

CHAPTER -1

Introduction

The gender issue has received considerable attention mainly in the last three decades. The term gender is considered a social construction- it grants meaning to the fact of sex.¹ It refers to the socially constructed roles and relation between men and women. It is a part of the broader socio-cultural context. Gender also refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and learned through socialization process. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. Conversely, it could be said that only after specific meanings came to be attached to the sexes, did sex differences become pertinent.² Men and women may be physically different, but this does not mean that they are therefore innately different from each other. It is society which has decided that men and women possess different traits and attributes.³

In a male dominated society, women have to face numerous problems both specific to their sex and their religion.⁴ All religions have accorded women an inferior status and relegated them to a secondary position. Religion itself is the end product of patriarchal society and so is male domination.⁵ The Indian women from the early period of the Vedic times were subordinate to man. Law and religion did not recognize the equality and equal rights of man and woman. The disabilities of a woman arose from the fact that she was born a woman.⁶ The *Manu Samhita* decreed that women could own no property and he denied her right to independence and individuality and it stated that: in childhood a female must be subject her father, in youth to her husband and in old age to her sons. Both the Hindu and Muslim religion dictated that a woman should worship their husband as God. The Manu said that, heaven is only attained through the husband and as a reward for having duly worshipped him as God on earth. In Islam, wife should be submitted to the husband and considered him next only to God.⁷

The present study has an attempt to explore how did colonial rule affect women lives and how did it transform the Muslim society in the colonial Surma Valley. This study is located within the

¹ V. Geeta, *Gender*, Stree, Calcutta 2002, p.10.

² Ibid.p. 10.

³ Ibid.p.02.

⁴ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Status of Muslim Women, Economic and Political Weekly*, February, 1994, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid.p.1.

⁶ Mahmooda Islam, *Nari Itihase Upekkhita*, Mowla Brothers, Dhaka, 2004, p. 74

⁷ Mahmooda Islam, *ibid.* p.83.

emergence and growth of women's movement in India in the context of both internal socio-structural and external global process of change.

Women's status in pre-colonial India

In the early Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status with the men.⁸ They could participate in state functions, important assemblies and discussions. Evil practices like sati, infanticide, and child-marriage had not yet come into being. Widows could remarry if they so desired. Education was not restricted to boys as in the later period. They were not confined to the four-walls of their homes, and had a voice in the selection of their life partners.⁹ But in the later Vedic period they could not enjoy any right and lived like domestic slaves. They were forbidden to study the Vedas. It came to be believed that the performance of sacrificial ceremonies by women annoyed Gods.¹⁰ Highly obsessive and various forms of age-old social and religious practices imposed distinctive power and status for men and women. The disabilities of a woman arose from the fact that she was born a woman.¹¹

During the Medieval period, the position of Hindu women registered a gradual decline after the advent of Muslims in India. The nefarious custom of infanticide also gained ground. *Purda*, a common practice among Muslims, became popular among the Hindu families too. Sati became the order of the day and it could not be completely curbed despite state regulations issued by Akbar and Jahangir. Widowhood was considered a punishment for the sins of one's previous life. Divorce and remarriage were quite common among the Muslims, but not so among the Hindus. Polygamy was widely practiced among the Hindu and the Muslim communities.¹²

Economically the Muslim women were much better than their counterparts among the Hindus. While the former were entitled to a definite share in the property of their parents even after marriage, and latter were usually deprived of it. The interest of a Muslim lady was further safeguarded by *mahr* by which she could lay claim to the property of her husband's parents.¹³

⁸ A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, 2003, Delhi, p.256 ; Dr. C.M. Agrawal, *Nari*, Indian Publishers, Delhi, 2000, p.188 .

⁹ Ibid.p.188.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 190.

¹¹ A.R. Desai, *ibid*.p.257.

¹² C.M. Agarwal, *ibid*. p.193.

¹³ *Ibid*.p.193.

It is true that Indian history recorded instances of outstanding women like Gargi, Chandbibbi, Nurjahan, Razya Begum, the Queen of Jhansi, Mirabai and Ahalyabai, who accomplished great feats in the spheres of literature, art, philosophy, administration and even warfare.¹⁴ There were other women of royal families who influenced politics before the arrival of Mughals in India include Malika- Jahan, wife of Jalaluddin, khudavadazada, sister of Muhammad Tughlaq, Bibi Mattu, widow of Islam Khan, an Afgan leader, Shams Khatun, queen of Bahlol Lodhi and Bibi of Ambha, mother of Sikandar Lodhi. The names of Fatuha and Nusrat Khatun in the field of singing and that of Nusrat Bibi and Mehr Feroz in the field of dancing have become a legend. Women of royal households were also known for their philanthropic activities and religious pursuits.¹⁵ However, women of lower strata were mainly concerned with domestic affairs and were not allowed to move out of their houses due to uncertain political conditions.¹⁶

The society was totally affected by religious superstitions and social evils. Social conditions were equally depressing and the most distressing was the position of women. The people were the victims of social conservatism and feudal superstitions. In all the previous stages of society in India, women, in general, were dependent and subjugated. The majority of women lived in an unenviable position at the threshold of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

In pre-colonial India, the birth of a girl was unwelcome and unexpected.¹⁸ Infanticide was so prevalent among the Hindus; the parents killed girl babies because the marriage of a girl was burden as it was too expensive for poor parents.¹⁹ The curse of infanticide even became a religious custom among the people of various parts of India- especially in Rajasthan, Punjab, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. But such customs was not practiced by the Muslims as it was prohibited by the Islam. The birth of female child was regarded as an inauspicious event while that of a male child was given a blatantly preferential treatment within the family. Attempts to kill girl infants at birth were not unusual and the female child was killed immediately after her birth.²⁰

¹⁴ A. R Desai, *ibid.*p.256.

¹⁵C.M. Agarwal, *ibid.*p.192.

¹⁶*Ibid.*p.192.

¹⁷ Bharati Ray, *Early Feminist of Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p. 28.

¹⁸ Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books Ltd, New Delhi, 1998, p. 84.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*p.84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*p.84.

Child marriage was so prevalent among every community. The girls were married at very tender age. The girls who escaped infanticide were married at a very early age. Early marriage was the only vocation left for them due to absence of female education. 'The custom of early or infant marriage arose due to caste restrictions and elaborate customs regarding marriage which made the parents anxious to marry their daughters at the earliest opportunity.' Among the people, girls were generally married between the ages of seven and twelve years – the *shastras* laying great stress upon the necessity to marry a girl before or immediately upon attaining puberty, after which, it is, of course a great disgrace for her to remain in her father's house. Girls were married at that age when they even did not know the meaning of the marriage. They were unaware of all the burdens of marriage. Girls were married at that delicate and tender age when they used to play with their dolls and other toys. Many Indian literature of the nineteenth century depicted the picture of child marriages.

When the husband of a Hindu woman died she was expected to commit sati. The widows had to throw her living body on the pyre with the corpse of her husband when he died.²¹ The custom of sati was also prevalent in many parts of India. When a woman's husband died, then she was asked to ascend the funeral pyre of her dead husband to burn herself. 'This was done for two main motives - spiritual glamour and material gain. On its spiritual side, the woman reached in immolation the highest peak of the old Sita-Rama glamour - matehood faithful through life and after death. Secondly, there was a lot of material gain to the family after becoming a sati. In Bengal, *dayabhaga* form of inheritance was prevalent, under which widows could inherit their husband's property if the latter died without having a son, even the family was undivided.²² Besides this, in many cases the guardians of the family often encouraged the widows to commit sati otherwise their children would not inherit any property. So she was asked to sacrifice her life for the sake of the welfare of the family. But after their death, actually the children would not get anything.²³

Those who did not commit sati, they became widow and faced life long miseries²⁴ as they had no right in their husband's property and they treated almost as slaves. The barbarous custom of Sati

²¹Ibid.p.83.

²²Radah Kumar, *History of Doing*, Kali for women, 1993, p.9.

²³Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Andolon*, Dacca University Press Ltd, Dacca, 1989, p. 8.

²⁴Bipan Chandra, *ibid*.p. 84.

practised by the orthodox Hindus of Bengal, by the Rajputs, Jats and Sikhs of Northern India and many other parts was glorified by the priests and other religious preachers.

Whenever the old husband died, then his wife became a widow. And compulsory widowhood was enforced on either young or child wives. Widows were not allowed to remarry except some lower castes. But the Muslim women enjoyed some better position than the Hindu women as the Muslim law accorded women a higher status than Hindu law²⁵ because Islam gave some special privileges to the women as widows had the right to remarry. Infanticide, suttee system was totally prohibited in Islam. But the Muslim women also suffered due to the easy procedure of divorce i.e 'talaq' and purdah etc.

According to the Hindu shastras and the old customs a widow duly observing the vows of widowhood was to be respected even by elders, was usually given the management of the household and every effort was made to mitigate her unfortunate position'.²⁶ A young widow was seen as 'bad luck' bride who had caused her husband's death. Due to these reasons, the widow's pretty jewels and clothes were forcibly taken back by her husband's relatives. She was often made the drudge of the household. This was considered to be the just and deserved punishment for some unknown sin committed by her supposedly in an earlier incarnation. She was regarded by the society as unfortunate, unauspicious and condemned women. As the relation between husband and wife was considered sacred and indissoluble, even after the death of the husband, the wife was supposed to live a life of asceticism, self denial, unflinching devotion to her husband's memory, self sacrifice and self effacement. She was not allowed to wear nose-ring and coloured clothes of any kind. She was not allowed to join a singing party at marriages. She was given a soiled chadar (sheet) to wear. She was not given rich food to eat; rather she was to observe fast from two to six days in a month on different sacred days. She was warned to observe all these customs strictly. In case of any violation her image was lowered. The custom of compulsory widowhood made the condition of women worse.

²⁵ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.25.

²⁶ Ranjit Kumar Roy, *Retriveing Bengal's Past: Society and Culture in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, 1995, p. 6.

After the death of the husband, the relatives of the died proposed two options in front of the widow. Either she had to commit Sati or to leave the property. Her Children also would not get anything as the property inheritance.²⁷

The abuse of polygamy was worst among the Kulin Brahmins of Bengal, who even took to marriage as a profession to survive. At one time the poor Kulin Brahmin, due to economic reasons, chose marriage as a profession, made a living by marrying many number of girls one after another and taking dowry from them, and living in turns in the girls' houses. The contemporary history and literature speak of the extreme oppression of women under these decadent social and cultural conditions.²⁸ An eighty-year-old Brahmin in Bengal had as many as two hundred wives, the youngest being just eight years old. Several women hardly had a married life worth the name, since their husbands participated in nuptial ceremonies for a consideration and rarely set eyes on their wives after that.²⁹ The custom of Devadasis was widely practiced in South India. It was a social sanction of forced prostitution of helpless women. In Bengal, there were a good number of prostitutions due to the widowhood, child marriage etc.³⁰

Women in general, both Hindus and Muslims, were pushed back to the isolated, cursed '*zenana mahal*' or '*andar mahal*' and deprived of any kind of freedom, enlightenment or education, social or legal rights. Regarding education for women, there was the superstition that if the girls learnt to read and write, they would become widows. Purdah or ghunghat or veil was known in the region. Married women used to observe it in the presence of their husband's kin as well as before their husbands in the presence of others. They also extended purdah to all classificatory and 'courtesy' affine - to most of the senior men of the village as well as towards certain female affines, notably the mother-in-law or classificatory mother-in-law. It was observed as a mark of respectability and mannerism by all communities in the whole of Northern India and Punjab was no exception.

²⁷ Aditi Falguni, *Banglar Nari Sangramer Itihas*, Annesha Prakashan, Banglabazar, Dhaka, 2010,p.19.

²⁸ Kanak Mukherjee, *Women's Emancipation Movement in India*, National Book Centre, New Delhi, 1989,p. 24 .

²⁹ Bipan Chandra, *ibid.* p.84.,Maleka Begum, *ibid.*p.14.

³⁰Maleka Begum, *ibid.*p. 9.

Social reform movements in colonial India

In India, the establishment of the new administrative set up and the spread of modern education and ideologies among the Indians found expression in the movement for reform for the Indian women.³¹ In colonial India, social reform became an important issue and they focused their attention about the 'woman question'. Reformers were found throughout India and among all communities.³² They addressed a number of issues, most of them relating to marriage and the importance of female education. In India, there were three main agencies who raised questions about women, they are the Christian missionaries, educated Indian male reformers and the women themselves.³³

The newly emerging middle class and the traditional as well as western educated intellectuals launched initial efforts to abolish laws and customs which suppressed women. Thus by the second half of the nineteenth century there were reform groups in all parts of British India. The Brahmo Samaj, the Parthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj and reform movement among the Muslims, Sikhs, and Parsees had the component of improving the rights and status of women in their agenda. They generally opposed social and legal inequalities and gave special attention to the problem of suttee, female infanticide, polygamy, child marriage, purdah prohibition on female education, prohibition on widow remarriage, devadasis (temple dancers wedded to the Gods) and the patrilineal joint family.³⁴ The torch-bearer of this enlightenment was Raja Rammohan Roy (1774- 1833), one of the founders of the Brahmo Samaj (1828). Then came Debendranath Tagore and the members of the Young Bengal, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen and other social reformers. Besides Bengal, social reform movements initiated by great personalities grew in other parts of India also.³⁵ Dayanand Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, Nirmal Durgaram of Gujarat, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Behramji Malabarinand Keshav Karve of Bombay,

³¹ A.R Desai, *ibid.* p. 256.

³² *Ibid.* p.256

³³ *Ibid.* p.256.

³⁴ C.M. Agarwal. *ibid.* p.192.

³⁵ Kanak Mukherjee, *Women's Emancipation Movement in India*, National Book Centre, New Delhi, 1989, p.34.

Veerasingam Pantulu and Venkataratnam Naidu of Madras, were some of the notable personalities among several social reformers. They led movements for female education and social rights for women, and for the eradication of the reactionary feudal legacies.

With the initiative of such nineteenth century Bengali reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar who extended the analysis of the degradation of the Indian society to the position and condition of women. Women's issues became the central theme in the socio-cultural movement in Bengal.³⁶

Raja Ram Mohan Roy raised the issues against suttee which was widely prevalent among the Hindus on that time. The agitation he organized against suttee is the best example of his life long crusade against social evils. In 1817, Mrityunjaya Vidyalankara, the chief Pundit of the Supreme Court, announced that sati had no *shastric* sanction. William Bentick, the provincial governor of Bengal, used the strategy of marshalling *shastric* texts to show that sati was not a required, or religiously sanctioned practice. The same strategy had been used by Ram Mohan Roy, in his *A Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent to the Practice of Burning Widows Alive*. This work was written in 1815, allegedly after Roy saw his sister-in-law forced on to his brother's funeral pyre, but translated in to English only three years later, in 1818. In it Roy set out to prove that none of the ancient Hindu prescriptive texts laid down that a widow must commit sati, in effect its incidence testified to the degeneration of the Hindu ethos. In response, a hundred and twenty- eight pundits published a 'manifesto' asserting that Roy's arguments were incorrect, and that he could not be said to be representative of Hindu opinion. In his reply to this manifesto, Roy again marshaled textual evidence, dwelling particularly on the *shastras*, to show that, according to them, sati was not obligatory, and was in fact the 'least virtuous act' a widow could perform, which had meaning only if it was voluntary.³⁷ In 1818, William Bentick, prohibited sati in his province. It took another eleven years for this prohibition to be extended to other parts of India, and the Sati Abolition Act was passed in 1829, when Bentick had become Governor- General of India.³⁸ A petition was sent to the Governor- General and British

³⁶ M Swapna Banerjee, *Men, Women and Domesticity: articulating middle class identity in colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p.4.

³⁷ Radha Kumar, *ibid.* p.14.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.9.

Parliament but there was some protest from the Hindu orthodoxy. In 1830, orthodox Hindus in Calcutta formed the Dharma Sabha, to campaign against the abolition sati.

The record has shown that, moreover, that a considerable proportion of the satis recorded for early nineteenth century Bengal were of women who killed themselves years after their husbands had died. This could have been because their lives had become intolerable rather than because the sati had entered them.³⁹

Ram Mohan believed that Hindu religion was opposed to suttee and declared it as murder according to every *shastras*.⁴⁰ He organized a group of progressive peoples to keep a check on such performances and to prevent any attempt to force the widows to become suttee. He himself went to the burning ghats at Calcutta to persuade the relatives of widows to give up their plan of self-immolation. Under his leadership the Bramho Samaj's anti sati campaign furnished the first example of a systematic movement. He was considered one of the greatest reformers⁴¹ whose name is usually listed first among those of nineteenth century reformers concerned with improving women's status. The spirit of reform embraced almost the whole of India, beginning with the efforts of Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, leading to the formation of the Bramho Samaj in 1828. The practice of Sati, or of burning or burying alive the widows of Hindus, is hereby declared illegal and punishable by the criminal courts, passed by the Governor- General in Council on the 4th December 1829.⁴²

Ram Mohan played a notable part in improving the lot of women in many other ways too. He condemned the subordination of women and opposed the prevailing notion that women were inferior to men in all ways. Before that two regulations were passed in 1795 and 1804 to suppress the inhuman practice of infanticide. But these regulations remained in effective till the social reformers took up the issue and roused the social conscience of the people. They campaigned against polygamy, bigamy and the 'kulin' system. They also fought for property rights for women. They stood up against the dowry system and the sale of girls. The very objective of Atmiya Sabha was to rouse a new consciousness against medieval traditions.

³⁹ Ibid.p.9.

⁴⁰ Bipan Chandra, *ibid.* p.84.

⁴¹ Geraldine Forbes. *ibid.*10.

⁴² Radha Kumar, *ibid.*p.10.

Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Nanda Kishore Bose, Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay and Diwan Matichand, were some of the prominent members of this sabha.⁴³

It was this Atmiya sabha, headed by Rammohan Roy that had drawn up the Draft Programme for the reformation of Bengal. It discussed all sorts of problems effecting the contemporary society. Problems such as idolatry were discussed and attempts were made to mobilize public opinion.

Another great social reformer Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar organized long struggle in favour of widow remarriage.⁴⁴ The Hindu women were prohibited to remarry after the death of their husband. They had to pass out their life in a miserable condition. It was his efforts that the first lawful Hindu Widow Remarriage Act was celebrated in Dec 1856. Keshab Chandra Sen and Devendranath Tagore openly celebrated widow remarriages. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was also opponent of polygamy. In Bengal Polygamy was widely practiced among the Kulin Brahmin. Arguing that the practice of kulinism was inhuman, Iswar Chandra presented the government with a petition signed by 2,500 persons requesting the legislative prohibition of polygamy. Vidyasagar protested against child marriage. Both Keshab Chandra Sen and Devendranath Tagore openly celebrated widow remarriages actively supported the movement for abolition of polygamy and advocated the upliftment of women in society.⁴⁵

Like Vidyasagar, In North India, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj condemned child marriage, dowry, and polygamy. According to Saraswati, practices such as polygamy, child-marriage and the seclusion of women did not exist in Aryan India, moreover men and women had equal rights. Both girls and boys should start learning Sanskrit, Hindi and foreign languages at the age of five, after the age of eight both sexes should be compulsory educated, but in separate schools, that true education was part of religion. The minimum age of marriage for girls should be 16, and for boys 25.⁴⁶

In Bombay Mahadev Govinda Ranade through his Parthana Samaj encouraged widow remarriage, and opposed child marriage. The Theosophical Society also played an important role in the movement of Hindu Renaissance. This society rendered some social services by

⁴³ Ibid. p.33.

⁴⁴ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.* p.23.

⁴⁵ Radaha Kumar, *ibid.* p. 22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.22.

demanding reforms like abolition of child marriage and the purdah system. It worked for the upliftment of the women. Virasalingam made widow remarriage and female education the key points of his program for social change. Ramakrishna regarded women as representatives of the Mother of the Universe. The Ramakrishna mission, with its missionary technique, encouraged women as teachers and preachers. The Rehnumai Mazdayasan Sabha initiated the modernization of Parsi social customs regarding the education of women, marriage and the social position of women in general. Rai Salig Ram (also known as Huzur Maharaj), a follower of the Radhasoami faith, advocated female emancipation. In South India, R. Venkata Ratnam Naidu opposed the devadasi system.⁴⁷ Dr Muthulakshmi Reddi and other reformers waged a long struggle against the institution of temple prostitution or devdasis (an hereditary caste of women) who consecrated themselves in early childhood to temple service. It was the result of their strenuous agitation that an act was passed in 1925 for the prohibition of this practice.⁴⁸ The movements also organized in the lower levels of Hindu Jati Hierarchy. The Satya – Shodhak Samaj of Jotiba phule also took up the cause of women.⁴⁹ Besides these reformers, the British liberal officials tried to bring modernization by social reforms. They realized that many social evils were prevalent which restricted the overall development of the women. To remove these evils the British government passed various laws from time to time.⁵⁰ Conservative reaction was strong and people opposed any interference in the socio-religious activities of any communities. They, however, had to act under the pressure of social reformers of every community.

Thus a regulation for declaring the practice of Sati, or of burning or burying alive the widows of Hindus, illegal, and punishable by the criminal courts was passed on 4 December, 1829 known as Regulation Act of XVII of 1829. The Government of India also legalized the remarriage of widows (especially of Hindus) by passing an Act known as Act XV of 1856.¹⁹ To curb the evil custom of female infanticide, the Female Infanticide Act VIII was passed in 1870.²⁰ On 25 June 1928, the government of India also appointed a committee to examine the state of the law relating to the Age of Consent as contained in Section 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Act 1925 (XXIX of 1925).²¹ Some socio-religious reform movements also came

⁴⁷ Geraldine Forbes, *ibid* .p.11-27.

⁴⁸ Desai A R, *ibid*. p.257.

⁴⁹ Ruhela Saryu, *Understanding the Indian women Today: Problems and Challenges*, Delhi, 1999 , p. 21 .

⁵⁰ Bakhshish Singh Nijjar, *History of the United Punjab*, vol 1, Book India Store, Atlantic, New Delhi, 2010, p.60-61.

forward in the nineteenth century to help the government in removing these evils and tried to implement these laws in their respective regions. Thus suttee was abolished (1829), widow marriage was legalized (1856), Female infanticide was banned (1870), inter- community marriages were permitted under the Special Marriage Act (1872), there was legalization against child marriages (1929).⁵¹

In India, the socio-religious reform movement began among Muslims rather late compare to other communities. The Muslims did not realize the western education was necessary for their upliftment. In all spheres of life and thought the Muslims were less advanced than the Hindus throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. This was due to their slow growth of nationalist consciousness, economic backwardness, strong opposition to western and vernacular education.⁵² It was only in the ends of the nineteenth century the social reform movement among the Muslim society was begun due to the contact of western ideas and thoughts. The 'awakening' in colonial Bengal which had infused new life into Hindu and Bramho community also had profound implications for Muslim society.⁵³ The male reformers such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Thanawi in Deoband, Amir Ali, Abdul Latif sharply criticized the prevailed social evils and superstitions. They raised issues on polygamy, child marriage, purdah, rigorous of widowhood, arbitrary divorce etc. and expressed their views on women's emancipation.

Rokeya Sakhwat Hussein took leading part for awakening Muslim women. She challenged the traditional patriarchal set up and fought for equal rights with men through her writings. Rokeya Sakhwat Hossein was considered as a pioneer of women's education. Rokeya established Sakhwat Memorial School for girls' education. Before Rokeya, many schools and Madrassas were established by the Muslim women but did not last. Nawab Faizunnessa Choudhary and Nawab Firdus Mahal established schools and patronage many schools.⁵⁴

As the women's position could be used as an indicator of society's advancement, the nineteenth century India, witnessed the social reform movement along with the women's education had begun to make some headway in Bengal. Social reformers realized that without female

⁵¹ Ruhela Saryu, *ibid*, p.23.

⁵² Anowar Hossain, *Muslim Women's Struggle for Freedom in Colonial Bengal*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2008, p.31.

⁵³ Bharati Ray, *From the seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.109-10.

⁵⁴ Shahin Akhtar and Moushumi Bhowmik, *Zanana Mahfil: Bangali Mussalman Lekhikader Nirbachit Rachana*, Stree Publication, Kolkata, 1998, p.31.

emancipation and female education society's progress would be impossible. Vidyasagar focused on mass education for girls and boys. As a government inspector of schools, he organized forty schools for girls, many of which he ran at his expense.⁵⁵ At first Christian missionaries had taken the initiative but the educated middle class also started some indigenous schools. The English educated male folk felt the need for women's education. A woman needed to be educated in order to match her husband and to be able to perform her domestic role effectively in the modern's context.⁵⁶ Even in the early part of the nineteenth century, education was informal and largely limited to practical matters. Women from respectable families only got the opportunity of learn vernacular literature and received some education in keeping accounts.⁵⁷ But the reformers of every communities advocated women education and they took many measures in this respect along with the removal of the social evils. They found many women's association which worked for women's education. Devendranath Tagore supported women's education through his *Tattwabodhini Sabha* which inaugurated a new era by advocating for women's rights. The Derozians or the Young Bengal Society was also the passionate advocates of women's right and demanded education for them. In Bengal Keshab Chandra Sen developed educational programmes The Bramhos set up their own communities and worked together to advance the cause of female education, abolish superstitions. The Bramho women also played a part in the general social change. By the 1860, some of them broke conventional customs in matters of education, dresses, purdah.⁵⁸

In 1865, the Bramho Samaj under the leadership of Keshab Chandra Sen sponsored the first organization where women met for religious instruction, sewing lessons and discussions of social issues.⁵⁹ In the meanwhile, the *Bamabodhini Sabha* started *Bamabodhini Patrika* for women's education and *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* established several girls' for schools. Dayananda championed the cause of female education on Vedic principles. The Arya Samaj also founded many schools for girls. The Parthana Samaj advocated female education. . Dondo Keshav Karve offered a practical solution with his Institutions in Poona to educate young widows to become

⁵⁵ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.* p. 23.

⁵⁶ Bharati Ray, *ibid.* p.34.

⁵⁷ Dutta Kalikinkar, *Survey of India's Social life and economic condition in the eighteenth century 1707-1813*, Calcutta, Firma, K.L.Mukhopadhyay 1961, p.23-24.

⁵⁸ Bharati Ray, *ibid.* p. 33.

⁵⁹ Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, N.J Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985 ,p.291.

teachers in girl's schools. Jotiba Phule and his wife was pioneer in establishing a girls' School at Poona in 1851.

With the efforts of these social reformers, many girls' schools were established almost all part of India. The establishment of Bethune school in 1849 was considered as the milestone of women's education.⁶⁰ This school was soon followed by a number of girls' school. There were many women like Swarnakumari Devi, Rasasundari Devi, Bamasundari Devi, and Brahmamoyee Devi who were educated either by their husband, father or self educated. They wrote many books and articles which were published in the women journals. Rassundari Devi wrote the first autobiography "*Amar Jiban*" in Bengali which marked a new era of women's progress. This autobiography gave a detail description of her day to day life experiences as a housewife and mother. It also gave a detailed picture of that period when reformers were attempting to change the lives of women.⁶¹ Saralabala Chaudhurani, a Bengali woman from the famous Tagore family, was an excellent example of "new woman."⁶² She became as an early female educationist, a patriot and a feminist.⁶³ Saraladevi's education began at home with a tutor, she then attended Bethune College, graduating with honours in English in 1890. She continued studying- French, Persian and then Sanskrit- in preparation for her M.A examination. Remaining at home, she studied music, wrote songs, and wrote for her mother's journal. Her boldest step was to leave home and become a teacher in Maharani's school in Mysore.⁶⁴

Her mother, Swarnakumari Devi, was a novelist and editor of a women's journal. Before the introduction of English education in India, Rassundari Devi, Haimabati Sen etc. showed their eagerness or learning. Towards the close of the nineteenth century Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, founded Sarada Sadan (Home of Wisdom), a school for widows in Bombay and Poona in 1889. She was truly remarkable as a pioneer in women's education and rebel champion of women's rights. Her father supervised her education and allowed her to remain unmarried. She was awarded the title "*Pandita*" in recognition of her great learning. She and her brother traveled throughout India lecturing on female education and social reform. Ramabai began to work with

⁶⁰ . Bharati Ray, *ibid.* p.35.

⁶¹ Tanika Sarkar, "A Book of Her own. A Life of Her Own : Autobiography of a Nineteenth –Century Woman," *History Workshop Journal*, 36 (autumn, 1993)

⁶² Forbes Geraldine, *ibid.* p. 29 .

⁶³ Meredith Borthwick, *ibid.* p. 131-133.

⁶⁴ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.* p.30.

reformers to educate women through the Arya Mahila Samaj (Aryan's Women's Society)⁶⁵. While in Poona she gave evidence before the Hunter Commission and stressed the urgent need for women doctors and teachers. By 1900 the Sharada Sadan had trained eighty women were able to earn their own living through teaching or nursing.⁶⁶ Mataji Tapaswini, who began the Mahakali Pathsala of Calcutta in 1893, promoted learning for women. Maharani Tapaswani and K.D. Karve were educating young women from conservative homes to become, as they argued, better wives and mothers in a modern world. To gain the support of conservative communities, they developed curricula dominated by home science and religious lore.⁶⁷

Begom Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain established Sakhwat Memorial Girls' School in 1911 for the Muslim Girls.' Rokeya published a number of articles, short stories and novels in which she developed her ideas on the need to awaken women to their oppression and the role of education in this process⁶⁸. Sister Subalakshmi tried her best for the emancipation of women. Begum Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz's mother, Amirunnessa, founder member of Anjuman-e- Khawatin –e-Islam in Punjab and some other Muslim women in Punjab played important role in the All India Women's movement. The opportunity of getting modern education produced a number of higher educated and progressive women like Sarala Devi, Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Bose who were participated to reform the society and founded many organizations. Thus during the course of the nineteenth century the pattern of women lives began to change and they produced almost 400 literary works ranging from poetry to novels and autobiographies. Besides the male social reformers women also became active agents for progressing of women education. Through their writings and associations, they communicated with each other and developed a new social network.⁶⁹ They took active parts in the process of change, and came forward to help other women. The progressive and educated women of both the communities found women's organization by themselves. Greatly encouraged by their male guardians to "to move with the times" they joined new clubs and associations formed particularly for women.

With the development of female education, several women's organizations were founded in different parts of India for the uplift and enlightenment of women. The Bramho Samaj, the

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.46.

⁶⁶ Ibid.p. 47.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 54.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.56.

⁶⁹ Geraldine Forbs, ibid.p.29.

Sadharan Bramho Samaj, the Parthana Samaj etc. played vital role for women's right. The Arya Mahila Samaj founded by Ramabai did much for improving women's status. The Bharat Mahila Parishad of the National Social Conference (1887) encouraged women to work side by side with men. Saraladevi Choudhurani's Bharat Stree Mahamandal (1910) worked in Allahabad, Lahore, Delhi, Karachi, Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapore and Calcutta for the moral and material progress of all women throughout India. The Women's Indian Association (1917), the National Council of Women in India (1925) and the All- India Women's Conference (1927) did a lot for the abolition of *Purdah*, child marriage, social prejudices and took up the causes of female education and political liberty.⁷⁰ The Sakhi Samiti (1861) of Swarna Kumari Devi, daughter of Devendra Nath Tagore urged the Hindu, Muslim and Christian women to participate in it. The Bangiya Nari Samaj (1921), the Bengal Women's Education League (1927), and All- Bengal Women's Union (1932) contributed to the development of the status of women in Bengal.

The rapid entry of Indian women into politics in the early part of the twentieth century was a remarkable chapter of Indian history. Women started to participate in the mass movement organized by the Indian National Congress. During the time of Swadeshi Movement the women first actively participated in the movement. Gandhi also tried for the liberation of women from the miseries and mobilized them for the freedom struggle. Gandhian phase of the national movement was notable in which women's participation significantly increased. Gandhi spoke traditional idioms but in a very subtle way liberated women from the stranglehold of patriarchal tradition.⁷¹ Thus at the very moment when Congress and Mahatma Gandhi were calling on them for a national effort the Indian women broke their age long restriction and taking part in political mass movement, picketing of liquor shops, marching in demonstrations, courting jails, facing lathi charges and bullets.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted women to become equal partners in the battle of *Swaraj*, (self government). During the Civil Disobedience Movement 1930-31 women hailing from different communities and regions came out openly to break salt laws, forest laws and other government

⁷⁰ Aparna Basu & Bharati Roy, *Women's Struggle: A History of All- Indian Women's Conference 1927-1990*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1990) ; Women's Indian Association. Quinquennial Report, 1917-22, WIA Papers

⁷¹ Chanana Karuna, art, *Gandhi , Women's Roles and the Freedom Movement*, Gender and Nation, Nehru museum, New Delhi, 2001,p.301.

regulations. They took out *prabhat pheris* (morning processions), picketed liquor shops, and held meetings and demonstrations in support of the movement. Some 2,000 women were imprisoned during 1930-32. Despite severe repression of women by the government the protest activities continued. Sarojini Naidu raided the Dharasana salt works; Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya attacked salt fields in the precincts of Bombay; Swarup Rani Nehru (wife of Motilal Nehru) led the procession of *Satyagrahis* in Allahabad along with others, and Urmila Devi (sister of Deshbandhu C.R Dass) led the lady picketers in Calcutta. Such was the impact of these activities that the government had to ban a number of women organizations in Bengal, namely Ladies Picketing Board, Nari Satyagraha Committee, Nikhil Jatiya Nari Sangha and Rashtriya Mahila Sangha.

Women continued to participate in the struggle for freedom in the years to come. A number of women courted arrest when Vinoba Bhave launched the individual satyagraha on 17 October 1940. When Mahatma Gandhi gave the call ' Do or die' at the time of the Quit India Movement it roused the passion of women nationalists. Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Amar Kaur and Pushpa Gujral from the Punjab, Anasuyabai Kale from Madhya Pradesh, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi, Mira Ben, Khurshed Behn and Usha Mehta from Bombay, Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali from Karnataka were the most prominent among those who courted arrest.⁷²

Apart from participating in political activities, a section of women remained active in the field of social work, seeking inspiration and guidance from Mahatma Gandhi. This included participation in and taking charge of the village reconstruction programmes, work for the removal of untouchability and other forms of social and economic oppression and attempts to root out illiteracy, orthodoxy, superstition and communal separatism.⁷³

Thus by the end of the nineteenth century and first half of twentieth century, there were a number of women who were educated, articulate, mobile, and increasingly involved in public activities which was the result of long struggles for liberation of women by the enlightened social reformers. "It was the efforts of these progressive intellectuals that women are now even members of legislature and participated in the public life."

⁷² Aditi Falguni, *Banglar Nari Sangramer Itihas*, Annesha Prokashan, Dhaka, 2010, p. 47

⁷³ C.M Agrawal, *ibid.* p. 200

Statement of problem

The present topic “ Gender and Society- A Study of Change in Muslim Women in Colonial Surma Valley- 1874- 1947” has emphasized on how did colonial rule affect women lives and how did it help to transform the Muslim society in the colonial Surma Valley. Besides highlighting the social status of women the present topic also throws light on some of the issues like marriage, domesticity, purdah, education, participation in public life etc.

Traditionally women have been excluded from historical accounts which have focused on the “Great Man of History” premises, thereby writing women out of history.⁷⁴ Not only political but even social and economic historians have left out women.⁷⁵ Furthermore, women have almost always been defined according to their relationship to men. A woman is not a person in her own right; she is primarily her father’s daughter, a wife or a mother.⁷⁶ The Philosopher Simone De Beauvoir said, “One is not born a woman, one becomes one.”⁷⁷

In the 1970s, the member countries of the UN, asked to appoint committees to enquire the status and position of women and produce reports on it. Like other member countries, India also set up commissions to study the status of women. As a result women issues received much attention from the government, the press and women themselves.⁷⁸ They raised issues about gender inequality, gender justice, property inheritance, gender relation etc. In USA Women Studies emerged as a new academic discipline and scholars tried to write about the history of the ‘second sex’.⁷⁹ The women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the western world had a fundamental impact on the establishment of women’s studies. It started to write “her- story” as opposed to “his-story”.⁸⁰ In women history, women are as objects of study, subjects of the story.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Sangeeta R. Gupta, *Emerging Voices: South Asian American Women Redefine Self, Family and Community*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1999, p.23.

⁷⁵ A. Suryakumari, *Women’s Studies*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993, p.23.

⁷⁶ Sangeeta R. Gupta, *ibid.* p. 23.

⁷⁷ A. Suryakumari, *ibid.* p. 13.

⁷⁸ Rehana Ghadially, *Women in Indian Society*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 1988, p. 1.

⁷⁹ A. Suryakumari, *ibid.* p.28.

⁸⁰ Sangeeta R. Gupta, *ibid.* p.23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 23.

In the last thirty years many books and materials about the women studies have been published and there are also numerous research works at the national level but at the regional or local study is scanty. No serious attempt specially to study the question of women status and the impact of colonial rule in the Surma Valley has been made. It is in this relatively silent area that this research work intends to focus. Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876-1939*, has focused on the new role of Muslim women in colonial Bengal, their education, writings, social change but nothing about on the Sylhet and Cachar. Anurupa Biswas, in her book '*Barak Uptyakar Nari Jagoron*' gave special reference to the women in Barak Valley. The present work is but a modest attempt to fill this gap.

Objectives

This study aims to address these issues:

This study aims at discussing the position and status of Muslim women in the colonial period, 1832-1947 and its relevant issues like marriage, purdah system, domesticity, ideal relationship between men and women in the broader context of change in colonial India.

It also intends to study progressive transformation among some sections of the Muslim society and their endeavor for reform on women issues. The study has an attempt to analyse how did colonial rule affect women lives and how did it help to transform the Muslim society in the colonial Surma Valley.

The study has also highlighted the impact of social reform movement on women lives and changing attitude of the society towards women after introducing various social reforms by the British Government.

This study also focused women's experiences and narratives through archival and interview material, on how women themselves perceived and participated in this change.

Methodology

The method of data collection and collection of source materials which are used for this research work has dictated by the specific objectives of our enquiry. The source materials which are used

for this work may be broadly classified as primary and secondary source. Primary sources exploration had done in the Record Room of the Deputy Commissioner, Silchar, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, Archival material at Assam, State Record Room and Archive, Guwahati. Indian Council for Historical Research, Guwahati, Silchar District Library, Silchar. The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, The National Library, Calcutta, Swadeshi Research Centre, Karimganj, Kendriya Muslim Sahitya Sangsad, Sylhet, Bangladesh, Jalalabad, Folklore Study Center, Sylhet, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Asiatic Society, Dhaka,

Apart from these, some non conventional sources also yielded considerable information for the project. We have particularly focused on the folklores and folksongs. Besides this, the source which are used for writing this thesis include official government records, newspapers, collected speeches and writings, reports and minutes, memories and autobiographies, oral histories, personal letters, diaries, and songs, census reports, education reports as well as monographs and articles etc also as important sources for collecting data and historical evidences.

Besides the above mentioned methods, the field research technique is also an important method for collecting source materials. Though there are a number of books on Gender study but these books are not giving any thing specific about Muslim women in Surma Valley. So for this micro study, field research technique like discussions, oral interviews, scheduled questionnaire are very much necessary for collection data and information.

The secondary source material comprises the published works of other scholars and the author's personal correspondence with persons closely related to the theme of the present work. Magazines, newspaper, articles published from time to time and also published from Sylhet in the early nineteenth century has taken in to account to write this thesis.

A part from consulting secondary source like books and journals both in Bengali and in English. I have consulted some primary sources like newspaper, and contemporary newspaper are perhaps massive.

So far as that has been adopted in preparing the work is concerned, the empirical methodology is basically followed and generally used.

Survey of literature

For nearly half a century there are a number of seminal books on gender study which focuses specifically on women in India and Bengal. Hence, it is very important to review some of these existing literatures which are very useful for this study. The period of the research work is vast; moreover in this period from 1874 to 1947 the political and socio-economic conditions of whole of India had undergone changes. Colonial Surma valley under the Britishers from 1874-1947 saw various changes in every section of the society, especially women. Though much literature and source material is available on this subject, but we find very little work on the regional level and therefore it needs more probing.

There are many books on the social history of the Indian women. A.S. Aterkar's '*The Position of Women in Hindu civilization*' deal with the histories of Indian women.⁸² Neera Desai's '*Women in Modern India*' was the first social history of Indian women with women as its subject.⁸³ Jeffery Patricia, *Frogs In a Well- Indian Women in Purdah*, examines the position of Muslims in India who were the hereditary custodians or pirezade at a Sufi shrine in Delhi. It gives a detailed analysis of the position of women living in purdah. It sheds new light on the question of the position of women in India through extensive interviews with the pirezade women themselves.⁸⁴ Padmini Sengupta's '*The Story of Women in India*' also offered women as their subjects. Imtiaz Ahmed's '*Modernization and social change*' is also an important book for getting knowledge of Muslim reform movement which was initiated by the progressive Muslim intellectuals and the *Ulemas*.⁸⁵ Meredith, Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, looks at topics salient to women to assess the changes experienced by the women in the Brahma Samaj.⁸⁶ Kenneth W Jones, *Socio- Religious Reform Movements in British India*, is a

⁸² A.S Alterkar, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1959

⁸³ Neera Desai, *Women in Modern India*, Vora and Co, Bombay, 1957

⁸⁴ Jeffery Patricia, *Frogs In a Well- Indian Women in Purdah*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1979

⁸⁵ Imtiaz Ahmed, *Modernization and Social Change among Muslim in India*, Manoar Book Service, 1983

⁸⁶ Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, N.J Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985

regionally based history of religious reform movements in India.⁸⁷ Kanak Mukherjee's in his '*Women Emancipation Movement in India*' is focused on the women emancipation movement from different views. Through out his book, the author tried to establish the relation between the women emancipation movement and the freedom movement. He argued that the women's emancipation movement developed stage by stage along with the freedom movement and the class struggles of the workers, peasants and all other sections of the oppressed people.⁸⁸ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women : Essays in Colonial History*, is a collection of articles by historians turning new theoretical perspectives on conventional questions.⁸⁹

Kumar Radha, '*The History of Doing*' gives a brief interpretative history of women's organisations and associations in the different parts of India.⁹⁰ From the last two decades the research scholars and historians published many books on the Muslim women in Bengal in general and in India in Particular.

As this study deals with the comparative study of status of the Hindu and Muslim women. Manisha Roy's, *Bengali Women*, give a detailed picture of the relationship of Bengali woman with her husband and any other member of her laws family. She has also written about the every stage of a woman life and the roles and obligation imposed upon her by the patriarchal society.⁹¹ Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, (1876-1939)* has focused on the Urdu-speaking classes of upper India. She defined Muslim elite women as "Bhadramahidla" and first used this term among the Muslim society. The subject of her book is, women and gendered social concepts during the colonial period.⁹² Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, has focused on women who were literate that makes them, by their small numbers, elite. The main object of this book is to privilege women's own accounts. It gives a sympathetic and comprehensive study of Indian women. The author begins with reform movements for women and their impact. In this book, Geraldine Forbes clearly stated how

⁸⁷ W Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in India*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁸⁸ Kanak Mukherjee, *Women's Emancipation Movement in India*, National Book Centre, New Delhi, 1989

⁸⁹ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989

⁹⁰ Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing*, Kali for women, New Delhi, 1993

⁹¹ Manisha Roy, *Bengali Women*, USA, 1993

⁹² Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*, Leiden, Newyork, 1996

colonial rule effect women lives. She argued that among the other reforms, encouragement for female education was one of the most important items of the reform agenda that contributed to the emancipation of women as modern education produce some “new progressive women” who began to define their own problems and many women’s organization developed through which women began asking for their rights.⁹³ Naseem Ahmed in his *Liberation of Muslim Women*, commented the Muslim women of the Middle- East countries tried to break the traditional bondage of the four walls. He argued that there is also a wave of women emancipation movement in the Middle- East countries in the recent years. He also discussed about the traditional systems of *Mohar*, *talaq*, subordination of women etc. According to him, the Muslim women could not enjoy all the rights such as right to inheritance, right to *khula* are which was given to her by the Holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad.⁹⁴ Fatima Ali, *Women in Islam*, (Medina Publications, Dhaka, 2005),, are very important books for this study. These books described about the lives of the women on the Islamic view point and these books also give information how these laws were practiced by the patriarchal society.

Similarly the subject of Dr. Anowar Hossain’s *Muslim Women’s Struggle for Freedom in Colonial Bengal* is the study of the role of the upper and middle class urban Muslim women in Bengal in the context of “Muslim Revivalism” under the British colonial rule in India from 1873 to 1940. The study in some cases takes into consideration of the ideas and activities of some non-Bengali elite Muslim women living outside Bengal. The purpose of the study is to investigate and explore whether there was any quest for modernity among the Bengali Muslim women or whether they remained completely apathetic to the process of modernity.⁹⁵ In “*Visible Histories, disappearing Women: Producing Muslim Womanhood in Late Colonial Bengal*” Mahua Sarkar examines how Muslim women in Colonial Bengal were excluded from the history. She argues that the contribution of the Muslim women did not come to be light.⁹⁶

Besides this, there are many Bengali books and literatures which are also very useful for this study. Maleka Begam’s, “*Banglar Nari Andolon*” pointed out various stages of the women

⁹³ Geraldine Forbs, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge , 1998

⁹⁴ Naseem Ahmed, *Liberation of Muslim Women*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2001

⁹⁵ Anowar Hossain, *Muslim Women’s Struggle Freedom in Colonial Bengal*, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta, 1998.

⁹⁶ Mahua Sarkar, *Visible Histories, Disappearing Women: Producing Womanhood in Late colonial Bengal*, Zubban, Kali for Women, 2008

awakening and various issues raised by the social reform movement in the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century. The subject of this book, women emancipation movement during the colonial period is one of the most important issue all over world even today. Maleka pointed out that there were a critical moment between the women's movement and women's awakening.⁹⁷ Gulam Murshid's *'Nari Pragati: Adhunikatar Abhigate Banga Ramani'* discussed how the English educated Bengali Bhadrakalok tried to modernise their wives and daughters and how the women themselves supported these movements. This book also dealt with how much was the social reform movements successful to modernize the women. Anurupa Biswas's *Barak Uptyakar Nari Jagaran* is dealt with the history of the women awakening in Barak Valley. In this book, she has discussed about the colonial history of the Barak Valley and changes and reforms made by the British Government. The changing position of women lives in the society and their participation in various fields is the core subject of her book.⁹⁸

Mahmuda Islam's "*Nari Itihase Upekkhita*" is pointed out how men excluded women from History. According to her, women had more contribution than men for progressing the civilization but their contribution was totally denied by the patriarchal society.⁹⁹ "*Gender Aloke Songskriti*" edited by Selina Hossain and Biswajit Ghosh observed that the culture which was established by the patriarchal society and also discussed how patriarchal society snatched all the rights from women and pushed them to live as a handicapped.¹⁰⁰

There are many articles also used for this study. Asghar Ali Engineer's "*Status of Muslim Women*" examined the social status of Muslim women on the light of the Quran and how far it is practiced in the patriarchal society. He argued that it is not religion but patriarchy which is the real culprit. Religion itself is the end product of patriarchal society and so is male domination.¹⁰¹ Hena dass's "*Syleheter Narisamaj O Nari Andolonar Bikash, vol I*" is very useful for the study.

⁹⁷ Maleka Begum, *Banglar Nari Aandolon*, Dacca University Press Ltd. Dhaka, 1989

⁹⁸ Anurupa Biswas, *Barak Uptyakar Nari Jagaran*, Calcutta, 1998

⁹⁹ Mahmuda Islam, *Nari Itihase Upekkhita*, Mowla Brothers, Dhaka, 2004

¹⁰⁰ Selina Hossain and Biswajit Ghosh, *Gender Aloke Songskriti*, Mowla Brothers, Dhaka, 2008

¹⁰¹ Asgarh Ali Engineer, *Status of Muslim Women*, Economic and Political Weekly, February, 5, 1994

This article dealt with the women emancipation movement, their education, participation in the politics in Sylhet.¹⁰²

Sharmila Mitra's "*The Movement for the Women's Emancipation within the Bengali Muslim Community in India*" examines the changing role of Muslim women in Bengal in the early twentieth century. This article focuses on obstacles to social progress as well as on the positive role played by a section of the Bengali Muslim community in enabling modernization through a programme of social reform designed to emancipate women from their traditional bondage in the male-dominated society. It examines the writings (in Urdu) of women involved in the social reform movement and focuses in turn on the three issues: purdah, women's rights and education for women.¹⁰³

Thus in the last thirty years many books and materials about the women studies have been published and there are also numerous research works at the national level but at the regional or local study scanty. It is in this relatively silent area that this research work intends to focus. Besides this we find marginalized voices of minority community women. Therefore we have to rely on oral histories, constructing history through life stories and women's experiences and narratives through interview material. This will be done through selected woman protagonist, family histories and individuals examples, as data on general women population is scanty.

¹⁰² Hena Dass, *Sylheter Nari Samaj O Nari Andoloner Bikash*, Vol I, Brihattar Sylheter Itihas, ed by Shubendu Imam, Md. Abdul Ajj, Habibur Rahman, Abul Fateh Fattah, Abul Jashar, Sylhet, 1997.

¹⁰³ Sharmila Mitra, *The Movement for the Women's Emancipation within the Bengali Muslim Community in India*, Women's History Review, vol.15, no,3, July, 2006