

## GENTLEWOMEN IN COLONIAL CALCUTTA: EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOLING

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**ABSTRACT** This article shows how two pioneering institutions for female education in colonial Bengal, Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' Schools, made significant contributions to female education at a time when women's education was mostly restricted to home teaching. The study brings out the underlying contradictions between traditional and modern approaches towards education displayed in the goals, admission process and curriculum structure of these two schools. Analysing their respective contributions demonstrates that Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' schools produced the modern Bengali *bhadramahila* (well-educated woman) who secured higher education, but was also rooted in traditional values. The final section illustrates how with the expansion of education in the twentieth century, the boundaries of the reformist zeal gradually blurred, so that educated women in Bengal could fight for greater equality.

**KEYWORDS:** *Bengal, Bethune School, Bhadrak, education, Hindus, India, Muslims, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, women*

### Introduction

In nineteenth-century Bengal, female education became important to Hindu *bhadralok* (well-educated men) reformers as they countered the proselytising influence of missionary education. However, they struggled with the kind of education imparted to girls to prevent the onslaught of missionary influence (Borthwick, 1984: 68–72; Manchanda, 2014: 120). From a Muslim female perspective, as Mahapatra (2010: 25) reports, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain had commented: 'We are demanding our basic right to education, we do not need sympathy' (*Amra jaha chaitechi taha anugraher fol noy, amader jonmogoto adhikar*).

In that contested broader context, this article examines the crucial roles played by Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' schools in the expansion of female education

in Bengal. Bethune School was established in 1849 and Sakhawat Memorial in 1911, both providing education to Hindu and Muslim women, respectively, at a time when female education was discouraged or restricted to the home. The study also analyses the underlying debate between traditional and modern approaches towards education displayed by both institutions in their goals, student composition and curriculum structure. By evaluating both the contribution and the debate, this article first demonstrates that Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial played significant roles in the making of the modern Bengali *bhadramahila* (well-educated woman) who pursued higher education, but also displayed compassionate and motherly affection. The final section of the article illustrates how following the expansion of female education from the second and third decade of the twentieth century onwards, educated women from both institutions became teachers, doctors and social workers and began to participate in activities outside their traditional domestic world. As the boundaries of the reformist zeal gradually blurred, education gradually also empowered more women to fight for economic freedom and gender equality.

Elsewhere in Northern India, Bhai Takht Singh and his wife Harnam Kaur had started the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya in 1892 (Manchanda, 2017) and Lala Devraj had started the Kanya Mahavidyalaya in 1896 (Manchanda, 2014: 120–1). Following the analysis of Manchanda (2014, 2017) of how female education at these two institutions in Punjab helped in the production of an ideal Sikh and Arya *kanya* (girl) serving her husband and family, this essay shows that through their organising principles and curricula, Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' schools in Bengal also wanted women to be educated mothers and compassionate wives (Manchanda, 2014: 120). However, unlike Manchanda (2014), this article pointedly examines the intersectionality between class, religion and education followed by Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial in their goals, student composition and curriculum structure. Lastly, students graduating from Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya and Kanya Mahavidyalaya worked outside the home to spread the ideology of the two schools in Punjab, which was *Sikhipracheer* (making of an ideal Sikh woman) and *Vedpracheer* (making of an ideal Aryan girl), as Manchanda (2014: 147) observes. Somewhat differently, female students from Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' Schools carved out an autonomous space for themselves from the second decade of the twentieth century onwards, when they became teachers, doctors, poets and social workers, entering all fields of public life (Kerkhoff, 1995: 207). Women from Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial as two pioneering educational establishments in Bengal exercised their agency to cross the threshold of becoming just educated mothers for future enlightened generations, developing themselves in a different way than observed in the Punjab.

### Early Schooling for Girls in Calcutta

John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune (1801–51) founded a primary school for girls in Calcutta in 1849. This was the first organised effort by Bethune and *bhadralok* reformers to start a school for female education in Calcutta. His supporters included the great

reformer of Bengal, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, who even provided scriptural sanction for female education (Bagchi, 1993: 2214–5). Prior to Bethune School, most women were educated by their husbands or brothers at home, often secretly. Other than husbands and brothers, *zenana* education or private tuition at home by missionaries or European ladies educated many Bengali women. Punyalata Chakraborty's novel *Chelebelar Dinguli* (Childhood Days) provides an excellent example of such early home education by a British lady (Chakraborty, 1880: 15–7). At the age of five years, Punyalata went to a school, which was in her house. A British lady taught students to recite English poetry, sing songs and learn proper mannerisms. During that time, *zenana* education did not change the domestic organisation, but *bhadraloks* disapproved of the evangelical character of the education that was imparted (Borthwick, 1984: 69). Bethune School sought to provide secular education to women from upper caste *bhadralok* families with the goal of producing educated Hindu mothers.

Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School, started by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932) in 1911, provided the foundation for Muslim women's education in Bengal (Bagchi, 2009). In 1936, it became the only government institution for Muslim women in Calcutta. Prior to Sakhawat Memorial, progressive groups such as *Musalman Suhrid Sammilani* in 1883 had educated Muslim women within the four walls of the house (*andarmahal*). In other instances, they were educated at a Muslim Girl's Madrasa started by Nawab Shamsi Jahan Firdaus Mahal of Murshidabad in 1897 (Amin, 1996: 147, 150–1). Like Bethune School, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School was a pioneering effort to send women to a formal educational institution. By examining school reports and personal accounts of students from both institutions, this study shows that Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' schools helped women in Colonial Bengal to secure education well beyond basic literacy.

### Debates over Goals and Student Composition at Bethune

Bethune School became the public arena where the colonial government and *bhadralok* reformers encountered tensions between tradition and modernity. They had to deal with general opposition towards female education as well as the views of orthodox sections who preferred a special curriculum for female students, such as knitting, sewing and household management (Manchanda, 2014: 129). In this, a balance had to be found between Western education and Indian values so that women did not forsake their feminine attributes (Borthwick, 1984: 73). To attain these goals, girls were taught Bengali, needlework and embroidery. English was taught on the parents' request. Bethune aimed to turn traditional Bengali women into urban and literate women who would participate in refined discussions with their husbands and maintain the hearth peacefully (Chanda & Bagchi, 2014: xiv; Nag & Ghose, 2004: 23–4).

In terms of student composition, the institution included only women from wealthy Hindu families. J.E.D. Bethune persuaded several families to send their daughters to the school. Eminent *bhadraloks* such as Debendranath Tagore and Pandit Madanmohan

Tarkalaankar admitted their daughters to Bethune School. Girls were taken to and from the school in covered carriages, but *purdah* (seclusion) was not maintained, as most of the teaching was done by male pundits. Subsequently, the number of students at Bethune School increased from 21 in 1849 to 93 in 1863. However, despite all the advantages, the orthodox *bhadraloks* opposed public schooling for women as offending custom and religious propriety. As a result, enrolment declined to 64 in 1864. To maintain the school, the Government of Bengal introduced a fee of ₹1/-, which was still beyond the financial capacities of lower middle-class families which led to continued decline in enrolment (Borthwick, 1984: 74–9; Nag & Ghose, 2004: 26–7).

At the beginning, Bethune School balanced modern and traditional approaches towards education. The institution fulfilled the *bhadralok* agenda of creating a compassionate wife partly based on the Victorian notion of angel in the house, partly necessitated by the desire to follow Western standards of a civilised nation. Moreover, it did not include women from lower class and non-Hindu backgrounds. Orthodoxy in student composition kept Bengali *bhadramahilas* away from working class women (*chotomahilas*) and Muslims. The initial effort to balance modern goals with a traditional approach towards education did not produce female graduates comparable to their male counterpart. Students dropped out at the third or fourth grade as there were no female teachers and little support for their education at home. Those who continued largely memorised texts without understanding them (Borthwick, 1984: 79; Chanda & Bagchi, 2014: Iv; Nag & Ghose, 2004: 28).

The situation changed after the reorganisation of Bethune School in 1878, when it merged with *Banga Mahila Vidyalaya*. After this amalgamation, standards of education and enrolment figures improved and Bethune School provided instruction in English. In 1881–82, Bethune School had 100 students, out of whom 58 studied in English. The reorganised Bethune School sent Kadambini Bose for the first time to sit for the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University in 1878. She passed the examination in second division, falling short of one mark to secure first division. She secured scholarships to pursue higher education, and in 1879 was admitted to the new First Year Arts course in Bethune School. The First Year Arts naturally progressed to Bachelor of Arts in the college classes of Bethune School. Nag and Ghose (2004: 40–2) recount that Chandramukhi Bose completed her First Year Arts at Free Church Normal School and then took her BA degree from the college classes of the Bethune School along with Kadambini Bose in 1883. She later completed her Masters in English and was appointed as a teacher in the college classes of Bethune School. Finally, the college class at Bethune School was affiliated to Calcutta University in 1888 and was renamed as Bethune College and Bethune Collegiate School (Nag & Ghose, 2004: 38–9, 41–2).

As an affiliated School and College, Bethune could not discriminate based on religion. Along with upper caste Hindu and Brahmo girls, the school admitted Christian but not Muslim girls. For example, in 1888, out of the 136 students enrolled in Bethune School, 44 were Hindus, 87 Brahmos and five Christians. However, by the turn of the

century, Bethune School and College were placed under the New Regulations of the Calcutta University Act of 1904 (Kerkhoff, 1995: 147). This meant that the University now taught postgraduate courses, but also increased its control over colleges and the university. Fixed minimum college fees were introduced, and control was used to curb student militancy (Sarkar, 1983: 105–6).

Bethune’s governing body maintained strict supervision of the institution and introduced new rules on affiliation and grants-in-aid, which were official subsidies. The intake now began to include Muslim students, otherwise Bethune School and College would have lost support from the government. Faizultennesa Zoha (1905–75) was the first Muslim woman to graduate in Mathematics from Bethune College in 1923. She later obtained her master’s degree from Dhaka University and then went to England for higher studies. On her return, she became the Chair of the Mathematics Department at Bethune College (Chanda & Bagchi, 2014: 69; Kerkhoff, 1995: 114–5; Sarkar, 1983: 106–7). Along with the inclusion of students from different religious backgrounds, Bethune School’s reorganisation also increased its enrolment, as Table 1 indicates.

As is reflected in these enrolment figures, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bethune School played a significant role in the expansion of female higher education in Calcutta, despite accusations by orthodox *bhadraloks* of spoiling the purity of Hindu women. Bethune School and College included also women from non-Hindu backgrounds and provided instruction in English, History, Geography, Chemistry, Physical Sciences and Mathematics. Yet, it did not abandon the teaching of needlework and home management. Through its organising principle, Bethune School and College was aiming for a co-existence of traditional and modern approaches towards education.

Table 1    **Enrolment at Bethune School from 1881–2 to 1901–2**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>
1881–2	100	1893–4	125
1882–3	114	1894–5	128
1883–4	112	1895–6	132
1884–5	124	1896–7	145
1885–6	142	1897–8	145
1886–7	119	1898–9	155
1887–8	119	1901–2	137
1888–9	136		
1889–90	136		
1890–1	108		
1891–2	127		

Source: Compiled by the author from Nag and Ghose (2004: 56–94).

### Rokeya and the Sakhawat Memorial School

Parallel debates about tradition and modernity arose among Muslims. According to Rokeya, women did not have the same opportunities as men. In her view, education was the only method to emancipate women. She wanted women to believe in themselves and not be ‘feckless mannequins’ (Quayum, 2016: 146). Through education, Rokeya wanted students to inculcate habits of individual observation and thought, learning the best of Indian and Western cultures. To attain these goals, she started a school in Bhagalpur on 1 October 1909 after the death of her husband, Syed Sakhawat Hossain. However, this school faced opposition from her stepdaughter and son-in-law, which forced Rokeya to leave Bhagalpur in 1910 for Calcutta, where Syed Abdus Salek provided her shelter. Staying at 30, European Asylum Lane, Rokeya re-started her school, Sakhawat Memorial, on 16 March 1911, with two rooms and eight students at 13 Waliullah Lane, predominantly a Muslim neighbourhood. Sakhawat Memorial taught English, Bengali, Biology, Mathematics and manuals on ideal feminine conduct. Initially, Urdu was the medium of instruction, but in 1917, English became the medium and the school added a sixth grade. Finally, in 1936, the Government of Bengal recognised Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School as an English medium high school for Muslim women (Amin, 1996: 156–7; Kerkhoff, 1995: 139; Mahapatra, 2010: 25).

Initially, the school attracted girls from poor Muslim backgrounds, and orthodox Muslim families did not send their children to her school. They believed that without having any formal educational background herself, Rokeya was destroying the purity of the Muslim community by providing education to Muslim women whose real place was at home. To bring in girls from respectable Muslim families, Rokeya went from door to door requesting conservative families to send their daughters to her school. To appeal to orthodox Muslims, Rokeya somewhat mellowed her bold ideas on women’s emancipation. Like Bethune School, she also sought to guarantee *pardah* and covered transport. Consequently, the school began to appeal to elite Muslim families and enrolment from orthodox families improved. The figures in Table 2 reflect this.

Table 2 Enrolment at Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School 1916 to 1930

<i>Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Enrolment</i>
1916	105	1922	124	1928	149
1917	107	1923	122	1929	133
1918	114	1924	120	1930	123
1919	123	1925	104		
1920	126	1926	109		
1921	121	1927	128		

Source: Pal (2010: 98).

Maulvi Syed Ahmed Ali, the school secretary, confirmed the increase of Muslim students from respectable families by publishing an article in *The Mussulman* on 9 June 1911. Balancing modern goals with a traditional approach, Rokeya improved both enrolment figures and the quality of education at Sakhawat Memorial (Amin, 1996: 156–8; Mahapatra, 2010: 25).

Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' Schools were symbols of women's awakening and started a countrywide movement to empower women through education. Both institutions provided agency to women. Yet, they constantly adjusted and reconfigured themselves under colonial and nationalist pressures. Bethune School received support from the government, hence they could not discriminate in terms of religion or economic background (Forbes, 1996: 44–5). On the other hand, the institution raised money through private subscriptions from Hindu *bhadraloks*. Through its curriculum, Bethune School fulfilled the *bhadralok's* agenda of producing Western-educated compassionate wives. Rokeya also conformed to the religious customs and practices of her community in order to attract Muslim girls from orthodox families to her school. Both institutions recognised and promoted female education, but in their goals and curriculum structure conformed to the needs 'suitable' for girls. Chanda and Bagchi (2014: Ivii) record this: 'She would be a perfect wife and companion of the husband even within the larger joint family structure. She was expected to flourish with her own personality under her husband's patronage'.

### **Courses Taught and the Making of the Modern Bengali *Bhadramahila***

This section discusses how, through the courses taught, both institutions addressed the needs of orthodox Bengali Hindu and Muslim families. Both institutions wanted students to receive the best of Indian and Western cultures through the specific courses that were taught. Students received training in modern science, literature and conventional family values. To begin with, students at both institutions studied English. At Bethune School, they learned Milton's *Paradise Lost*. At Bethune College, *Nine Modern Plays* by J. Hampden and *The World of Illusion* by Jacob Washerman were part of the curriculum. Nirmala Sinha of Bethune School indicated that she enjoyed learning new English texts: 'To an eager fresher like me, just out of the *andarmahal* of a conservative Hindu family, everything was clothed in a new light of wonder and delight' (Bhattacharya & Sen, 1980: 181). As reported in the Bethune College Magazine of 1934, Lila Roy, the editor of *Jayashree*, was one of the first students to pass the Bachelor of Arts Examination in English in 1921 from Bethune College (Bhattacharya & Sen, 1980: 181; Nag & Ghose, 2004: 73–4). From 1917 onwards, English was also the medium of instruction at Sakhawat Memorial. Rokeya believed that knowledge of English helped Muslim women to progress as they were far behind their Hindu counterparts. At both institutions, English was necessary not just to become a compassionate wife, but also to pursue higher education.



Along with English, Bengali was another important subject. Both Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial wanted women to learn their mother tongue, which was also a method to attract women from respectable Hindu and Muslim families (Manchanda, 2014: 133). Emphasis was placed on reading, writing, composition, grammar and recitation of poems to develop the skills of a companionable wife (Manchanda, 2014: 134). Some of the Bengali texts, as indicated in the Bethune College Magazine of 1934, included *Rukhmini Haran Nat* by Sankaradeva, *Haraprasad Granthaguli* by H.P. Shastri and *Kathagucha* by Rabindranath Tagore (Chatterjee, 2014: 12–3; Nag & Ghose, 2004: 64). According to Rokeya, Bengali Muslims had little knowledge of Bengali even though they had lived in Bengal for generations. Subsequently, she started teaching Bengali at her institution in 1917, but the department was closed as it did not have enough students (Hussain, 2006: 39–40; Mahapatra, 2010: 26).

Students at both institutions took mathematics and science subjects. At Bethune School and College, as reported in the Bethune College Magazine of 1934, women were taught arithmetic, geometry, calculus, organic and inorganic chemistry, plant physiology and genetics. Biology, physics and chemistry were also taught at Sakhawat Memorial. Notably, both institutions provided instruction in mathematics and sciences at a time when female intellect was considered inappropriate and insufficient for the study of physical and natural sciences.

Domestic science and physical fitness were also part of the curriculum, as attempts were made to impart all skills necessary for a girl to become a good housewife (Manchanda, 2014: 136). Through physical exercise, women were trained to undertake housework. At Bethune School and College, girls learned sewing, embroidery and management of the domestic economy. There was a gymnasium and tennis court for its school and college students (Nag & Ghose, 2004: 49). To Rokeya, superior education made better mothers. Students at Sakhawat testified of excessive strictness and emphasis on ladylike behaviour (Amin, 1996: 157; Ray, 2010: 63). Physical fitness was also given due attention at Sakhawat. Even after independence, the school continued to follow Rokeya's ideals. For example, Soma Ghatak, a former student of Sakhawat Memorial recalls that during her school years (1956–8), they received training in modern science and conventional family values (Ghatak, 2010: 78–9). To please Hindu and Muslim elites for producing good mothers (*sumatas*) and good wives (*sugrihinis*), the teaching of domestic and natural sciences received equal importance, confirmed by documents in the West Bengal State Archives (WBSA/1-5/26/1873) and several secondary sources (Forbes, 1996: 56; Ghatak, 2010: 79; Kerkhoff, 1995: 212–3; Manchanda, 2014: 136; Ray, 2002: 70).

The survey of their curricula shows that as both institutions provided education in modern literature, science and household management, schooling combined Western education with traditional Indian values to produce the modern Bengali *bhadramahila* who served her family. The reformist agenda did not contain the idea of gender equality or women's economic independence (Manchanda, 2014: 141). Nonetheless, the situation was gradually changing in the early twentieth century. With the expansion



of education, more girls came to the city to attend the two educational institutions. Bethune School and College had many students from East Bengal (Nag & Ghose, 2004: 41). Similarly, Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School had students from Dinajpur studying at the institution (Kerkhoff, 1995: 212–3, 227; Sen, 2010: 137). Education gradually prepared women to write articles on the significance of female education, to participate in the national movement and enjoy freedom outside the control of the family. They carved out an increasingly autonomous space for themselves in society.

### The 'New Woman'

Through such education, more women took control of their lives, became educators themselves and participated in the social reform movement. This was evident from some of the essays they published, articulating their needs and critiquing the local society and foreign rule, as well as developing their own educational institutions (Forbes, 1996: 60–1). To illustrate the change, this section highlights the accomplishment of a few women from Bethune School and College. From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women showed interest in studying natural science subjects and mathematics. For example, Kadambini Bose was the first student from Bethune School to secure high marks in exact sciences at the University Entrance Examination in 1878 (Nag & Ghose, 2004: 38). Later, she became the first woman to study at Calcutta Medical College. In 1888, Lady Dufferin Women's Hospital appointed her on a monthly salary of ₹300/- (Karlekar, 1986: WS27). In 1888, Virginia Mitter and Bidhumukhi Bose from Bethune School were successful in the Medical Board Examinations (Nag & Ghose, 2004: 46–7). Women also excelled in literature and language. Professor Sati Ghosh, who studied at Bethune College after completing her education from Maharani Girls' School in Darjeeling, obtained her doctoral degree in Bengali from Calcutta University and then taught Bengali at Lady Brabourne College in Calcutta (Chatterjee, 2014: 1–10).

Several women who became educators established educational institutions for women. Abala Bose (1864–1951), a student of Bethune College, established 200 schools for girls in the villages of Bengal. In 1925, she founded the Vidyasagar Vanibhavan to train widows to become teachers, as it was difficult to secure teachers for schools. Others like Jyotirmoyee Gangopadhyay (1889–1945), a graduate from Bethune College, remained unmarried throughout her life to fulfil her goal as a teacher. Some women took to writing to advocate women's education (Chanda & Bagchi, 2014: ix–xii). Fazilatunnesa in 'Freedom for Muslim Women', published in *Saogat* in 1929, campaigned for Muslim women's higher education. To quote Fazilatunnesa (Chanda & Bagchi, 2014: 72–3):

It is my ardent request to all my young Muslim brothers that they should let their sisters rise: only then can we hope for freedom. Or else, not only will the sisters be doomed, but the humanity of the brothers will also be extinguished forever.

Women took upon themselves the responsibility for their own education. Many progressive men proved supportive. Dwarkanath Ganguly, a Brahmo doctor, criticised the government for not including women in medical colleges. After much opposition, the Calcutta Medical College opened its gate to women in 1883 (Karlekar, 1986: WS27; Nag & Ghose, 2004: 46–7). The spread of education empowered women to establish institutions and be supportive of future women leaders (Forbes, 1996: 31).

Along with interest in science and mathematics, girls from Bethune College engaged in ‘activities against the state’ (Kerkhoff, 1995: 219). Bina Das from Bethune College actively participated in the national movement and received nine years of imprisonment for attempting to shoot Sir Stanley Jackson, the Governor of Bengal. Students left Bethune School and College to join the Female Students’ Organisation, *Chatri Sangha* (Kerkhoff, 1995: 219; Kumar, 1993: 90). In 1923, Kamini Roy (1864–1933) and Rokeya herself demanded women’s right to vote in the Calcutta Municipal elections. The colonial government, Hindu *bhadraloks* and Muslim elites opposed such demands. Yet, despite strong male opposition, some propertied women secured the right to vote in the Calcutta Municipal elections. In 1925, some women became councillors of the Calcutta Corporation, and finally, in 1935, the Bengal Legislative Council included a few women representatives (Kerkhoff, 1995: 222–3; Kumar, 1993: 41). The limits of the reformist agenda of education at Bethune School and College gradually blurred in the twentieth century as more of their students crossed the threshold of domesticity. To quote Forbes (1996: 63): ‘What was deviant behavior for one generation was acceptable behavior for the next’.

The success of Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School motivated the government to declare more scholarships for Muslim female students. W.A. Jenkins, the Director of Public Instruction, in his *Report Upon Girls’ and Women’s Education in Bengal in 1938*, indicated that the Government of Bengal introduced 87 Subdivisional Scholarships of ₹15/- each for four years and 27 District Scholarships of ₹25/- each for Muslim girls studying at residential colleges. Here, also, the reformist agenda followed by Rokeya gradually blurred, as more and more women attended Rokeya’s school. *The Mussulman* on 11 June 1931 praised Sakhawat Memorial Girls’ School for its excellent students and teachers. Lastly, as is also recorded in an India Office Record document (IOR/V/27/860/26/1938), the institution provided the foundation for the establishment of Lady Brabourne College in 1939, a girl’s college in Calcutta for Muslim women (Amin, 1996: 157–8; Hussain, 2006: 81–2).

## Conclusions

The ‘new woman’, as these educated women were called, fought for gender justice and sought to modify gender relations in the direction of greater equality (Forbes, 1996: 28). Unlike Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya and Kanya Mahavidyalaya, where

Western-educated women endorsed the ideal of being dedicated to the husband (*pativrata*) and became active agents for the propagation of their faith, this study shows that students from Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial in Bengal campaigned for better education for women (Manchanda, 2014: 147). Women from Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial not only showed interest in pursuing higher education in Mathematics, Chemistry and English but, apart from teaching, they actively participated in the anti-colonial movement and demanded voting rights for women. After much struggle, women broke the boundaries of traditional cultures and continued their struggle for gender equality under colonial repression and nationalist cultural tradition.

Bethune and Sakhawat Memorial Girls' Schools thus made pioneering contributions to the progress of female education in Bengal. They became the embodiment of Hindu and Muslim women's emancipation. Through their organising principles and curricula, they produced the modern Bengali woman, who was Western-educated yet conformed to Indian traditions. However, with the expansion of education, the situation gradually changed as women first educated themselves and later became educators. As they established more educational institutions to provide modern education to women and set up organisations, they participated in the anti-colonial movement and brought forward the needs of women. The early success stories opened new avenues for other women, something they aspired for, making the early pioneers role models for Bengali 'gentlewomen' in a way that was different from the experience of educated women in Punjab.

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