

CHAPTER-7

Conclusion

The wave of women liberation movement which was spread all over India in the nineteenth century, also spread in Surma Valley. Like other part of India, the modernization of the society began after the coming of the British. The ideology and philosophy of the Bramho Samaj, Arya Samaj and the conservative and liberal reform movements among Muslims also stirred the minds of the native people. Social reformers like Bipin Chandra, Sundari Mohan Dass, Kamini Kumar Chanda, Girish Chandra Nag, Sitanath Dutta, Shaikh Sikandar Ali, Abdul Kadir Sinkapani, Ali Amzad Khan, Abdul Matin Choudhury, Maulavi Abdul Karim, Abdul Mazid, Ashraf Hussain, felt the urge to reform the society. They began to raise their voices against the ill customs and superstitions including women issues prevailing among both the communities.

The step towards the liberation of women marked a great change in the lives of women in colonial Surma Valley. It shattered the inner quarters of the common people. Access to formal education gave women the opportunity to participate in the public sphere. Although men were the first to take up the cause of women. Women too did not lag behind. Some of the outstanding women of the nineteenth century struggled against the prevalent condition and pursued with all sincerity the object of women's liberation. Lila Nag, Hena Dutta, Suhasini Dass, Khairun Nessa Choudhury, Jubeda Rahim Choudhury, Sirajunnessa Choudhury, Sahifa Banu, Shamsi Khanom Choudhury and others were constantly engaged in their efforts to raise the social position of women. They raised their voices against the patriarchal domination, purdah, polygamy, oppression, gender inequality, right to education, early marriage etc. Among other issues, spreading up of female education took the top ranking issue by both the male and female reformers. The education paved the way of removing the other social evils.

The modern education had improved the status and position of women in a family. The girls of both the communities went to the schools and colleges. The previous notion about women education has changed. Parents who cared about female education waited until their daughters were older before arranging their marriages or occasionally allowed young married women to continue their education. This reduced the percentage of child marriages. Older brides became mothers at a later age and often played a greater role in child-rearing. Often there were opportunities to exercise some choices of their own and consequently their status was far less derivative than had been true for a previous generation. Khairun Nessa Choudhury (Sylhet),

Shamsi Khanom Choudhury, Rashida Haque Choudhury were getting married after the complete of their education. Saiful Nessa, Dr Sharikunnessa, Khairun Nessa Choudhury (Hailakandi), completed their education after marriage. Though in 1940s Muslim female education has progressed and there was a zeal for spreading of female education among the educated families but the 1931 Government Census shows that there were 12,997 Muslim female literates in the entire Sylhet district and there were 744 Muslim female literates in the Cachar, that means only 1% female literates in the valley. In the true sense, the progress of Muslim society in the field of female education was started after the independence.

Many women also became teacher and joined other profession. Khairunessa Begum, Shamsi Khanom Choudhury, were the renowned School Inspectors, Sharikunessaa, Dr Afia Khatun became successful doctors. Besides this, the Muslim women also got the right of Property Inheritance, 1937 under which she could claim both her husband's and father's property. The educated Muslim women also took interest in the administration of the zamindar estate. Among them Sahifa Banu, Sirajunnessa Choudhury, Ubed Hasana Banu Choudhury were deserve to mention. Women also experienced increased opportunities for the expression of their individuality. Formal education and particularly the development of publications intended for the written by women gave women a voice. Through their writings they were able to communicate with each other and develop new social network. Thus, though in late compare to their Hindu and Bramho counterparts but there was a gradual progress. The study also shows that it was after 1940's the Muslim women of Surma Valley would participated in the process of modernization. Jubeda Rahim Choudhury was the first woman who attended the political meeting without wearing *burqah*. Her act was considered as the first step to reduce the strictness of purdah in Surma Valley. Sahida, her sister and Sirajunnessa Choudhury also gave up their *burqah* when they attended the meeting. With the passage of time, many women also moved out in the streets to cover their heads with a '*churni*' instead of *burqah*.

In this study, we also find that the Muslim women participation in the politics was very rare. During the time of the Non- Co-Operation movement though Hindu women took active part in the politics but the Muslim women kept themselves aloof from the movement spreading out that

time. The Muslims not only became literate later period but also joined in the freedom movement rather late. When Hindu women came forward for the active participation in politics, they secluded within four walls due to their conservative mentality. They did not actively participate in the processions, meetings etc. The Muslim women observed purdah strictly and thought that it was unfair to participate in the public sphere. However the Muslim women motivated their husbands, son or brother to participate in the freedom movement and given shelters to the freedom fighters in times of need. The factors like illiteracy, strict seclusion and patriarchal domination marginalized the role of Muslim women in their movement. Jubeda Rahim Choudhury was the first Muslim women who actively participated in the politics. With her encouragement, Anowara Basit , Syeda Lutfunessa Khatun, Hajera Mahmud, Sahera Banu joined in the Muslim League and actively participated in the Language movement in 1952 and the Bangladesh War of Liberation.

The study also shows that Muslim women's participation in the freedom movement was overshadowed by the separatist politics. Although a large number of the Muslims participated in the freedom struggle during 1930s, the orthodox section of Muslim intellectuals influenced the Muslim mind. The Muslim League spread the gospel of communal and separatist politics among the Muslims as the Hindu Mahasabha did among the Hindus. The nationalism that developed during the Swadeshi movement had strong Hindu overtones. The Hindu concept of motherland as the mother God was popularized, as the movement was spearheaded by the Hindu middle class, and naturally this failed to appeal to the Muslim community. The revolutionary clubs did not help to bridge the gap either. Thus a direct attempt to mobilize Muslims to join separatist politics was made by the Muslim League and as a result, a large number of women began to participate in the movement for the formation of Pakistan. Jubeda Rahim Choudhury who earlier joined in the Indian National Congress, later on joined in the Muslim League.

Like their Hindu and Bramho counterparts, the Muslim women leaders like Jubeda Rahim Choudhury, Sirajunessa Choudhury wanted to increase the role of elite women in public life. They considered voting right as a first step towards the entry to the public life. The emergence of women's movement demanding definite political rights was considered by them as the ultimate

goal of their struggle. They tried to acquire more freedom of action and positive role in public affairs corresponding to the Muslim beliefs and values. Their efforts, however, had hardly any effect on the living condition of the majority of Muslim women. The gulf between the elite and the uneducated village women was difficult to bridge for lack of mass contacts. The purdah system often stood in the way of mobilizing rural women. It was only during the Sylhet Referendum, a large number of women exercised their right to vote.

This study also makes it apparent that all women were not equally transformed and were not able to reconstitute new roles for themselves. Their social status was not equally improved.

The educated women enjoyed better social status than the illiterate people. Though modern education changed the lives of one section, other section remain unchanged due to their illiteracy and ignorance. The major barriers to the awareness of rights among women were illiteracy, excessive involvement in domestic chores, household constraints (that is, attitude of husbands and in-laws), social structure involving an in-built inequality of the sexes and very little changes in ideology with regard to personal laws and independence.

Thus in Surma Valley, for the first time in the history of the nation, women began to communicate with women outside their families and local committees. Systematic modern education began under influence of the Welsh Presbyterian Missionaries and also the active help of the native people which facilitated by the increasing number of women 'Literate in vernaculars' and brought changes in the society. These changes not only nourished Muslim society but also spread its influence after independence on a large scale. It is evident from the above discussions that unlike the previous centuries, the colonial rule had immense effects on the lives of the women. The colonial rule had produced a good number of progressive women who participated actively in the social formation. They were Sahifa Banu, Ubed Hasna Banu, Begom Shamsi Khanom Choudhury, Anowara Basit, Khairun Nessa Begom, Najnin Begom, Sirajunnessa Choudhury, Sitara Begum, Begum Jebu Ahmed, Rashida Haque Choudhury and so on. The interest for spread of Education amongst the backward section of Muslim inhabitants particularly for Girls' education was well known, so they could draw the sympathy of all sections of people irrespective of caste, colour and creed. Their works in social and political arena and

particularly in literature has set an example for the future generation of women of the present Bangladesh and Barak Valley in India.