

CHAPTER-4

Women Education in Surma Valley

Women's education was one of the important questions of debate and struggle during the nineteenth century social reform movement. The status of woman in any society was considered as an indicator of that society's development. Therefore the status of women became the main focus of the socio-religious movement and the progressive intellectuals took initiative for the improvement of women status and position. The reformers realized that educating a woman means educating a family, so they urge the introduction of female education. They supported women's education and did not hesitate to see their own women folk going out of their homes and taking part in education. Reformers like Vivekananda, had the firm opinion that women should be fully educated so that they could participate in social reforms and assist those who were propagating these reforms.¹ He argued that "women themselves were the most suitable judges of what was good for them and in which areas reforms or changes were required most urgently. In 1875, the Arya Samaj was founded by Dayanand Saraswati who felt that without education women could not distinguish right from wrong. Dayananda advocated compulsory education for both boys and girls. Dayananda argued that all girls should be educated until the age of 16.²Emphasizing the importance of education among women E. Boulding in his *Women in the Twentieth Century World* writes: "When you educate a male you invest only in one person; when you educate a female you invest not only in that one person; but all the children she will bear."³ Both the Hindu and Muslim society believed that educated women would face early widowhood. In his Report on the State of Education in Bengal (1836) William Adam wrote: "A superstitious feeling is alleged to exist in the majority of Hindu families, principally cherished by the women and not discouraged by the men that a girl taught to read and write will soon after marriage become widow."⁴ Adam also commented on the fear, shared by the Hindus and the Muslims that "Knowledge of letters" might facilitate female intrigue.⁵ The patriarchal society did not allow them to read or write. The women are basically dependent on fathers on childhood, then husbands and finally sons for support; they said prayers and performed rituals to insure longevity for these men. If learning to read would lead to a husband's death, then pursuing knowledge was tantamount to suicide. This was a sex-segregated world; men and women did

¹ Dr. Vinita Kaur, *Women and the Wind of Change*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2000, p. 83.

² Ibid.p. 84.

³ Anowar Hossain, *Muslim Women's Struggle for freedom in Colonial Bengal*, Progressive Publishers, Kolkata, 2008, p. 71.

⁴ Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 33.

⁵ Ibid.p.33.

different work and occupied separate spaces. Women interacted primarily with women and it was women who enforced the prohibition against female education. Many of the women who learned to read before the 1870s have reported hiding their accomplishments from other women.⁶ Rassundari Devi, taught herself to read by stealing precious moments from her housework and the responsibilities of caring for twelve children.⁷

The intellectual condition of the Bengali Muslim women during the first half of the nineteenth century was deplorable. Though education was made compulsory equally for both males and females by the prophet of Islam, women were deprived of that. In the Holy Quran when reference is made to acquisition of knowledge those addressed are believers (including women). It says: “Women possess intellect, wisdom and soul as man and women come from the same stock.”⁸ But the Muslim women have been prevented from seeking and acquiring knowledge. Consequently, illiteracy and ignorance became widespread amongst Muslim women. Fathers had prevented their daughters from reading and writing. They were confined to household tasks. If a father wished to educate his daughter, he would only allow her to learn how to read, since writing- they believed – was forbidden for them.⁹ In India, there were three main agencies that were responsible for the spread of modern education in India. They were the foreign Christian missionaries, the British Government and the Progressive Indians.¹⁰

In India, the Missionaries started the first girls’ school but their efforts were soon rivaled by Indian reformers.¹¹ Despite their valiant efforts, there were no real advances in female education until the second half of the nineteenth century when the government offered financial support.¹² The Charter Act of 1813 took the state responsibility for the spread of modern education. It provided that “a sum of not less than a lac of rupees in each year shall be set apart.” For educational purposes.¹³ After decided to introduce modern form of education in India, there arose a debate within the colonial state regarding the type of education to be imparted to the

⁶Ibid. p. 33.

⁷Ibid. p.32.

⁸Ibid.p.71.

⁹Ibid.p.84.

¹⁰A.R Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Popular Prakashan, Delhi, 2003, p.128.

¹¹Geraldine Forbs, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge, 1998,p.33.

¹²Ibid. p.33.

¹³Ibid. p. 134.

Indians.¹⁴ Governor General William Bentinck which medium of language must use to educate Indians. Someone argued that the medium should be the Indian vernacular or local languages and other group of people argued English language should be the medium to introduce modern education in India. The first school of thought was known as the ‘Orientalist’ and the latter was known as the ‘Anglicist’.¹⁵ The controversy was resolved in favour of the Anglicists when Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, endorsed and adopted their views in 1835.¹⁶ But no serious attempt was taken for the spread of female education. In contrast to support for boys’ schools, there was little interest in the education of girls. The colonial government, despite pressure exerted by missionaries and liberals, was unconcerned with female education. The missionaries were more interested in female education and schools for girls.¹⁷

The British liberal officers and the Indian progressive social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy also supported the Anglicist.¹⁸ Lord Dalhousie, the Governor– General of India from 1848 to 1856, declared that no single change was likely to produce more important and beneficial consequences than female education.¹⁹ Sir Charles Wood, President of the Board of Control issued an education Despatch in 1854 that detailed a shift in governmental policy, from providing higher education for the elites to support for mass education in the vernacular. The Despatch also included education for both sexes.²⁰ He particularly emphasized on the need for women’s education. “The importance of female education in India can not be overrated and we have observed the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives to give a good education to their daughters. By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men.”²¹ The establishment of Bethune school in 1849 was considered as the milestone of women’s education. In 1882, the Hunter Commission reviewed the progress of education in India; serious efforts had been made to develop primary schools for girls and teacher –training

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.p.135.

¹⁶ Ibid.p. 37.

¹⁷ Ibid. p.37.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.135.

¹⁹ Y.B Mathur, *Women’s Education in India*, 1813-1966, Asia Publishing, Bombay, 1973, p.25. Geraldine Forbs, *ibid*.p. 40. Anowar Hossain, *ibid*.p. 71.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 19.

²¹ Ibid.

institutions. Higher education for women and co-education were still contentious issues.²²Faced with the fact that 98 percent of school – age girls were not in school, authors of the Hunter Commission Report recommended more liberal grants- in aid for girl’ schools than for boys’ and special scholarships and prizes for girls.²³

Social reformers realized that without female 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵Even 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.²⁶ 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, *pardah* such as to move outside, to admit in the schools etc.

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

²² Geraldine Forbes, *ibid*.p.44.

²³ *Ibid*. p. 45.

²⁴ *Ibid*.p. 23.

²⁵ Bharati Ray, *Early Feminist of Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p.34.

²⁶ Kalikinkar Dutta, *Survey of India’s Social life and economic condition in the eighteenth century 1707-1813*, Calcutta, Firma, K.L.Mukhopadhyay 1961, p.23-24.

issues.²⁷In the meanwhile, the *Bamabodhini Sabha* started *Bamabodhini Patrika* for women's education and *Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha* established several girls' 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 teachers in girls' 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.²⁸ This school was soon followed by a number of girls' school. Like Bengal, the progressive minded people of Surma Valley also took gradual steps for spreading the female education.

This section attempts to understand the spread of education in Surma Valley and its impact on Muslim women.

Progress of education in Sylhet- Cachar region

In pre-colonial Surma Valley, the pattern of education was same as all over in India. There was no systematic and secular education. Muslim male students received education from *Maktabs* and *Madrasas* and Hindu male students received education from *Tols*. *Madrasas* and *Tols* were at that time are the only formal institution of education. There were no school for getting education both the Hindus and Muslims together. The Hindu *Pundit* taught in the *Tols* and *Maulavis* were taught in the *madrasas*. The enlightened and educated person opened "Patshala" at the *berrandah* of their home. The 'patshala' started daily in the morning and evening. It was known from the some earlier records that a group of Brahmin *pundits* came Sylhet from Kannuj via Mithila on the request of the king of Tripura. They spread education in Sanskrit and taught Hindu *shastras* among few persons in the valley. They established some *tols* and 'chatuspati' in Panchakhanda, Burunga, Taraf, Baniyachang and other places of the valley. After the coming of Shahjalal (RH) in Sylhet Islam was spread and many *madrasas* were established as a centre of Islamic learning.²⁹ During the Muslim rule, Persian and Arabic language recognized as an official language, these languages were widely spread. Though before the coming of the British,

²⁷ Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849-1905*, Princeton, N.J, Princeton University Press, 1985, p.291.

²⁸ . Bharati Ray, *ibid*, p.35.

²⁹ Md. Hafijur Rahman Bhuyan, art, Shiksha, p. 41.

many Hindu Kings and Muslim *Nawabs* encouraged education but education was not felt necessary. Facilities for women in the indigenous system of learning (in *Tols, Maktabas and Madrasas*) were virtually non-existent. The numbers of male students were also very negligible.³⁰ In Sylhet, educations were common among the royal and aristocratic families. In Cachar though the Dimasa kings encouraged and patronized education³¹ but it was confined to a limited number of upper caste males. Girls received some education from elders in the family. In the feudal ages, even education for men was not compulsory and women were completely confined to domestic chores and since it was thought quite unnecessary to give them education. Owing to socio-economic constraints, females did not receive any education at that time because the society felt that it would not have much use to her. Muslim students received education from *Maktabas* which was exclusively male oriented traditional centers of Islamic learning. The *madrasas* have disregarded female voices and female education.

In Surma valley, the Welsh Presbyterian missionaries took the first important step for the spread of modern education. According to the Mr. Adam's report, the British Government took the decision to set up an English medium high school, aided by the Government in every district of Bengal.³² It was said that Reverend William Pyrse was known as the pioneer of English education in the Surma Valley who started a school first at Sylhet. In 1849, Rev. Williams visited Sylhet and wrote a letter to the directors of Wales for permission to open a Mission Station in Sylhet. The Directors allowed Mr. Pyrse to establish a Mission Station in Sylhet. Mr. Pyrse and his wife moved to Sylhet in 1850 from Cherrapunjee and began his missionary operations in the plains. In Sylhet, the missionaries established several schools and succeeded in breaking down the prejudices and antipathy of a good number of people against Christianity.³³ During the second half of the nineteenth century, with due inspiration of the government and some progressive native males some schools were established in Sylhet. These schools were

³⁰J. B Bhattacharjee, *Cachar Under British Rule in North-East India*, New Delhi, 1977, p.228.

³¹ Ibid.p.228.

³² Ibid. p. 229.

³³ Rev Vanlalchhunga, *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Church of Wales on Sylhet- Bangladesh and Cachar-India, 1886-1955*, Shalom Publication, Silchar, 2003, ibid.p.4.

known as Middle English School.³⁴In 1836, Sylhet Government Pilot High School, the first English high school was established.³⁵

Mr. T. Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar, suggested that school should be set up in Cachar following the model of Bengal Presidency. J.G. Burns proposed to set up schools at Silchar, Hailakandi and Kattegora.³⁶ But these schools could not flourish due to the lack of funds. Reverend William Pyrse started a school first at Sylhet. In 1859 four students appeared in the entrance examination of the Calcutta University from this school, Babu Nabkishore Sen passed out the examination successfully. The Assam District Gazetteer mentioned that in 1867 there were 28 schools at Sylhet and the number of the student was 1,127. Thus modern English education spread though very slowly but gradually in the Surma Valley. Reverence Pyrse from Sylhet came to Silchar started the High Grammar School in 1863 which was later converted into a Government *Zilla* School.³⁷

The introduction of modern education by the Christian missionaries changed the society greatly. They introduced education by opening schools for boys and girls in the town and also in the villages. The progressive educated male folk who were employed by the British government also felt the urge to reform the society. Many indigenous schools – *patshalas* and *maktabs* were established for the males by the native people. In 1871-72 primary schools and M.E schools. were established Sylhet, Habiganj, Jakiganj, Sunamganj, Maulavibazar, Badarpur, Kattigorah, Karimganj, Hailakandi, Narsingpur etc.³⁸ The missionaries started their operation in Sylhet and from Sylhet they tried to expand their activities to the neighbouring plains as well. In 1889, Miss Williams reached Sylhet. She took charge of the girls' schools. The lady missionaries also provided efficient help in the girls' school and visited *Zenanas*. *Zenana* work proper was introduced and carried on very energetically by the Misses Dass and also gave medicine to the poor people of Sylhet.³⁹ In the middle of the nineteenth century the missionaries devised a new system of education called “*zenana system*” or “*zenana education*” by house to house visits. It was designed to impart education among the aged women inside the scheduled apartment at

³⁴ Hafijur Rahman Bhuyan, *ibid.*, p.42.

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 42

³⁶ J.B. Bhattacharjee, *ibid.* p. 232.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p.232.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.4.

home. As the orthodox Hindus and Muslims did not like to send their to public girls' schools, they wanted that the girls may be educated at home by trained tutresses.⁴⁰ The work in Sylhet began under the care of the Rev J. Penjwern Jones and Miss Elizabeth Williams and it was this lady who set up the *zenanas*.

In 1834, Lord William Bentinck, the then governor general ordered William Adam's to give a report on Bengal education. In 16th century, Moulana Jia Uddin, an old man of famous Mufti family of Sylhet, established a *madrassa*. This *madrassa* was continued almost 200 hundred years till 1837. This *Madrassa* was one of the best centre of the Parsi learning. Both the Hindu and Muslims were read in this school. The Mughals donated 542 acre land to the Madrasah. The children of Sylhet were learned Parsi at home, some time they took private tuitions.⁴¹

In 1882, Luttmon Johnson, Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet reported to the chief Commissioner on Muslim's education. He reported, that "For the expense of the students of the *Madrassa* and of the travellers and the Khanka (a boardig house for persons who devote themselves to study and prayers) has been assesses at Rs. 85/- and No. 285 at Rs. 275/ etc. As an allowance and a help towards the maintenance of the said Mufti Mohammad Asim and for the expense of *Madrassa*."⁴²

According to Mr. Adam's report, one school should be established in each district. The said *Madrassa* was closed in 1837. In 1840-41, the government established an English high school. In 1874, during the time of Lord Norhbrook, the then governor, Sylhet was included with Assam. Before the establishment of Calcutta University, in 1857, the people did not respond positively. As a result, the school was closed and the government also did not take any responsibility for the spread of modern education.⁴³

In 1873, there were two girls' primary schools in Sylhet. Ten students were read in Sylhet school and eleven students were read in other school. Though in 1765, Sylhet came under the British East India Company' rule along with Bengal but the government did not took any step towards the progress of education. In 1848, the company appointed some school inspectors and

⁴⁰ Anowar Hossain, *Muslim Women's Struggle for Freedom in Colonial Bengal*, Progressive publishers, Kolkata, 2008, p.82.

⁴¹ Rasamaya Mohanta, " *Sylheteter Shiksha O Shikshagan* ", Brihatter Sylheter Itihas, p.263.

⁴² Narendra Kumar Gupta, *Srihatta Prativa*, Sylhet, 1961, p.148-49.

⁴³ *Ibi*.p.49.

established 11 local education committee in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.⁴⁴ One committee was established for the Sylhet. This local committee established a school “Provisional school” in Sylhet. In 1854, this school expanded as a full- fledged school in Sylhet. Reverend Pyrse, established two Middle English Primary school in Nayasadak and Sekhghat. But there were no female student in these schools. The conservative society did not give any response for female education. Not only the Muslims, but the Hindu women also maintained purdah and never go outside the home. The British government began *zenana* education for educate the *pardanasin* women. Some progressive women appointed as a *zenana* teacher who were known as a “governess”. They went door to door for the progress of female education. There were three Bengali governesses in Sylhet. They were: Sarjubala Barman, Indubala Dev Choudhury, Mrs. P Bannerjee. In zenana schools, they taught geography, mathematics, Bengali & English literature, history, science, cooking, sewing, child –rearing, health care, housekeeping etc. Lady missionaries in cycles or carts would visit families and educate the ladies of the household.⁴⁵

Rev. T.J.Jones, Miss Elizabeth Williams and Miss Laura Evans came to Silchar for spreading missionary works and modern education.⁴⁶ They were the pioneer missionaries in Silchar. They moved to Silchar from Sylhet in 1893. They also selected Karimganj, a subdivision of Sylhet as an area of their missionary activities. In 1894, Dr. O.O.Williams and his wife stationed at Karimganj along with Miss Sushila Dass. These missionaries determined to spread female education. The missionaries considered the spread of female education as a special task for them. Miss Williams has visited the women of Karimganj as much. She takes one *zenana* regularly, and is very fortunate in that several persons gather in to the one *zenana*, so that one gathering represents several *zenanas*.⁴⁷ The fourth missionary station in the Sylhet Cachar plains was Maulavi Bazar. In January, 1898, Rev. T.W. Reese and his wife moved to Maulavi Bazar from Sylhet. Besides the plains portion of Cachar District, the North Cachar Hills also formed a part of the Welsh Mission field in 1905, the work was supervised by Garlan Williams from Silchar. In 1912. Rev. J.M Harries Reese was stationed in Haflong, the Chief town of the North Cachar Hills. In Habiganj, Miss Laura Evans and Miss Andrew moved from Sylhet. They began their work in Habiganj in April, 1922. Sunamganj Mission Station was established in 1923. But, at no

⁴⁴ Rasaymaya Mohanta, *ibid.* p. 263.

⁴⁵ Sharif Uddin Ahmed, *Sylhet: History and Heritage*, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, Dhaka, 1999, p. 323.

⁴⁶ . JB Bhattacharjee, *ibid.* p.235-50.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.39.

time had a resident missionary been stationed there, the missionary been stationed there, the missionaries in Sylhet town paid occasional visits. Besides, the Welsh Missionaries established Mission station at Shaistaganj, they also opened Bible school at Bhatara.⁴⁸

They introduced education by opening schools. They opened boys and girls schools in the town and also in the villages. They also taught practical subjects like Cookery, house keeping, child welfare, care of the sick, Hygiene, needle work and weaving. They opened teachers training schools. The lady missionaries worked among the *Zenanas* and they taught them about Jesus Christ and they also instructed them sewing, needle work, weaving etc. The Missionaries instructed them sewing, needle work, weaving etc. The missionaries tried their level best to the Namasudras in various ways. Besides these, they established a 'Home' for widows and orphans at Karimganj called *Dipti Nibash* which means "Light House."⁴⁹ In Cachar, though many schools were established before the coming of the missionaries and native people send their sons to the missionary school but the female education did not get much importance. The people were not enthusiastic for the spread of female education because of their conservative outlook. There was a wrong interpretation among the people that women education would cause early widowhood. Besides that they felt that education made women unruly and outspoken. They were not exposed to the outer world and were confined within home. The church appointed female missionaries to gain access to the 'zenana mahal' or 'andarmahal' for spreading modern education.⁵⁰ The female missionaries went from door to door to encourage female education and they had entered several zenanas of Hindus and Muhammedans. But the common people did not respond to them properly. They started their mission operation with mission schools in Karimganj and Silchar. Besides the plains of Cachar and Karimganj, North Cachar Hills also formed a part of the Welsh mission field in 1905.⁵¹

The Welsh Presbyterian Mission started a Girls' school at Silchar in 1895, which should be taken as the beginning of female education in the valley. The parents being unaware of the virtue of modern education did not send their daughters to the institution. Kamini Kumar Chanda, a strong supporter of female education, offered active help to the Mission by convincing the orthodox

⁴⁸ Reverence Vanlalchunga, *ibid*, p. 435.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.436.

⁵⁰ Nag Tejmala Gurung and Nag Sajal, *The(Invisible Inscription: Women Missionary and Education of Women 1886-1905*,p.2.

⁵¹ Rev. Vanlalchhunga, *ibid*,p.435.

guardians to send their daughters. He himself set the example by sending his daughter to the school.

In Karimganj, Dr O.O. William and Miss Sushila Dass have established a small Girls' School in 1895. Sunday services and Bible classes were commenced. In 1897, the Karimganj Girls' School recorded about 20 girls, though the average number was 16. By 1900 the number of girl students in Karimganj grew to be 34 girls. The growth of girl student in Karimganj was remarkable but this school was came to an end in the year 1937. In Karimganj District Pandit Ramabai Saraswati and Miss J. Helen Rowlands also dedicated their lives for the cause of female education. Their teaching on practical subjects like cookery, house keeping, child welfare, care of the sick was very useful and became popular among the masses.

TABLE 1:

The following table shows the number of women attending the *zenana* classes year by year.⁵²

Years	Hindus	Muhammadans	Total
1921-22	53	61	114
1922-23	58	89	147
1923-24	47	94	141
1924-25	47	82	129
1925-26	77	65	142
1926-27	54	77	131

In the middle of the nineteenth century, education was progressed in Sylhet. In that time, there were 45 boys high school in Sylhet and six girls' school in Sylhet. There were 1519 students in these schools.

Besides this, in the second half of the nineteenth century many associations were set up in different parts of Bengal to diffuse education among elderly women at home. *Srihatta Sammalini* was the first association which tried to foster education in Sylhet. Some energetic young men of Sylhet lived in Calcutta who were students at that time realized to establish an association for the

⁵² Reports on the Progress of Education in Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1926-27,

progress of female education. The *Srihatta Sammilani* came into existence in Srihatta Student Hostel in 1876. They were Sadayacharan Dass, Radhanath Choudhury, Sitanath Dutta, Ramkumar Dutta, Srinath Dutta, Sundarimohan Dass, Bipanchandra Pal, Tarakishore Choudhury. They were influenced by Sibnath Shastri and Surendranath Bandhopadhyaya and determined to live for the social and political reform of the country.⁵³

In 1877, the *sammilini* took first step for the progress of female education. They faced serious problems as the society was conservative and did not realize the necessity of female education. They first meet with the Bramho educated families who supported female education and established female schools in different places. As many parents did not want to send their daughters to schools the *Sammilini* established schools at home also. The *Sammilini* encouraged *zenana* education or *antapursiksha* among both the Hindu and Muslims.⁵⁴

In the subsequent years the *Sammilani* undertook different programmes for the development of female education and founded female schools in Syllet, Habiganj, Maulavibazar, Sunamganj, karimganj some other areas for the spread of female education among both Hindu and Muslim women. In 1877, 118 women applied for the sitting in examination in Sylhet. For the progress of female education the *Sammilini* did another good work. It distributed prizes among the promoted students which effected greatly. The first prize distribution function was presided over by Surendra Nath Bannerjee. On this function, Surendra Nath Bannerjee inspired young men to progress female education in village and *muffassil*. Many students of the Murarichand college also joined in this association. Not only girls but also the women living in *antapur* were allowed to sit for the examinations from class I to VII. Both written and oral examinations were taken in Urdu and Bengali; Regular and external departments were opened and students aged between 4 and 45 were permitted to sit for the examination on the syllabus fixed by the Srihatta Sammilani under the supervision of the School Inspectors Maulavi Walis and Maulavi Golam Gafur. Many teachers of *Sammilini* went door to door to encourage female education. On the other hand many women could read and write with the help of their own male members of the family.

The Central committee of *Srihatta Sammilini* controlled the examination, results and introduced syllabus. They issued certificates also. The rules and regulations also maintained by this

⁵³ Anowar Hossain, *ibid.* p. 86.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.86.

committee. In 1883, there were 373 women applied for the sitting examination. Among them 296 were regular candidates, 79 were private. But the documents of *Sammilini* proved that only 181 candidates appeared the examination. In 1883 about 10 Muslim women passed, namely Ashar Bibi, Ramiza Bibi, Nasira Bibi, Ariza Bibi, Zamia Bibi, Amuza Bibi, Achira Bibi and Nasa Bibi. In 1884 among the 383 girls, 21 Muslim students passed the examination organized by the *Sammilani*.⁵⁵ They were namely Syedia Zinnatannisa Bibi, Amuza Bibi, Syeda Faizunnesa, Faramzan Bibi, Khudeja Bibi, Abiza Bibi, Shunai Bibi, Bidiza Bibi, Nafiza Bibi, Razan Bibi and some other from Eastern parts of Bengal. Srihatta Sammilani imparted female education based on its own syllabus, offered certificates, medals and rewards to the successful candidates. In 1889, Maulavi Sirazul Islam Khan Bahadur, lawyer of Calcutta High Court was present at the annual prize giving ceremony of *Srihatta Sammilani* and declared a prize of Rs.10 to encourage Muslim girls so that they take education at least by maintaining *purdah*.⁵⁶

Besides this, Bipin Chandra Pal and Sundari Mohan Dass founded the '*Jatiya Bidyalaya*' in 1880⁵⁷ for spreading female education and tried to foster nationalism and patriotism among the native people.⁵⁸ In 1905, Bipin Chandra Pal also established '*Swadeshi Bhandar*' for collection of money for the cause of the country.⁵⁹ Subarnaprava Dass, Dr. Kalyani Dass and Anjali Dass, Hemantakumari Devi took initiative for the establishment of Government aided Girls' minor school. Girish Chandra Nag, a social reformer and an advocate of female education organized movement along with other students of Sylhet who lived at Calcutta, to remove the social evils under the influence of the Bramho Movement and to free the motherlands from the foreign rule. Bipin Chandra, Sundari Mohan Dass, Sita Nath dutta, Tarakishore Choudhury were supported his efforts. Girish Chandra spent a lion share of his income for the cause of the country. He helped the native people by donating money to establish the indigenous industries during the time of the Swadeshi movement. He donated money for the spread of female education. He developed transport and communication system in his village. Besides this he established a post-office and a school known as "*Rai Bahadur Patshala*". Though his early life was influenced by the Bramho Samaj but he did not converted to the Bramho. His father in-law Prakash Chandra

⁵⁵ Maya Bhattacharjee, *Shatbarsha Purbe Muslim Antapurbasinider Bidyacharcha*, Bangla Academy Patrika, Sraban- Aswin, 1988, p.48.

⁵⁶ Ibid.p.87.

⁵⁷ Dipankar Mohanta, *ibid*,p.95.

⁵⁸ Ibid,p. 149.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 95.

Dev was more progressive and supported female emancipation. He constantly inspired Lila Nag to broke the age-old barriers of four walls .Mahim Choudhury one of the disciple of Raja Ram Mohan Roy popularized and progressed the views of Bramho Samaj. His wife Nalinibala was also active supporter of the Brmho Samaj. Satinath Thwatabhusan, Gagan Home and Mohendra Roy became the followers of the Brmho Samaj. In Surma Valley, the Hindu women first took active part in the social reform movement due to the encouragement of their husbands. Lila Nag was the pathfinder of the women awakening movement in Sylhet. She fought for women equality, women’s right to education and economic independence.⁶⁰ Sarada Manjori Dutta encouraged female education. She also propogated the Bramho philosophy and visited door to door for popularize the Bramho philosophy.⁶¹ Her daughter Subarnaprava Dass, also advocated female education and toured in the remote places for spreading female education.⁶² Krishna Priya Choudhury and Mollika Sundari Dass Purkaysta also converted to the Bramho and encouraged female education.⁶³ Mollika Sundari Dass established a primary school in Dighli, Sylhet.⁶⁴

In 1886, Raja Girish Chandra established an English medium school in Sylhet. In 1891 it was promoted to intermediate and known as Raja Girish Chandra High School.⁶⁵ In 1903, Hemanta Kumari choudhury founded the girls’ school in Sylhet. She was the headmistress of this school. This school was promoted as a English Girls’ High School in 1924.⁶⁶ In 1940, Konok Purkayastha, student of this school secured first position in matriculation in Bengal. In 1901, Hemanta Kumari Devi published a women journal “*Anthopur*”.⁶⁷This was the first women journal edited by the woman. The Sylhet District Gazetter mentioned that in 1874-75, there were 27 high schools and 195 primary schools in Sylhet. In 1880-81 there were 31 high schools and 285 primary schools and in 1890-91 there were 44 high schools and 695 primary schools and in 1900-01, there were 68 high schools and 1017 primary schools in Sylhet. In 1905, there were 59 high schools in Sylhet.⁶⁸ In 1928, Ramkrishna Mission established “Ramakrishna Girls’ high

⁶⁰Dipankar Mohanta, *Lila Roy O Banglar Nari Jagiron*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 1999 p.9 ⁶⁰ Shamsad Husam & Masum Rahman Akash, *Kaler Camvase Jara*, Sekerer Sandane, Sylhet,2002,p. 180.

⁶¹ SaradaManjori Dutta, *Mahajattrar Pathe*,Kolkata,p.19.

⁶² Anjali Lahiri, *Subarna Prava Dass abong Tatkalin Nari Samaj*, Shillong, Assam, 1990,p.5.

⁶³ Dipankar Mohanta, *ibid*.p. 95.

⁶⁴ Dipankar Mohanta, *Nabjanmer Brismit Atiti: Mallikasundari Dass Purkaystha*, Jugvery, Sylhet, 7th & 14th Feb, 1996.

⁶⁵ Md. Abdul Ajj, *Shiksha Dikhaya Sylheter Atit O Bartaman*, 2000,Sylhet,p.51.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.51.

⁶⁷ Abdul Hamid Manik, *Sylhet Guide*, p. 111.

⁶⁸Rabbani Choudhury, *Moulavibazar Jelar Itihas O Otijya*, Agami Prakashani, Dhaka, 2000, P. 69.

School". In 1935, Maimunnessa primary school was established in Shekh Ghat. Welsh Presbyterian Missionary established mission school in Sylhet which renamed as Kishori Mohan Girls' school. Kaji Jalaluddin Girls' high School and Amberkhana girls' high school did many important progress in female education. Besides this there were many girls primary schools such as Mirja Jangal Junior Girls' School, Government Girls' School, Shishu School, Basanta Kumar Shishu Academy, Baby Care, Osmani Kinder Garten, sunrise kinder Garten, Anonda Niketan, Salam Shishu Academy, Shahjalal Jameya Islamia etc.

The establishment of the Murari Chand College in 1892 was a great landmark for the progress of higher education. From 1892 to 1908 this college was financed by Raja Girish Chandra. and from 1908 to 1912 was got some financial assistance from the government. In 1st April, 1912, Assam Pradesh Government provincialised the college.⁶⁹ In 1940, another college, Madan Mohan College was established.⁷⁰ In Sunamganj, the first school was established in 1887 on the occasion of the jubilee ceremony of the accession of the queen Victoria. The school was named as Sunamganj Jubille High School. In 1944 Sunamganj College was established.⁷¹ In Habiganj, Bindaban Das established Brindaban college in 1931. After few years it was transferred to the Government land and runned by the government aid.⁷² In 1939, Bajendra Narayan Choudhury, zamindar of Pailgaon advocated female education. He and some other progressive male founded first women college. In 1945, Assam Government provincialised the college's expenditure and renamed as Government college. Suprava Dev joined as the first female lecturer of this college.⁷³

Moin Uddin Ahmed, the great industrialist and social reformer advocated female education. He established Moin Uddin Adarsha Girls' Collge. ⁷⁴He donated land for the college and also gave the expenditure of building construction. ⁷⁵Lila Roy, was the first women who got admission in the Dhaka University and became a new era of co-education and women higher education.⁷⁶ When she obtained admission to the M.A (Part I) class in English. Shortly after when Susma Sengupta enrolled into the Department of Economics, the question of *purdah* came up. In 1923,

⁶⁹ Md Abdul Ajj, *ibid.* 51.

⁷⁰ Md Hafijur Rahman Bhuya, *ibid.* p, 50

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 50.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 51.

⁷³ Iffat Jahan, *Sylheter Arthaniti O Samaj*, Utso Prakashan, Dhaka, 2010, p. 223.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 150.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 150.

⁷⁶ Shamsad Husam, *ibid.* p.156.

having obtained their B.A degrees from Bethune, Latika Roy, Lila Roy, Arubala Sengupta and Santibala Nag joined the M.A Part I class in Bengali and Sanskrit. Special classes were held for them in the afternoon at 4.30 after the general classes. Severe criticism came from the conservative people.⁷⁷

Thus in the first half of the twentieth century, very few women began to go to school and tried to break down the traditional bondages. The Hindu enlightened minority first welcomed the work of the missionary and infact some native people also encouraged the missionary work. The 'zenana' education became popular among the women. The enlightened minority educated their wives, daughters and sisters. A significant number of women from the high and low class of the society sent their girl children to the missionary girls' school for education. Although the society did not realize the immediate benefits of female education, the next generation of the society reaped the fruits of this enlightenment. It was recorded that by 1901 there were 47 female literates (per 10,000 of total male and female population) in the districts of Cachar.⁷⁸ In 1900-01, there were only 1`15 percent females went to the school.⁷⁹

The reform among the Muslim society emerged rather late here also. They only learned Arabic and Persia and some basic religious education. Besides that when Hindus started to receive modern education introduced by the Christian Missonaries, Muslim Kept aloof themselves. The Muslim Ulema preached that the English education was '*Haram*' (illegal) for the Muslim and they would not get the English education on the name of the Non co-operation with the British. The Muslim males received their education from *maktabs* and *madrassas*. They did not accept the English education on the initiative stage. So they lagging behind in every field either social or economic status. It was only in the beginning of the twentieth century, they Muslim males of this region started to receiving education and and awakening among the Muslims likely to be started. They also got employment under the British Government and they improved their social and economic condition which was deteriorated after the coming of the British. They started to advocate female education. They thought their daughters, wives and sisters at home either themselves or by appointing tutor. There were many progressive Muslim families such as Hurmat Ali Badlaskar, Nasib Ali mazumdars, Md Gulam Rabbani, Rezan Ali, Mubarak Ali

⁷⁷ Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim women in Colonial Bengal*, Leiden, Newyork,1996,p. 165.

⁷⁸ Census of India,196, Vol.iii, Assam ,p,166 & B.B Hazarika & Roy Choudhury S.B, Gazetter of India,p. 406.

⁷⁹. Allen B.C, *ibid.* p. 146.

Badlaskar, Sajidur Reja Laskar, Sonowar Ali Choudhury etc.who advocated female education in the colonial period. Like their other counter parts, the Muslim middle class intellectuals began the reform movement and advocated female education. The views and thoughts of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Syed Amir Ali, Syeed Latif also influenced the minds of the Muslims in Surma Valley. They tried to regenerate the community by advocating western education and co-operation with the British.⁸⁰In Sylhet,Syed Shaikh Sikandar Ali (1891-1964) advocated female education and tried to modernize the society. He established Mainunnessa Girls' High School in 1935.⁸¹ Abdul Kadir Sikapani also raised his voice against the prevailing social evils and superstitions.⁸² Sayyaid Shamsul Islam, Amirul Islam, Abu Jafar Abdullah, Dewan Mohammad Ajruf,⁸³ Aminur Rashid Choudhury, Sayful Alam Khan, Ashraf Uddin Choudhury⁸⁴. Maulavi Nurul Haq published the first monthly literary magazine '*Al-Islah*' in 1932 in Sylhet where the progressive Muslim intellectuals expressed their views on women issues. The establishment of the Kendriya Muslim Sahitya Sangsad in 1936 in Sylhet also created a new era among the Muslim intellectuals.⁸⁵ Ali Amzad Khan established a primary school in 1903 in Maulavibazar which later converted into Ali Amzad Girls' High School.⁸⁶ Maulavi Abdul Karim and Abdul Mazid⁸⁷Eklmur Raja Choudhury, Syeed Mustafa Ali, Syeed Muztaba Ali, Syeed Murtaja Ali, Abdur Razzak, Fojrul Haq, Abdul Gaffar Datta Choudhury, Aminur Rashid Choudhury, Ashraf Hussain gave a new direction to the Muslim society.⁸⁸ They began to raise their voices against the ill customs and superstitions prevailing in the Muslim society. The progressive intellectuals like Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Dewan Abdul Matin Choudhury⁸⁹,Dewan Ajjur Raja Choudhury,Sarafat Ali Choudhury,Maulana Asiruddin Sahib,⁹⁰ Dewan Abdul Karim Choudhury,⁹¹Majhar Choudhury, Motahir Ali, Sonowar Ali Choudhury encouraged female

⁸⁰ Anowar Hossain, *ibid.* p. 32.

⁸¹ Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, *ibid.* p.67.

⁸² Shamsad Husam and Masum Rahman Akash, *Kaler Canvase Jara*, Shekorer Sandane, 2002, p.31.

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 67..

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 68.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.67.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁸⁷ Dipankar Mohanta, *Sekaler Sylhet: Suhasini Dass*, Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 2005.p. 23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.26.

⁸⁹ Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, *ibid.* p. 78-80.

⁹⁰ Nibedita Dass Purkaysta, *Mukti Manche Nari*, Prip Trust, Dhaka, 1997, p.9.

⁹¹ Fahmida Rashid Choudhury & apurba Sharma, (ed) *Sirajunnessa Choudhury: Birth ceremony*, Itayadi Grantha Prakash, Sylhet, 2010, p.20.

education. It was from these families that the first daughters, wives and sisters, went to schools and steeped outside the *andarmahal*.⁹²

At first they educated women of their family at home and they set up their mind to send their daughters to schools. Though the awakening among the Muslims started late, but there was a gradual progress. It was only in the 1930's that Muslim parents began to send their daughters to schools and those who did not allow their daughters to go to schools encouraged *zenana* education. This event marked a new chapter in changing the conservative outlook of the society. Thus the Muslim women went to the school and became educated more lately compare to the Hindu. The Muslim not only became literate later period but also joined in the freedom movement rather late. When many Hindu women came forward for the active participation in politics, they secluded within four walls due to their conservative mentality.

During the Non-Co-Operation Movement, many Hindu girls left the Mission School and joined in the Dinnath Nabakishore Balika Vidyalaya. This school was set up in Silchar in 1921 with the noble effort of Babu kamini Kumar Chanda and Shyama Charan Dev which was nourished by the funds of tea-planters Babu Naba Kishore Sen and Dinnath Dutta and the school was named as Dinnath Nabakishore Balika Vidyalaya . To the common people the school was known as the "Swadeshi School" because it was greatly influenced and directed by the swadeshi or Nationalistic ideas. During British period this school was managed by the people without any Govt. aid.⁹³

Many girls were passed out lower primary School and Middle English School, but they did not have the chance of further education. Khairunnessa Choudhury was the first Muslim female graduate in the Sylhet district. In Karimganj, the Ratanmoni School was the oldest school which was established in 1864. Many schools for boys and co-ed schools were established in colonial period. In Karimganj, Madan Mohan Madav Charan Girls' Higher Secondary School which was established in 1935, considered as the first girls' school because unlike the Mission School a good number of all classes came to the school. Many Muslim girls' also joined in this school but their number was very negligible. From 1935-1947, only 60 Muslim girls (approximately) read in this school. From this poor number we could easily imagined Muslim women lagging behind

⁹² Sonia Nishat Amin, *ibid.* p. 29.

⁹³ Hate Kari, 3rd volume, Bengal year-1373, D.N.N.K., H.S.School, p. 6.

in education. In Hailakandi, there were many other Lower primary and Middle primary Schools. The Muslim girls dropped out from schools after passing lower primary examination or middle vernacular school. In Hailakandi district, Indra Kumari Girls' School was the only girls school which was established in 1942 under the private aid. Saifulnessa was the first Muslim woman who passed out matriculation in first division with three letters in 1946 as a student of this school in Hailakandi district. As regards higher education Gurucharan College was the oldest college in Surma Valley. It was set up in 1935. a widow Kiran Sashi Nag donated Rs.10,000/ for this institution on the condition that the college would cater to the needs of female education. This college was named after her husband Late Guru Charan Nag.⁹⁴The number of women matriculates and above level of degree holders were very limited in 1935. Generally 18 to 20 girls students came out successful in the matriculation examination from Silchar. There were only two girls student in G.C. College in 1935. Even 1945 to 1949 there were about 35/40 girls students out of which only two belong to Muslim community.⁹⁵ But they could not complete their college graduation. The establishment of Karimganj College in 1946 was also marked a new era for the progress of higher education in the Valley. From 1946-47, no women admitted in this college due to the conservative attitude of the people.

TABLE-II

The 1901 census shows the compare between Hindu and Muslim literate person in Sylhet.⁹⁶

Religion	Total persons	Total literate	Male	Female
Hindu	1,049,248	72,944	69,321	3,623
Muslim	1,180,324	24,097	23,267	830

The 1901 census shows that there were 69,321 Hindu male and 3,623 female literates in the Sylhet. Among Muslims, there were 24,097 Muslims, among them, 23,267 male literates and 830 female literates in the Sylhet. This figure proved that the progress and growth of Muslim female education was low compare to the Hindu women.

⁹⁴ Dey Parimal, "*Gurucharan College, for the spread of female education*", "Souvenir, Golden Jubilee Celebration, G.C. College, Silchar, 1986 p.39.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.39-40.

⁹⁶ Census of India, 1901, Vol, iv, part ii, Assam, by B.C Allen, Shillong, 1902, p.6.

TABLE- III

The following table shows the low percentage of the Muslim female literates in Surma Valley.⁹⁷

District	Total number of female	Number of literates	Percentage
Sylhet	775,628	12,997	1.67%
North Sylhet Subdivision	205,316	5,619	2.73%
South Sylhet Subdivision	96,282	951	0.98%
Karimganj	130,628	1,369	1.04%
Habiganj Subdivision	179,494	2,270	1.38%
Cachar	92,478	2,288	0.80%
Silchar Subdivision	557,781	744	0.97%
Hailakandi	34,582	565	0.50%
North Cachar Hills Subdivision	115	3	2.60%

The above table shows that though female education was progressed in the valley, but the percentage of female literates was very low and it was only 1.67% in Sylhet and 0.80% in Cachar.

⁹⁷ Census of India, 1931, vol iii, by C.S Mullan, Shillong, 1932

The percentage of female literates was too less due to the many reasons. In Surma Valley, purdah lays a detaining hand on the Muslim girl's education. They were secluded at home and they were not allowed to go outside the home. The Muslim society also did not permit them to meet with any male members except very close kin. They could not think of getting their girls educated in public institutions. Generally, the Muslims considered female education highly improper. The Muslims did not encourage female education in fear of violation of purdah.⁹⁸

The conservative attitude of both the Hindu and Muslim society also felt disastrous effect on the progress of female education. There was superstitious feeling that education caused early widowhood and the women had also become outspoken. They felt that marriage should be the only aim of women's life and her best place was at home. They never realized that for running the home efficiently and rear the children properly a certain education is necessary.⁹⁹

The *Madrassa* oriented learning disregarded female voices. Though Islam disfavoured co-education but it did not denied female education. Islam has never proscribed literacy for women. It is highly misleading to think so. According to the Quran both Muslim men and women are required to pray "Lord, increase me in my knowledge." Also, the prophet has said, "Acquisition of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim men and women." So that men do not find any excuse of depriving her of education. But the traditional societies have tried to keep her uneducated or gave her only elementary religious duties, nothing more.¹⁰⁰ Besides, the elderly women had prejudices and they did not permit the girls of their families to read and write neglecting the domestic work.

Besides this, the Muslims hatred against the English education was distrous for them. They lagging behind almost hundred years than the Hindus. The first half of the twentieth century, education was limited to the higher enlightened wealthy families. There were other causes which prevented not only the Muslim girls' but other communities from having educational facilities. Early marriage was one of the most important among them. Among the Muslims it was also quite common. Girls are withdrawn from school just at the time when they begin to mature in mind as well as body. They were married when they were only ten years old. The education of

⁹⁸ Anowar Hossain, *ibid.* p. 109.

⁹⁹ Sonia Nishat Amin, *ibid.* p. 183.

¹⁰⁰ Asgar Ali Engineer, art *The Status of Muslim Women*, Economic and Political Weekly, February , 1994,p.4.

Muslim girls has been impeded not only by the specific handicaps of purdah and early marriage, but frequently by the conservatism of the Muslim community women.

The causes of the comparative backwardness of the Muhammadan community is well known. It proceeds from the demand that education should first be directed to the acquisition of the Arabic alphabet and to the reading of the Koran. This education is imparted in maktab. A maktab proper consists of three classes. In the first children are taught the Arabic alphabet, in the second to read the Koran and learn by heart such passages as are necessary for worship, in the third class they learn something of one or more of the Islamic languages, Urdu, Persian, Arabic.

Poor economic condition was also one of the important factor for the slow growth of female education. The parents thought that female education was unnecessary for them as they went another's house. A section of the Muslims thought that daughters would be married off, therefore, spending on their education was meaningless. It was also felt that expenditure at the time of marriage in the form of dowry and rituals could not be avoided if they were educated. Providing higher education to daughters meant their becoming more age, and sending grown up daughters to school and colleges would invite social criticism which might create at the time of marriage. Besides, higher education to girls, the Muslims feared, would create problems in getting equally educated grooms.¹⁰¹

Lack of sufficient female schools was also another cause of the lagging behind. There was great opposition to send girls to co- educational institutions and insistence on religious education only were also the main factors that retarded the progress of modern secular education among Muslim women. The want of an adequate number of female teachers and the lack of fund for women's education also hampered the growth of female education.¹⁰²

In Surma Valley, though daughters of Hindu families went to the mission schools but their number was very negligible. Though a small portion of English educated people welcomed missionaries and supported by their active help, but the majority people did not accept these missionaries' activities as they were outcaste. Besides this, these missionaries tried to convert

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.109.

¹⁰² Md Hafijur Rahman Bhuya, ibid. p. 50.

people into Christianity through their education. So fear of loss of religion, they did not send their children to the mission schools. Most of them preferred for *Zenana* education.¹⁰³

Despite all these obstacles, female education had progressed in the valley. Sahera Banu and Khairunnessa Choudhury became the first graduate in Surma Valley in 1938.¹⁰⁴ Shamsi Khanom Choudhury began her education in Khairun Nessa Girls' Primary School. In 1936, she passed out matriculation from Sylhet Government Girls' school and after two years, she passed out Intermediate from Murari Chand college in 1938. After that she completed her graduation from Shillong Ladykean College. She was determined for further education. She got her master degree from the Aligarh University in 1942.¹⁰⁵ She was the first Muslim women who got degree from the Aligarh University. After her completion of education, she became a successful teacher. She taught few days in Sakhwat Memorial girls' school, Calcutta. During this time, she meet with Shamsun Nahar Mahmud. In 1945, she joined as a School inspectress in Assam School Board.¹⁰⁶ Ajjun Nessa Khatun Choudhury was the first matriculate in the Maulavi bazaar sub-division. She passed out her HSLC in 1938 from Dubri Lady Car Girls' High school. After that she admitted into Shillong College.¹⁰⁷

It was only in 1942 two or three Muslim girl passed out Matriculation in Cachar district. Some of them became teacher of primary school after passing the primary school or middle vernacular school Rashida Haque Choudhury who was the first Muslim Female graduate in entire Bark valley was passed H.S.L.C in 1944 from the Mission School. The Silchar Mission Girls' school after many dramatic changes became Silchar Government Girls' Higher Secondary and Multipurpose school. Her family was progressive so she got the chance of further education and in 1946 she passed out Pre- University examination from the Lady Braboune College, Calcutta. But there was no such prominent figure in Karimganj District, as during the time of referendum the aristocratic families of Karimganj left India and migrated in Sylhet. It was after partition the percentage of Muslim higher educated females increased gradually. Bilkis Jaigirdar passed her I.A from the Murarichand College, in 1934 and got her graduation in 1936.¹⁰⁸ After that she

¹⁰³ Narendra Kumar Gupta, *ibid.* p. 223.

¹⁰⁴ Sharif Uddin Ahmed, *Sylhet: History and Heritage*, Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, Dhaka, 1999, p.323.

¹⁰⁵ Shamsad Husam & Masum Rahman Akash, (ed) *Kaler Camvase Jara, Sekerer Sandane*, Sylhet, 2002, p. 138

¹⁰⁶ Shamsad Husam & Masum Rahman Akah (ed), *ibid.* p.138.

¹⁰⁷ Information from Md Abdul Aziz, interview dated on, 09/10/12, Dhaka

¹⁰⁸ Shamsad Husam & Masum Rahman Akash (ed) *ibid.* p. 135.

became the teacher of the Sylhet Government Girls' School.¹⁰⁹ She was also one of the founding member of the Maimunnessa Girls' High school. She became the president of this school. She was also associated with other educational institution.¹¹⁰ After the partition, she became the president of the Redcross Society. She established a co-operative society for the knitting and sewing.¹¹¹ Miss Kile Khan, was the first women in Sylhet, who read in Oxford University. She also engaged herself for encouraging female education in her native village Chirahimpur.¹¹² Mrs Umme Ayesha Khatun Choudhury was another progressive woman. After getting higher education, she was appointed as the Chairman of the Rajshahi Education Board.¹¹³

Thus in conclusion we may say that the progress of Muslim women education was slow but there was a gradual progress in Surma Valley. The number of educated women increased only after the independence. Though their number were small but there were many women like Khairun Nessa Choudhury, Jubeda Rahim choudhury, Sirajun Nessa Choudhury, Anurupa Biswas, Rashida Haque Choudhury who were educated either by their husband, father or self educated. They wrote many books and articles which were published in the women journals. They participated to reform the society and founded many organizations. The opportunity of getting modern education produced a number of higher educated and progressive women in later period. Thus modern education changed the pattern of women lives. 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.¹¹⁴ They took active parts in the process of change, and came forward to help other women.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 135.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.p.135.

¹¹¹ Ibid.p. 135.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 157.

¹¹³ Ibid. p.157.

¹¹⁴ Forbs Geraldine, *ibid*, p,27-29