878. J. Kamm, *Hope Deferred—Girls' Education in English History* (London, 1965), p. 261.

[118] J. Kamm, *How Different From Us*; S. Delamont, "The Contradictions in Ladies' Education"; Emily Davies, "The Influence of University Degrees on the Education of Women," *Victoria Magazine*, 1863, in E. Davies, *Thoughts on Some Questions Relating to Women* (New York, 1971; Cambridge, 1910). The latter recounts that the question was first raised in 1856, when a lady applied for admission to the examinations of the University of London and was refused.

[119] "Bıswabidyālaye strīlokdiger parīksā," *BP*, 13, 166 (June 1877). See also *Education Gazette*, 23 January 1885 in *RNNB* 31 January 1885.

losophy.[120] It was hoped by its well-wishers that it would become "the Girton College of the East."[121] In *Abalābāndhab*, a women's journal run by the progressive Brahmos who had managed the Banga Mahila Bidyalaya, Girton College was again held up as the model for the education to be given at Bethune School.[122]

Kadambini Basu sat for the Entrance Arts examination in 1878, and missed obtaining a first division pass by only one mark. It was noted that she obtained high marks in Bengali, tolerable marks in history, "and even in exact science—a subject which is not usually considered to be congenial to the female intellect—she acquitted herself creditably."[123] Accordingly she continued to study for the F.A., and the status of the school was raised to that standard.[124] The Free Church Normal School also opened college classes for Candramukhi Basu, the pioneer of the E.A. Both she and Kadambini passed the F.A. in 1880. In 1881 both were awarded government scholarships to read for their degrees at Bethune School, and both received their B.A. in 1883. Candramukhi went on with further study, to become the first woman M.A. in 1884, and Kadambini went on to medical college.[125] Vidyasagar noted this landmark in female achievement by presenting Candramukhi with a set of Shakespeare's works, inscribed "from her sincere well wisher Isvara Chandra Sarma."[126] By the end of the century, twenty-seven girls had B.A. degrees.[127] In 1904, thirty girls passed the E.A., and nine passed the F.A. There

[120] "The Bethune School," *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 6 March 1879.

[121] *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 24 April 1878. Girton College was the first women's college at Cambridge.

[122] *Abalābāndhab*, 1, 4 (February 1879).

[123] From the Minutes of Calcutta University for 1878-79, cited in Prabhatcandra Gangopadhyay, *Bānglār nārī-jāgaran*, p. 73.

[124] The school became a full-fledged college attached to Calcutta University in February 1888. From then on the school section was known as the Bethune Collegiate School. J. C. Bagal, *Bethune School*, pp. 46-47.

[125] *Ibid.*, pp. 40-45.

[126] Chabi Ray, *Bānglār nārī āndolan—sangkrāmī bhumikāy dersa' bachar* (Calcutta, 1955), p. 35.

[127] See the list of women graduates in U. Chakraborty, *Condition of Bengali Women*, Appendix IV.

were no B.A.s that year, however, suggesting a high dropout rate. Very few women continued with tertiary studies after marriage.[128]

Inevitably, the growth of higher education for women prompted some opposition. Much of this would have been from less-educated men who sensed competition and a loss of their authority in society. The "educated woman" became a figure of fun and the butt of numerous Bengali satires in prose and drama. The vituperativeness of some of these attacks indicated a deep feeling that educated women were a real threat to male dominance and social control. While praising the first women graduates, the vice chancellor of Calcutta University attempted to allay popular fears in his convocation address in 1883:

> I can readily understand that there may be many in India, perhaps some even among this assembly, who look upon this part of to-day's ceremonial with some measure of doubt and apprehension. St. Paul has told us that the path of safety for woman lies in the performance of the functions of wife-hood and mother-hood, that is to say, in the exercise of the domestic duties and virtues. . . . No one wishes, no one expects, that the extension of education to Indian women will lead them at once to throw aside the restraints of caste, the habits of seclusion which the practice of the country justifies, or even the timidity of temperament which characterises them today. Those who apprehend anything like a disorganization of the present social system of India may lay aside their fears. The customs of a nation are not so easily changed.[129]

[128] Sarala Ray Centenary Committee, *Sarala Ray*, p. 94; interview with Mrs. Sailaja Chakravarty, daughter of Hemantakumari Chaudhuri, in Calcutta, 13 February 1978. Both women dropped their plans for sitting the E.A. when they got married.

[129] University of Calcutta, *Convocation Addresses*, II, 1880-1898 (Calcutta, 1914), pp. 467-468, Address by the Vice-Chancellor, the Honourable Mr. H. J. Reynolds, on 10 March 1883. Satires on educated women are too numerous to list. Some indicative titles are Jogendracandra Basu, *Model bhaginī* (Calcutta, 1886); Durgadas De, *Miss Bino bibi bi e (onār in e kors)*

Opposition to tertiary education for women came not only from orthodox Hindus but from a faction within the Brahmo Samaj with a different educational philosophy. After 1878 the two groups were divided along fairly clear lines into the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and the Nababidhan, the latter opposing advances made by the former. Objections were advanced on two grounds. One was the English-derived argument that higher education was unfeminine, and the other was the matter of loss of national identity. For instance, while accepting that Kadambini's success in the E.A. proved that the mental capacity of the sexes was the same, the opposition was "still firmly of the opinion that special teaching is necessary in the case of women for the education and refinement of that tender nature which God has given them for the purpose of softening and humanizing society."[130] They ridiculed the cause of higher education by pointing out the inappropriateness of the titles "Bachelor" and "Master" of Arts.[131] It was also pointed out that the British in India were in no hurry to send their own daughters to university, implying that the benefits were by no means generally acknowledged: "The fact is that the majority of the ruling race do strenuously object to subject their daughters to a conventional mode of examinations which neither fits them for worthy positions in life nor makes them better individuals in any sense of the expression."[132]

As a countermeasure, the Nababidhan group put up its own scheme for female education. The government grant had been withdrawn from the Native Ladies' Normal School, which after producing four teachers was no longer in a flourishing condition. After a temporary cessation of operation, it reopened in 1880 as the Metropolitan Female School, with thirty pupils.[133] This school languished,[134] but in the meantime the

(Barisal, 1898); Radhabinod Haldar, *Pāskarā māg* (Calcutta, 1888); Siddheswar Ray, *Boubābu* (Calcutta, 1889).

[130] *IMS*, 12 January 1879.

[131] *Liberal and New Dispensation*, 28 January 1883; 10 August 1884.

[132] *IMS*, 2 March 1879.

[133] *Ibid.*, 6 April 1879; Indian Reform Association Report 1879.

[134] *Ibid.*, 31 October 1880.

Committee of the Indian Reform Association came up with a replacement that would challenge the educational philosophy of the Bethune School. In 1882 it proposed a Native Ladies' Institution, "specially adapted to the requirements of the female mind and calculated to fit woman for her position in society." It declared that the awarding of degrees to women was "objectionable and unsexing." What was needed was a plan of education suited to the Hindu female character, a plan "at once natural and national."[135] The *Indian Christian Herald* proclaimed its approval of the new institution, as in its view "India wants her sons to be *sons* and her daughters to be *daughters* and *not* sons."[136] In fact, the curriculum differed little from that of the Bethune School. Juniors learned English (Toru Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*) and Bengali (*Sitār banabās*), arithmetic, science, drawing, ethics, domestic economy, and music. Seniors studied select passages from *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice* and Addison for English, arithmetic, the history and geography of India, physical geography, Paley's *Natural Theology*, the laws of health, and the *Harmonium Sutras* parts one and two for music.[137] The Bible was also one of the English textbooks.[138] This specially formulated "feminine" curriculum was still too harsh to satisfy some critics. The *Liberty* of Lucknow complained that Addison was too antiquated and Paley too abstruse for women, and that such difficult texts ran counter to the Association's aim "not to turn our housewifes into pedantic bluestockings and self-opinionated gentle *savants*."[139]

The popular Native Ladies' Institution and the failing Metropolitan Female School were amalgamated on 1 January 1883 as the Victoria College for Women.[140] Its managers declared proudly that "With a view to avoid masculine training and meet the special requirements and develop the softer suscep-

[135] *Liberal and New Dispensation*, 2 April 1882.
[136] *Ibid.*, 26 March 1882.
[137] *Ibid.*, 21 May 1882; 23 July 1882.
[138] *Ibid.*, 4 June 1882; 23 July 1882.
[139] *Ibid.*, 4 June 1882.
[140] *Ibid.*, 17 December 1882.

tibilities of the female mind, special subjects were included in the curriculum besides the ordinary course of studies, such as domestic economy, drawing, music, cookery, needlework, and laws of health." Weekly lectures were delivered at College Hall, in a popular and conversational style, which helped students in their home studies. In December 1882 thirty candidates presented themselves for examination, including three Christians, ten Hindus, and seventeen Brahmos. Most lived in Calcutta, but eight were from the *mofussil*. The bishop of Calcutta presided at the prize-giving, and gave his wholehearted endorsement to this attempt to enable ladies to study at home amidst their domestic duties. In his address he said that "only one or two ladies might compete for University distinctions, but the great majority of women must always demand and ought to receive feminine training such as this institution imparted."[141]

Though more flexible in structure than the Bethune School, the Victoria College never had the same success. Despite protestations that it offered a truly national feminine education which was not against Hindu beliefs, it was firmly identified with Keshub Chunder Sen and the Nababidhan. Although it had accused the Bethune School of being westernized and un-Hindu, the Victoria College itself catered mainly to Brahmos, including the Anglicized families of some England-returned *bhadralok*. There was a European headmistress, Miss Pigot, and a boarding department was opened in 1883.[142] Girls were able to continue with higher studies to a certain extent. R. C. Dutt's daughters were educated to the standard of E.A. there.[143] The Victoria College managed to survive, but its fortunes fluctuated greatly over the next twenty years.[144]

[141] *Ibid.*, 1 April 1883.

[142] *New Dispensation*, 26 August 1883.

[143] Sushama Sen, *Memoirs of an Octogenarian* (Simla, 1971), p. 55.

[144] After Keshub's death it declined, but was revived by his daughter, the Maharani of Cuch Behar. *BP*, 4:2, 283 (August 1888). In *Mahilā*, 3, 10 (May 1898) there was an appeal to women for funds to maintain the school, and a call for volunteers for lecturing. The school probably closed between 1889 and 1895, and again between 1899 and 1901. Niranjan Niyogi, *Sādhan o sebā*, pp. 179-183. This volume also gives the subsequent early history of the

A noteworthy development in female education was the foundation of the Mahakali Pathsala in 1893. This school, established on orthodox Hindu principles by a female ascetic, Mataji Maharani Tapaswini, established a national form of education in a way the Brahmos never could. Upper-caste girls attended, in covered carriages, for a traditional education. The curriculum included Sanskrit, Bengali, arithmetic, and moral textbooks, but greater emphasis was placed on the learning of various *pūjā* rituals and the connected culinary skills. The best *pūjā* performer received a prize. The basic principles on which it was founded included the observance of *sāstric* injunctions in domestic life; the inculcation of *patibrata dharma* (devotion to one's husband) and the observance of the roles of a Hindu woman; the learning of literature and history from the *Kāvyas* and *Purānas*; and instruction in sewing, cookery, accounts, and the drawing of *ālpanā*. The school had its own textbooks. In its field it achieved a high standard. Girls who had reached the highest class were reading the *Rāghuvamsa* in Sanskrit. The school was supported solely by the Hindu community. Its patrons included wealthy native landowners such as the maharaja of Darbhanga[145] and the maharaja of Burdwan.[146] A further seal of approval, unusual in such an agressively Hindu context, was the official patronage of Lady Minto.[147] The school was also gladly accepted by its more progressive contemporaries.[148]

The Mahakali Pathsala had twenty-three branch schools in Bengal. The central school in Calcutta started with thirty pupils, and the number had increased to 450 by 1903, a higher enrolment figure than any other girls' school at the time.[149]

institution, as does the *Victoriā Institiusaner satabarsa smaranikā 1871-1971* (Calcutta, 1971).

[145] *BP*, 6:1, 387 (April 1897).

[146] *BP*, 8:1, 489 (May 1904). He gave 3,000 rupees to the building fund and promised a further donation of fifty rupees per month.

[147] *BP*, 8:2, 510-511 (February-March 1906).

[148] *BP*, 5:3, 362 (March 1895).

[149] M. G. Cowan, *The Education of the Women of India* (Edinburgh, 1912), pp. 112-115; Lotika Ghose, "Social and Educational Movements for and by Women," in *Bethune School*, pp. 145-146.

The nationalistic educational philosophy of the school was particularly acceptable in the period following the partition of Bengal in 1905.[150] The school's popularity was attributable to its compromise between education and orthodoxy, and its maintenance of continuity between home and school. The functioning of the school showed how Hindu orthodoxy and tradition had gradually been redefined to include female literacy, without occasioning any protest from the Hindu community. It is also interesting to note that despite the emphasis on education for a role in the home, many of the teaching functions of the home had been transferred to the school. The responsibility for teaching home duties was thus institutionalized, resulting to some extent in a change in the nature of domestic life. The success of the Mahakali Pathsala signified a general acceptance of the need for education for women.

There remain a few other trends to be noted. Coeducation was tried for the first time in 1897. Two *bhadramahilā* were admitted to the first year class at the prestigious Presidency College, but the experiment proved unpopular and was later discontinued.[151] Toward the end of the century a vogue for extreme westernization was current among parts of the *bhadralok* elite. Bethune School no longer seemed to provide the kind of training in accomplishments and languages needed by the future wives of high government officials. For a thoroughly English education, parents began to send their daughters to European schools like the Loreto House convent, which admitted a small quota of Indian girls. Loreto girls wore white

[150] Srinath Canda, *Brahmasamāje callıs bathsar*, p. 320.

[151] Presidency College, *Centenary Volume 1955* (Calcutta, 1956), p. 19. See also the controversy this evoked in the press: *Bangabāsī*, 10 July 1897, *Hitaisi*, 13 July 1897, *Doinik-O-Samācār Candrikā*, 14 July 1897 in *RNNB* 17 July 1897; *Burdwan Sanjībanī*, 13 July 1897, *Pratikār*, 16 July 1897, *Saraswat Patra*, 17 July 1897 in *RNNB* 24 July 1897; *Sulābh Samācār*, 31 July 1897 in *RNNB* 7 August 1897; *Doinik-O-Samācār Candrikā*, 5 August 1897 in *RNNB* 14 August 1897; *Dacca Gazette*, 30 August 1897 in *RNNB* 30 August 1897. The two girls were Brahmos. The point was made repeatedly that coeducation was not accepted in either Britain or America, and so should not be imposed on Bengal. Two female students were also admitted to the B.A. class at Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, at this time. *Hitabādī*, 30 July 1897 in *RNNB* 7 August 1897.

frocks to school, were educated entirely in English, and learned French and music as accomplishments. The earliest pupils included the daughters of P. K. Sen (granddaughters of R. C. Dutt), Bihari Lal Gupta, and Sir Nilratan Sircar.[152] One early pupil recalled that her progressive Brahmo father, Dr. Prankrishna Acharya, had wanted her to attend a Bengali school, but her conservative mother favored Loreto House because she would learn more accomplishments there and thus make a better marriage. Her mother's hopes were justified. After matriculating from Loreto she married an England-returned I.C.S. officer.[153] Numbers at English schools were very small,[154] but indicate the kind of aspirations of the *bhadralok* elite.

The spread of female education generated discussion about the uses to which education should be put, and what the role of an educated woman should be. Authors began to quote Pope's dictum, "A little learning is a dangerous thing." Rajnarain Bose pronounced that it was better to remain in ignorance than to be "half-educated" and use that paltry knowledge to read obscene stories and plays.[155] The *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* warned that

> to all those women in whose hearts there is no natural purity, who have no natural hatred of impure thoughts, in the making of whose hearts purity was not everlastingly united as an element, who are incapable of thinking independent thoughts—to all these pitiful women a little learning is totally disastrous—the cause of their downfall—and such examples are not rare.[156]

[152] Sushama Sen, *Memoirs*, p. 89. Also personal communication from Miss Bose, Calcutta, 10 March 1978. She was one of the third group of Bengali pupils at Loreto, around the turn of the century. Her parents sent her there to get the benefits of a western education.

[153] Interview with Usha Haldar, daughter of Dr. Prankrishna Acharya, Calcutta, 13 March 1978.

[154] There were twelve Bengali girls at Loreto House around 1910. Miss Bose has a photograph of this group—the girls in it included herself, her three cousins, the granddaughter of Sir Chandra Madhab Ghose, and the four daughters of Sir Nilratan Sircar.

[155] Rajnarain Bose, *Se kāl ār e kāl* (Calcutta, 1976), p. 60.

[156] "Nārīganer alpasiksā," Bāmāganer racanā, *BP*, 3:2, 242 (March 1885).

Increasingly parents considered a basic level of education to be essential for their daughters, so as to enable them to write letters, keep accounts, and read a few books. Marriage criteria had been substantially revised. The fact of literacy was no longer kept secret from the groom;[157] it became, instead, an important bargaining asset. As early as 1870 the deputy inspector of education in Dacca reported that the unmarried "in their selection of brides have come to consider beauty without education defective."[158] According to one women's journal, when people came to inspect a prospective bride one of the first questions was "can the girl read and write a bit?" The girl was usually able, with difficulty, "to write a half-page letter full of mistakes, and had learnt to turn over a few pages of *Durgesnandinī* or *Swarnalatā*, and thought of herself as having learnt a great deal, looking down on those who had not had the good fortune to learn all this as lesser creatures."[159]

The link between education and marriage raised a further issue connected with *alpa siksā* (little education). It was said that a woman with a little education would think of herself as an educated woman, and become unduly proud and arrogant.[160] A writer in the women's journal *Banga Mahilā* satirically ridiculed modern education, the aim of which was to enable girls to call themselves *siksitā*, or educated women. This title meant that they could do fancy work, recite a few prayers, and write poetry and prose for *Bāmābodhinī* or *Banga Mahilā*.[161] In many *bhadraparibār*, or good families, women wasted their time reading *Megnādbadh* or *Britrasanghār*, *Dvīpnirbān* or *Durgesnandinī*, but in very few households was there ever any educated discussion among women.[162] They were said to have no desire to read useful books such as

[157] W. Adam, *Reports*, first report (Rangpur, 1835), p. 110.
[158] Government of India, *Selections*, p. 387.
[159] *BP*, 6:1, 385 (February 1897).
[160] "Nārīganer alpasiksā," *BP*, 242.
[161] "Strīsiksā," *Banga Mahilā*, 1, 5 (September 1875).
[162] *BP*, 385.

biographies or books on child rearing, children's education, domestic medicine, or religion.[163]

Higher education for women prompted the question, "Will the woman, who has obtained the B.A. degree, cook or scour plates?"[164] It was feared that educated women would no longer be able to fulfil their natural role, which was still that of housewife, wife, and mother. Bengali society was in transition, and old and new elements had not yet blended. Female education became acceptable, but old functions still had to be carried out. Education was felt to train women in nonproductive activity rather than in needed skills, teaching them only to spend their leisure time reading novels. Writers chose to ignore the disapproval that had been expressed in the past at the degenerate, luxurious lives led by illiterate *zenana* women.[165] It was also commonly believed that education gave women aspirations to a western way of living and created dissatisfaction with their material conditions. The prevalent image of the Englishwoman was probably drawn from the stereotype of the *memsahib* in India, a purely social being who never did any housework. However, as a writer in the *Calcutta Review* remarked, such undesirable consequences were unlikely. Female education in England had only produced one of Miss Edgeworth, Caroline Fry, Hannah More, and Mrs. Somerville in many generations, therefore the creation of occasional *savants* was hardly a danger when weighed against the fact that there was nothing an educated lady could not do better than an uneducated one.[166] Others spent some effort finding examples of English women who were learned, pious, and also attentive to their household duties, such as Mary Lovell Ware[167] or Charlotte Brontë.[168] It was stated with approval that Mrs. Somerville was equally at home in calculating

[163] "Strī-siksār antarāy o taddūrīkaraner upāy," *Antahpur*, 7, 1 (May 1904).
[164] *Burdwan Sanjībanī*, 21 January 1890 in *RNNB* 1 February 1890.
[165] See Chapter One.
[166] "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, p. 102.
[167] "Nārīcarit," *BP*, 5, 76 (December 1869).
[168] Mankumari Basu, "Nabyagrihinī," *BP*, 4:2, 287 (December 1888).

the aberrations of a comet and in mending her husband's stockings.[169] Whether such assurances did much to allay the fears of the *bhadralok* is unrecorded.

Writers, mainly male, idealized the "traditional" housewife, uneducated but skilled in her duties, contrasting her sharply with the stereotype of the new fun-loving, domestically incompetent educated woman. Champions of female education attempted to answer these charges. One writer argued that education made a woman better understand the dignity of housework, and appreciate the importance of her position as analogous to that of the ruler of a small kingdom.[170] A woman writer, the daughter of pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, acknowledged the stereotype of the blue-stocking but attempted to discourage the phenomenon:

> Oh dear ones! If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to *mem-sahib* like behaviour. That is not becoming in a Bengali housewife. See how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman. And see how if God had not appointed us to this place in the home, how unhappy a place the world would be![171]

The debate over education raised the question of the "true" female role. Many of the arguments used were imported from Britain by different factions among the patrons of female education. For instance, the *Indian Mirror* discussed a "striking paper" on the future of English women by Mrs. A. Sutherland Orr, from the *Nineteenth Century* for June 1878. This lady advocated female education, but believed that the progress of female culture would prove detrimental to matrimony and lead eventually to the extinction of the species. The editor agreed with her, and condemned Calcutta University for sanc-

[169] "Native Female Education," *CR*, 25:49, p. 102.

[170] *BP*, 3:2, 239 (December 1884).

[171] Kundamala Debi, "Bidyā sikhile ki grihakarmma karite nāi?" Bāmāganer racanā, *BP*, 6, 86 (October 1870).

tioning a scheme of education that "tends to unsex women."[172] The *Brahmo Public Opinion* discussed the feminist Mrs. Fawcett's reply to Mrs. Orr in the August issue of *Nineteenth Century*. It came to the radical conclusion that "Let artificial restrictions be removed, let the same facilities for education be offered to women that are enjoyed by men and then natural forces will have fair play and women will find their fit career."[173] The *New Dispensation* maintained constant opposition to university education for women, predicting that lady B.A.s would be unable to find a place in society:

> What are we to do with them? Are they to cook, nurse, feed their children, attend to their husbands' wants, be good women in every respect? They might have done each and all of these things without becoming graduates. . . . Where then is the use of degrees for women, unless they be asked to unsex themselves and like men go to compete with them in all the active duties of life.[174]

The physical and moral evils much discussed by opponents of higher female education in England[175] were raised in the columns of the *New Dispensation*. One Dr. H. Hastings was quoted as saying "I venture to affirm, that it is physiologically impossible to have a learned girl and a healthy, robust mother, and strong children!"[176] This argument was not persuasive in Bengal, where the alternative of spending the whole of life in the *antahpur* was notoriously unhealthy, and one of the main reasons for advocating female education was that it would help produce strong children. The *Tattwabodhinī Patrikā* raised the familiar Comtean interpretation of women's "nature," governed by the heart rather than the intellect. The kind of education needed to attain a B.A. or M.A. was chiefly intel-

[172] *IMS*, 30 June 1878.
[173] *Brahmo Public Opinion*, 12 September 1878.
[174] *Liberal and New Dispensation*, 18 March 1883.
[175] See P. Atkinson, "Fitness, Feminism and Schooling," in S. Delamont and L. Duffin, *The Nineteenth Century Woman*; E. Davies, "The Influence of University Degrees on the Education of Women."
[176] *New Dispensation*, 29 July 1883.

lectual, not emotional, therefore considered unsuitable for women.[177]

Despite the strictures of disapproval from so many directions, most women appreciated the value of education without relinquishing their domestic role. Radharani Lahiri, trained as a teacher from the Native Ladies' Normal School, still wrote that "Helping others is a woman's ornament, and religion her life—taking these two sayings to heart a woman could be educated, and nothing other than good will result from it."[178] Women were grateful for efforts made to educate them, although many realized that in order to progress they would have to push themselves forward rather than rely on others.[179] The deep desire for education that was felt among women is illustrated in an incident related by one Nagendrabala Debi in the women's journal *Antahpur*:

> One day my son said to me, "Mother, please explain one of my lessons."
> What could I say, myself the very image of the goddess Saraswati!
> I said, "Memorize it, that will be sufficient."
> He said, "How can I learn if I don't understand?"
> I said, "Can't the private tutor explain it to you?"
> He did not answer. Then, having no other way out, I told him, "I don't know how to read."
> My son looked astonished for a moment, then said, "So you don't know anything."[180]

She prayed that all mothers educate their daughters to protect them from undergoing such humiliation.

Fortunately such incidents were becoming rare among the *bhadramahilā* by the turn of the century. By the 1880s many

[177] *Tattwabodhinī Patrikā*, 452 (Chaitra 1802 [1880]) in B. Ghose, *Sāmayikpatre*, part 2, p. 463.

[178] Kumari Lahiri, "Strīlokdiger abasya siksanīya ki?" *BP*, 142.

[179] Srimati Saratkumari, "Strīloker bidyā siksā," Bāmāganer racanā, *BP*, 11, 144 (August 1875).

[180] "Strīsiksā bisaye ardha siksitā hindu mahilādiger matāmat," *Antahpur*, 4, 4.

bhadramahilā were literate, especially in the cities. Census figures show a steady rise in the number and percentage of female literates for Calcutta over the period 1871-1901.[181] It is not possible, on the basis of these figures, to work out the level of education attained, or to ascertain the class or caste basis of educated females to see the proportion that were *bhadramahilā*. What stands out clearly is that there was a gradual extension of female education during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although the total percentage of the female population receiving education was still extremely small,[182] and much less than the proportion of males, the achievements in the field of female education during the nineteenth century were phenomenal.

There had been a mere handful of literate women among the *bhadramahilā* early in the century, but by 1900 attending a public school had become an accepted part of a girl's life. The growth of female education was an institutional change with far-reaching implications for women's role, although the actual extent of disruption was much less than that envisaged and feared by many male critics. For women themselves, education was both a means of access to a far broader field of experience than had come within their reach before, and a stimulant and help in the performance of their domestic routine.

[181] Unfortunately the figures do not provide a good basis for exact comparisons. The number given as the total population fluctuates and the categories used in collecting statistics differ in each of the early censuses. However, the overall upward trend is clear. In 1876 there were 3,886 literate Hindu females in Calcutta; in 1881 there were 6,795 literate and learning, and in 1891 there were 10,162 in this category. In 1901 they formed 9.7 percent of the female population, compared with 3.36 percent in 1876. See *Censuses for Calcutta, Town and Suburbs*, 1872, 1876, 1881, 1891, 1901.

[182] By 1907 the number of women under instruction in Bengal had increased to 127,800, although this still only represented 3.1 percent of all girls of school age. The figure for 1907 is post-Partition, and does not therefore include numbers for East Bengal and Assam, as previous statistics did. H. Sharp, ed., *Progress*, p. 213.