

Conclusion

This research has attempted to analyze the history of women's participation in higher education in West Bengal. This investigation narrated the history from 1947 when the position of women in higher education in West Bengal was not satisfactory. Only a limited number of women could get opportunity to achieve higher education. Almost none of them could take part to decide about the education of women as well as future life of women. Srimati Rasasundari in her autobiography *Amar Jiban* sketched the scenario. Many women had to face similar situation that of her at that time. The society above all the family did not support women's higher education. Only few women could tear off the barrier and established themselves as Kadambini Ganguly (1861-1923), Chandramukhi Basu (1860-1944), Saraladevi Chaudhurani (1872-1945), Kamini Roy (1864-1933) and Lady Abala Bose (1865-1951).

After independence in 1947 the environment of education, particularly the higher education of women was started to change to a better goal to some extent. The implementation of the Indian Constitution in 1950 gave the equal rights and status to women with men. Those Constitutional provisions help women to achieve higher education. Further both the union government and the government of West Bengal took various steps for the expansion of higher education of women. After independence the University Education Commission (1948-1949), the first education commission, clearly stated the importance of women's education. On the basis of the recommendation of the University Education Commission (1948-1949) the union government formed different committees for the development of women's education. Those committees were National Committee on Women's Education (1958), National Council on Women's Education (1959), Hansa Mehta Committee

(1961), Emotional Integration Committee (1962), Bhaktabatsalam Committee (1963) etc.

It was more important that with the formation of those committees the participation of women in higher education increased. Even the chairpersons of many of those committees were honourable women. Many of the members of those committees were women. Thus the participation of women in higher education was important as the women were attached to play the role of policy-makers also. The Education Commission of 1964-1966 further emphasized on the importance of women's education. With the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission more and more women started to achieve higher education. The recommendations of the Five Year Plans, the implementation of the recommendation of the University Grants Commission (1956), the implementation of the National Policy on Education 1986 were the landmarks in the approach to women's education. The government of West Bengal also took different steps for the development of participation of women in higher education.

With those steps taken by the both union government and the government of West Bengal the participation of women in higher education was increased as students, teachers, researchers, administrators and even as policy-makers. It is true that the elaborated facilities had attracted more and more women to get higher education. Along with quantitative expansion, it is also true that there had been a qualitative improvement also. Women had been occupying more and more top places in the list of successful candidates in different examinations and winning distinctions in the academic world. It was found that changed social conditions, economic necessity and the

realization of the value and necessity of higher education had brought about a remarkable progress in the status of higher education of women.

When we attempted to explore socio-economic and cultural conditions of the issue, we found the complexity. In urban areas there was a greater acceptance of higher education of women than in rural areas. The people of urban areas were more conscious about the higher education of women. But in rural and *mofussil* areas social attitudes towards women's higher education was not developed properly. Caste system was also an important factor in this matter.

We have also analyzed that women's strong desire to achieve higher education helped them to reach their goal. It is further explored that inspite of engaging themselves in higher education some women could not utilize that golden opportunity properly. Hence those students could not reach their target as they should to do. But the limitation was not of them but responsibility was of the society at large.

We have seen that inspite of concerted efforts to improve the participation of women in higher education the educational status of women was far from satisfactory. The enrolment of women in higher educational institutions was low as compared to men. On the other hand we have also explored that women had to take trouble to achieve higher education in many rural and *mofussil* areas in West Bengal. Many women had to face different difficulties to have higher education. One of those difficulties was insecurity of women. In the twenty first century women can reach any sector of work and many women proved their quality successfully in every aspect of their activities. But morning newspapers of almost every day show us the

harassments of women in different ways. It may be child marriage, female foeticide, sexual harassment, rape or oppression after marriage. Those incidents were great obstacles towards the higher education of women in West Bengal.

It is more stinging to say that the development of socio-economic condition could not reduce such violence. Moreover the incidents of molestation were increasing day by day. Surprisingly such incidents did not happen in rural and *mofussils* areas only but also in urban areas. Hence many of the parents chosen colleges and universities for the women of their family regarding not only on the standard of the teaching of those colleges or universities but also the security of the way they had to go through to colleges or universities. Consequently women of various villages and *mofussils* had to compel to rely on male guardians to go out of home and if they did not have such guardian, the women had to give up their studies or private tuitions. So those women had to compel to accept the harsh reality.

One of the major obstructions was the narrow social attitude in many villages, *mofussils* and socio-economically backward areas in West Bengal. *Towards Equality, the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* (1974) showed that clearly. Further the recent surveys also proved that social attitudes towards higher education of women in some rural and *mofusil* areas in West Bengal did not progress properly. Like the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) the recent surveys also proved that many people of our state believed that marriage was the final destination of a woman.

In our society marriage is considered as the domain of elderly kinsmen. It is true in the case of women because of values attached to virginity before marriage is an important consideration in many families particularly in rural and *mofusil* areas in our state. Many parents would like to marry-off their daughters at an early age and the age gap between the bride and bridegroom is expected to be quite considerable. The position of women can be looked into from different practices associated with the institution of marriage, i.e., the mate-selection procedure, the *kanyadan*, the *patriarchal* rule of residence, the concept of '*pati parameswsar*' etc. Many people believe that women may get higher education and then they may be engaged in a service according to their quality and qualification. But after that they should be involved in the system of marriage as early as possible.

This strange idea is believed in our society that the social status of a woman is mostly determined by her marriage. And this belief has its presence in villages and *mofussils* as well as in many educated towns. Our research points out this problem by analyzing a number of literary texts, contents of few Bangla feature films and some survey reports.

So to solve those obstacles there is a need of more and more social awareness. This is essential to make the people more conscious particularly in rural areas. It is necessary for the women to contribute to the socio-economic development of the state and to strengthen their role in society and to realize their own capacities. The media and various forms of communication have to be geared to this end. All priorities should be given to build a conductive environment for higher education of women. Hostel facilities for women along with hostel maintenance stipends should be provided particularly in rural and *mofussil* areas. Ragging (most of them are

gender-related) and sexual harassment in higher educational institutions should be abolished strictly. Developing positive attitude towards community living, family planning and scientific mind should also be developed effectively.

The number of sanitary blocks for women students in co-educational institutions particularly in rural areas should be adequately increased. Much allocation of funds should be made for women's higher education. Above all the state and the family need to be the backbone for the women who need to make progress in their chosen paths. Though there are considerable progresses made in the arena of higher education of women in the state, there are number of obstacles which are to be evaded.

We hope for both quantitative and qualitative growth of women in higher education and bright future ahead in West Bengal. We humbly expect this research would provide an entry point for further research on this issue.