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## **A study on Development of Women's *Education in Bengal: Missionary Impact and Social Reform (1800–1947)***

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### **ABSTRACT :**

This study explores the historical development of women's education in Bengal, focusing on the period before India's independence. It examines the influences of various social movements, political forces, and economic compulsion on women's education in West Bengal. Prior to independence, the region saw limited opportunities for female education, with few schools available for girls. The research traces the role of Christian missionary activities, which were pivotal in the establishment of schools for girls in the early 19th century. The study also highlights the impact of the Bengal Renaissance, which saw the abolition of the purdah system and greater participation of women in education, culture, and politics.

**Keywords:** Women Education, Missionaries, Social Reform

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### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

Women had the right to education in the Brahmanic education system. In the Vedic age; there was no difference between men and women. Women had rights in the Vedas. During this period, it was considered the father's duty to educate his daughters. Women not only studied the Vedas, but also did teaching. Women also wrote books. Women were regularly involved in intellectual conversations about Brahma. It is known that women were skilled in dance, singing and music during this period. Women's education was mostly limited to practical skills like needlework and weaving. The Goutam Buddha was not in favour of accepting women into the Buddhist order, but at the request of Mahaprajapati Gautami and Ananda, he was allowed to accept women into the Sangha.

There was no complication to women's education in Islam in achieving primary education. The purdah system restricted girls from attending school beyond a certain age. Due to strict religious rules, purdah system and various types of social discipline, it was not possible for ordinary girls to get education.

Vivekananda believed that women should have equal opportunities in education as men.

Swami Vivekananda always tried to ensure that girls could be well-established through education. He recognized the importance of establishing schools in rural areas to promote women's education. If women are neglected in a society that society will never be able to progress.

Swami Vivekananda felt the need to open schools in villages for women's education. He believed that only educated and conscious mothers can educate their children. And only well-educated children can make the face of the country bright. In his education plan, he included subjects like language, literature, mathematics, religion, education, art, science, domestic science, cooking, sewing and health in the curriculum of women's education. By practicing these subjects, they will become self-confident.

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### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

**Chakraborty and Varma (2021)** studied about "Women Education in Calcutta (1947-1961) With Special Reference to West Bengal". The author focused mainly on the study of women education in Calcutta. The author emphasis on the study of women technical and medical education.

**Biswas (2018)** studied about 'Educational status of women West Bengal'. This Paper focused the development of women literacy rate in West Bengal has been increased.

**Bais and Patel (2023)** studied about 'Women's Education in Independence India: A Glimpse'. The study focused on approach toward increasing women-centered educational infrastructure so as to improve female literacy levels in India.

**Sing and Jana (2020)** studied about 'Development and Obstacles of Women Education in Independent India'. The authors focused on There were a lot of initiatives taken by the government with respect to our constitutional provisions but these were not acted purposively. Therefore some suggestions are provided.

**Kapor (2018)** studied about 'Status of Women in Pre-independence India'. The author focused on status of women education in the pre-independence period and the author highlights the status of women within the country was in a deprived state.

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### 3. OBJECTIVES:

- To study the status of Women Education in Pre-independence

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### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

#### 4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative historical research design**. The purpose is to trace and analyze the evolution of women's education in West Bengal during the pre-independence period, focusing specifically on the contributions of Christian missionaries and socio-cultural reformers.

#### 4.2 Nature of the Study

The research is **descriptive** and **interpretive** in nature. It involves examining past events, institutions, and figures to understand the development of educational infrastructure and its impact on women in Bengal before 1947.

#### 4.3 Sources of Data

This study is based primarily on **secondary sources**, which include:

- Historical documents and archival materials
- Government records and reports
- Published books and journals
- Missionary society records and memoirs
- Newspapers and periodicals from the 19th and early 20th centuries
- Articles and theses from academic databases

Key sources include the records of:

- Calcutta Female Juvenile Society
- Ladies Society for Native Female Education
- Serampore Mission and Bethune College Archives

#### 4.4. Data Collection Method

Data has been collected using the **documentary analysis method**, involving the review and interpretation of existing texts, reports, and institutional histories. Each document was evaluated for authenticity, credibility, and relevance to the research objectives.

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### 6. DISCUSSION:

#### 6.1 Role of Missionaries:

**Christian missionaries** played an important role in Girl's education. The missionaries were active in West Bengal from 1600 A.D. to promote girls' education. The Portuguese had been here much before the incorporation of the English East India Company in 1600 A.D.

A school for girls was established in Chuchura in 1818. This school was established by Reverend May. During this time London society played an important role in education of girls. William Carey established a school in Serampore in 1819 for the education of girls. In 1820, eighteen schools were established under the initiative of the 'Calcutta Female Juvenile Society'. The schools were established to improve girls' education. Miss Cook established 4 schools for Girls' in 1821. With a handsome donation of RS 20000 from Raja Vaidyanath, the Central School was established in 1826 by Mrs. Wilson. For the advancement of girls' education, the 'Ladies Society for Native Female Education' was established in the year of 1824.

In 1835, schools for girl's education various districts of West Bengal. These districts are Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Hoohly, South 24pgs etc. During the Bengal Renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a major change in women's education was observed. The purdah system was abolished, and women showed interest in participating in education, society, culture and politics. Radhakanta Deb established a school for girls in

Shobhabazar, Kolkata. Both Parichand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar contributed to women's education by publishing monthly magazines dedicated to promoting learning and awareness among women.

In 1849, the 'Calcutta Female School' was established in Kolkata through the efforts of Bengali educationists including Drinkwater Bethune and Dakshina Ranjan Bandyopadhyay.

#### **Serampore College (1818):**

Serampore College was established in 1818. It is one of the oldest educational institutions in West Bengal. It was the first English Missionary College established in West Bengal. William College and its role in 19th century cultural developments in Bengal.

#### **Bethune College:**

It was established in the year of 1887 to promote education for girls.

#### **6.2 Calcutta University Commission (1917):**

This commission focused on improving university education in Bengal.

'Pardah' school should be provided for the education of girls of families who would like it.

Special provisions must be made to ensure the proper training of women teachers, recognizing their crucial role in advancing female education.

Medical courses should be provided for girl students. In case of non-existence of separate girls' schools, co-education might be provided.

#### **6.3 Indian Initiatives:**

Indian leaders like Rammohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar made significant contributions to the development of women education.

**Vidyasagar** worked his entire life for the development of girl's education.

He established several schools to promote women's education. Vidyasagar also founded a girls' school in Jaugram, in the district of Midnapore, as part of his efforts to advance female education.

To spread women's education, Vidyasagar requested the government to introduce a government grant system. But it was not maintained. Therefore, he opened 'Nari Shiksha Bhandar' and appealed enthusiastic people for financial support in the cause of women's education.

In 1857, with the help of Halliday Sahab, Vidyasagar established schools for girls' in various villages of West Bengal. Thirty five girls' schools were established in Medinipur, Burdwan, Hooghly, and Nadia districts for development of women's education. The total number of students in these schools was 3500.

**The Rokeya** was a social worker. She established schools for girls. In 1911, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School was established in a house at 13 Waliullah Lane, Kolkata, to spread education among the Muslim women's community. At that time, there were two schools for the education of Muslim girls. The first school was established in 1897 under the support of **Begum Ferdowsi** Mahal, Nawab of Murshidabad. The second school was established in 1909 by Suhrawardy's mother, Khujista Antar Banu.

**Sakhawat Memorial School** was established for girls' education. This school was initially established for primary education for girls; later in 1914, this school was upgraded to upper primary school. At that time, 84 students were studying in this school.

**Sakhawat Memorial School** was later converted into an English medium girls' school in 1930. This was possible due to efforts of Begum Rokeya.

**Gokhale Memorial Girls' School** was established in 1920 by renowned social worker Salara Ray.

**Nari Shiksha Mandir** was established in 1928 initiated by Deepali Singh.

**The non-formal primary** school for girls started by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha,

in 1923 that aimed to make education accessible to girls outside the traditional system.

**Serampore Girls' High School** was established in the year of 1855. This Girls' school offers education from Class I to Class XII. After Independence this school is approved by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education.

**Serampore Mission Girl's High School:** The School was founded in 1927. It is an upper primary school with secondary education, located in Serampore.

**Serampore R C Girls School:** It was established in the year of 1932, this school provides upper primary education with secondary and higher secondary levels.

#### **6.4 The reason for the lack of progress in women's education are**

- There is a lack of girls' schools in rural areas. Many girls drop out of school because there is no separate school in their own village.
- Most parents believe that girls are best suited for housework. That's why they did not want to send girls to school.
- Financial problems are an essential problem in women's education.

- Conservatism and prejudice among underdeveloped castes and tribes are creating obstacles in women's education.
- There was lack of separate educational Institutions for girls to pursue higher education.
- During this period, a separate curriculum for women's higher education did not exist

Illiterate women are the mothers of the future generation. As a result, they will be discouraged from educating their daughters. That is, the current illiterate mother is an obstacle in the way of educating the future generation of daughters.

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## 8. CONCLUSION:

Before independence there was no significant development in women's education in West Bengal. Vidyasagar, Rokeya Begum have come forward for the development of women's education and have established many educational institutions. Prior to 1813, the Missionaries had worked mainly in the field of primary education through the modern Indian languages.

This study seeks to trace the historical evolution of women's education in Bengal, focusing on the contributions of missionaries, reformers, and social movements. It aims to highlight the challenges faced by women in accessing education and the gradual transformation of attitudes towards women's educational rights. By examining the role of key institutions and individuals, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the progress and setbacks in the development of women's education in Bengal.

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## 9. LIMITATIONS:

- The study was limited to Women Education only.

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## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS OF FURTHER RESEARCH:

- Comparative Study of Women's Education Across Indian States
- Role of Indigenous Women in Promoting Education.
- Education among Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal.

## EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATION:

- This study helps educators and policymakers understand the historical roots of women's education in Bengal. It reveals how past social reforms, missionary efforts, and local initiatives contributed to building the foundation of gender-inclusive education.
- The pioneering work of reformers like Vidyasagar and Rokeya serves as a model for present-day advocacy.

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