



EDUCATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE DISTRICT OF MALDA (1834-1947)

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ABSTRACT:

The Malda district was formed in 1813. This is an ancient district of Modern North Bengal.¹ Though the age of this district nearabout 200 years, yet it has passed 500 years as the trading centre. The historical area Pundra Vardhana, Borendri etc were the especial part of this district.

KEYWORDS: Training, Employee Performance, Perfect, NationLink Telecom Inc.

INTRODUCTION:

G.E. Lambourn asserted that "the district of Malda, which with that of Dinajpur forms the western portion of the Rajsahi Division of Bengal, lies between 24°30' and 25°32'30" north latitude and 87°48' and 88°33'30" east longitude. It extends over 1,899 square miles and is bounded on the north by the Purnea and Dinajpur districts, on the east by Dinajpur and Rajsahi, on the South by Murshidabad and on the West by Murshidabad, the Sonthal Paraganas and Purnea. English Bazar, situated at the centre of the district in 25°0'14" N. and 88°0'11'20" E; is the chief town and administrative head quarters".²

J.C. Sengupta mentioned in his 'West Bengal District Gazetteers-Malda' that "The name 'Malda' was formerly applied to the town which is now known as old Malda. The present headquarters of the district has originated from the factory which was built by the East India Company to carry on trade, mainly in silk and cotton textiles. The town, which sprang up around the factory came to be known as Engle Zavad. Englezavad was converted to English Bazar in course of time, and being the head quarters of the district it came to be known as Malda. The word Malda is not of Sanskrit origin but of Arabic, and, therefore, it is safe to conclude that the name Malda came into existence after the muslim conquest of Bengal".³

Abul Fazal, the court poet of great Akbar mentioned the name 'Malda' in his famous book 'Ain-I-Akbari'. According to him 'Mal' means Wealth and 'Daha' means Lake or sea or bay. So 'Maldaha' means sea or lake of Wealth. According to Abdus Samad, a prominent writer of Malda district "from the name of Pir 'Shah Malda' the term Maldaha is derived".⁴

Alexander Hamilton however wrote- "Malda was a large town, well inhabited and frequented by merchants of the different nations."⁵

Renel wrote "Malda is a pretty, neat city. This as well as Cossim Bazar is a place of trade."⁶

In the beginning, the Malda district was formed with eight police stations and later on in 1947 the number of police stations were fifteen. Administrative glory of the district was changed time to time.

Malda districts is the district of composite culture. There is very friendly relation between the two major communities-Hindu and Muslim in the district of Malda. As a community Muslim played an important role in the history of Malda.

There are two major religious divisions of the Muslim Society in Bengal as well as India - Shia and Sunni. Sunni were subdivided under four schools-Hanafi, Safi, Maleki and Hambeli. Majority of Muslims in Bengal as well as Malda were belonged to the Hanafi school of thought. Muslims of Bengal were divided into three groups namely - Ashraf, Azlaf or Atraf and Arzal. Ashraf mainly consisted of the Muslims of foreign origin - Mughals, Pathans, Turkis, Mirzas etc. They were positioned as the upper class Indian of the social ladder. Azlaf were constituted as the ordinary Indian Muslims who were converted into Islam from lower classes. They were vertically stratified the Muslim society from the very beginning of the Muslim rule in Bengal. The Muslim society in Malda socially also bore the same features under our investigation. Arzal were consisted of suppressed Muslims. The Muslims of Bengal were mainly Azlaf or Arzal.⁷

The Bengali Muslims constituted about half of the Muslim population of the Indian sub-continent. In all aspects of life and thought the Bengali Muslims were backward than the Hindus throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. This was owing to their slow growth of nationalist consciousness, economic backwardness, strong opposition to Western and vernacular education.⁸

While the Hindus were demanding English Schools and colleges, the Muslims sat apart, enveloped in the memory of their tradition and held back by the conservatism of Islam.⁹

Hunter blamed the system as a whole for the miserable condition of the Muslims : "The truth is that our system of Public instruction which has awakened the Hindus from the sleep of centuries and quickened their inert masses with some noble impulses of a nation is opposed to the tradition, unsuited to requirements, and hateful to the religion of the Musalmans"¹⁰

Bengal was the classic example of Muslim backwardness in education. The following Table gives an indication of the proportion of Muslims in the various educational institutions in 1874-5.

Table Muslim education 1874-5 : Bengal proper.

Division	% Muslims in pop.	% at Schools	% Hindus in pop.	% at schools
Burdwan	12.8	6.0	85.3	93.5
Presidency	48.2	24.0	50.9	75.0
Rajsahi	61.0	45.0	38.5	54.5
Dacca	59.1	27.0	40.4	73.0
Chittagong	67.4	43.0	29.7	54.5
Total for Bengal Proper	48.8	29.0	50.1	70.1

¹¹(Source - census of Bengal 1872).

The census report of 1891 gives a clear picture about the literacy and illiteracy of Hindus & Muslims :-

1891

Hindus

Literate

Male - 1370865

Female - 64865

Illiterate

Male - 7308011

Female - 8802956

Muslims

Literate

Male - 545053

Female - 8406

Illiterate

Male - 9179094

Female - 9659424¹²

Anowar Hossain describes in his book 'Muslim Women's struggle for freedom in colonial Bengal' that "the first half of the nineteenth century was a period of darkness, gloom, despair of the Muslims of

Bengal along with the Muslims of the whole Indian sub-continent. They were suffering from decadence, ignorance, frustrations and were framed by the yokes of immobile customs and prejudices based on misinterpreted injunctions. As is usual in most backward societies the worst sufferer from all social ills of the Muslims were the weak women.¹³

While the women of the Hindu community of Bengal as well as Malda embraced the western education, the Muslim women neglected this. The women of Muslim community forgot that – “An educated mother is best than hundred teachers.” The Muslim guardians also feared that the English education might lead to Christian conversion. On the other hand the guardians of Hindu women encouraged their daughters to take the English education. So the Hindu women became more advanced than that of the Muslim women.

The guardians of the Muslim daughters prohibited the education out of their houses. A class of Muslims began to think that propagation of women education means the waste of time and waste of money. They encouraged their daughters to read Arabic-Urdu ‘Kayeda’ and ‘Ampara (30th chapter of Holy Quran). According to them, reading and completing the Quran was just like to complete the degree of the women.¹⁴

In 1834 English became the state language in lieu of ‘Persian’ language. The Muslim society did not feel the need of the cultivation of Bengali language before 1834. The condition of Muslim women education was very worst especially in the district of Malda. The local Muslim leaders could not take any decision to give the contemporary education to the women, although the women lived in English Bazar, the district town of Malda.¹⁵

The Muslim community of Bengal as well as Malda undoubtedly had been suffering from severe hesitancy regarding education of women. Year after year social negligency was its main reason. Regarding this, an incident of 1868 should be mentioned here. While Abdul Lateef read an article entitled ‘Mahammedan Education in Bengal’, Parichand Mitra enquired after whether any step has been taken or not for the women education in Muslim community. In reply, Moulavi Abdul Hakim (behalf of Abdul Lateef) of Calcutta Madrasah said – In Islam enough importance has been given to teach women. But problem is that unlike the other communities, the Muslims cannot send their children to school or colleges. Following the religious dictum the Muslims are compelled to make their daughters to live with ‘Purdah; (veil) and like other communities the Muslims are also determined to follow their religious doctrine.¹⁶

In the first half of the 19th century or before the 19th century the women of the Muslim society of Malda district could not get proper education. The unwritten prohibition was there to the women to take Bengali education. They were compelled to take the Urdu education. As a result they could not speak properly in Bengali language.¹⁷ So that was the serious problem to the women of the Muslim society of Malda district.

But in the second half of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century the situation of the women educational system has been changed. At that time some Muslim social reformers of Bengal wanted to bring the consciousness among the women through the ‘Sabha’ and ‘Samiti’ and also through the different kind of schools.

The wave of the Aligarh movement by the master blaster of Muslim modernism sir sayed Ahmed Khan reflected the condition of the Muslim women. They (the women) denied the words of the orthodox Muslims and wanted to go out their houses for the purpose of taking education. They embraced the English education with the educated person of Bengal as well as Malda.

With the foundation of Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School in Calcutta by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain in 1911, women’s education took a new momentum. Her long cherished desire was the spread of modern western education among the Muslim women folk. With that object she founded in 1910, Sakhwat Memorial Girls’ School, in memory of her late husband Sakhawat Hossain, in Bhagalpur which she shifted to Calcutta on march 11, 1911 at 13 Waliulla Lane. From a humble beginning it became a leading High School for the teaching of both Hindu and Muslim Girls. ¹⁸ It also paved the new impetus to the Muslim women of Malda district.

The 20th century was really the period of consciousness about the women education of Bengal as well as Malda. Highlighting the significance of education among women E. Boulding in his 'women in the Twentieth century world' writes : "When you educate a male you invest only one person; when you educate a female you invest not only in that one person, but all the children she will bear."¹⁹

With the establishment of Chintamani Chamatkar Girls' School (C.C. Girls' School, 1932) of the Malda town, the new door of education was opened for the Muslim girls. The Jalalia Girls' Muktab was founded by Kazi Azharuddin in the year of 1916 paved the new way for the Muslim women education in the said district.²⁰

The students of this Muktab (Jalalia) did not have to pay any fees for the purpose of education. The Muslim society got attracted to the difference in teaching- learning process, useful curriculum and also in various aspects. In the days of child marriage the youngers bride would come to take education.²¹

The Muslim society of English Bazar interested so much about the Girls' education particularly in the first half of the 20th century. The Muslim Girls' students took their education in the Moslem L.P. (Lower Primary) Moktab and Islam U.P. (Upper Primary) Moktab of Mirchak, Fulbari etc. of the town.

With the awakening of women education, cultivation of literature was also developed in the various areas just like Bholahat, Chapi Nababganj, Shibganj etc.

Nokia Khanom, the first Muslim woman who completed her matriculation degree from Dadan Chak School in the year of 1929. Later on she took her I.A. degree from Dadan chak college. For the few days Nokia went to Bangladesh and left 60 Bighas of land. She wrote a letter to her husband Nijamuddin Ahmed Chodhury that she (Nokia) left 60 Bighas of land for the purpose of the education of the children from the foreign countries.²²

Habiba Khatun, the sister of Nokia Khanom completed her matriculation degree in the year of 1931. Later on she completed her M.A. degree and made an instance to the Muslim Community.²³

Habiba Khatun married a famous Bank Officer, she herself did not receive any govt. job. But her children took their education in the foreign countries and received govt. job in the higher posts.²⁴

It is to be mentioned here that Nokia and Habia were the niece (Daughters of a brother) of Idrish Ahmed who was the founder of Dadan Chak College.²⁵

Different kind of conveniences were there in the town of Malda but uncleanliness in the roads or paths of the Muslim Muhallas (Lane), carelessness towards the children, backwardness of education etc. were very pathetic. To see this condition, in the year of 1928-29 Begom Sakina, the wife of Nurannabi (District Judge of the district of Rajsahi and Malda) organized 'Mahila Samiti for the consciousness of the women. In the Hall of Malda Model Junior Madrasah a meeting was held. Various welfare programmes were taken from the social conference of the veiled women.²⁶

In the Aihoo Girls' school which was founded (1932) by Abdus Sobhan Shah the Muslim Girls of remote areas came here for taking education. For the consciousness of the Girls students in school one day in a week observed as cleaned day. In spite of that he introduced 'Purnima Association' in the every month in the night of Purnima for the purpose of social intercourse and discussion. The women of Muslim families participated it.²⁷

In the first half of the 20th century at least three Muslim Girls' student passed matriculation examination from Barlow Girls' School of the town. They were - (i) Hasina Khatun daughter of Ismail Sekh of Fulbari 'Mohollah' (Lane) (ii) Amina Khatun, daughter of Elahi Munshi of Kothabari Mohallah and (iii) Jaba Khatun, daughter of Abul Hussain Daroga of Bibigram Mohollah.²⁸ (Lane)

Probably Two talented girls student of Barlow Girls' school got scholarship. They were Beli Khatun, daughter of famous pleader Ziauddin Ahmed of Kuttitola Mohollah and other one Abeda Khatun, daughter of famous pleader Akbar Ali Moktar of Kalitola Lane.²⁹

The name of Mehrun Nesha, daughter of Khan Saheb Abdul Gani should be mentioned here. She was not only a talented student but she also could recite different poems in the different educational 'Sabha and Samiti'. In the first half of the 20th century she went to Murshidabad from Malda with her father to join at the conference of 'Anjuman'. Nabab Bahadur Nashirul Momalek Mir Jan Sujayet Alibeg

presided in it. In the conference Meherun Nesa was admired for reciting a part of 'Islam Bilap' of Gani Saheb and Nabab gave her 50 Rupees as a prize.³⁰

The patrika (Newspaper) 'Kumkum' which was published in 1939 from English Bazar town described about the cultivation of literature of the Muslim Girls' students and women. Some of the names should be mentioned here – Begom Moulada Khatun, Begom Shamsun Nahar and Mrs. Hasina Nasir. Later on Ajija Nur Muhammad of Nababganj earned her fame as a writer and female reporter.

Begom Jahanara of 'Monakosha' village is known as famous writer. The world poet Rabindranath Tagore admired the literary talent of Jahanara. She revealed 'Chaya Bithi'.³¹

Jahanara published that patrika from Calcutta. Later on the name of chahya Bithi changed into "Barsha Rani." The famous poet of Bengal Kazi Nazrul Islam collected the various writings for Jahanara.³²

The name of Prof. Sanaullah, one of the founders of Malda college should be mentioned here for the development of Muslim women education. Once upon a time Prof. Sanaullah lived in the house of Idrish Ahmed. Later on he helped to establish the Malda college. He brought the light especially for the Muslim women with the establishment of this college. Among the Muslim women Humera Khatun, the daughter of Samsuddin Bosni of Sujapur started her college education from Malda college and completed her higher education from Rajsahi college (East Pakistan, now in modern Bangladesh). Later on she became a famous Doctor of Rangpur.³³ According to Amantullah Choudhury, in the year of 1946 Humera Khatun and Nazma Khatun got their matriculation degree. In the same year Md. Amantullah also got his matriculation degree from Malda Zilla School.

From the year 1939 to 1946 however, the list of names had been found where the 30 percents were women, many of them became writers.

It is to be honestly noted that the muslim families of Malda district embraced the education for women in the beginning of the 20th century and later.

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