

## Education of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal

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**Abstract:** *Islam attaches great value to education. Acquiring knowledge has been made obligatory for both men and women. But attitude of the Muslims of Bengal towards women education was not encouraging in Colonial Bengal. They observed purdah or seclusion. Muslim society at that time was very conservative. But as there was no separate educational institution for girls, they had no other alternative than to attend boys' madrasahs. The conservative class reacted to it. Hence attempts were made to establish separate schools for girls. Some great personalities took initiatives for the progress of women education. In 1870 Government of Bengal adopted some measures for the development of modern education for women. After creation of the new province in 1905 progress for modern education among Muslim women in Bengal was noticed in some extent. The system of zenana education played a vital role in this field and at the end of British rule considerable progress was noticed. This paper aims at throwing light on the position of Muslim women in education and their gradual progress in colonial Bengal.*

**Key words:** Education; Muslim Women; Colonial Bengal;

### Historical Background

Education of a Muslim child in Bengal traditionally began with the *bismillah* ceremony at the age of four years, four months and four days.<sup>[1]</sup> In this ceremony the child would recite the first verse of the Quran, and then sweets were distributed among the people assembled there. Thereafter, the child began learning verses of the Quran by heart from a tutor called an *ustad*, who would come to the house to teach the child. Daughters as well as sons learned the Quran in this parrot-like manner, taught by a woman teacher or *ustani*. Girls could participate only rarely in instruction outside the home, as they were kept in *purdah* from a very early age.<sup>[2]</sup> Female education was recognized by the British Government as essential for development from the early time. But socio-political and religious causes were working against the progress of female education. Although the Hindus were more advanced than the Muslims of Bengal in receiving modern education, generally, women's education was discouraged even among them. It was regarded as being against the injunctions of the Hindu scriptures and there was widespread belief that education of women led to their widowhood.<sup>[3]</sup> In spite of this, during the nineteenth century great personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) championed the cause of the women of their society. They struggled hard against social customs based mostly on distorted versions of religious injunctions in order to ameliorate women's inferior social condition and to establish their rights as human beings. As a result, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries the

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socio-legal status of Bengali Hindu women advanced. On the other hand, the ill-fated Bengali Muslim women of that time did not have a single champion like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar to fight for their emancipation from restrictive customs, misinterpreted religious injunctions and the general ignorance of their illiteracy.

As Muslim community as a whole was considered disadvantaged, Muslim women were considered more disadvantaged, lagging behind their male counterparts. Despite the Government measures for educational uplift of the Muslims nothing was said about the education of Muslim women and no special provision was made for them even in the early part of the twentieth century. In 1849 Lord Dalhousie (1848-56) informed the Bengal Council of Education to include female education. The conservatism of the Muslim society regarding this education was criticized at a meeting of the Bengal Social Science Association in Calcutta, where Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-93) presented a paper on Muslim education. While discussing on the paper, Pyarichand Mitra enquired whether steps had been taken for the education of Muslim women, as had been the case with their male counterparts. The Nawab did not respond. Maulvi Abdul Hakim of the Calcutta *Madrasah* responded to this question saying that the education offered to Muslim girls at home was quite adequate. As the Muslim girls observed *purdah* they could not go to schools. <sup>[4]</sup> Unlike Abdul Latif, Syed Ameer Ali proved supportive to the cause of women's education. At the All India Muslim Educational Conference in 1891, he strongly advocated women's education saying that it should advance at the same pace as that of male education. Unfortunately, nothing concrete emerged out of this. <sup>[5]</sup> Traditionally, women in Bengal received their education at home, and it was mostly religious and moral in nature.

### **Role of Press and Publication**

Bengali Muslim public opinion as reflected in the Bengal press was favorable to the cause of female education from the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the Census of 1901, four hundred Muslim women knew English. <sup>[6]</sup> *Mihir O Sudhakar* was surprised about this. The *Al-Eslam* was worried about the type of education given to women and suggested that Muslim women needed:

A type of education suited to Muslim society. A course was suggested that it would cover six years and lead to knowledge of Urdu, Religious instruction, Bengali, History, Geography, Arithmetic, Physical environment, Hygiene, Moral training, Arts and Crafts, Embroidery, Cooking, Child-care and looking after the members of the household, House-keeping and Hand Writing. <sup>[7]</sup>

The *Saogat* took an important role to propagate in favour of education of the Muslim women. Aysha Ahmed <sup>[8]</sup> wrote in the same periodical, "Chastity is an inner thing and its preservation requires mental faculties, a sense of duty and the power to discriminate between good and bad. These faculties can be fully developed only through education". <sup>[9]</sup> Public opinion in favor of women education started gaining ground. The *Mahammadi*,

*Saoghat*, *Shikha* and other periodicals of those days published a number of articles on Muslim women's education and its problems. *Mihir O Shudhakar* suggested that English should be taught in girls' *madrassahs*. The *Saogat* defending women's education from the attacks of pious Muslim leaders, then wrote, "The chief impediment to female education are the *Mullas*.... But they do not realise that if our womenfolk are properly educated then they will not only become worthy mothers and housewives but also true mates to their husbands and competent advisers to them". Although public opinion grew slowly in favor of women's education, nothing much was achieved.<sup>[10]</sup>

### **Missionary Efforts**

The Christian missionaries played a significant role in the early stage of women education. They took lead in establishing schools for women's education after withdrawal of the ban against missionary activities by the Charter Act of 1813. The first school was established for Indian Christian girls in 1807. By 1828 their number rose to 30 schools and number of the students attending was 600. But the Christians and the lower class Hindus attended these schools. The Muslim girls were not mentionable. Adam's Report of 1838 show that there were 175 pupils in Burdwan, among them only one was Muslim, while 138 were Hindus and 36 were Christians.<sup>[11]</sup> Girls in these schools were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, needle work and in some cases, religion.

Besides the missionaries, there were some enlightened personalities like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dwarkanath Thakur, Gour Mohan Tarkalankar, RadhaKanta Deb, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar et. al. who felt the necessity of female education. They took initiatives, but it was confined among the Hindus. The Muslims were not benefitted by this effort. In 1849 the Director of Public Instruction (1848-1851), John Eliot Drinkwater Bethune established a girls' school, named 'Calcutta Female School'.<sup>[12]</sup> This school was a milestone of modern education for the women in Bengal. But for a long time Muslim girls had no access to this school. A Female Normal School was opened in Dhaka in 1863 to train female teachers for the first time. As a teachers' training school there were no Muslim girls because there were no Muslim teachers.<sup>[13]</sup>

It was closed in 1872 on the ground that trainees were not available.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Some Outstanding Individual Efforts**

A Female Adult School was founded in 1873 by Shubha Sadhini Sabha (Philanthropic Society) at Dhaka. It was renamed 'Eden Female School'<sup>[15]</sup> in 1878. At the same time a Middle English school was established for girls by Dr. Ananda Charan Khastagir in Chittagong. The credit for being the pioneer in formal education for Muslim women in Bengal goes to Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani (1847-1903). She was a reputed social worker with a large Zamindari estate at Paschimgaon in the district of Comilla in East Bengal. She appeared in a critical time of the Muslim society with a challenging plan for the progress of female education. She established some religious educational institutions at Comilla. Her *madrassah* was promoted to a higher secondary Islamia College and afterwards *Gazi Alia Madrassah*. She also established four boys' and two girls' schools.

'Faizunnessa Middle Girls' School' at Comilla was considered as the 'best girls' school' (except Eden School) in the Government Report on Public Instruction in Bengal in 1880-81.<sup>[16]</sup> The Middle English School of Chittagong was converted to Dr. Khastagir's Girls' School in 1907.<sup>[17]</sup> Another educated Muslim woman was Khujistha Akhter Banu (Suhrawardiya Begum, 1874-1919), a member of the politically and culturally prominent Suhrawardy family of Calcutta. She was good at Persian, Urdu, and English as well. She also founded two primary schools for girls in Calcutta in 1909. Later on, one of these two schools was named "Suhrawardiya Begum Muslim Girls' School." She was the inspiration for a tradition of women's education and activism in her family. Suhrawardiya Begum was awarded an honorary degree in Persian by Calcutta University.<sup>[18]</sup> Her younger son Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy (1892-1963) became the Prime Minister of Bengal in 1946-47. No less important was Khairunnesa Khatun, born in a middle class family of Munshibari in the district of Sirajganj of East Bengal. She was very talented as a writer. In 1895, Khairunnesa took the responsibility of the post of the Headmistress of Sirajganj Hosenpur Girls' School.<sup>[19]</sup> Her pioneering zeal and persistent efforts were considered as the great force for the progress of school.

The most remarkable Bengali Muslim woman in this respect was Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932). She was born in Pairaband, a village in Rangpur district in Northern Bengal. Her school, established in 1911 at Calcutta (Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School), was one of the pioneering Muslim girls' schools. Rokeya's husband was a firm supporter of women's education and encouraged her literary talents. Rokeya published her first article in 1903-4 in a Bengali women's magazine in Calcutta, on a subject related to the status of women.<sup>[20]</sup> In this paper she came out as an outspoken critic of the extreme forms of *purdah*.

The Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School which had only eight students on its rolls at the start, enrolled 40 students by 1914. During its annual assembly 150 Muslim women were present along with a number of Hindu and Parsi women. But due to transport problem and shortness of qualified teachers total number of students reduced to 84 by the end of 1915.<sup>[21]</sup> In curriculum and Purdah restrictions this school conformed to the schools for Muslim girls.<sup>[22]</sup> The curriculum in this school included literacy, handicrafts, home science, gardening and physical fitness training. Actually these schools were the first few schools that helped the progress of education of Muslims. But these few schools were not the only indication of educational progress of the Muslim women. In fact Rokeya's writings pointed to the emerging views of the next generation of the Muslim women.

### **Government Efforts**

The Government of Bengal took the responsibility of women education in 1870. In 1872-73 the backwardness of women education was discussed in the Government Report on Public Instruction of Bengal. Some measures for promoting women's education were adopted there. Hindu girls were coming out of home for education. They were coming to *Pathshalas* and schools. But a very few number of Muslim girls attended *Maktabs* and schools. They lagged behind the girls of their fellow community. Reasons for lack of

progress of women education were numerous. Attitude of parents of both the communities was the main reason for this backwardness. The Muslim girls, however, were slow to take modern education. They had their own reasons for doing so. When the boys were being educated in a Muslim family, it was obvious that they would have some influence on their sisters. Thus, some Muslim girls became eager to learn and they did it with many difficulties. The example of Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhurani of Comilla and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain of Rangpur may be mentioned. They realized women must be by the side of men in the way towards modernity.

These pioneers helped themselves and helped others to get education. Influence of the educated girls of other communities was also strong. When girls from Hindu and native Christians were coming to girls' schools, one or two Muslim girls could be found in the registers. In 1901-02 thirty eight thousand and ninety five pupils were in the primary and middle schools of Bengal. Of them 1,224 or 3.18% were Muslims, 32,140 or 84.36% were Hindus and 3,986 or 10.46% were native Christians.<sup>[23]</sup> So, it can be presumed that though the position of the Muslim girls is lower than the native Christians, they came out of their doors to the courtyard of schools.

Educational schemes for Muslim women received fresh impetus after partition of Bengal in 1905 due to increased Government patronage and increased awareness within the community.<sup>[24]</sup> The new provincial Government wanted encourage women education by affording guidance and assistance on practical lines. Because women education formed a significant part of overall educational development in the new province of Eastern Bengal. Distinguished persons like Nawab Salimullah (1866-1915), Nawab Ali Chowdhury (1863-1929) and Rai Dulal Chandra Dev were invited to participate in committees on women education.

On the recommendation of the Female Education Committee<sup>[25]</sup> the Government created more primary schools for girls in the province. Indeed, number of primary schools rose from 2,789 in 1906 to 4,956 in 1911 and that of their pupils from 51,180 to 1,10,817.<sup>[26]</sup> In addition to primary schools the Government established a number of secondary schools for girls. Their number increased from thirteen in 1906 to twenty two in 1911.<sup>[27]</sup> Three Government schools, Eden Female School at Dhaka, Alexander Girls' School at Mymensingh and Dr. Khastagir's Girls' School at Chittagong were taken up by the Government during this period for better management.<sup>[28]</sup> Number of pupils increased at the Eden School from 125 in 1906 to 244 in 1911, at Dr. Khastagir's School from 68 in 1906 to 110 in 1911 and at the Alexander School from 100 in 1906 to 170 in 1911. In 1906 there were one hundred twenty one Hindu and only four Muslim girls in the Eden School. In 1911 there were 1 Eurasian, 1 Persian, 8 Indian Christians, 209 Hindus and 25 Muslims in that school.<sup>[29]</sup> By the end of 1911 the province had five Middle English schools. Two of them were maintained by the Government and the rest were aided. The Government schools were the Faizunnessa Girls' School at Comilla and the girls' school at Sylhet. All middle vernacular schools for girls were more or less developed. The progress of education of the Muslim women in the new province of eastern Bengal has shown in the following table.

**Table-I: Progress of education of the Muslim women in the New Province of Eastern Bengal, 1906-1912**

Year	Type of Institutions	Number of Institutions	Total Pupils	Muslim Pupils	% of increase of Pupils	% of progress
1906-07	Primary School	2,781	5,1180	22,223	43.42%	
1911-12	Primary School	4,956	11,0817	56,575	51.05%	7.63
1906-07	Secondary Education	18	1,503	48	3.1%	
1911-12	Secondary Education	22	2,480	108	4.35%	1.34

*Source. Report on the Progress of Education in Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1907-1908 to 1911-12, Vol -2; Calcutta, 1913, p. 89.*

The above table shows that position of the Muslim pupils lagged behind than others but their rate of progress was satisfactory. Percentage of Muslim girls rose from 43.42 in 1906-07 to 51.05 in 1911-12 and their progress was 7.63 in the primary level. In the secondary level it rose from 48 in 1906-07 to 108 in 1911-12 and their progress was 1.34. Efforts of the Government and inspiration of the Muslim leaders were the causes of progress of the Muslim women in the new province.

The Report on Public Instruction in Bengal mentioned a gradual progress of number of female pupils. In 1912-13 it was increased by 1,423; and in 1913-14 it rose to 6,013. Per 1000 literate (can read and write) Muslim women numbered 1.5% in Dhaka; 3.5% in Presidency; 4.0% in Burdhan; 2.2% in Chittagong and 1.7% in Rajshahi Divisions.<sup>[30]</sup> Number of literate Hindu women was much more than that of Muslims. Out of 1,000 Muslim women only 2.3% were literate and number of literate in English was 0.07%. In the Hindu community the number of literate and English literate was 118.5% and 0.8% respectively.<sup>[31]</sup> The total number of female pupils in 1915-16 was 2, 84, 813. Around that year the attitudes of the parents were gradually changing. An interesting information in the *Report on Public Instruction 1920-21* was that the percentage of increase of Muslim girls was higher than the Hindus. One lac seventy three thousand four hundred ninety four or 51.9% were Muslims and 1, 39, 299 or 41.7% were Hindus.<sup>[32]</sup> This progress was due to the liberal assistance from the Government. However, Muslim women education kept on a slow and steady progress. By 1932 there were 3,03,830 Muslim girls under Public Instruction which was 56.2% of the whole, while Hindu girls were 2,07,139 or 38.45% and others 22,386 or 4.15%.<sup>[33]</sup> Progress was mainly in primary stage but slowly Muslim girls were coming into higher stages. Number of Muslim girls in different types of institutions has been shown in the following table:

**Table- II: Number of Muslim Girls in different types of institutions, 1931-32 to 1936-37**

Year	College		Secondary		Primary	unrecogised	special	Total	% of the Progress
	Arts	Professional	High stage	Middle stage					
1931-32	8	-	92	225	3,02,746	6,116	759	3,09,946	56.80
1936-37	45	2	341	614	3,95,478	5,576	2,504	4,04,560	59.78

*Source: Quinquennial Review on Progress of Education in Bengal, 1931-32 to 1936-37, pp. 70-71*

From the above table a steady progress of Muslim girls can be seen. But there were very few Muslim girls in Training Colleges and Training Schools. There was only one Muslim girl in Training College and 42 in Training School, whereas number of Hindu girls was 27 and 138 respectively in 1936-37.<sup>[34]</sup> At the same time, there was one Muslim girl in Medical College and two were in Medical School, while Hindus were 17 in Medical College and 36 in Medical School.<sup>[35]</sup> All India Education conference at Calcutta in 1937 revealed that the educated women of India were realizing their responsibility and their power. A number of women attended the Conference. Among them Purnima Bysack, the secretary to the Department of Female Instruction presented a paper entitled “Problems of Women’s Education” in the conference. This paper was very important and more effective for the progress of women education in the country. This flow reached everywhere in Bengal. As a result, there was a ray of hope for further progress in Bengal. Moreover, women education progressed remarkably due to special contribution of A.K. Fazlul Huq’s Government.

At the initiative of A. K. FazlulHuq, the Chief Minister of Bengal, Lady Brabourne College was established in 1939. Especially it was very important for the Muslim girls. The college taught Arabic, Persian and Urdu from its inception. Shamsunnahar Mahmud [1909-1964] a close follower and colleague of Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain, joined the college as a lecturer.<sup>[36]</sup> Dhaka University was established in 1921 and it created a new arena for the Muslim students of East Bengal. It is worth mentioning that the University of Dhaka broke the barrier of conservatism of the society in Eastern Bengal with regard to co-education of women in the University. Lila Nag was the first female student of the department of English of the University of Dhaka but Fazilatunnesa was the first Muslim female student of this University. She overcame the conservatism of the Muslim society and got herself enrolled into M.A. (Mathematics) class in 1925 and passed M.A. with first class in 1927. Later Muslim female students like Azizunnesa, KhodejaKhatun, Jamsherunnesa and Anwara Khatun emulated Fazilatunnesa’s example. But they generally offered subjects of the Arts Faculty. Maleka Banu got herself enrolled into first year M. Sc. Chemistry in 1941 and later on obtained a Ph.D. from U. K. She worked as a professor of Chemistry at Eden Girls’ College for many years. However, the number of Muslim female students increased gradually and some of them offered subjects of the Science Faculty as well.<sup>[37]</sup> In fact, Lila Nag and Fazilatunnesa had paved the way for women entrants to the Dhaka University. By the close of the 1930s middle class Muslim families were sending their daughters to educational institutions. Maleka Banu

thus viewed the late nineteenth century as a period of Jagaran or awakening for the women, and the early twentieth century as the period that gave birth to the women's movement.<sup>[38]</sup>

On the other hand, Calcutta University (established in 1857) authorities were in favour of female education. They gave permission to women in 1878 to attend the examination under this University. Calcutta University Commission adopted some recommendations for spreading female education in Bengal in 1917. From these periods the number of female students increased rapidly. Chandramukhi Basu (1860-1944) was the first female student of Calcutta University who passed F.A. (First Arts) in 1880.<sup>[39]</sup> At first Regina Guha passed B.L. (Bachelor of Law) examination under Calcutta University among the women of Bengal in 1919.<sup>[40]</sup> But Sultana Begum Muidjada was the first Bengali Muslim female student of Calcutta University. She obtained B. A. (Hons.) Degree from this university in 1922. She was also awarded two medals: "Shantimoni" and "Umesh Chandra Mukherjee" for her academic excellence.<sup>[41]</sup> At the same time her younger sister, Sakina Faruque Muidjada got herself enrolled into the M.A. class in Law and secured first position among the Muslim women in the whole of Bengal.<sup>[42]</sup> In spite of these, the number of Muslim women of this university was insignificant.

Progress of Muslim women in education however, was noticeable during the period under review. In this period they were successful in making at least a window in the wall, if not a small door, which could supply them with enough light and air to survive. Percentage of total number of Hindu and Muslim pupils in Bengal has been shown in the following table:

**Table-III. Percentage of total number of Hindu and Muslim pupils in different stages of education in Bengal (1912-1941)**

Year	Institutions	Total number of pupils	Muslim girl students	Hindu girl students	% of Muslim pupils	% of Hindu pupils
1912	Higher Education (College and University)	40	01	31	2.5%	77.5%
1921		216	03	146	1.38%	67.59%
1930-31		375	03	366	0.8%	97.6%
1941		2765	160	362	5.78%	85.36%
1912	Secondary Education (Middle and High School)	5966	133	4182	2.22%	70.09%
1921		13231	521	6754	3.93%	51.04%
1930-31		8771	233	5116	2.65%	58.32%
1941		23822	1899	19801	7.97%	83.12%
1912	Primary School	207261	76353	124917	36.83%	60.27%
1921		329754	178371	145188	54.09%	44.2%
1930-31		511075	280903	219219	54.96%	42.89%
1940-41		779192	425103	339605	54.55%	43.58%

Source: *Supplement to the Progress of Education in Bengal, 1912-13 to 1916-17, Calcutta, 1918, pp. 70-71; Report on Public Instruction in Bengal, 1920-21, 1930-31, 1940-41, Alipore, 1943, p.54.*

The above table shows that the position of Muslim women was satisfactory. But it was limited to the primary level. On the contrary, number of Muslim women was very poor in the secondary and higher levels. Even there was no noticeable progress up to 1931. After 1931 the Muslim women advanced gradually as A.K.FazlulHuq's Government contributed to the progress of Muslim women in education in this period.

### Zenana System of Education

Besides the provision of education for girls through schools, education spread among women at home through the *Zenana* System.<sup>[43]</sup> Under this system the woman folk of respectable families received instruction by visiting teachers in their respective homes. The system aimed at giving education to women and widows at some centers organized and run by the Government in cooperation with the local people. The earlier missionaries started the *Zenana* System of education. Miss Toogood of the Normal School became the first successful lady teacher under the *Zenana* Mission. For several years the *Zenana* classes became fairly popular with certain families in Calcutta, but the activities of *Zenana* education of the new province were slow.<sup>[44]</sup> Since 1907, however, organized attempts were made to spread *Zenana* education in the new province. Bibi Amirunnesa, wife of Maulovi Abdus Samad, became the first Muslim lady in Eastern Bengal to become a Government-appointed peripatetic *Zenana* teacher. Miss MEA Garret, the Inspectress of Schools for the province of Eastern Bengal was highly impressed with the keenness and hard work of Amirunnesa.<sup>[45]</sup>

*Zenana* education, however, spread in Dhaka. Three hundred housewives on an average learnt to read, write and keep accounts and acquired good knowledge in needlework by 1911.<sup>[46]</sup> *Zenana* classes were started in Faridpur in 1910. It had 9 centres in five different villages and total number of pupils in these centres was 30. In 1919 there were 77 pupils, of whom 47 were Hindus, 10 Muslims and the rest were Indian Christians.<sup>[47]</sup> In Rajshahi division *Zenana* classes started in Bogra. It opened in 1910 with five centres. In 1911, total number of pupils under regular instruction was 91, of whom 47 were Hindus and the rest were Muslims. They were taught sewing, geography, simple arithmetic and hygiene. *Zenana* centres were also opened in Mymensingh, Chittagong, Noakhali and Comilla. At Comilla, out of 43 women students 33 were Muslims and out of six centers four were in the houses of Muslims.<sup>[48]</sup> This indicates that Muslims were taking active part in spreading education among their women possibly because they recognized their backwardness in education and they did not have to pay for such *Zenana* education. In 1914-15 an additional annual sum of Rs. 5,400 was sanctioned for the extension of *Zenana* education.<sup>[49]</sup> Out of that money 5 *Zenana* teachers were appointed at Calcutta for Muslim women. In 1913-14 there were 29 *Zenana* teachers, forty five in 1914-15, and forty seven in 1915-16.<sup>[50]</sup> There were 719 women under this System in West Bengal.<sup>[51]</sup> In East Bengal there were 598 women under *Zenana* System in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chittagong divisions.<sup>[52]</sup> In 1915-16, the number of pupils increased to 1,737.<sup>[53]</sup> It required frequent inspection to keep them up to the mark. But for the causes of various problems the Government of Bengal abolished the system of *Zenana* education in 1933.

## Conclusion

Thus it can be concluded that the progress of Muslim women's education was very limited up to the emergence of the new province. The system of early marriage and the prevalence of the *Purdah* system were the difficulties to the progress of women education among the Muslims. In spite of this, some enlightened Muslim women like Nawab Faizunnesa, Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain et.al. felt the necessity of women education and they took initiatives effectively. As a result, the Muslim girls came out from the four walls of their homes to the courtyard of the schools. The Female Education Committee also contributed in various ways. Moreover, the Government of Bengal made remarkable efforts for the diffusion of Muslim women's education. Gradual progress in women education was seen and number of institutions for girls and their pupils increased considerably. After establishing Calcutta University in 1857 and Dhaka University in 1921 Sultana Begum Muidjada, Fazilatunnesa, Maleka Banu et al broke the conservatism of the Muslim society and they took higher education from these universities. In fact, they paved the way for the next generations. The *Zenana* System of education was introduced in many parts of Bengal to educate housewives and widows. As a whole, the position of Muslim women in education and their progress were noticeable in the first half of the twentieth century. The period under consideration witnessed the first light of the dawn or at least a ray of hope.

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8. Ayesha Ahmed was a progressive lady in the first half of the twentieth century in Bengal. She wrote an important article on 'Muslim Samaje Unnatir Antaray' in the *Saogat* in 1929. Her thought was the emancipation of the Bengali Muslim women by spreading female education.
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11. William Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

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13. Asha Islam Nayeem, "The Attitude Towards Women's Education in Eastern Bengal in the Twentieth Century," *Bangladesh Historical Studies*, vol., XXIII, 2012-14, Bangladesh History Association, Dhaka, p.108. Training schools for teachers were called Normal School.
14. *Government of Bengal: General Department Education Branch A Proceedings for 1872*, Nos.60-61, Calcutta.
15. A female school was founded in 1873 by Shubha Sadhini Sabha (Philanthropic Society) which was attended mostly by Brahma girls. The Government of Bengal asked the society if another school could be set up. In response, the Dhaka Brahmos proposed to convert their female adult school into a girls' school which was formally opened in June 1878. Within months founders decided to hand over the management to the Government under the new name of "Eden Female School" as appreciation for the Lt. Governor, Ashley Eden's interest in the matter of female education in Dhaka. cf: Sonia Nishat Amin, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-197.
16. *General Report on the Public Instruction in Bengal, 1880-81*, Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1881, p. 85; Masuduzzaman, Selina Hosain (ed.) *Bangladesher Nari O Samaj*, (Dhaka: Maola Brothers, 2004), p.106.
17. In 1878, Dr. Ananda Charan Khastagir established a Middle English Girls' School at Chittagong. In 1907, it was transformed into Dr. Khastagir's Girls' High School by his son-in-law.
18. Khujista Akhtar Banu Suhrawardiya trans. *Aina-i-Abrat*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Calcutta: Sitara-i-Hind Press, 1937), Passim. See also Minault Gail, *Secluded Scholars: Women's education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.262.
19. Sayyid Abul Maksud, *Pathikrit Naribadi Khairunnesa Khatun* (Dhaka: Sahitya Prakash, 1992), Passim
20. The *Avarodbasini* of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, (Dhaka: BRAC Printers, 1981), and also *Sultana's Dream and Selections*, (ed. and translated by Raushan Jahan", pp. 2-32.
21. Hasina Joarder, *Begum Rokeya: The Emancipator*, (Dhaka: Nari Kalyan Sanstha, 1980), p. 41.
22. Raushan Jahan, ed. and translated "Rokeya: An introduction to her life" in *Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Sultana's Dream and Selections*, pp. 7-18.
23. *Supplement to the Progress of Education in Bengal, 1902-03*. Calcutta, 1908, p. 17.
24. M. K. U Molla, "Women's Education in Early Twentieth Century Bengal", *Bengal Studies*, (East Lansing, University of Michigan) p. 42.
25. The President of the Committee was R. Nathan, C. I. E, I. S. S., Members were: Commissioner, Dacca Division; Nawab Salimullah; The Director of Public Instruction, Eastern Bengal and Assam; Raj Dulal Chandra Deb; Nawab Ali Choudhury; S.C. Mukherjee, District Magistrate, Pabna; Moulavi Ahsan Ullah; Inspector of Schools, Chittagong; G. Das Chakravarty, Dacca; Ananda Chandra Roy; BabuJatin Mohan Sen, Chittagong; Sister Frances, Catholic Convent, Dacca; Miss E.L. Williamson, Baptist Zenana Mission, Dacca; Miss E.M. Loyd, Silchar Girls' Mission; Mrs. P. Chatterjee; Miss. E. Moore, Baptist Zenana Mission, Barisal; The Inspectress of Schools, (Secretary of the committee).
26. *Report on the Progress of Education, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1901-1902 to 1906-1907*, Vol. I, p. 8 and 1907-1908 to 1911-1912, Vol. I, p. 97.

27. *Report on the Progress of Education, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1907-1908 to 1911-1912* Vol. II, Appendix Table CII, p. 81.
28. The monthly cost of the Alexander Girls' School was Rs. 731-13-0 and of Dr. Kkastagir's Girls' school Rs. 537-12-0. *Report on Female Education, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1911*, pp. 27-28; *Eastern Bengal and Assam Education Proceedings, 1912*.
29. *Report of the Progress of Education, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1907-1908. to 1911 to 1912*, Vol. 1, p. 95.
30. *Report on the Public Instruction in Bengal, 1912-13 and 1913-14*, Calcutta, 1914, p. 17.
31. *Proceeding of Government of Bengal, General Department (Education)*, September, 1916, p. 11.
32. *Proceeding of Government of Bengal*, August, 1922, pp.32-34. Inspectress of schools were of the opinion that the supply of trained teachers were much less than the demand. This paucity of trained teachers was the main hindrance towards progress of female education. Special importance was given to courses on needlework, hygiene, and first aid. Special attention was given to training of teachers. Female education received much progress with financial assistance from imperial Government. It was suggested that increased out turn of female teachers and provision of school houses with quarters for female teachers was needed for better progress, but it could not be done due to lack of enough fund.
33. *Review on Progress of Education in Bengal, 1927-28 to 1931-32*, p. 76.
34. *Supplement to the Review on Progress of Education in Bengal, 1931-32 to 1936-37*.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Masduzzaman , Selina Hosain,(ed.) *Bangladesher Nari o Samaj*, pp 118-119.
37. Maleka Begum, *Narimukti Andolon*, Dhaka :1989 passim.
38. Sonia Nishat Amin, *op. cit.*; in Ray, Bharati, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-128.
39. *Calcutta University Commission, 1917-19*, Calcutta, 1920, Vol. I, pp. 166-68.
40. *General Report on the Public Instruction in Bengal, 1880-81*, Calcutta, pp. 87-88.
41. Sonia Nishat Amin, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.
42. S.M.H., Zaidi, *Position of Women under Islam*, (Calcutta: Book Tower, 1932), p.126.
43. Zenana is a Persian word. It means concerning to female. Here 'zenana system of teaching' is used to mean the method of imparting some education to elderly women at home. For details see Asha Islam Nayeem, "Breaking the Myth of the 'White Woman's Burden': Female Missionaries in Bengal and the Institutionalization of Zenana Education", in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (Humanities)*, Vol.59,No. 1, June 2014, Dhaka, pp. 1-30.
44. *Review on Progress of Education in India, 1897-98, to 1901-02*, Vol. I, Parliamentary Papers, 1904, Vol. 65, Cd. 2181, pp. 320-21.
45. Note by Inspectress on Zenana Classess, Dacca: 1910-1911, *Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam Education (A) Proceedings for the month of January, 1912*, File No. E /25/,Nos.53-56. P.59, National Archives, Bangladesh; See also Asha Islam Nayeem, "Breaking the Myth of the 'White Woman's Burden': Female Missionaries in Bengal and the Institutionalization of Zenana Education".
46. Report on Zenana Home Classes, Dacca, 1910-11, p. 57; *Eastern Bengal and Assam Education Proceedings, 1912*.

47. Miss Bose, Gopalganj Zenana Classes, 31 March, 1911. *Eastern Bengal and Assam Education Proceedings*, 1912; Pupils were recruited almost entirely from the agricultural classes; their age varied from 13 to 40. They were taught reading, writing and simple arithmetic. The mistresses visited the centers after 20 days.
48. Zenana Education in Comilla, Memo No. 265A-7, 1911, by E. Chamier, Assistant Inspectress of Schools, Comilla, *Eastern Bengal and Assam Education Proceedings*, 1912.
49. *Review on Progress of Education in Bengal, 1912-13 to 1916-1917*, pp. 109-11.
50. *Proceedings of Government of Bengal*, July, 1916.
51. *Review on Progress of Education in Bengal, 1912-13 to 1916-1917*, pp. 109-11.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 120.