

CHAPTER-2

**Gender Transformation in Muslim Societies
in Colonial India**

After the consolidation of the British power in India, many far reaching changes took place in the field of administration, society, economic and politics etc.¹The colonial rule introduced new economic rules, land reforms, and introduced modern education system which produced new middle class intellectuals who initiated the socio- religious reform movements all over the country. The Bramho Samaj, the Parthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj along with other social reform movements also took up the cause of women. Social reformers like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Mahadev Gobinda Ranade, Behramji Malabari, Dhondo Keshab Karve, R. Venkata Ratnam Naidu, Virasalingam Pantulu, Rai Salig Ram and some others pleaded for women liberation movement through female education.²Though the women liberation movement was started by the progressive male reformers but later on the women also joined in it. Saraladevi Choudhurani, Swarnakumar Devi, Pandita Ramabai Saraswati, Mataji Tapaswani advocated female education and tried their best for the upliftment of the women status.³ These new educated women founded women organizations in different parts of India for the uplift and enlightenment of women. The Arya Mahila Samaj founded by Ramabai did much for improving women's status. The Bharata Mahila Parishad also encouraged women to work side by side with men. Saraladevi Choudhurani's Bharat Stree Mahamondal (1910) worked in Allahbad, Lahore, Delhi, Karachi. Amritsar, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Midnapore and Calcutta for the moral and material progress of all women throughout India. ⁴ The Sakhi Samiti (1861) of Swarnakumari Devi urged the Hindu, Muslim and Christian women to participate in it.⁵

The socio-religious reform movement among the Muslims emerged rather late compare to the other communities. When in the nineteenth century social reform movements started among all the communities by the progressive intellectuals for removing social evils and get impetus for modern education for all classes of the people including women, the Muslim society remained unchanged. As a result, the professional classes and the bourgeoisie developed within the Muslim community later than in the Hindu community. The former found the latter already firmly established in government services, as also in key positions in trade, industry and finance. According to A.R. Desai, “ The upper strata of the Muslim

¹ Begum Rowshan Ara, *History of Muslim Education in Bengal 1780-1882*, Kolkata, 2008, p.1.

² Anowar Hossain, *Muslim Women's Struggle for Freedom in Colonial Bengal*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2008, p.143.

³ Ibid. p.144.

⁴ Ibid. p. 144.

⁵ Ibid. p.144.

community in the pre-British period, were of the whole, divorced from medieval trade or money lending and were mainly engaged in military and administrative careers. Further, they predominantly resided in Northern India which came under the British rule much later. The vast Muslim population of Bengal mainly belonged to the poorer classes. Hence a modern intelligentsia, a modern educated middle class and a bourgeoisie, on a substantial scale, sprang from within the Muslim community later than from within the Hindu community.”⁶ The position of the Muslims deteriorated, their distress became much more acute than that of the other communities, and that they could not make an adjustment with the new state of things as the replacement of the Muslim rule by the British rule wounded the pride and self respect of the Muslims as a ruling race.⁷ The various administrative and economic measures introduced in the country following the consolidation of the British rule were contributory factors in the decay of their position and privileges.⁸ There were many reasons for that. The Muslims felt that they comprised the ruling community in India. They were particularly hostile to the British whom they accused of expropriating them of their political power.⁹ The anti- Muslim policy of the British government after the mutiny intensified the anti- British feeling of the Muslims. This made the Muslims avoid any contact with the new culture and education with the British introduced in India.¹⁰ . 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 India which had infused new life into Hindu and Bramho community also had profound implications for Muslim society.¹¹ The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a gradual process of social change which may be termed the Muslim’s awakening. This transformation of society largely initiated by the new generation of Muslim men who had received western secular education, and broke away from the old way of life and the traditional superstition.

This chapter has discussed the transformation which led to social reform movement and the changes that followed such a process.

In the nineteenth century there were two reform movements among the Indian Muslims. One was Islamic revivalism spearheaded by the middle class *Ulema* and the other organized a

⁶A.R Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, New Delhi, 2003 p, 163.

⁷ W.W.Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans*, , London, 1871 ,(reprint, Delhi, 1969) pp,148-83

⁸ Begum Rowshan Ara, *ibid*, p. 3.

⁹ A.R Desai, *ibid*.p.280.

¹⁰ *Ibid*,p. 280.

¹¹ . Bharati Ray, *From the seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1995,p.109-10.

modernization campaign led by educated middle class.¹² The first group advocated ‘Islamic revivalism’ which was directed to the purification of Islam and turned into socio-economic and political character.¹³ The most prestigious among them was Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, who authored the *Behishati Zewar* (Ornament of Paradise). In this book, the Muslim woman is advised in order her life in accordance with Islamic principles in the traditional way.¹⁴ Hazi Shariat Allah, Dudu Miyan and Titu Mir all became involved in the socio- economic battles of the Muslims by protecting their religious rights.¹⁵ Another movement is associated with Shah Waliullah in Delhi, who opposed the unorthodox religious practices and revived the Shia sect and strict monotheism. The philosophical and learned tradition of the Firangi Mahal in Lucknow was incorporated into the new educational syllabus and propagated throughout India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sharitulla of Bengal was the leader of the Faraizi movement Bengal which took up the cause of the peasants and even spoke against the caste system among the Muslims.¹⁶ The most notable of the Muslim reformers was Sayyid Ahmed of Rai Bareilly, in Uttar Pradesh. He attracted the Muslim artisans of the declining weaving towns of Allahabad and Patna finding a ready audience and giving the common people dignity and an identity through a common faith at a time of social dislocation. He realized that unless the Muslims adapted themselves to the changed circumstances of British rule, they would be deprived of all new opportunities for status and prosperity. He was highly impressed by modern scientific thought and worked all his life to reconcile it with Islam. He interpreted the Quran in the light of rationalism and science.¹⁷ He urged the people to develop a critical approach and freedom of thought. He also warned against fanaticism, narrow-mindedness and exclusiveness. He asked the people to be broadminded and tolerant.¹⁸

During the later half of the nineteenth century, the thought process of the Indian Muslims substantially changed in colonial India. A section of the educated Indian Muslims realized that there was no alternative but to make friends with the British and embrace their polity. They tried to regenerate the Muslim community by advocating western education and co-operation with the British. The aim of all these social reformers was to liberate people from

¹² Bharati Ray, *ibid.* p.109.

¹³ Anwar Hossain, *ibid.* p.32. Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India Deoband, 1860-1900*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 5.

¹⁴ Sajida Shabbir, *Struggles for Muslim Women's Rights in British India, (1857-1947)*, Pakistan Vision, Dec 2011, vol 12, issue 2, p. 6.

¹⁵ Asim Roy, *Islam in History and Politics: Perspective from South Asia*, Oxford University Press, P.53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.55.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 55.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.56.

superstitions and illiteracy and directed them towards the path of progress. They produced a good number of Bengali and Urdu literature and journals to spread Islamic heritage and to remove the prevailing social evils. Attention was almost focused on degrade and degenerate conditions of women. The customs of child marriage, polygamy and talaq came in for severe criticism. Reform was the call of the movement.¹⁹ The question of educating Muslim women generated much discussion. The Muslim reformers wanted education for women almost for similar reason as their Bramho-Hindu counterparts. The Muslim reformers initiated the process of change among women through education.

The liberal reformers such as Syed Ahmed Khan in Aligarh, Abdul Lateef, Amir Ali, and others in India tried to make a friendly relationship with the British. Abdul Lateef realized that the British help would be necessary for the development of his own community. To promote their educational and material development, he adopted two- fold programmes: the promotion of loyalty to the British rule and the dissemination of the English education among them. Lateef advocated English for the Muslims in order to progress the society and to participate in the British administration. For this, he established the Mohammedan Literary society in 1863²⁰ in Calcutta. He was also associated with the establishment of Presidency College. In North West Frontier Province and Oudh the efforts of the Muslim community to maintain its position were supervised by Syed Ahmed Khan.²¹ Like his other colleagues, he also advocated western education and reapproachment between the Muslim elite and the British administration with a motive to convince the Muslims to give up the dream of restoring of Mughal glory and to get advantages from the British rule.²² He emphasized the necessity of both western learning and traditional religious education and gave a new pattern of thought. He was considered as the pioneer of Muslim modernization in India.²³ He The Anglo Mohammedan Oriental College was established through his endeavours in 1875 and was an effort to impart education to Muslim. He determined that the Muslim community would remain entirely loyal to the Government.²⁴

Another social reformer, Syed Ameer Ali rendered significant services to the regeneration of the Muslims. He fostered English education among the Muslims and realized that without

¹⁹ Shahin Akhtar and Mousumi Bhowmik, *Zenana Mehfil, Bangali Mussalman Lekhikader Nirbachit Rachana*, Stree Publication, Kolkata, 1998, p. 15.

²⁰ Anwar Hossain, *ibid.* p.33.

²¹ Sahida Lateef, *Muslim Women in India*, Kali for women, New Delhi, 1990, p. 25.

²² Anwar Hossain, *ibid.* p. 36.

²³ *Ibid.* p.36.

²⁴ Sahida Lateef, *ibid.* p.25.

receiving modern education, the Muslim society could not compete with other communities. To express the views of the Muslims to the British government Ameer Ali established the Central National Mohammedan Association in 1877.²⁵ Ameer Ali in his paper “A cry from the Indian Mohammedans” focused the deplorable condition of Muslim community in 1882.²⁶ On behalf of the Central National Mohammedan Association he sent a memorial to the British government. As a result the Government of India granted certain concessions for the primary education of the Muslims. Ameer opposed the oriental study and wanted that the Muslims should be given English education which should be made compulsory subject in high school and colleges. He wanted a change in the intellectual and political life of the Muslims. Ameer Ali in his famous book *The Spirit of Islam*, expressed the ideas of Prophet Mohammad and cleared the misconceptions about Islam. His efforts for political upliftment and cultural revival and intellectual awakening of the Muslims give him a unique position among the Indian Muslims.²⁷

Like Ameer Ali, Ameer Hossain, advocated friendly relation with the British and encouraged English education. Being a modern educationist, he expressed his views to abolish the Hoogly Madrassa and proposed to open a college attached to the Calcutta Madrassa. He made an appeal to the Government to establish an English medium College for the Muslim students in the Muslim dominated area but the British Government did not accept his proposals, they only gave some concessions to the Muslim students.²⁸

In 1889, Mirza Gulam Ahmed organized the Ahmadiya Movement which was based on liberal principles. It started a network of school and colleges for that purpose and published periodicals and books, both in English and vernaculars.²⁹ Tyabji, an enlightened and progressive Muslim, was the founder of the anti-purdah movement in Bombay.³⁰ Shaikh Abdul Halil Sharar, an outstanding author and journalist, organized a veritable crusade against purdah in the United Provinces.³¹

Besides this, the colonial administration also took specific steps towards the end of the nineteenth century for the progress of education, in which Muslim were seen to be trailing Hindus. According to the Report of the Moslem Education Advisory Committee(1934),

²⁵ Anowar Hossain, *ibid.* p. 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.35.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.36

²⁹ *Ibid.* p.282.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.284.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 285.

following the recommendations made by W.W Hunter in 1871, the government took a number of steps to encourage “secular” education among Muslims. These included financial assistance in the form of special endowments, liberal grants-in – aid, and special scholarships for Muslim students; encouraging the *madrasas* and *maktabs* (elementary schools) to include the study of “rational” subjects in addition to religious texts; teaching Arabic, Persian and Urdu in schools and colleges; setting up special hostels for Muslim students in urban centres and appointing more Muslims to educational positions.

Like their other Hindu counterparts, the Muslims also understood the importance of female education. In 1867, the issue of educating Muslim girls was raised at an assembly of the Bengal Social Science Association. Maulavi Abdul Hakim of the Calcutta Madrassah summarily dismissed the idea, maintaining that the education provided at home was adequate. On the other hand, Syed Ameer Ali stated at the All Indian Muslim Education Conference in 1891 that female education should advance at the same pace as male education.³² The conservative Muslim society regarding female education was voiced at a meeting of the Bengal Social Science Association in Calcutta, where Nawab Abdul Latif (1828-1893) read paper on Muslim education.³³

Abdul Latif and his contemporary Syed Ameer Ali laid the base for modernization for Muslim in Bengal along with the other leaders of that community.³⁴ Latif was untiring in his efforts to promote western education for the well-being of Muslims. Thus his stand on the issue of female education would bear considerable significance.³⁵ Maulvi Abdul Hakim of the Calcutta Madrasa, female education should imparted within the home because on that time it was unthinkable that Muslim girls went outside the home for education, violating the *pardah*.³⁶

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-98), the renowned pioneer of the Aligarh Movement, was ambivalent about female education.³⁷ Syed Ahmed was not opposed to female education as such, but probably thought the time was not yet ripe considering the socio-economic status of Muslims. His attitude towards women was quite biased. Sir Syed was in favour of veils for Muslim women and also believed that women should only receive education at their homes.

³² Sonia Nishat Amin, art, *The Early Muslim Bhadramahila: The Growth of Learning and Creativity, 1876 to 1939*, Bharati Roy,(ed), *From the Seams of History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997,p.109.

³³ Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal*, Leiden , New York, 2008,p.141.

³⁴ *Ibid*.p.141.

³⁵ *Ibid*. p.141.

³⁶ *Ibid*.p. 141.

³⁷*Ibid*.p.143.

Like other Muslims, Sir Syed thought that an allowing Muslim woman would be wrong and as they would mix with other girls of all classes, caste, creeds were studying jointly. Sir Syed had many followers who took the issues of female education with more vigour and clarity than himself. In the Muhammeden educational conference, the Muslim men for the first time raised the issue of education in their favour. The resolution passed by the conference were opposed tooth and nail by religious and fundamentalist section of the Muslim community. Sir Syed Khan's reaction is an example of his backward attitude amongst the more enlightened members of the society. He said "people would be supervised to learn that I am progressive in my thoughts and actions but in connection with the education of women my ideas correspond to these of our elders. This is not the proper time to open girls' schools and to ape the system of European schools for girls' education."³⁸ Reformers like Altaf Hussain Hali, Sayyid Mumtaz Ali and his wife Mohammadi Begum, Syed Mahmud and Sheikh Abdullah advocated mass female education. Soon a girls' school was set up at Aligarh in 1906 by Sheikh Abdulla and his wife. The followers of Sir Syed advocated girls' schools, set up teacher's training schools, published the first women's journals.³⁹ In 1915 the All India Muslim Ladies Conference was held and the burning topic was the female education.⁴⁰ In Bengal, the first woman to systematically and ceaselessly launch the campaign for Muslim women's education was Rokeya sakhwat Hossain who in 1911 set up a girls school "Sakhwat Memorial Girls' School" in Calcutta. She was ranked one of the great architects of the Bengal Awakening.⁴¹ Women's emancipation as Rokeya realized mostly depended on women's education. She treated female education as the savior of national degeneration throughout her action, speeches and writings. In her effort to popularize female education in a society that laid great stress on domestic values, she argued that only education could make a perfect householder, good wife and good companion.⁴²

In the beginning of the twentieth century, more steps for the educational development of the Muslims women were taken. Many women journals appeared. In 1908, Rashid ul Khaire started the publication of 'Asmat' at Delhi, Abdullah's "Khantoon" emerged at Aligarh in 1909, Syed Mumtaz Ali's "Taleem-E- Naswan" came into being at Lahore in 1898. But the most prestigious of all the journals was Fatima Begum's "Sharifa Bibi". The journals were

³⁸ Sajida Shabbir, *ibid.* p.6.

³⁹ Sonia Nishat Amin, *ibid.* p.142.

⁴⁰ Sajida Shabbir, *ibid.* p.6.

⁴¹ Sonia Nishat Amin, *ibid.* p. 155.

⁴² Anowar Hossain, *Begum Rokeya: Nari Jagoroner Agradut*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2006, p.63.

published to motivate more and more Muslim women to receive education.⁴³ During that time, in Bengal, many Muslim educated reformers published newspapers and magazines for the reform of the Muslim society along with the women issues. These are : *Akbar-e-Islamia* (1884), *Hitkari* (1890), *Islam Pracharak* (1891), *Mihir* (1892), *Hafez*(1892),*Kohinoor* (1894), *Soltan*(1902, *Nabanoor* (1903), *Al- Eslam* (1915), *Islam Darshan* (1916), *Bangiya Mussalman Sahitya Patrika*,(1918), *Saugat*, (1918), *Banganur* (1919) , *Moslem Bharat* (1920), *Dhumketu* (1922), *Sahachar* (1922), *Samyabadi* (1923), *GanaBani* (1926), *Shikha*(1927), *Naoraj* (1927), *Mohammadi* (1927), *Sanchay* (1928), *Jagaran* (1928), *Jayati* (1930), and *Bulbul* (1934).⁴⁴

It was only in the early part of the twentieth century that the Muslim women also awake against to redress perceived social ills such as polygamy, child marriage, and advocate female education, eradication of *abarodh* and generally improve women's status in society. Though their numbers were very small but they gave a new orientation to the society. They contributed many ways either through writings or participation in the freedom movement. The Muslim women' awakening is a subset of the 'Muslim awakening, which in its turn formed part of the greater Bengali awakening. Maleka Begum in '*Banglar Nari Andolan*' refers to the late nineteenth century as a period of women's awakening and the early twentieth century as one which saw the birth of women's movement in Bengal.⁴⁵ Before participation in the public life, they widely campaigned for women's emancipation through literature as it was one of the grounds of their battle for liberation.

Thus, during the first half of the twentieth century, the liberation movement for the Muslim women gained much importance. The Muslim social reformers and writers came forward to address issues ranging from the social to the theological, applying an unbiased and discriminatory critical analysis on the topic in women question.⁴⁶ Altaf Hussain Hali devoted his *Majlis an- nisa* to the plight of Muslim women. Sayyaid Mumtaz Ali commented on polygamy, the age of marriage, *purdah* and the empowerment of Muslim women.⁴⁷ Nazir Ahmed, a civil servant set a model for writers in the *Mirat al-urus* (The bride's mirror) detailing the evils of polygamy and the virtues of female education and widow remarriage. Justice Shah Din in Punjab advocated training for Muslim girls, if not in scholarly pursuits

⁴³ Sajida Shabbir, *ibid.* p. 6.

⁴⁴ Mahua Sarkar, *Visible Histories: Disappearing Women Producing Muslim Womanhood in late Colonial Bengal*, Zubaan, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 2008, p.83.

⁴⁵ Ray Bharati, *ibid.* p.110.

⁴⁶ Dr. Vinita Kaur, *ibid.* p.88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.88.

then at least in the basic skills of reading, writing, arithmetic, hygiene and home economics.⁴⁸ Munshi Namdar in his *Dui Sateener Jhagrah* (1867) cautioned the readers about the discord that might ensue from practicing polygamy⁴⁹. Nausher Ali Khan Yusufzahi in his *Bangiya Mussalman* (1890) criticized the practice of polygamy. He said “Our gaze has not yet turned to the poisonous effects of polygamy, the chief of which are production of too many children, domestic dissension and female suicide. The incidence of polygamy is not small by any count in this country. Among the Muslims of Bengal for every 1000 married males there are 1033 married females, i.e 4% of marriages are polygamous.⁵⁰ Criticizing the practice of child-marriage or early marriage Ismail Hossain Siraji wrote in *Al- Eslam* in 1918 that the system of child marriage was a hindrance to female education and progress and the general blossoming of a child’s life.⁵¹

In 1919 Moniruzzaman Islambadi condemned child marriage on medical and economic grounds.⁵² In 1335 B.S the Muslim periodical *Moyajjin* lamented the fact that one of the causes of the miseries of Muslim family as well as society is the early marriage and that Muslims girls are given marriage early by their guardians without the proper consent of their daughters.⁵³

Munshi Mehrullah in his *Bidhaba Ganjana and Bishadbhander* (1894) severely criticized the practice of child marriage and favoured the widow remarriage.⁵⁴ He was greatly concerned with the misfortune of both the Hindu and Muslim widows. Mohammad Kafiluddin drew attention to the miseries of the widows belonging to both the Hindus and Muslims in his novels *Tarabati Manohar* (1896) and expressed his firm opinion on widow remarriage.⁵⁵

In 1906 B.S.(1900) women’s emancipation figured as a subject of discussion in the *Islam Procharak*. In 1314 B.S. Munshi Karam Chand wrote an article in *Islam Procharak* entitled “*Talaq Ba Moslem Stree Barjan*” drawing the attention to the misuse of divorce which had thrown thousands of women in to indescribable sufferings and which was considered as the violation of the rule of Islam. Mohammad Karam Chand deplored that the Muslims were

⁴⁸ Ibid.p. 88.

⁴⁹ Kazi Abdul Mannan, *Adhunik Bangla Sahitya O Muslim Samaj* ,p.141-143

⁵⁰ Anowar Hossain, *ibid*.p.54.

⁵¹ Ismail Hossain Shiraji, “*Nari Jatir Durgati*”, *Al- Eslam*, Bhadra, 1324 B.S

⁵² Moiruzzaman Islambadi, “*Samaj O Sanskar*”, *Al- Eslam*, Asharh, 1326 B.S

⁵³ *Moyajjin*, Kartik, 1335B.S

⁵⁴ Mohammad Mehrullah, *Bidhaba Ganjana O Bishadbhander*, Jessore, 1375, p.80.

⁵⁵ Mohammad Kafiluddin, *Tarabati Manohar*, 1896, cited in Waqil Ahmed , vol.ii p.13.

treating their wives as any other property and divorced them on the most trivial grounds.⁵⁶ In 1919 Al-Eslam lamented that it was common practice for husbands to beat or divorce their wives simply for some trifling reasons such as that “there was either too much or too little salt in the curry.”⁵⁷

Begum Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain was considered as the pioneer of the Muslim female emancipation.⁵⁸ Rokeya’s bold formulation of women’s emancipation as laid down in her numerous writings, especially in “*Stree Jatir Abanati*” (The degraded Condition of Women) and ‘*Ardhangi*’ (His other Half) .To her, women’s emancipation meant the establishment of equal rights for women in the educational, economic and political spheres. Followed by Rokeya, a good number of Muslim females such as Azizunnessa, Khairunnessa,⁵⁹ Nurunnessa khatun,⁶⁰ Begum Sofia Kamal, Shamsun Nahar Mahmud⁶¹ raised their voices against the pudah, child marriage, polygamy and advocated female education.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the educated Muslim women began to participate in the public life and started movements for the upliftment of their legal and political status. During the Revolt of 1857, though many Muslim women joined against the colonial rule but after that they kept aloof themselves from the Indian national freedom movement. In 1905 Hindu women joined the anti-partition movement in Bengal by boycotting foreign goods and buying only swadeshi or indigenous products.⁶² Protest meetings were held by women and about five hundred of them watched the lying foundation stone of the Federation Hall at Calcutta on 16 October, 1905. Raabindra Nath Tagore announced his plan for observing “*Rakhi-bandhan*” in which women took part and another rite “*arandhan*” suggested by Ramendrasundar Trivedi, asking women not to light the hearth for cooking on the partition day.⁶³ The women gave very positive response. They organized *Swadeshi Melas* and Saraladevi Choudhurani opened “*Lakshmir Bhandar*” which sold only indigenous goods. Women gave up use of foreign *churis* (bangles) and women of Tangail, Mymensingh and Barisal gave over their savings to the “*Swadeshi Bhandar Samiti*”. The prominent women leaders of the swadeshi movement were Saraladevi Choudhurani,

⁵⁶ MohammadKaram chand, “*Talaq ba Moslem Stree Barjan*”, *Islam Procharak*, 1314 B.S

⁵⁷ Al-Eslam, 1312 B.S

⁵⁸ Anowar Hossain, *ibid*.p. 60.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*,p,60

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.p. 159.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.p.165.

⁶² Geraldine Forbs, *ibid*.p.123.

⁶³ Anowar Hossain.*ibid*, p.213.

Hemantakumari Choudhury, Labanyaprobha Dutta, Snehashila Choudhury, Ashalata Sen, Kumudini Mitra, Banalata Devi etc.⁶⁴ During the swadeshi movement, a section of the educated Muslims supported the swadeshi movement but the major weaknesses of the Swadeshi movement was that the Muslim community in general did not directly participate in it. The Hindu nationalism infused the movement with Hindu religious colour and thus restricted Muslim's participation in the cause.⁶⁵ But the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics was created a new era. He mobilized the Indian masses to participate movement against the colonial rule. Besides this the Hindu women, he modified his message to appeal to Muslim women. Gandhi asked women to spin and encourage their husbands to join the movement.⁶⁶ A large number of women participated in the freedom movement. Gandhi touched the hearts of both Hindu and Muslim women. He explained to women there was a place for them in the movement, and then he expressed his faith in their courage. It was possible to help the movement without leaving home or neglecting the family.⁶⁷ During the non co operation movement and Khilafat movement, a large number of women arrested on the streets of various parts of the country when they boycotted British goods. Gandhi recognized the potentiality of women as picketers. Writing in *Young India* he urged women to join the programme. The women in the different parts of the country joined in the processions and propagated use of *Khadi* and *Charaka*. Addressing numerous public meetings in different parts of the country, he appealed to women to donate their jewellery for the national cause and help him make collection for the *Tilak Swaraj Fund*.⁶⁸

In 1921 Be- Amma responded to the call of Gandhi. At the All- India Ladies Conference in Ahmedabad, 6000 women formed the audience of Be- Amma's lecture supporting the Gandhi's move. She urged women to enlist as Congress volunteers and, if their, menfolk were arrested, to join the picket lines and keep the flag flying.⁶⁹

Be- Amma (Abadi Bano Begum) was an outstanding Muslim woman leader, active in Muslim women's association and the Khilafat movement. She went about addressing meetings all over India. Be- Amma was invited to join the deputation for women's franchise in 1917. She had attended the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress at which Annie Besant presided and urged women to participate in the movement against the British.

⁶⁴ Ibid.p.213.

⁶⁵ Ibid.p.215.

⁶⁶Geraldine Forbes, *ibid*.p. 125.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 125.

⁶⁸ Dr, Vinita Kaur, *Women and the Wind of Change*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, P.67.

⁶⁹ Anowar Hossain, *ibid*.p.218.

Her sons Mohammad Ali and Saukat Ali, representatives of the new generation of Muslim leaders, were moving away from conciliation with to criticism of the British government. Their attacks were launched through the publication of two weeklies the *Comrade* in English and *Hamdard* in Urdu. Their mother too, organized women's protest meetings criticizing the government policy particularly regarding Turkey. She was supported in these efforts by her daughter – in-law, and the wives of other Muslim leaders. She had also addressed the Muslim League on behalf of her imprisoned son when he was elected president of the 1917 session. Thereafter, she fully participated in the joint Muslim League and Congress Non-cooperation movement. Be- Amma ardently advocated the use of *Khaddar* and the Hindu-Muslim unity. Her services to the cause of the Khilafat, Swaraj and Hindu-Muslim unity were invaluable. In this connection she visited Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Kasur.⁷⁰ In Bengal Muslim women, though small in number came out to support the Non- Cooperation movement. When C.R Das's son was arrested in Calcutta in 1921, the whole city was in protest against the government's ban on political demonstrations. Mr. C. R. Das's wife, Basanti Devi, his sister Urmila Devi and his niece, Miss Suniti Devi, took the streets and were arrested. When word of their arrest spread, a huge crowd of Marwaris, Muslims, Bhattias, Sikhs, Coolies, mill-hands and school boys gathered around until the police released women. Muslim women supported the programme of selling *Khaddar* by the women of the Das family. By the 1920s when revolutionary activities were in full swing in Eastern Bengal, Lila Nag and Dipali Sangha advocated *Swadeshi* ideas through the spread of education among women. Some Muslim women were inspired with ideas of Lila Nag and Dipali Sangha.⁷¹ In East Godavari District, Madras, a group of women gathered to meet and listen to Gandhi. Smt.Duvvuri Subbamam, a woman attending this assembly, "jumped in to the freedom struggle" at this time and resolved to form a women –only cadre of devasevikas (god-devoted servants).⁷² In Karnataka, the women not only provided food and shelter to Congressmen who were carrying on their work incognito, but often acted as messengers fearlessly ferrying secret information from one camp to the other. Among the scores of Karnataka, women who participated whole heartedly in the struggle for freedom were Kamaldevi Chattopadhyay, Umabai Kundapur, Krishnabai Panjekar, Ballari Siddama and even Gowramma were the most prominent.⁷³

⁷⁰Ibid.p.218.

⁷¹Ibid,p.219.

⁷² Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Pruthi (ed), *Women and the Indian Freedom struggle*, Pointer Publishers, Jaipur, P.39.

⁷³ Ibid.p. 69.

The Civil Disobedience Movement brought several Muslim Women into Public life. Their participation in this movement (1930-32) differed qualitatively and quantitatively from the early 1920s and won them a place in the history of nationalist movement.⁷⁴ In Bombay, thousands of women marching and picketing effectively. Under the leadership of Sarojini Naidu, Goshiben Naoroji and Avantikabai Gokhale organized the Rashtriya Stree Sangha and Desh Sevika Sangha who stated its goal as swaraj and women emancipation.⁷⁵ In Bombay, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, Sarojini Naidu's sister-in-law, and Avantikabai Gokhale were among the first women to defy the government monopoly of salt manufacture and thus, break the salt law. Kamaladevi recalls that on April 1930, thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitches of clay, brass and copper and instead of uniforms, the simple cotton saris of village India.⁷⁶

In Bihar, many women came forward courageously under the leadership of Mrs. Hasan Imam who not only addressed several meetings of students in Patna but along with her daughter Mrs Sami and Mrs. C.C. Das as well as several other women at Patna, organized a procession in the city to inaugurate an intensive campaign of boycott of British goods. During the week ending 25 July 1930, Patna witnessed two demonstrations in which nearly 3000 women took part and the leaders courted arrest. Mirabeau toured Bihar extensively, carrying on a successful propaganda for the use of charka and women leaders were also advocating non payment of the *chowkidari* tax.⁷⁷

In Bengal, Latika Ghosh, Urmila Devi, Jyotirmoyee ganguli, santi Das (Santi kabir), Bimal Prativa Devi, Kamala Das Gupta, Bina Das, Pritilata Waddedar and others made and sold salt, picketed cloth and liquor shops, preached the value of *Khaddar*, went to jail and participated in the street processions.⁷⁸ The capital city was also the heart of revolutionary struggle and women's colleges became centers for recruiting new members. In district towns and village women joined processions, wore *khaddar*, and hid fleeing revolutionaries. The Mahila Rashtriya Sangha (MRS), began in 1928, was the first formal organization to mobilize women for political work. The Mahila Rashtriya Sangha had goals similar to Rastriya Sevika Sangha in Bombay; they wanted to achieve swaraj and improve women's

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.42, Anowar Hossain, ibid. p.221.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 43.

⁷⁶ Dr. Vinita Kaur, ibid. p. 67.

⁷⁷ Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Pruthi, (ed), ibid. p.69.

⁷⁸ Anowar Hossain, ibid. p.221.

status.⁷⁹ In 1930 Daulatunnesa participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement almost as a whole timer. She actively organized meetings, led processions, violated section 144 and broke Salt Law. In 1932 when the movement spread all over the country, the Gaibandha Samiti (Daulatunnesa herself the secretary, Maya Bhattacharya of Bagura, the president and Dukhyabala Das, the Vice-president) violated the British laws under the leadership of Daulatunnesa and Maya Bhattacharya. Daulatunnesa delivered speech at different meetings in which thousands of Hindus and Muslims from Bamundanga, Suratkhal, Naldanga, Bijoydanga, Fulsari, Kuptala, Tulsighat assembled to listen to her. She was jailed several times for her revolutionary activities against the British. In her absence Ziaunnahar Rakina Khatun and Samsunnahar Rokeya Khatun led the movement. After she was released, Daulatunnesa devoted herself to the social works organized by Mahila Atma-Raksha Samiti (MARS) during the famine of 1943.⁸⁰ In Bengal, many revolutionary groups were also established. Bina Das, the young college student who fired a pistol at Governor Jackson, is the most famous revolutionary women. Bina, her elder sister Kalyani, Surma Mitra, and Kamala Das Gupta first decided of form a student organization for the discussion of political matters.⁸¹

Most of the women who became involved with revolutionary groups at this time were students. They associated with the secret societies and after that they had worked with women's organizations and with Congress.⁸² In Bengal, the women were more active than before. Whereas previously women had supported revolutionaries by keeping house for them, spreading propaganda, collecting funds, hiding and transporting weapons and even making explosives, now they were directly involved in revolutionary acts. Santi and Suniti, two schoolgirls from Comilla, shot Magistrate Stevens to death on December 14, 1931. They had presented him with a petition to allow a swimming competition and when he went to sign it, they both pulled revolvers from beneath their shawals and fired directly into his body. Stevens died on the spot and Santi and Suniti were taken to Comilla District Jail where they signed a statement admitting their guilt. Santi and Suniti wanted to become the first women martyrs and were angry to hear they would not be hanged but would instead go to prison.⁸³

⁷⁹ Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Pruthi,(ed), *ibid*.p.47.

⁸⁰ Anowar Hossain,*ibid*. p. 224.

⁸¹ Rajkumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Pruthi,(ed), *ibid*.p.51.

⁸² *Ibid*.p. 50.

⁸³ *Ibid*.p. 53.

Fulbahar Bibi was an ardent supporter of Gandhi she worked during the movement together with Kiran Rudra of Paikpara. She was imprisoned in 1932 for six months. She was first kept in Dhaka and then transferred to Bahrampur jail. After her release, she devoted herself to the cause of the Congress.⁸⁴ Muslim women, either arrested or became victims of police violence during the Civil Disobedience Movement, were Raziya Khatun and Halima Khatun of Mymensingh, Samsunnesa Begum, mother of Golam Jilani of Dacca; Raisa Bano Begum, wife of Asaf Ali Beg of Dacca and others. These women not only participated in the movement but also helped the leaders with money and jewellery. Hazimunnesa Khatun was arrested in Calcutta and Banabibi was tortured by the police after she was arrested in Midnapore in 1932. Some of the women (Raziya Khatun and Halima Khatun) had direct contact with the Jugantar Party. These two prominent women also participated in the Quit India movements in 1942 and were arrested.⁸⁵

Hosneara Begum made contacts with Ladies Picketing Board formed in Calcutta and with various women's organizations such as the Nari Satyagraha Committee, Rashtriya Mahila Sangha, Nikhil Jatiya Nari Sangha. These organizations broke the salt law and sent batches of women for picketing and courting arrest during 1930-32. Subash Chandra Bose and Kazi Nazrul Islam, the rebel poet encouraged her to adopt the nationalist ideas of Gandhiji. She was a social worker, a poet and a Swadeshi at heart. She went from door to door and contacted the slum dwelling women living in Calcutta to propagate the ideas of Swadeshi, women's self sufficiency and Hindu- Muslim unity. She wanted that women should assist their menfolk, work with them and fearlessly go to jail in order to drive away the British. The atrocities made by the British did not discourage her, but activated her desire to suffer more, to sacrifice more and to achieve more.⁸⁶

In 1932 Hosneara organized women's procession at Calcutta Maidan on the occasion of celebrating Independence Day. In the face of strong police violence she was capable of organizing the procession assembled at the foot of Calcutta Monument to violate British law. Along with the leaders of the Civil Disobedience Movement she was arrested and sent to Alipur Central Jail and then to Baharampuotiic jail. She composed many patriotic poems in prison of which “ *Muktir Bani Hoini Ajo Rakto Akore Lekha*” is quite famous.⁸⁷ Samsun Nessa was joined in the Civil dis obedience movement. She was imprisoned for several

⁸⁴ Ibid.p.224.

⁸⁵ Ibid.p.225.

⁸⁶ Ibid.p.224.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p.225.

months. She donated her wealth to the freedom fighters.⁸⁸ Raisa Banu was joined in the Civil disobedience movement. She also organized a women's army. There were many women who actively participated in the civil disobedience movement. They were Rausan Ara Begum, Begum Shahnawaj, Badrun Nessa, Rakina Khatun Begum Kamaluddin and Begum Shahjadi. Wajia Bai, Ammajan, Hiran Bibi, Hajimnessa also participated in the breaking salt-law and civil disobedience movement. The British arrested them many times. Jaitun Bibi joined in the indigo uprising against the British. Gauharjan supported the freedom movement by donating her wealth. She attended many meetings called by the Indian National Congress. Ayesha Bano was associated with the Surya Sen's 'Biplabi Dal'.⁸⁹ She was known as the 'Suyasen's Biplabi kanya' or the daughter of Surya Sen. She was a good novelist. Her poems were published in *Saugat*. She fought along with Pritilata and Kalpana Dutta. Mrs. Abdul Kadir was another Muslim lady who played an active part at Lucknow, the centre of activity of women at that time. The women of Lucknow organized meetings pleading for *Khaddar*. A committee of women was formed under the presidentship of Mrs. Abdul kadir for organizing work among women.⁹⁰

In North India, women from Allahabad, Lucknow, Delhi, and Lahore joined public demonstrations and shocked a public unused to seeing respectable women in the streets without veils.⁹¹ In the Punjab a massive procession of five thousand women inaugurated the Civil Disobedience Movement. Pickets, picketing and meetings were organized under the women leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai's daughter, Parvati Devi and Lado Rani Zutsi.⁹² However, it was in Gujarat, the home state of Mahatma Gandhi where women's participation was the largest and perhaps the most impressive. Special classes were started in the Sabnarmati Ashram to train women *Satyagrahis*. Mridula Sarabhai who was the moving force behind this venture, was later arrested and sent to Belgaum jail. A women oriented organization, the Rashtriya Stree Sabha carried on an intensive propaganda for the widespread use of Swadeshi. Kasturba, Saraladevi Sarabhai, Mridula Sarabhai, Indumati Sheth, Mithubehn Kanugaand, Khurshedbehn Naoroji, Dadabhai Naoroji's grand-daughter were the prominent leaders of the Ahmedabad who carried the civil disobedience movement.

⁹³ In Assam, a young teenage girl courageously led a procession of five hundred and was

⁸⁸ Ibid.p. 226.

⁸⁹ Aminul Islam, *Swadinata Sangrame Banglar Muslim Nari*, an unpublished article, Kolkata, 2008

⁹⁰ Anowar Hossain, *Muslim Women's Struggle for Freedom in Colonial Bengal*, p. 217.

⁹¹ Rajkumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Pruthi,(ed), *ibid*.p.61.

⁹² Dr. Vinita Kaur, *ibid*.p.70.

⁹³ *Ibid*.p.71.

subsequently killed in the police firing.⁹⁴ In 1930, Aruna Asaf Ali was imprisoned for one year. In 1941, she again imprisoned for one year during the time of Quit India Movement. She was also associated with the communist movement and leftist movement.⁹⁵ Between 1930-40 a handful of women participated in the anti- colonial struggle led by the communists. What a very strong and widespread students movement was organized against the British imperialism, many girl students joined the movement and participated in the meetings and demonstrations organized by the students. The pioneers among them were Kanak Mukherjee from Bengal, Perin Bharucha from Punjab and Nargis Batliwala from Bombay and others. They initiated an All India Girls' Students Convention at Lucknow in January 1940. Under the auspices of All India Students' Federation. Sarojini Naidu was the chief guest and Renu Chakravarty was the president. In Bengal, the first girl student committee was formed by some university and college students. The Bengal Provincial Girls' Students Association worked side by side with Bengal Provincial Students Federation established in 1936. Kanak Mukherjee, Santi Sarkar, Kalyani Mukherjee, Priti Lahri, Gita Mukherjee, Kamala Chatterjee, Kalpana Dutta, Mai Kuntala Sen and many others started forming girl students all over Bengal. We see the women participating in all worker-peasant movements and the activities of the Mahila Atma- Raksha Samiti during 1940s.

In the first half of the twentieth century, many Muslim women joined in the leftist movement. Kanak Mukherjee, Shanti Sarkar, Gita Mukherjee, Kamala Chatterjee, kalpana dutta, Manikuntala Sen, were the top- leading leaders of the leftist movement. Of them the name of Laila Ahmed of Jalpaiguri can be mentioned. She was the wife of Abdus Samad, a member of Legislative Assembly. Maksuda Begum was the wife of Mansur Habibullah in Bardawaman. She was communist leader who fought against the British.

Rabeya Khatun was the wife of communist leader Sayyid Shahedullah. She worked mainly for the workers and laboures. Dukhman Bibi and Gulbahar Bibi was associated with the Trade Union Movement in 1930. Begum Hamd Ali was another Communist leader. Najimunessa was born in Calcutta and established Mahila Atmarakshma Samad in Calcutta. She was also associated with the trade union movement. She organized many processions, meetings for the the release of the Mahatma Gandhi along with 500 Muslim women. Fatima Jinnah established 'Nari Shiksh Kendra' for upliftment women. From her childhood she was associated with the Freedom movement. Begum Aljaj Rusul and Mrs. Mumin were

⁹⁴ Ibid.p.73.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.75.

associated with the All India Muslim Student Federation for girls which was established in 1941. They advocated women emancipation.

Maksuda Begum, wife of Mansur Habibullah of Burdwan and Nazimunnesa , daughter of Kutubuddin Ahmed of Calcutta worked for the workers and peasants. They were the members of the Communist Party worker. Dukhomon and Gulbahar Bibi of 24 Parganas took part in the trade union movement during 1930s. Dukhomon worked in the jutemill at Alambazar and Gulbahar at Tollygunj rice-mill. The wife of Nazir Hossain Fadkar was involved in the underground activities organized by the communists. She became the secretary of the Mahila Atma- Raksha Samiti. Daulatunessa Khatun a follower of Gandhi was also a patron of the Communist party.

Before the Mahila-Atma Raksha Samiti came in to existence in 1943 as a broad mass organization, Muslim League took up extensive programmes to organize women in Calcutta. The women leaders of the Muslim League, Mrs. Momin, Sahajadi Begum, Sabeda Khatun etc. were associated with MARS. But the main force of the Samiti was the mass of the toiling women of the villages and cities. Among the central organizers of the Samiti, the most prominent Muslim Women were Nazimunnessa Ahmed, Rabeya Begum, and Maksuda Begum. When the Tebhaga Movement started in 1940s under the leadership of the Communists, a large number of Muslim women in Dinajpur, Midnapore, 24 Parganas, Rangpur and other rural areas waged class struggle against their oppressor: the landlords and jotedars. The movement revealed that “revolutionary girls were also born in Muslim homes; but the homes of hundreds of Muslim share croppers.” They chanted with their Hindu sisters: “Hindu- Muslim Bhai Bhai; we want Tebhaga on the basis of a receipt and without receipt we will not give up our rice.”⁹⁶ There were many women who participated in the freedom movement. During the Quit India Movement, prominent women such as Sucheta Kripalani, Aruna Asaf Ali and others went underground to carry on the struggle. ⁹⁷Aruna Asaf Ali was able to hoist the National flag on August 9 at Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay, in spite of police firing which resulted in eight deaths.⁹⁸ Rajkumari Amrit Kaur and Smt rameshwari Nehru, who had been arrested immediately after the movement started , were treated harshly by the police. Sarojini Naidu and Mira Behn were also arrested and kept in the Aga Khan Palace at poona, along with Gandhiji. Many women belonging to different strata of society

⁹⁶ Ibid.p.227-28.

⁹⁷ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.* p.206.

⁹⁸Raj Kumar, Rameshwari Devi, Romila Pruthi, *ibid.*p. 135.

laid their lives in this movement. The brave Kanaklata Barua, a girl in her teens, was shot dead while leading a procession to Gohpur police station to hoist the tricolor.⁹⁹

In course of time, the Muslim women were also associated with the voluntary associations set up exclusively by Muslim women, Muslim liberals and Bramho or Hindu reformists.¹⁰⁰ They were also members and sometimes even leaders of the student associations, peasant movements and labour unions.¹⁰¹ In 1907 the Anjuman-i- Khawateen- islam was set up at Lahore by Begum Mohammad Shafi. She also presided over the Muslim Ladies Conference in 1909.¹⁰² In Hyderabad, Masuma Begum and her mother and lady Asrfar-ul- Mulk had organized the Anjuman-i- Khawateen as early as 1901.¹⁰³ In Bengal, it was established by Rokeya in 1916 and it was formed in Deccan in 1919. Besides this, some prominent Muslim women also associated with the three major organizations: the National Council of Women in India (NCWI), Women's Indian Association (WIA), the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC) emerged between 1917 to 1927.¹⁰⁴

The social reformers raised issues on *purdah*. The women also were organized against the excessive strictness of *purdah*. Anti-*purdah* meetings were held in many parts of the country.¹⁰⁵ In 1905 a Muslim Ladies Conference was organized by Attiya Begum in Aligarh.¹⁰⁶ The Begum of Bhopal, who was involved with the activities of the Muslim Educational Conference, made funds available in 1907 for the establishment of Girls' School at Aligarh. In 1914 she convened a Muslim women's meeting at Aligarh which met every alternate years as the All India Muslim Ladies Conference. Mrs. Mohammad Shafi organized the conference meeting held in Lahore in 1917. Masuma Begum attended the conference held in Patna in 1918 at which her mother had presided. At these meetings resolutions on education and *purdah* were passed as a routine. In its Lahore session, presided over by Abru Begum, a resolution against polygamy was proposed by Begum Shahnawaz and passed.¹⁰⁷ The activities of this conference at Lahore were reported on by Margaret Cousins, who noted that at the Fifth Annual Conference of Indian Muslim women held on March 3-5, four

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 135.

¹⁰⁰ Anowar Hossain, *ibid*, p.219.

¹⁰¹ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid*. p. 203.

¹⁰² Shahnawaz Begum, *Father and Daughter*, Lahore: Nigarishat, 1971, p.25.

¹⁰³ S.M.H Zaidi, *Muslim Womanhood in Revolution*, Calcutta, 1937, p.107.

¹⁰⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *ibid*. p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ Anowar Hossain, *ibid*. p.178.

¹⁰⁶ Sarafraj Hossain Mirza, *Muslim Women's Role in Pakistan Movement*, Lahore Research Society of Pakistan, 1969, p. 13.

¹⁰⁷ Shahnawaz Begum, *ibid*, p. 42.

hundred delegates attended and Jahanara Begum made two speeches against polygamy.¹⁰⁸ The 1921 session met at Agra and Lady Shafi presided over this meeting which again condemned polygamy.¹⁰⁹

The Anjuman –i-Khawateen – Deccan formed in 1919 and the Lucknow Women’s Organization which had eminent Muslim women activists like Begum Habibullah, Begum Waseem, Begum Aijaz Rasul and Lady Wazir Hossain. They were trying to organize Muslim women against *pardah*. The Imperial Club of Allahabad was formed by lady Sulaiman who was also president of the Hamidia Girls’ School established in 1925.¹¹⁰ In Bengal, Anjuman-i-Khawateen-Islam was established by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, in 1915. The Anjuman-i-Khawateen –Islam of Bengal organized meetings of All India Muslim Ladies Conference in Calcutta and organized *Milad* in the different parts of Bengal. The Anti-Purdah League founded by the young members of the Muslim Sahitya Samaj at Dacca drew public attention against purdah.¹¹¹ Rokeya went from door to door, trying to establish the organization, at that time, when it was difficult to imagine Muslim women leaving the confines of their homes to join meetings and voluntary organizations. For days together, she would go from house to house, pull the veils off the women’s faces, and hold their hands as they stepped out of their homes, one by one.¹¹² Most of the social reformers, however supported female education and were against the practice of wearing a veil. The notable exception was among them was the Begum of Bhopal. When Sheikh Abdullah and his wife started a girls’ school in Aligarh, the begum of Bhopal gave much financial aid. In 1911, on the occasion of Muhammadan Educational Conference, the veil clad begum of Bhopal, along with Sarojini Naidu, Sarala devi, and Chandrani delivered a very impressive speech.¹¹³

During the long years of its existence, Anjuman-e- Kawatin provided funds to a number of widows, helped poor girls of marriageable age to get married to suitable grooms and sponsored the education of many needy girls. But it would not be just to mention only these small charities and social services undertaken by the organization. If one considers the history of Muslim women’s gradual development over the last twenty years, it is evident how hugely indebted Muslim society is to this organization that worked away from the public glare for long.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 50.

¹⁰⁹ Anowar Hossain, *ibid.* p.180.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 180.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 181.

¹¹² Sahin Akhtar & Moushumi Bhowmik (ed), *Women in Concert*, Stree, Kolkata, 2008, p.275.

¹¹³ Sajida Shabbir, *ibid.* p.1

The reformers now raised their voices on the child marriage. The development of the various Indian women's national organizations, their efforts to co-operate with one another, and their relationships with Indian males, British officials, and British created a friendly atmosphere among the Indian women.¹¹⁴ . In 1860 the criminal code set the age of consent for both married and unmarried girls at ten years. The issue reappeared in the 1880s and in 1891 the criminal code was amended to raise the age of consent to twelve years. A revival of interest in the age of marriage and age of consent and ultimately to proposals in the Indian Assembly. Various bills addressing these questions were introduced and defeated until 1927 when Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarada introduced his Hindu Child Marriage Bill.¹¹⁵ The Assembly referred Sarada's bill to Joshi Committee. Many Muslim women such as Begum Hameed Ali, Lady Abdul Qadir, Mrs. Asif Ali, Begum Aziz Rasool, Mrs. Akthar Hussain, Mrs. Qazi Mehar Ahmed, Begum Hameeda Momin, and Mrs. I.F.Hassan also supported the bill. Their efforts were aimed at putting a stop to this evil. At the inaugural session of the women's conference in 1927, the Maharani of Baroda observed that child marriage deprived girls of their childhood pleasures.¹¹⁶ After ascertaining the views of different religious, social and medical associations the Committee put up a report to the Constituent Assembly on 20-01-1929 about fixing minimum age for marriage and registration. This bill was presented in the Assembly on 19 September 1929 and was made effective with effect from 1st. April 1930.¹¹⁷ Thus, we can pronounce that the first effort to put an end to the brutalities committed against women. This bill was presented to the Parliament it was opposed bitterly by the fundamentalist Muslims but also by conservative Hindus. The Quaid-e-Azam lent his unconditional support to it, notwithstanding the fact that the conservative Muslims had disapproved it. Conservative Muslim males said that in this way their Islamic code was being undermined while the Muslim women working for social reformation supported it vehemently¹¹⁸. It is important to mention here that Islam did not envisage an age of consent for marriage.

However it is advised to make arrangement for the marriage of girls only after they reach the age of puberty. Further Islam made stress on the education of women. There was no hard and

¹¹⁴ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.* p.83.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 85.

¹¹⁶ Shida Latif, *Muslim Women in India : Political and Private realities*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1990, p.68

¹¹⁷ Azra Asghar Ali, *The Emergence of Feminism among Indian Muslim Women*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000, p.152

¹¹⁸ Sajida Shabbir, *ibid.* p.17.

fast rule for early marriage of girls in Islam. Thus the fundamentalists' opposition to the bill was baseless.¹¹⁹

During the Women Suffrage Movement, Sarojini Naidu led an all India delegation of prominent women to meet with Montagu and Chelmsford.¹²⁰ With this deputation, Indian women began their struggle to secure for themselves political and civil rights. Saraladevi Chaudhurani presented the resolution supporting the vote for women. Many meetings were organized all over India- of provincial and district Congress Conferences and of women's organizations – to express support for women's franchise.¹²¹ Herabai, Annie Besant, Cornelia Sorabji, Madame Bikaji Kama actively campaigned for the 'right to female vote'. Several Muslim women supported in favour of female franchise. When a delegation on the issue of women suffrage was sent to Montagu- Chelmsford in 1917 on behalf the '*Bangiya Nari Samaj*', Mrs. Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain along with Kamini Roy, Mrinalini Sen, Kumudini Bose, also participated in it.¹²² Encouraged by the viceroy of female franchise in the Calcutta Municipal election in 1923, a women delegation led by Kamini Roy and two Muslim women, Begum Rokeya Sakhwat Hossain and Begum Sultan Muwayidzada, met the viceroy, Lord Lytton, to seek his support for their cause. In 1925, the Bengal Legislature approved a limited female suffrage and in 1926 Bengali Muslim women exercised this right for the first time.¹²³ When the first Round Table Conference held in London in 1930-31 the Indian women had presented a memorandum to the conference Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz had participated in it. At the Conference Begum Shah Nawaz and Mrs. Subbarayan spoke about the "awakening" of women and their leadership in promoting social change. The British claimed that *pardah* custom would decline if women were given the right to vote. By this time Mrs. Hamid Ali, together with Margaret Cousins, Muthulakshmi Reddi, Rani Rajwade, Tarabai Premchand, Sarojini Naidu issued a joint memorandum in support of universal adult franchise. With the Gandhi- Irwin Pact of March 1931, Congress agreed to participate in the Second Round Table Conference and Sarojini Naidu attended this conference as representative of the women's organizations. Begum Shah Nawaz was again nominated by the British. By this time she firmly supported the congress demand for adult franchise¹²⁴ After much debate the three women's organizations produced a joint memorandum

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p.18.

¹²⁰ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.* p.92.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p.9.

¹²² Anowar Hossain, *ibid.* p.186.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p. 187.

¹²⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *ibid.* p.110.

reiterating their demand for adult franchise and objecting to the various schemes for separate electorates and reservation of seats. As a temporary and short-term measure they agreed to accept the enfranchisement of literate women and urban women.¹²⁵ Early in 1933 when women leaders decided to work for a men women franchise ratio of 1:5, Begum Shah Nawaz, together with Radhabhai Suubbrayan, Dorothy Jinararajadasa and Sarala Roy asked individuals and organizations to voice their support. When the Linlithgow Committee decided to examine witnesses from Indian women's organizations to prepare the Act of 1935, prominent Muslim women Begum Hamid Ali and Shamsunnahar Mahmud spoke on behalf of the women's organization and presented a memorandum. However, the India Act of 1935 introduced special electorates for women and fixed the ratio of voters on gender basis at 1:5 under certain conditions.¹²⁶ The victory of suffrage movement brought several Muslim women on the field of election politics. The most prominent among them were Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, Qudisia Aizaz Rasul, Sarifa Hamid Ali, Kulsum Sayani, Hajrah Ahmed, and Shaista Ikramullah.¹²⁷ Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz, Qudisia Rasul, Sharifa Hamid Ali, Kulsum Sayani and Hajra Ahmed worked women's organizations until the 1940s Separate electorates for Muslim women and the consequence of the Communal Award presented each with a special challenge. Jahan Ara Shah Nawaz and Qudisia Rasul made decisions about their relationship with the Muslim League,. Sharifah Hamid Ali and Kulsum Sayani were social reformers forced to deal with political issues.¹²⁸

After gaining the political right, the women became more conscious about their legal status. An organized efforts were made to the Hindu Woman's Right to Property, the Hindu Woman's Right to Divorce Act, the Prevention of Polygamy Bill.¹²⁹ G.V. Deshmukh introduced the Hindu Woman's Right to Property Bill to remove "the existing disabilities from which Hindu women suffer." He proposed an equal share for wives and daughters with male heirs if the head of the family died intestate.¹³⁰ Women's organizations agreed to support this bill despite their reservations. Members of the Bhagini Samaj, a Bombay women's organization, wrote a memo to the government suggesting a new law of succession "where the female heirs will come as heirs according to modern notions."¹³¹ Commenting on a divorce bill, Mrs Damle of Yeotmal said this would not help women. Women did not need

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 110.

¹²⁶ Anowar Hossain, *ibid.*p.188.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*p.199.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*p. 202.

¹²⁹ Geraldine Forbs, *ibid.*p.113.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p.114.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*p.114.

divorce, they needed economic independence and more power so they could prevent their husbands from taking second wives. These reform minded women wanted comprehensive legislation accompanied by social and economic change.¹³²

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Muslim religious mentors focused their attention on the difference between Indian social laws and the Islamic laws which were forcibly made effective in various areas. These included the women's inheritance wherein women were deprived of any share. This was against the Islamic injunctions.¹³³ Muslims concentrated their efforts on the inclusion of Shariat Bill in the Family Laws Act 1937. At last, Shariat Bill was made effective with effect from 16 September 1937. It was named Family Laws Act 1937. The Shariat Act provided some opportunity to change the social as well as political status of Muslim women in India.¹³⁴ The 1937 Shariat Act was passed to enable Muslim women to regain their rights of inheritance, dower and divorce under Muslim personal laws.¹³⁵ The object of the shariat Act was defined as clarifying the questions regarding succession, special property of females, betrothal, adoption, marriage, divorce, maintenance, dower, guardianship, minority, bastardy, family relation legacies, and gift partition etc. The bill aims at uniformity of law among Muslims throughout the British India, in all their social and personal relations.¹³⁶ With the passage of time the Muslim women also got the right of divorce when the "Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act 1939" was passed.¹³⁷

Thus during the later half of the nineteenth century, a transformation took place due to the efforts of the social reformers, and some liberal British officials, the Muslim women also broke their traditional bondage. In the first four decades of the twentieth century Indian Muslim women stepped out of the confines of home to participate in the public world. Though the Muslim males started the liberation movement for the upliftment of the women status but later on the women became active agents. The enlightened Muslim community tried to give a new life to the society by their liberal and rational thoughts side by side with the orthodox and conservative forces.¹³⁸ They fought for their legal and political rights and

¹³² Ibid,p, 114.

¹³³ Sajida Shabbir,ibid.p.18.

¹³⁴ Ibid.p. 19.

¹³⁵ Dushka, Saiyid, *Muslim Women of the British Punjab: from Seclusion to Politics*, Macmillan Press LTd, London, 1998, p. 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid.p.20.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 23. Anowar Hossain, ibid.p.184.

¹³⁸ Anowar Hossain, ibid.p.26.

came along with their Hindu and Bramho counterparts. Some women choose literature as one of the grounds for their battle and others actively participated in the women's organizations and ultimately took active role in contemporary politics.