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# The Impact of the Renaissance in Empowering Women: Contributions to the Freedom Movement and Educational Development in the Indian Subcontinent

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## Abstract

The Renaissance in the Indian subcontinent marked a significant socio-cultural transformation that reshaped women's roles by promoting education, rational thought, and social reform. While existing scholarship has largely focused on elite reformers and dominant communities, the contributions of women, particularly Muslim women, remain underexplored. This study examines the impact of Renaissance ideals on women's empowerment in colonial India, with a specific focus on women's participation in freedom movements and the advancement of female education. Adopting a qualitative historical research design, the study draws on secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, archival documents, newspapers, and periodicals. Data were analyzed using thematic and historical analytical methods, supported by textual and content analysis, to interpret women's agency within broader socio-political and cultural contexts. The findings reveal that Renaissance-inspired ideas were selectively adapted within indigenous and religious frameworks, enabling women to negotiate social constraints and actively engage in nationalist and reformist movements. Education emerged as a central instrument of empowerment, fostering gender consciousness and expanding women's public participation. By foregrounding women's experiences, particularly those of Bengali Muslim women, this study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of social reform, nationalism, and gendered modernity in South Asia.

**Keywords:** Renaissance, Freedom Movement, Educational Development, Women's Empowerment, Social Progress and Women's Contribution.

## Introduction

The term Renaissance, derived from the French word meaning "rebirth," conventionally refers to the intellectual, cultural, and artistic revival that emerged in Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries (Waibel, 2020). Characterised by humanism, rational inquiry, secular learning, and an emphasis on individual dignity, the European Renaissance marked a departure from medieval scholasticism and reshaped social thought, education, and political consciousness (Burke, 1998). Although geographically rooted in Europe,

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Renaissance ideas did not remain confined to the West. Through colonial expansion, missionary education, print culture, and global intellectual exchange, these ideals travelled across continents and interacted with indigenous societies, including those of the Indian subcontinent. In South Asia, the encounter with Renaissance-inspired ideas occurred primarily during the nineteenth and early twentieth century under British colonial rule (Chakraborty & Purkayastha, 2020). Rather than producing a direct replication of the European Renaissance, this encounter contributed to what historians often describe as a socio-cultural and intellectual awakening, frequently termed the "Indian Renaissance" or "Bengal Renaissance" (Sarkar, 1973; Kopf, 1969). This period witnessed intense debates on religion, social customs, education, and governance, prompting reform movements that sought to reinterpret tradition in light of reason, justice, and social progress. Central to these debates was the question of women's status, education, and participation in public life.

Women in the Indian subcontinent had long been positioned within rigid patriarchal structures reinforced by customary law, religious orthodoxy, and social conventions such as purdah, child marriage, and restricted access to education. Both Hindu and Muslim women experienced systemic marginalisation, though in distinct cultural and institutional forms (Forbes, 1996). Colonial modernity and Renaissance-inspired humanist values challenged these structures by introducing new discourses on individual rights, women's education, and social reform. Reformers increasingly argued that the progress of society was inseparable from the uplift of women, thereby placing women's emancipation at the centre of broader nationalist and reformist agendas. In Bengal, this intellectual ferment took on a particularly dynamic character. Reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Islamic reform initiatives, and later nationalist organisations engaged deeply with ideas of rationalism, education, and moral reform. While early reform efforts were often led by male elites, their consequences profoundly affected women's lives. Education for girls, women's literary production, and debates on women's rights gradually expanded women's social visibility (Chatterjee, 1989). Importantly, women were not merely passive recipients of reform but increasingly active agents who appropriated and reshaped these ideas according to their lived realities.

Muslim women in Bengal occupy a critical yet underrepresented position within this historical narrative. Mainstream historiography has often prioritised Hindu reform movements, marginalising Muslim women's contributions to social reform, education, and anti-colonial resistance (Sultana & Gazi, 2023). However, historical evidence demonstrates that Bengali Muslim women actively engaged in intellectual, social, and political struggles from the nineteenth century onward. Figures such as Begum Rokeya Sakhawat exemplify how Renaissance-inspired ideals of rationality, education, and gender justice were indigenised within an Islamic framework. Through her writings and educational initiatives, Rokeya challenged patriarchal interpretations of religion and advocated women's education as a prerequisite for social progress (Hossain, 2006a; Rokeya, 1988).

Beyond intellectual and educational reform, women in the Indian subcontinent also played visible roles in anti-colonial movements. From the Wahhabi movement in the early nineteenth century to the Swadeshi, Khilafat, Non-Cooperation, and Quit India movements, women participated as organisers, protestors, fundraisers, educators, and, in some cases, revolutionaries. Bengali Muslim women such as Bibi Amtus Salam and many unnamed participants contributed to peasant uprisings, nationalist mobilisation, and resistance against both British and later Pakistani domination (Hossain, 2006a). These actions challenged prevailing assumptions that women were politically inert or confined solely to the domestic sphere. The transmission of Renaissance ideals to the Indian subcontinent was neither linear nor uncontested. Colonial education systems, missionary schools, print media, and reformist organisations acted as key channels through which ideas of humanism, rational inquiry, and women's education circulated. At the same time, these ideas were selectively adopted, reinterpreted, or resisted within local cultural and religious contexts. As Partha Chatterjee (1989) argues, nationalist discourse often constructed a "new woman" who symbolised cultural authenticity while simultaneously embracing selective aspects of modernity. This tension was particularly evident in debates surrounding women's education and public participation.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to women's history and gender studies in South Asia, significant gaps remain in understanding the precise mechanisms through which Renaissance-inspired ideas influenced women's empowerment, especially among Bengali Muslim women (Forbes, 2003). Much of the existing literature treats women's participation in freedom movements or educational reform in isolation, without adequately exploring the intellectual genealogy linking these developments to Renaissance humanism and indigenous reformist thought. Consequently, the role of Muslim women in shaping socio-political change remains underexplored and undervalued. This study seeks to address this gap by critically examining how Renaissance ideals (transmitted through colonial and reformist channels) contributed to the empowerment of women in the Indian subcontinent, with a particular focus on Bengal. It investigates how these ideas encouraged women to challenge restrictive gender norms, engage in nationalist struggles, and advocate for educational reform. By situating women's agency within a broader historical and ideological framework, the study highlights the complex interplay between Western intellectual influences and indigenous socio-religious movements. Understanding this historical process is crucial not only for reconstructing a more inclusive narrative of the Indian freedom movement but also for tracing the foundations of contemporary debates on gender equity and women's education in South Asia. The Renaissance-inspired awakening of women's consciousness did not immediately dismantle patriarchal systems; however, it laid the groundwork for long-term transformations in women's social roles, political participation, and educational access. By foregrounding the experiences of Bengali Muslim women, this research contributes to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of women's

empowerment in colonial and post-colonial South Asia. This study addresses the gap by investigating:

a) The mechanisms linking European Renaissance ideals to women's agency in Bengal.
b) Distinct patterns of Muslim women's activism compared to other groups.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to show the role of women's society in different stages of the Contributions to the Freedom Movement and Educational Development in the Indian Subcontinent, examining how the Renaissance influenced the status and empowerment of women in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in relation to their roles in societal and cultural transformation.

**Research Objectives**

a) To analyse the contributions of women who, empowered by Renaissance ideals, actively participated in the Indian freedom movement, challenging traditional norms and advancing the cause of independence.
b) To investigate how the Renaissance ideals fostered the development of educational opportunities for women, paving the way for intellectual growth and societal reform in the Indian subcontinent.
c) To assess the broader cultural and social changes during the Renaissance that facilitated shifts in gender roles, with a focus on how these changes influenced women's liberation and societal participation.
d) To understand the long-term effect of the Renaissance on the empowerment of women and its contribution to shaping modern perspectives on gender equity and education in the Indian subcontinent.

**Research Questions**

a) How did women who were inspired by the Renaissance ideals contribute to the Indian freedom movement by ignoring the traditional norms?
b) How did the Renaissance ideals promote educational opportunities for women and contribute to intellectual and societal reforms in the Indian subcontinent?
c) How did the cultural and social changes during the Renaissance reshape gender roles and influence women's participation in the liberation and societal movement?
d) What are the long-term impacts of the Renaissance on women's empowerment, gender equity, and education in the Indian subcontinent?

## Review of the Literature

### Background of the Status of Women in the Indian Subcontinent: The Status of Muslim Women in India

Muslim women in Muslim India were not completely neglected during the early period of Islam, with Arab traders coming to the Malabar region and Islamic ideology developing there. Sultan Siyaduddin of Malabar granted women access to schools, commercial centres, office courts, and the royal court, employing about 15 thousand skilled women in various important positions. Raja Mohammad Shah of Gujarat appointed women to responsible positions, employing about 12 thousand women as tax collectors, literati, scientists, craftswomen, musicians, and in police. Many wise women were found during the Sultanate and Mughal periods, including Razia, Chand Bibi, Noor Jahan, Jahanara, and Zebunnesa. Razia and Chand Bibi led the army on the battlefield, while Noor Jahan was the emperor's advisor in running the state (Musavi, 2001). Jahanara, the daughter of Emperor Shahjahan, was a famous poet. However, most women in society were far from the light of education and were mostly from Muslim aristocratic families. Despite the spread of Islam, women in subcontinents like Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey did not gain social status. In Indian Hindu society, women have not only been denied social rights but have also been denied access to all religious ceremonies. It is forbidden for them to read or listen to any religious text.

### The Condition of Muslim Women in Bengal

The British government, under Warren Hastings in 1772, avoided interfering with Indian family laws to prevent backlash, preserving Hindu and Muslim religious traditions. However, British colonial policies led to the collapse of rural self-sufficiency, economic exploitation, and communal divisions between Hindus and Muslims. The British viewed Muslims as potential threats, suppressing their education and economic advancement to maintain control (Hussain, 1959). In the nineteenth century, Western and Bengal Renaissance movements influenced women’s status, though with differing goals—Western reformers focused on workers, while Bengal’s reformers targeted women’s liberation. Hindu women faced severe oppression, lacking property rights and autonomy, as depicted in writings by Rassundari Devi and others (Devi, 1995). Muslim women fared no better; despite efforts by Syed Ahmed Khan and others, no significant reforms were undertaken (Karim, 1984). Muslim society in Bengal grew through conversions (especially among lower-caste Hindus) (Aziz, 1968), migration, and high birth rates, becoming a majority by 1881. However, most Muslims were impoverished peasants, while Hindus dominated landownership and commerce (Census of Bengal, 1881; Seal, 1968). Therefore, Sufi saints and socio-economic pressures facilitated conversions (Arnold, 1896; Sen, 1962).

British policies further marginalized Muslims, favouring Hindus in trade, education, and governance (Karim, 1984; Fyzee, 1974). For example, the British considered Muslims as potential threats to them after the 1857 rebellion and repressed their economic and intellectual progress. The Hunter Commission reported that Hindus were rewarded for their cooperation and support, while Muslims were purposefully excluded from government services and English medium schools (Hunter, 1972). They also resisted Bengali, associating it with Hindu culture (General Report of the Public Instruction, 1875). Caste-like divisions (Ashraf-Atraf) and sectarian conflicts (Shia-Sunni) further fragmented Muslim society (Ahmed, 1983; Long, 1852). Despite these challenges, the Renaissance movements introduced ideas of education and social reform, gradually influencing women's status. Yet, deep-rooted patriarchy, caste discrimination, and religious conservatism hindered significant transformation, leaving women's emancipation incomplete.

## The Impacts of the Renaissance

The joining of the women in the liberation movement in Bengal was influenced by the liberal renaissance. At the heart of the Renaissance was the Industrial Revolution in Europe. As a result of this industrial revolution, women's society in the West was the first to enter the labour market. The establishment of women's socio-economic and political rights begins with entry into the labour market. As a result, women's society joined the movement against the new rulers, exploiters, and oppressors, intending to establish rights. From this source, awareness was created in Bengal against caste discrimination, child marriage, and the oppression of women in the name of folk religion. From this time onwards, the demand for rights, development, and progress of women belonging to different communities took shape in the social movement. This movement started in two different streams; one is the reformist movement, and the other is the anti-colonial national liberation movement. There are similarities between these two streams in the liberation movement of women in Bengal. The women's liberation movement was inspired by the social movements in the West, the women's education movement, the suffrage movement, and other rights movements (Hossain, 2006a).

Evidence shows that the Western women's liberation movement influences the adoption of specific ideas, such as the right to education and economic freedom, which are backed by Western feminists and promoted by indigenous reformers. For example, the establishment of girls' schools in Bengal (e.g., Bethune school, 1849) directly reflected the Western emphasis on female education as a means of empowerment for getting rights first with men and then with themselves (Karim, 1984; Bagal, 1357b). While both Muslim and Hindu women participated in the Khilafat Non-Cooperation movements, Muslim women's participation was often positioned within Islamic solidarity against British rule that endangered the Ottoman Caliphate. This religious motive resulted in distinctive forms of

involvement, such as organizing under purdah restrictions, bringing together through religious networks, and highlighting the revival of Islamic rights (Hossain, 2006a).

**Western Influences**

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, women in England and Europe faced conditions strikingly similar to their counterparts in Bengal - legally subordinate to men, with no rights over property or their own lives. In England, a married woman's identity was completely subsumed under her husband's authority; she could not own property, retain her earnings, or have legal custody of her children (Gupta, 1958). While some upper-class women accessed education, true equality remained unthinkable. The first female university students faced humiliating restrictions - at Cambridge in 1870, they were barred from attending regular classes, and their names were omitted from official records (Ahmed, 1983). The struggle for basic rights was painfully slow: married women gained property rights only in 1888 after an 18-year parliamentary battle, and full voting rights came as late as 1928 (Hossain, 2006a).

The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods planted the seeds of change. Thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) boldly asserted women's full humanity in "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," directly challenging Rousseau's misogynistic views (Wollstonecraft, 1955; Kaur, 1992). The French Revolution's ideals of liberty and equality particularly energized women's activism, most dramatically in the 1789 Women's March on Versailles, where protesters demanded, "If women have the right to the gallows, why not to Parliament?" (Mukherjee, 1989). By the nineteenth century, these ideas coalesced into organized movements. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), in his famous book, The Subjection of Women, raised the issue of gender equality. Moreover, Mary Goodwin's famous publications, *Thoughts on the Education of a Daughter and A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, deal with the social plight of women in England and advocate for their rights. Three decades after Mary Goodin, Mrs. Thompson made a strong statement on women's rights: “Women of England: women of whatever country ye breathe, degraded-awake” (Sengupta, 1999).

Marxist theorists added a crucial economic dimension to the analysis. Friedrich Engels (1884) traced women's oppression to the rise of private property, arguing that true liberation required dismantling capitalist structures (Engels, 2010). Socialist feminists like August Bebel and Clara Zetkin connected gender equality with workers' rights, influencing global movements (Sengupta, 1999). The 20th century saw these ideas mature through inspiring works like Simone de Beauvoir's, *"The Second Sex*, Betty Friedan's, *The Feminist Mystic*, " Germaine Greer's, *The Female Eunuch*, Katie Millett's, *The Sexual Politics*, Juliet Mitchell's, *The Human Estate*, and more. Simon de Beauvoir in her outstanding book *The Second Sex*, which analysed gender as a social construct

(O'Malley, 1968). The European feminist awakening had a profound impact on colonial India. British women reformers and Enlightenment ideals introduced new possibilities, prompting Indian women to re-conceptualize their identities beyond traditional roles. O'Malley writes about the Western that made Indian women something revolutionary - "a new conception of themselves as human beings" (Mukherjee & Allen, 1982). The stage was set for India's own women's movement to emerge, blending indigenous reform traditions with these imported radical ideas.

The spread of these European feminist ideas to colonial India took place through multiple channels; The British reformists worked as reformers in the Indian sub-continent, especially through the activities of Christian missionaries, the custom of dynamic literature, and the education of a Western curriculum. These ideas were selectively adapted rather than merely pretended by Indian reformers to classify with regional social and religious contexts. For example, Bengali legends like Raja Rammohon Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar mobilized the enlightenment of Indian reforms, creating a mixed discourse that resonated with the Indian populace (Mukherjee & Allen, 1982). This study creates a grounding for the women's movement in Muslim society that will be discussed in the next section, which developed its own discrimination in response to both Islamic reformation and Western influences. Bengali reformers selectively adopted these Western feminist ideas. For example, Begum Rokeya, who was the founder of a Muslim girls' school and encouraged women's professional training, reiterated Mary Wollstonecraft's demands for women's education and economic independence (Hossain, 2006b). Similarly, the emphasis of John Stuart Mill on gender equality in legal and political rights influenced Bengali feminists of the early 20$^{th}$ century to advocate for female representation and property rights (Sengupta, 1999).

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

The research design is qualitative historical research to analyse how the ideals of the Renaissance affected the empowerment of women in the Indian subcontinent, with reference to their role in the freedom movements and their role in advancing education. Qualitative approach allows analysing socio-cultural change, transmission of ideologies, and agency of women in colonial and reformist conditions in an interpretative manner.

### Sources of Data

The study relies on secondary sources, such as academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, newspapers, periodicals, archival documents, and credible internet resources. Other contextual information was obtained through historical and political programmes carried out in Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television (BTV) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The research was done in libraries of large academic

and other institutions, such as the central libraries of Khwaja Yunus Ali University, Rajshahi University, Islamic University, Kushtia, and Jahangirnagar University, and the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Library, Bangla Academy, and Barendra Museum Library.

### Method of Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic and historical analytical procedures. Relevant writings were also systematically reviewed and sorted into major themes, including those of women's involvement in anti-colonial movements, educational reform, social and religious restrictions, and interpreted in the context of the history and socio-political realities in which they occur. A comparative interpretative methodology was used to compare the variations in the experiences of Muslim and Hindu women and measure the interface between the Western Renaissance ideology and the local reformations.

### Research Tools and Limitations

The key research instruments were archival research, textual analysis, and content analysis. The use of secondary sources and the lack of first-hand accounts of women in historical evidence limit the study, but the inclusion of several sources and critical interpretation adds to the credibility and verifiability of the results.

## Results and Discussion

### Renaissance Empowering Muslim Society

The second half of the nineteenth century marked a profound change in the Muslim society of Bengal. Until the first half of this century, Muslim society lagged behind the neighbouring Hindu society in every aspect of life. On one hand, the Muslim upper class lost political power and became extremely frustrated; on the other hand, the lower-class Muslims fell into extreme misery. To change this, the religious leaders of the Muslim community resorted to various reform movements that continued until the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. However, they did not realize the insanity of overthrowing British power through armed struggle. They took a position away from English education due to strong English opposition. As a result, their backwardness in English education accelerated. Hindu society, meanwhile, embraced modern education and was exposed to the Renaissance ideology (Ghosh, 1968).

The consciousness of the Muslims of Bengal was awakened in the second half of the nineteenth century. From this time onwards, they moved away from the place of British opposition and started trying to become modern by accepting the cooperation of the rulers and English education. Syed Amir Ali, Abdul Latif, Syed Amir Hossain, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan had a special role in this change in the thinking of Muslims. The governance of the company gave birth to the educated middle class in Bengal. This class gradually acquired Western knowledge, carried out religious, social, and educational

reform movements, and brought about great changes in the world of thought. During this time, a class of Muslims, having mastered and learned the Bengali language, tried to keep up with the current of the Renaissance. Gradually, they evolved from Muslims to Bengali Muslims. In this Bengali Muslim society, two types of thinking developed; one is conservative, and the other is progressive. Due to the efforts of this conscious class, the modern trend in Muslim society took place. As a result, in imitation of the renaissance of Hindu society, intense efforts were made for the modernization of Muslim society in Bengal, which was termed as the Muslim Renaissance (Hossain, 2006a).

As a result of this renaissance, Muslim intellectuals sought to play a positive role in alleviating the plight of women. According to them, one of the reasons for the overall decline in Muslim society was the poor condition of Muslim women. The progress of society is not possible without leaving behind this huge section of society. They saw Muslim girls suffering from illiteracy, torture, blockades, polygamy, child marriage, and divorce. These disenfranchised, uneducated Muslim women are deprived of light and air and chained like birds in a cage (Hossain, 2006b). As mentioned in Section 6.1, Bengal Muslim women confronted severe socio-cultural restrictions. Periodicals (like Saugat magazine) further documented these conditions. This magazine depicted women as denied education, restricted by purdah, and subjected to arbitrary divorce and polygamy" (Nasiruddin, 1985).

Nawab Abdul Latif was probably the first to initiate a discussion on the issue of educating girls. An article read at a meeting of the Bengal Social Sciences in 1868 drew attention to the plight of women, along with other problems of Bengali Muslim society. Parichad Mitra had an excellent discussion about Abdul Latif's comments. However, the hostile discussions did not abate then. Abdul Latif did not take any practical plan regarding women's education. His attitude towards the education of Muslim girls was conservative. In this case, he could not overcome the influence of Yuga Dharma and Yuga mentality. He educated his four sons in higher education. But it is not known whether he taught his only daughter (Haque, 1968). Thus, Latif showed his paradoxical nature as an early reformer. Syed Amir Ali's point of view was progressive in this regard. The National Mohammedan Association, under his leadership and later the Central Mohammedan Association, played a crucial role in the salvation of the degenerate Muslim society and the awakening of the Muslim women's society. In his address to the Mohammedan Conference held in Calcutta in 1899, he said that the education of girls should be parallel to that of boys. This will maintain the balance of society. Amir Ali further said that if men and women cannot improve society together, the real benefits will not be achieved. On the contrary, if one part is educated and the other part is kept illiterate, the result will be fatal. Although Amir Ali was in favour of women's education, he did not make any attempt to make it a reality. He married a foreigner woman and spent the last 24 years of his life in London (Ali, 1968).

Many Bengali Muslim intellectuals agree on women. They all acknowledge the need to spread education among men as well as women in social development. Sheikh Abdul Gafoor Jalalabadi wrote in Al-Islam about this, “Although there is a strict injunction in the Muslim scriptures to educate both men and women, the society has been ignorantly indifferent towards women's education for a long time. As a result, from the womb of the uneducated and superstitious nation, many superstitious children have been born. The history of the whole world has openly proclaimed that without the education and advancement of women, no society can shine the bright light of education and civilization” (Jalalabadi, 1326). About this, Syed Ismail Hossain Siraj has clearly spoken about the emancipation of women. He wrote, "I do not hesitate to say that those who seek the welfare and liberation of national life, leaving women behind, are idiots. If you can't awaken the power of women, where will the life of the child come from? This woman is the backbone of the nation. Race is never formed in school or college. The nation is formed in the mother's womb, in the mother's lap" (Siraj, 1330).

Opposition from religious conservatives has hampered women's education in Muslim society at every turn. However, the broadcasting of a section of Bengali intellectuals created a favourable environment for women's education in society. S. Wazed Ali writes about this, "Just as a person who is paralyzed half of his body cannot be said to be healthy, so a society which manages and arranges only half of the welfare and leaves the other half in ignorance cannot be called a healthy society. We can never get a healthy and talented boy without a wise mother. Sick and ignorant mothers are a hindrance to the progress of the whole nation. So, wife education and health are essential for our future well-being” (Ali, 1967).

In 1896, the daughter of the influential Kalkata (Calcutta) doctor Zahir Uddin Ahmed could not get admission to Bethune College because there was no access for Muslim girls. This caused a great stir in Muslim society. A month and a half later, Barrister E.A. called a meeting held at Khandaker's house. The purpose of that meeting was to establish a large-scale girls' school for Muslim girls. Nawab Begum Shamsi Jahan Ferdousi Mahal of Murshidabad was requested to preside over the meeting. It was at this meeting that the decision was taken to establish a girls' school. The school was inaugurated on January 19, 1897, by Lady McGee (Bamabodhini, 1897). The Dhaka Muslim Suhnad Sammilani was established in 1883 on the initiative of some students of Dhaka College. The organization campaigns for women's education (Mamun, 1983). The Bengal Provincial Muslim Education Association came to the fore with the initiative to temporarily expand education. Syed Waheed Hossain said that the main objective of the association is to spread women's education in our society. Separate schools must be set up for female education, and arrangements must be made for Muslim girls to study ethics. At the first annual session of the association held in Rajshahi, a resolution was adopted regarding wife education. The proposal states that in modern Muslim society, women's education is neglected. According to this association, attention must be kept in mind to the spread of

women's education with the veil. In addition to the Bengal Provincial Muslim Education Association, the Shrihatta Sammilani, organized by the Hindu-Muslim community, seeks to spread education among the girls of the Srihatta district (Mohandas, 1936).

**Influence on Women's Movement in Hindu Society**

The women's liberation movement started in the Hindu society of Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century. The pioneers of this women's liberation movement were some Hindu Brahmins and Christian social reformers. They criticize satidah, polygamy, child marriage, the rigidity of the veil, obstacles in the way of women's education, devadasi practice, patriarchal rule, scriptural discipline, etc. The main objective of these reform efforts was to break the shackles of femininity and establish women's rights. One of the influences of the Renaissance that started in Bengal in the nineteenth century must have been the director of this women's liberation movement. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), the father of modern India, raised the question of women's rights. He sought to build public opinion against the practice of satidah, polygamy, and caste discrimination, and expressed his clear views in favour of widow marriage, adding women's rights and education to the draft programme of the Relatives' Meeting in 1815. In 1818, he formed a public opinion against the practice of satidah. Rammohun Roy's family was also involved in the incident. Based on that incident, he started a movement against this practice. In the context of his movement, a law was passed on 4 December 1829 to abolish this practice (Sen, 1977).

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1991) originally chose widow marriage as part of the women's liberation movement. In the mid-nineteenth century, he created a stir in Hindu society in favour of widow marriage. To make widow marriage popular in society, he married a widow named Bhavasundari with his son. To popularize the widow marriage movement, he sent a petition with one thousand signatures to the Indian Legislative Assembly. Under the pressure of strong public opinion, the British government approved the Widow Marriage Act in 1856. Vidyasagar was a staunch supporter of women's education and a staunch opponent of polygamy. He sent a memorandum signed by about two and a half thousand people to the Indian legislature to build strong public opinion against polygamy. He helped set up 40 girls' schools to promote women's education. During his time as a school inspector in Hooghly, Medinipur, Burdwan, and Nadia, he was especially instrumental in setting up girls' schools. His contribution to the founding of the Bethune School in 1849 is no less. He set up a women's educational institution with the help of people without relying on government grants (Borthwick, 1984).

Keshab Chandra Sen's (1834-1884) efforts for the emancipation of women gained special importance in the Braksamaj. In 1865, the Braksha Samaj helped to form an organization for the betterment of women. Here the girls would meet for religious discussions, index art education, and to discuss various social issues. In 1859, Keshab Chandra staged a widow marriage drama in support of widow marriage. He sharply criticized child

marriage and polygamy. He spoke on the topic of England's Duties to India (24 May 1870) and Female Education in India (13 May 1870). And said that in order to alleviate the plight of women, they need to take firm steps for their education (Bagal, 1357a).

After the establishment of the Hindu College in 1817, efforts were made to lift the blockade of women's society. In 1819, the Baptist clergy of Calcutta founded *the Female Juvenile Society* to establish Bengali Female Schools for the education of Bengali girls. The Society established the first girls' school for Bengali girls at Gauribari in Kolkata (Calcutta) in May-June 1819. The Juvenile Society gradually established more schools in Calcutta. Work on the Baptist Mission in Dhaka began in 1815. Referend Neonad founded the first school here in 1817 on behalf of the mission. In 1823, the Society undertook a programme to educate women through the Women's Department of the Bengal Christian School Society. By 1826, the Ladies Society for Native Female Education in Calcutta had started establishing girls' schools in and around Calcutta.

Miss Mary and Cook came to Calcutta in 1821 from England to support the Calcutta School Society. At the initiative of the school society, she established 8 girls' schools. In Calcutta, a Brahmin scholar like Madan Mohan Tarkalankar enrolled his two daughters, Bhubanmala and Kundamala, in school, and devoted himself to writing textbooks suitable for women's education. In addition to Miss Cook, Mrs. W. H. Pius and Mrs. Thomas have been instrumental in the early development of women's education (Bagal, 1357b). The contribution of Lady Amherst, the wife of the then-Governor, is also memorable. When Bethune Girls' School was established in 1849, the formal education of Bengali women began. Madan Mohan Tarkalankar, Mahshi Debendranath Tagore, and Ramgopal Ghosh sent their daughters to this school. In Wood's Directive of 1854, the English authorities supported women's education and acknowledged the importance of providing education to the distressed women of Bengal. Raja Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, and some other social workers supported the initial initiative for women's liberation. Among these social workers, Raja Vaidyanath Roy donated 20 thousand rupees for the establishment of the Central Female School. Prasanna Kumar Tagore used to discuss in detail the need for women's education in his Rifma magazine. In 1822, Gaurmohan, in his book on feminist education, tried to prove that feminism was sanctioned in the scriptures. In 1842, Ramgopal Ghosh, one of the leaders of Young Bengal, awarded Madhusudan Dutta and Bhudev Mukherjee for their work on women's education (Devi, 1995).

From the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, Akshay Kumar Dutt and Madan Mohan Tarkalankar tried to change the attitude of society towards the female nation. After the death of David Hare (1842), the Hair Prize Fund (1844) was launched in his memory. Discussions on women's education and books on women's issues were published in favour of the funds of this fund. In August 1855, the monthly Patripatha was published under the editorship of Parichad Mitra and Radhanath Sikder. The magazine can make a significant contribution to changing the destiny of women. Parichad Mitra has described

the plight of women in his various works. Shivnath Shastri, Umesh Chandra Dutta, and Vijay Krishna Goswami joined the movement when the women's liberation movement started in Brahmo Samaj under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen. The leaders of the Brahmo Samaj, Dinnath Sen and Abhay Dutta, introduced inter-city education in Dhaka in 1870 (Ghosh, 1968).

Other notable periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century advocated for women's independence and women's education. The Hair Memory Fund awards annually for wife education. In 1857, Dwarkanath wrote Feminism. He declared that there is no difference between sons and daughters. She also played a significant role in the education of Debendranath Tagore during this time. Through his efforts, the Tagore family reached the pinnacle of the new culture. Thakurbari women learn to ignore social adversity. As a result, Swankumari Devi and Jnandanandini Devi became firmly committed to women's education and freedom. The Ladies' Theosophical Society was formed by the Goddess Swarnakumari to connect women with the world outside the home. Later, he established Sakhi Samiti. This Sakhi Samiti organizes aristocratic women. Ramsundar Roy, in his treatise on feminism in 1859, expressed his views in favour of feminist education and feminism. Michael Madhusudan Dutta also talks about women's education in his essay (Hunter, 1973).

## Women's Liberation and Education Movement in East Bengal

The women's liberation and women's education movement began in East Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century. Braja Sundar Mitra, a leader of the Dhaka Brahmo Samaj, established the Eden Girls' School in Dhaka in 1875. Braja Sundar Mitra also established a girls' school in his village. He even set up a girls' school in Cumilla at his place of work. Mahimaranjan Roy, the famous zamindar of Kakina, had earlier established a girls' school in Rangpur in 1863 (Ali, 1995).

Founded in 1863, Bamabodhini Sabha was the first organization for the welfare of women founded by the Brahmins. Bamabodhini Patrika, the spokesperson of this meeting, was the first to publish the writings of Bengali women. Between 1865 and 1867, at least 20 organizations started women's rights movements from different parts of Bangladesh. Among these organizations, the thoughts and consciousness of Abalbandhab and Banga Ramani are significant. The efforts of these two organizations have brought significant changes in women's society. Also, the Bamahitashini Sabha, founded in 1871, the Bharat Asraya, founded in 1872, and the Aryan Women's Society, founded in 1879, undertook extensive training programmes on women's education, social recognition of women's legitimate rights, and assistance to helpless and orphaned women. In 1879, the founders of General Braksh Samaj formed a women-led Bengali women's society and made revolutionary progress toward the advancement of women. In 1886, Swanakumari Devi, daughter of Debendranath Tagore, established Sakhi Samiti to help all women irrespective of caste. Saraladevi's Bharat Strimahamgul spread the flame of the women's movement (Habab, 1989).

Various periodicals were published in Bangladesh in the late nineteenth century. These magazines publish various articles focusing on different issues of women. An orphanage edited by Mrs. Thakmani Devi was published. The names of the director and Antahpur are particularly noteworthy in the list of newspapers published in the nineteenth century. These two magazines make a significant contribution to the transformation of women's society. Later, Bharati Patrika also published many articles in support of women. The role of these published works in the advancement of women in Bengal is outstanding (Banerjee, 1957).

Bengali society realized that education would be ruined if educated women did not take up independent jobs. In the nineteenth century, when women were thinking of making a living, they needed higher education. But sadly, three universities were established in India in 1858, but no female students were found at the university level till 1875. However, Dehra Balika Vidyalaya student Chandramukhi wants permission to be admitted to Calcutta University, which has caused a stir in society. Chandramukhi finally got admission to Calcutta University and passed MA in 1884 and was appointed assistant superintendent of Bethune school with a monthly salary of 75 takas (Pal, 1979).

Ramasundari Devi of Pabna chose teaching as her profession. In 1863, she founded a girls' school for women's education. Rajmani Devi came to teaching in 1866 with a monthly salary of 30 rupees. Monwara Majumdar of Barisal came to teach in 1877. Kadambini Ganguly became the first female physician to take up the profession in 1858. In 1893, he went to London to pursue a higher degree and returned home after graduating from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dublin. L.M.F. After passing, Jamini Roy went to Nepal in 1817 for a job. Abal Das had to be admitted to Madras Medical College, as there was no opportunity for admission of women to the medical college under Calcutta University. In 1883, in the face of strong public demand, Bengal was forced to admit students to the small Calcutta Medical College. In Calcutta, 725 women were first employed in various professions. Of these, 527 were in teaching, 6 in administration and inspection, 124 in medicine, 4 in photography, and 4 in literary journalism (Purkayastha, 1999). Thus, in the second half of the nineteenth century, an important change took place in the destiny of women in Bengali Hindu society. Women can achieve important rights in education, social, and professional fields. From the 1980s of this century, new ideas about women's rights emerged in a society that honoured women. However, this female society had to appear on the stage of her liberation at the hands of men.

## Conclusion

The Renaissance in the Indian subcontinent formed a critical historical turning point that transformed the role of women and re-evaluated patriarchal traditions, broadening access to education, participation, and political awareness. Even when it began in Europe, the Renaissance ideals, especially humanism, rationalism, and agency of the individual, were spread to colonial India in the form of education, reformist discourse, and print culture,

which were selectively applied to local social, cultural, and religious conditions. This paper has shown that these concepts have served as a driving force to empower women, and women have not only become the passive subjects of reform, but also active agents of anti-colonial movements and education. One of the key findings of this paper is that the engagement of women in freedom movements was not a coincidence or a symbol. Both Hindu and Muslim women participated in nationalist movements with a variety of approaches and context-related strategies, which usually led to the compromise of such social restraints as purdah, caste, and religious conservatism. Specifically, Bengali Muslim women were a very significant but historically excluded part in political mobilization, reformation movements, and social movements. Their participation in other movements like the Khilafat, Non-Cooperation, and Quit India movements demonstrates how ideas of dignity, self-worth, and collective responsibility inspired by the Renaissance were redefined in the Islamic and native contexts.

The research also shows that education acted as a safeguarded tool of female empowerment throughout the Renaissance era. Activists and women reformers saw education not only as the key to personal improvement but also to the greater social change. The establishment of girls' schools, promoting the literacy of women, and the slow introduction of women into the world of professions all led to the new gender consciousness. These changes shattered the old belief regarding the intellectual and social abilities of women and provided the basis for the greater involvement of women in the social sphere. Nevertheless, the achievements were varied and controversial because females still had to confront the resistance of the established patriarchal culture and religious conservatism.

This research adds to the comprehensive study of social change in the Indian subcontinent by foregrounding the intersection of the ideals of the Renaissance, native reform, and women's activism. It emphasizes the interaction of global intellectual trends with local reality to create different models of women's empowerment. The historical importance of this process can be observed in the present-day discussion of gender equity, education, and women's rights in the South Asian regions. Besides, the study highlights the sensitivity of the re-examination of colonial archives with critical sensitivity, because most historical accounts were framed by elite and male-dominated discourses. To reclaim the lives of women, methodological creativity and sensitivity to silences in the official documents are necessary. With women in the focus of historical investigation, the work stimulates the re-evaluation of nationalism, reform, and modernity as gendered dynamics as opposed to impartial processes. This strategy eventually enhances the grasp of the past and encourages a more fair and representative view of the South Asian social transformation and change.

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