CHAPTER 2

Bengali Public Theatre

Though Calcutta was having a number of theatre houses since the opening of Prasannakumar Tagore’s Hindu Theatre in 1831, none of these amateur theatres continued to stage shows for even a significant period. These were founded either by the nouveaux riche or by the reformers. The theatres were the result of their passing fancy. Once they lost interest or found some new diversion, the hapless theatre ceased to exist. Sometimes the theatre closed with their death. Then people had no other choice than waiting for the arrival of another theatre aficionado. Newspapers and journals kept on complaining about the absence of a permanent playhouse in the city. The amateur theatre that finally fulfilled their wish was the Baghbazar Amateur Theatre. That is why it has to be discussed separately.

Foundation of the Public Board

The amateur theatre had limited free tickets that were distributed among the dignitaries and the friends and relatives of the amateurs. Ordinary people tried in vain to collect tickets. One of the neighbours of Girischandra Ghosh somehow managed to procure a ticket for a show at the Pathuriaghata Banganatyalay and used to proudly display the booty. Instead of trying so hard to get hold of a ticket, Girischandra preferred to have a theatre of his own. But a lot of money was needed for opening a theatre. In those days Calcutta had *yatra* groups, besides the amateur theatres. Giving *yatra* performances was less expensive. Soon Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay founded Baghbazar Amateur Concert together with Girischandra Ghosh, Dharmadas Sur and Radhamadhab Kar. Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi joined the group a little later. They staged Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s *Sarmishtha*. Their shows were quite popular and continued for a year.
The vatra performances could not satisfy the young thespians. They wanted theatrical performance in the modern sense of the term. Moreover they wanted their shows to be for the common people, and not restricted to the few rich. Their enthusiasm and ability was great, but means limited. They had meagre income. They discussed the staging of various plays. They wanted a play that could be staged at minimum expense. Their ambition was to stage a new and serious full-length play that would give them the scope of displaying their histrionic skills.

The youths ultimately decided to stage Dinabandhu Mitra’s social sketch Sadhabar Ekadasi.\(^1\) The troupe now called themselves Baghbazar Amateur Theatre Club.\(^2\) This was a popular play and there was no fuss about costumes. They could stage the play in what they generally wore. Once the problem with costume was sorted, they thought scenery would not be much of a problem. They could work together to come up with something decent. All were satisfied and rehearsals began in full swing. Rehearsals were held at the house of Arunchandra Haldar.

Girischandra, who was the oldest among the youths, worked as the assistant book-keeper in the Atkinson Company. He used to remain engaged in the study of various books and translation of English poems. He had also established himself as a poet after composing the songs for their Sarmishtha vatra. He was therefore entrusted with the training of the youths, something that he continued to do throughout his life.

When they were rehearsing for the presentation of Sadhabar Ekadasi, Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay introduced Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi. The latter had earned fame for his presentation in the farce Kichhu Kichhu Bujhi at Kaylahata. This farce was performed to answer Jatindramohan Tagore’s Bujhle Ki Na at Pathuriaghata Banganatyalay. There was a part in Kichhu Kichhu Bujhi that satirized a member of the family of the Pathuriaghata raja. Ardhendu Sekhar was highly praised for the portrayal of that part.\(^3\) He used to help Girischandra in training
the youths. The latter conducted rehearsals in the evening after his office. Since Ardhendu Sekhar did not have any other engagement, he stayed at the place of rehearsal and trained whoever was available. His training added brilliance to the minor parts.

Sadhabar Ekadasi was first performed in October, 1869 on the night of Mahasaptami of the Durga Puja at the house of Prankrishna Haldar. Girischandra Ghosh played the part of Nimchand. The first performance was not satisfactory. The youths therefore took fresh preparations and came up with the second performance after a week, on the occasion of Lakshmi Puja. It was staged at the house of Nabinchandra Deb and was highly appreciated. Dinabandhu Mitra was present on the fourth performance on the occasion of Saraswati Puja, when Ardhendu Sekhar played the part of Jibanchandra and Abinaschandra Bandyopadhyay that of Kenaram. This play had many performances.

The performances of Sadhabar Ekadasi were greatly appreciated by one and all. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay wrote: 'All the characters are living personations and the subject, too, breathes much of reality' (Das Gupta Indian Stage II 155). Girischandra's portrayal of Nimchand was unanimously praised. Dinabandhu Mitra told Girischandra: 'বুঝিবি না শাক্তিল এ নাটক অভিনয় হইত না। নিম্নাচার নেন ভূমার জন্মে পোষা ইত্যাদি' (A. Gangopadhyay 55) 'This play would never have been staged, had it not been for you. It is as if Nimchand was created just for you'. The day after Girischandra's death, Dinabandhu Mitra's son Lalitchandra wrote in the journal Bengalee, echoing the sentiments of his father: 'About forty-five years ago Girishchandra [sic] appeared in the inimitable role of Nimchand in Dinobandhu's [sic] “Sadhabar Ekadasi” and when he awoke the next morning he found himself an actor' (qtd. A. Gangopadhyay 55). A short verse praised Girischandra: 'শীঘ্রদান দৃষ্টিকার দৃষ্টি সৃষ্টিক / নিম্নাচার নেন ভূমি সন আনালিত / নেপথিত করেন কথিত কোন্ধাস গণন / প্রতিষ্ঠ লক্ষায় করে মূল্যিত' (qtd. Das Gupta Indian Stage II 159) 'You are learned for the role of'
Nimchand / When you woke up after sleep / Saw your praise rending the skies / From the way to 
the house and the stage’. Amritalal Basu also wrote: ‘মাত্র মর পদ ইলে / নিমেনত রক্ষণে / প্রথম বোধিনা বল
মন চষে পড়িল ভার’ (‘Smritir Samman’ 139) ‘Inebriated, the step falters / Nime Datta is on the stage /
Bengal first saw its new actors’ actor’. Dinabandhu Mitra had praised Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi
for his portrayal of Jibanchandra on the fourth night: ‘জীবনের বলে শখি রামরায় যাওয়া […]
improvement on the author’ (qtd. A. Gangopadhyay 55) ‘Jiban’s kicking Atal before the exit is
an improvement on the author’. The dramatist said that he would add this in the next edition of
the play.

The seventh performance was staged together with Biye Pagla Buro, a farce by Dinabandhu
Mitra in 1872. Girischandra recited the prologue in the make-up of Nimchand: ‘মাত্র মর পদ
ইলে / গুহুর বুঝার হাঁ / গান করু হাসিগোল আহাদির ৰ। [ ]’ (qtd. A. Gangopadhyay 56) ‘See the old
fellow’s make-up after getting over his inebriation / What an affectation of marriage, with a
crown on the head, in the bride-chamber’. The performances of Sadhabar Ekadasi at the houses
of the prominent Bengalis made the Baghbazar Amateur Theatre popular.

Amritalal Basu has called Sadhabar Ekadasi ‘the unconscious germ of the public stage’ (B.
Gupta 200). Though Dinabandhu Mitra was the first dramatist of the public theatre, his plays
were initially staged at the amateur theatre. Girischandra calls him the father of the Bengali stage
‘because without Dinabandhu’s simple social plays the young Thespians would have been
nowhere’ (S. Mukherjee 29). He feels grateful towards this dramatist because his simple social
play Sadhabar Ekadasi that did not require expensive costumes enabled the youths to dare
performing it. But even then the project would have been quite unsuccessful without the
excellent portrayal of Nimchand by Girischandra. Hemendranath Das Gupta therefore says:
‘Dinabandhu and Girischandra were therefore called the real founders of the National Theatre and the Public stage of Bengal’ (Indian Stage II 163).

Dinabandhu Mitra was so pleased with the performance of Sadhabar Ekadasi that he told the youths to try staging his Lilabati. Girischandra likewise began the rehearsal. Abinas Gangopadhyay says that the seed of the public theatre was sown with the staging of Sadhabar Ekadasi sprouted with the staging of Lilabati (59). Indeed the success of Lilabati was ‘the immediate stimulus leading to its formation’ (S. Mukherjee 29). This drama thus holds a special place in the history of the Bengali public theatre and therefore demands a detailed study.

During the rehearsal of Lilabati some more youths joined the group. They wished to have a permanent stage like those at the amateur theatres of the rich. They tried to raise subscriptions from people. The money raised was spent on preparing a single scene. At last Brajanath Deb, one of the relatives of Girischandra, came to their rescue. He helped in raising funds. But suddenly he fell seriously ill. On his way back from the office, Girischandra used to attend his ailing relative. He conducted rehearsals only if he could spare time after these. Even after the death of Brajanath Deb, Girischandra was too disturbed to focus on rehearsals.

During this time, the Amrita Bazar Patrika announced that Lilabati was being staged at Chuchura (Chinsura) under the training of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Akshaykumar Datta. The former made some alterations to make it more stageworthy. Their performance was highly praised. Dinabandhu Mitra was also very happy and told Ardhendu Sekhar that they shall never be able to do something like the Chuchura (Chinsura) group. This disturbed the Baghbazar youths and they told Girischandra: "Will you sit back and watch us being defeated by the Chuchura group?" (qtd. A. Gangopadhyay 62) ‘Will you sit back and watch us being defeated by the Chuchura group’. This stirred up Girischandra and he said that they would stage the play without making a single
alteration. Rehearsals began with a new zeal. Dharmadas Sur worked day in and day out to get the scenery and the stage ready.

Lilabati was ultimately staged on May 11, 1872. Dinabandhu Mitra, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar and others were amongst the audience. The play was highly commended. The dramatist was beside himself with joy. At the end of the performance, he rushed to the stage saying: ‘अब दिनटे लिखा, चूँकि बंकिम’ (qtd. A. Gangopadhyay 64) ‘Now I will write a letter, [saying] fie Bankim’. He appreciated the recitation of Girischandra and said that he did not know that his poems could thus be recited. The audience also enjoyed the Midnapore dialect used by Ardhendu Sekhar in the role of the maid-servant. Mahendralal Basu’s portrayal of Bholanath Chaudhuri, the frivolous village zamindar, was so perfect that Dinabandhu Mitra used to address him by that name. All agreed that the performance of the Baghbazar youths far exceeded that of the Chuchura (Chinsura) presentation. The costumes of the youths were very much appropriate for their respective roles. Comparing their performance with that of the Tagores of Pathuriaghata, Dr. Kanailal De said to the latter: ‘अण्नाचार अदिति घराणा महानर फौजकाल फुटकाल रामा’ (qtd. A. Gangopadhyay 65) ‘Your acting is like putting a raven in a golden cage’.

Lilabati was staged every Saturday at the house of Rajendralal Pal. Free tickets were distributed for these performances. Gradually as the fame of this performance spread far and wide, people began flocking to the theatre for tickets. The demand for tickets was so great that the youths had to impose some sort of restriction. It was decided that only those who can intelligently understand acting shall be provided tickets. This rule caused an amusing result. People again flocked to the theatre a few days before the show in various groups, armed with certificates of eligibility! Abinas Gangopadhyay says that the theatre had to be closed after five nights due to heavy rains.
An audience, present at the first show of Lilabati wrote a letter that was published in the Education Gazette on May 24, 1872. He said that if the actors of this drama endeavoured, they might found a public theatre, which people could visit after buying tickets. This theatre would bear the stamp of the culture of the country. Even before this letter was published, the Naba-Prabandha wrote in August, 1868 about the need of a public theatre where salaried actors would perform and people pay tickets for entry. The money thus raised could be spent for the improvement of the theatre. The need for the public theatre was persistently voiced in the newspapers. When people were discussing the urgent need of founding a public theatre, the Baghbazar youths selected Nildarpan, a ruthless exposure of the oppression of the British indigo planters of the poor Bengali ryots, as the next play to be staged. They desperately needed a permanent place for holding rehearsals. They found an opportunity when Bhubanmohan Neogi offered them a room for holding rehearsals in his house on the bank of Ganga. He left the big hall on the first floor of the house and another room at the disposal of the young thespians. He also gave them an organ. Rehearsals went on with enthusiasm. In the meanwhile, Nabagopal Mitra, the editor of the National Paper suggested the name ‘Calcutta National Theatrical Society’ which was ultimately shortened to ‘National Theatre’ (S. Mukherjee 32).

The Baghbazar youths wanted to convert their amateur theatre into a public theatre. However the idea behind starting the theatre was not commercial. It was not a ‘monthly pay-packet for the young actors, however urgent their need for money might have been’ (S. Mukherjee 32). They wanted to sell tickets only to defray their expenses for the theatre. They needed money to prepare the scenery for every new drama. Since the raising of this amount through subscriptions was indeed difficult and there were many eager viewers, some of the actors wanted to sell tickets,
though not to make profit. The sale proceeds would help them meet the expenses of staging the plays.

However Girishchandra Ghosh wanted to wait for some more time before making the theatre public. He considered the idea too premature. His idea of ‘National’ was great and something different. He felt it was representative of the Bengali community in general and also of the country. In other words, he took the meaning in the literal sense of the term. He felt that an ill-equipped theatre house with poor sitting arrangements would slight the hallowed name of ‘National’. He said: ‘The word “National” implies a national theatre. But is this a national theatre? As such the other races turn up their nose at the name of Bengalis. What won’t they say if they see our poor scene and stage? They will never believe that these are due to the limited means of a few youths like us. They shall think what more to expect from such a race?’ Girishchandra believed that the British would regard the National Theatre to be the result of the combined efforts of the rich and the educated Bengalis. He also felt that they shall face the criticism of the public if they set up a box office. Everything would be fine till the entry was free. Since others did not agree, Girishchandra parted company with his friends. Few others like Radhamadhab Kar, Sureschandra Mitra, Jogendranath Mitra, Nandalal Ghosh and Mahendranath Bandyopadhyay also left because they too held similar views.

In the absence of Girishchandra, Ardhendu Sekhar became the instructor of the youths. The part of Sairindhri that was played by Radhamadhab Kar was now given to Amritalal Basu. Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay was the general organizer. The house of Madhusudan Sanyal of...
Jorasanko was taken on a monthly rent of Rs. 30.12. The first public theatre was to be housed here. Dharmadas Sur was entrusted with the responsibility of building the stage. But at that time, he used to teach at a school. Amritalal Basu began teaching on his behalf so that Dharmadas could devote more time on building the stage. At the end of the month Amritalal would bring the salary and hand it over to the latter. A dress rehearsal was held at the house of Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay on the day of the Jagaddhatri Puja of 1872. When the stage was somewhat ready, they decided to stage their first show on December 7, 1872.

There was an advertisement of Nildarpan in the Sulabh Samachar on November 19, 1872. The next day the Englishman wrote:

A few native gentlemen of Baghbazar have established a Theatrical Society, named The Calcutta National Theatrical, their object being to improve the stage, as also encourage native youths in the composition of new Bengali dramas from the proceeds of the sales of tickets. The attempt is a laudable one, and is the first of its kind. The first public performance is to take place on the 7th proximo, in the premises of the late Babu Madhusudan Sandal, Upper Chitpore Road” (qtd. S. Mukherjee 33).

Though practically there was no pavilion and the audience had to sit under the canopy of canvas, yet the play was a great success and the sale proceeds amounted to Rs.700 on the first night (Das Gupta Indian Stage II 178). Amritalal Basu says that tickets were priced at Rs.2 for the first class to be seated on chairs (taken on rental basis from Janbazar), Re.1 for the second class (seated on makeshift benches) and eight annas for the third class (seated on the stairs and the raised terrace in front of the building) (B. Gupta 209). The money, however, was spent for the benefit of the stage and the improvement of dramatic literature. None used to take a share of it, except Ardhendu Sekhar, who needed occasional help. Practically all the actors worked for the sake of
an ideal and the Bengali stage was really built on the sacrifice of a few middle-class Bengali youths.

The cast was distributed among the youths. They were encouraged by Sisirkumar Ghosh, editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika, Manomohan Basu, editor of the Madhyastha and Nabagopal Mitra, editor of the National Paper. The first show of the first public theatre of Bengal was held in gaslight. The performance commenced at 8:00 p.m., the doors being opened at 7:00 p.m. It was over by midnight. All the parts were played very well. Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi, in the role of Mr. Wood was a unique figure. But the author keenly missed Girischandra Ghosh who was extraordinary in serious parts (Das Gupta Bharatiya Natyamancha II 54).

The performance was highly commended by the Amrita Bazar Patrika and the Sulabh Samachar. The Education Gazette published an article on December 13 requesting people to encourage the public theatre. They wanted everyone to unite so that the cheap forms of entertainment could not once again gain popularity. The Englishman however felt the play was damaging to the prestige of the British and should be stopped (S. Mukherjee 34). Before the second performance, they wrote on December 20: ‘Considering that the Rev. Mr. Long was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment for translating the play, which was pronounced by the High Court a libel on Europeans, it seems strange that Govt. should allow its representation in Calcutta, unless it has gone through the hands of some competent censor, and the libelous parts been excised’ (qtd. Bandyopadhyay 105). In reply, the Secretary of the National Theatre wrote to the Englishman (and the letter was published on December 23) that they merely wanted to depict the picture of the rural Bengal and had no intention of vilifying the British. They went so far as to add that they held the Englishmen in high esteem. The Madhysatha wrote on Paush 15, 1279 that the same was declared from the stage at the end of the second performance of Nildarpan.
Another curious complaint was made by this same journal on Magh 6, 1279: ‘[...] ব্যবস্থাপনার ক্ষীন সমারোহে তথ্যায় নাটকাদিয়াস করিয়া এবং ভারতীয় নামে অভিভিত হইয়া অভাব্য কি জন্য ইংরেজী ভাষায় নাম প্রণীত ও ইংরেজী ভাষায় টিকিট ইংরেজী প্রকাশ করিয়াছেন, নুনন্তে পারি না। বাংলায় [sic] অন্যায়ের ‘‘নাটকমঞ্জরী’’ এরূপ / লেখা কি যায়স্বন নাহো? তত্ত্বপরিচয় ‘‘জাতীয় নাট্যালায়’’ শিকিয়া বাংলায় টিকিট ইংরেজী করা কি উচ্চ বিতর্কে না [...]' (qtd. Bandyopadhyay 119-120) ‘When Bengali plays are staged in the Bengali community of Bengal, in a playhouse that is being referred to as national, it cannot be understood why the managers are using English in the nomenclature and printing tickets, etc. Is not writing “National Theatre” in the Bengali script ludicrous? Would not writing “Jatiya Natyasala” and printing tickets in Bengali be better?’

Girishchandra satirized the players for taking a rash step by making the theatre public without a better house and a better stage by composing a song and putting it in the mouth of Radhamadhab Kar while playing a farce in a yatra performance. The song goes as follows:

লুকবেলী বহী ভোকার
তাতে পূর্ণ জ্যোৎ ইত্য কিরণ সিংহুর মাধ্য মাধৰ হয়।।
নাম হতে ধারা ধারা,
সর্বাধী জীবনবায়
বিভিন্ন শিকার মাটিতে উড়ি লোভ পায়; -
পিশ স্বপ্নকুল জ্যোতিভূত অবজ্ঞায়।।
কিবা ধর্ম্মণ্ড তান
অশাক্ত হিয়ু কর গান,
অবিনাশী মুখী গীত করতে সবে ধায়; -
সবাই মিলে ঢোক বলে ‘গীতবৃত্ত’ কর গাও।।
কিবা বালুমহ বেলা,
গানে গানে গানের বেলা
These lines cannot be translated into English, retaining the original sense. The song is explained as follows:

- **নুরুলেলী** : Beni Mitra. He did not act, but was the President of the Committee. It is also the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati.

- **তেলারার** : three streams

- **পুর্ণ** : Purnachandra Ghosh

- **আর্দ্র ইন্দু** : Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi

- **কিরণ** : Kiranchandra Bandyopadhyay

- **মতিল** : Matilal Sur

- **নাথ হাই মাতা মায়** : Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay was the organizer and took initiative in all matters.

- **নিরুপম্ম কীর্তিকারী** : Ignoramus

- **নির্মাণ** : A slang. Also the deity at the confluence of the three streams.

- **নব** : Sibchandra Chattopadhyay

- **মূল্যুত্ত** : Kartikchandra Pal. Kartik is the son of Sambhu – another name of Lord Siva

- **মান্দ্রা** : Mahendralal Basu

- **মূৰ্ত্তিক** : Jadunath Bhattacharyya
Dharmadas Sur built the stage.

Bishnu was a playback singer.

Abinaschandra Kar

Dinabandhu Mitra, the author. Also another name of God.

Bel Babu or Amritalal Mukhopadhyay

Rajendranath Pal, a well-wisher and others with the same surname

The play was staged at night.

Bhubanmohan Neogi’s house on the bank of Ganga, where rehearsals were held.

Gopalchandra Das

Many amongst the actors were farmers.

In trying to stage Nildarpan, they are actually spoiling its effect

Sasibhushan Das

Amritalal Basu

The fame of Dinabandhu Mitra might decline due to the poor acting

After buying tickets, people of all castes sat together to see the performance.

This was unlike other occasions when the seats of the aristocrats used to be separated from those of the ordinary people.

According to the Viswakosh, the song did not create any bad feeling. In fact Amritalal Basu says that they relished the song and sang it in chorus. ‘Ardhendu Sekhar also said, “all our names were so cleverly put into the song that it reflected much credit on the poetic imagination of Girish [sic]”’ (Das Gupta Indian Stage II 190).
Recruitment of Actresses

Though the National Theatre happens to be the first public theatre of the country, the responsibility of making certain reforms was borne by another theatre that was to come up soon. This was the Bengal Theatre\textsuperscript{16} opened on August 16, 1873 by Saratchandra Ghosh, the grandson of Asutosh Deb. He had earlier made his debut in the role of Sakuntala that has already been discussed. According to Hemendranath Das Gupta, Saratchandra got the inspiration of opening a public theatre after seeing the performance of the National Theatre at Jorasanko. He gave a concrete shape to his plans by the able co-operation of Biharilal Chattopadhyay. The Bengal Theatre was the first to have a building of its own. Saratchandra took the open space at 9, Beadon Street (Chaudhuri \textit{Calcutta} 189), in front of Asutosh Deb’s house\textsuperscript{17} on lease and the stage was built there.

The Bengal Theatre is credited with making certain reforms on the stage. Hemendranath Das Gupta writes: ‘To turn the theatre into a school of art, it is necessary to introduce female artist on the stage, as male actors cannot do it for any length of time -- boys from respectable / classes cannot be available and the standard is not reached even by the best boy-artists’ (\textit{Indian Stage II} 227-228). Before the recruitment of actresses, the female roles had been invariably played by youths\textsuperscript{18} and less frequently by boys.\textsuperscript{19} It is never possible to have the same effect with men in female roles as can be achieved with actresses. Change in forms of representation required same-sex impersonation. Michael Madhusudan Dutt told Saratchandra Ghosh: ‘It is very unnatural that men with signs of moustache do appear for females. If you mean theatre, you must take actresses. Introduce women and I shall write dramas for you’ (Das Gupta \textit{Indian Stage II} 229). Therefore at the suggestion of this famous poet as well as Pandit Satyabrata Samasrami and Mr.
O.C. Dutt, Saratchandra introduced actresses in his theatre. The four actresses to be recruited were Jagattarini, Syamasundari, Elokesi and Golapsundari.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote Maya Kanan for representation in the opening night. The Bengal Theatre purchased this play together with another named Bish ki Dhanurgun from the author. But the death of the dramatist marked it as an omen and they postponed it for future presentation. They chose Sarmishtha, written by the same dramatist for the first performance. They decided to apply all the sale proceeds in the aid of the orphaned children of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The Bengal Theatre opened with Elokesi and Jagattarini in the roles of Debjani and Debika. Golapsundari appeared as Sarmishtha in the subsequent nights (Das Gupta Indian Stage II 230).

Since women from respectable families would not appear on the public stage, the actresses had to be recruited from the prostitute quarters. Though the idea appears very natural to the people of the twenty-first century, many educated people opposed the idea vehemently at the period of its introduction. Intellectuals either dissociated themselves from the theatre or held an ambivalent attitude towards it. The Bengali stage lost the association of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar after the introduction of the actresses, though he used to take much interest in it earlier. Though Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was actively involved in the Chuchura presentation of Lilabati and his novels were adapted for the stage, he had reservations about the public theatre. According to Rimli Bhattacharya, he was not pleased with the stage version of his novels and believed that the Bengali language was not yet ready for drama. 'Some scholars have ascribed his distance from the public theatre to the death of his daughter. She is believed to have been murdered by her husband because he was having an affair with a stage actress' (R. Bhattacharya 43). Sibnath Sastri also believed that educated men from respectable families ought
to feel ashamed in appearing on the stage with the prostitutes or even financially supporting the theatre by buying tickets (Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalim Bangasamaj 112).

Newspapers were eloquent in their protests. While recording the success of the opening play of the Bengal Theatre, the Hindu Patriot of August 18, 1873 wished ‘this dramatic corps had done without actresses’ (qtd. S. Mukherjee 54). The Bharat Samskar of August regretted that ‘sons of respectable families should act with the women of the town’ (qtd. S. Mukherjee 54). The Madhyastha of Bhadra 14, 1280 B.S viewed the move with strong disfavour. ‘Amrita Bazar Patrika while admitting that female roles are better done by actresses uttered a warning against the novel experiment’ (qtd. S. Mukherjee 54). Even the Englishman could not help commenting on August 18: ‘we wish the drama would have done without actresses’ (qtd. S. Mukherjee 54). Seeing the outcry raised when women appeared on the stage, the group of Amritalal Basu ‘stuck to their original determination to employ only males’ (ctd. Mitra Amritalal Basur Jibani o Sahitya 59).

Favourable reactions also existed. Kshetranath Bhattacharyya wrote in the Education Gazette: ‘The more such theatres are started, acting will be improved and dramas composed in competition’ (qtd. Das Gupta Indian Stage II 228). According to him, the absence of female artistes will soon be considered a defect. He continues: ‘Some of the prostitutes are writing to receive education. If a few such educated women are secured, happy consequences will outweigh any mischief done’ (qtd. Das Gupta Indian Stage II 228).

Bipinchandra Pal21 writes in ‘The Bengalee Stage’ that the objection of the general public regarding the presence of the women on the stage

[...] is based upon the fact that the Bengalee [sic] actresses are recruited from a community which stands outside the pale of respectable society [...] one must respect an
opposition that bases itself upon considerations with the public morality. Even the most ardent advocates of our national stage must admit that it would have been the best for all concerned if our actresses could be recruited from the respectable classes of the community (56).

However he feels that the evil influence of the boy-actresses is more than that of their female counterparts. He therefore concludes that the stage had a choice of evils and the lesser of the two evils was wisely chosen.

The women who performed on the public theatre were social outcasts. They lived under the shadow of an accursed birth, which they carried till their death. ‘Lacking the identity of the patriarch that society recognized as the only identity, residential locality and single status were reason enough for the women concerned to be identified as a prostitute’ (R. Bhattacharya 12). Even those who did not hail from the prostitute quarters were looked upon as public women because they consented to appear on the stage. This show of disrespect was not the lot of only the actresses. Even the actors were looked down upon because they worked with the actresses, who were but the ‘necessary evil’ (qtd. N. Chattopadhyay 262) of the stage. Apare

Mukhopadhyay too says that during the early years of the Bengali public theatre, those associated with it were looked upon as pariahs. Girischandra writes in ‘Nater Ukti’: ‘লাভ কর জাতির কন্য নিয়ে নয় / নিয়ে ভাবতে পাশ অভিসরণ’ (192) ‘People say that acting is not blameworthy / The actors are the persons to be blamed’. He explains why it is so in the same poem: ‘সাহায্য করাতে / কে কষাণ না ভাব মান’ (192) ‘Assisted by prostitutes/ Therefore who will show respect’.

In an essay published in Rangalav, the Headmaster of a school complained that while on the stage, actresses try to lure the audiences by their body language. He echoes many puritans who believed that though the actresses have been provided with an alternative means of livelihood,
they cannot get away from the lure of their earlier profession. This was another reason behind the
disrespect shown towards them. In 'Abhinetrir Kataksha' Girischandra defends the actresses by
saying that they have to look at someone while acting. While on the stage, they may lure the
audience only at the cost of putting up a bad performance. In that case they would not have been
praised for their acting skills. He continues: ‘ব্যভিচারী সঙ্গীত সঙ্গীত মূর্তিতে কুষ্টিত ভান হয়’ (71) ‘The
incestuous regards even the glance of a chaste woman as seductive’. He gives the example of
Ravana being infatuated by the glance of Sita. He urges the critic to stop finding the faults of
actresses and instead look at their merits. They need encouragement and not censorship.

In the Preface to Amit Maitra’s Rangalaye Banganati Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay lamented:

[...] What fault made the accursed heavenly angels born in the human world and make splendid shows in Calcutta? [...] The area between
Hatibagan and Beadon Street resounded with the jingling of the ornaments of the nautch-girls;
and the Corinthian columns of the halls vibrated due to the shouts for encore and clapping of the
drunken audiences’. Many were moved by the miserable condition of the prostitutes and wanted
to rehabilitate them.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt suggested using the talents of the prostitutes for their
rehabilitation. Thus they were recruited in theatre. They found in drama a means of earning a
respectable livelihood and come out of their earlier stifling environment. Girischandra Ghosh
wrote: ‘[...] বেশায় আর মূর্ত তো সমুচ বিদ্বান এমন, তালার ভাগ করা কি যুথ করাই কি সমাজাঙ্কার? [...] আমি [...] বেশায় একটি নতুন গাথা চালিত করি, যে গাথা তারা ইচ্ছা করলে, পরিব্রাহ্মের শীঘ্রই কাটাতে পালে [...]’ (qtd. N.
Chattopadhyay 60) ‘Prostitutes and fools exist in the society. Does social reform mean avoiding
and hating them? I am trying to guide them in a new path, following which they may lead chaste lives, if they so wish'. Theatre thus played a significant role in social reform. At least a few of the miserable creatures 'whose pitiful accidents of birth condemned them to a life of untold misery and degradation, out of which there was absolutely no escape' (Pal 57) found a respectable means of livelihood.

The pursuit of every form of art has a necessary uplifting and self-restraining influence upon the artist. The actors 'have to study [...] the different characters in the play which they are called upon to interpret before large and critical audiences' (Pal 58). This requires continuous concentration of the mind. Thus the requirement of their profession imposes considerable discipline upon the performers. Bipinchandra Pal continues: 'The approbation of the public, which is the universal incentive of all actors and actresses, supplies that moral check to them which social opinion does to ordinary men and women' (58). Thus the theatre facilitates 'the alleviation of human misery and elevation of human character' (Pal 59). The imposition of strict discipline on the performers brought about an air of sobriety and decency in the professional demeanour of the actresses. The young girls now saw in the theatre an escape from the lowly life of the prostitute or 'a possible choice between degrading prostitution and a means of reasonable if uncertain income' (R. Bhattacharya 13). Thus there was a steady flow of young girls to the theatre.

However the actresses continued to face adversity. The money they received through theatre was far less than what they did in their lowly profession. So their guardians tried to stop them by all possible means. Another problem that they faced was the uncertainty of income due to the constant feuding within and amongst the theatre companies. This necessitated the presence of an asraydata, a protector. These were men who patronized the theatre. They either had a liaison with
an actress or were married to her by the norms of gandharba bibaha. They were referred to as theaterer babu or ‘babu of the theatre’ or that particular actress’s babu. Care was taken not to mention the names of these men from respectable and upper class families.

That the rehabilitation of the prostitutes through the means of theatre was indeed successful is proved by the facts of the lives of the actresses. One or two of them were lucky enough to re-enter the society by marriage. Usha Chakraborty says: ‘A prostitute might now even hope to bring up her daughter outside her own circle and give her in marriage; there were cases when such daughters lived happily with their husbands and children’ (34). Prostitutes educated their daughters. Some of these women turned to literature. Sukumari Datta wrote Apurba Sati, which was staged by the Bengal Theatre. Binodini Dasi wrote an autobiography Amar Katha ‘My Life’ and an incomplete Amar Abhinetri Jiban ‘My Life as an Actress’. She also wrote two books of poems – Kanak o Nalini ‘Kanak and Nalini’ and Kusum Guchchha ‘A Bouquet of Flowers’. Manodasundari Dasi wrote an autobiography Patitar Atma Charit ‘Autobiography of a Fallen Woman’. Tinkari Dasi had earned a considerable sum of money by acting. At her death, she left a will by which she gifted her two houses to a hospital at Burrabazar and the sale proceeds of her ornaments to her poor tenants.

Thus the introduction of actresses in the public theatre did indeed prove beneficial to the society at large. These women found an alternative means of livelihood and thereby stopped being engaged in their degrading profession. This in turn made the society healthier. They set an example to other prostitutes who could follow the steps of Tinkari Dasi and her like to lead better and meaningful lives.
NOTES

1 Dinabandhu Mitra, like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, had departed from the earlier tradition of Sanskrit dramatists. Their plays belong to the realistic school and attempt ‘to draw graphic pictures of the social and economic condition of the country […]’ (Das Gupta Indian Stage II 154).

2 ‘The Baghbazar Amateur Theatre Club (1868-1872) was in many respects the nucleus and forerunner of what was to become the National Theatre’ (R. Bhattacharya 9).

3 Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi was the cousin of Jatindramohan Tagore and used to stay at the latter’s palace for the purpose of study. He incurred the wrath of the royal family of Pathuriaghata for taking part in Kichhukichhu Buihi and was forced to leave the palace.

4 The cast for the first night was:

Nimchand : Girischandra Ghosh
Atal : Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay
Kenaram : Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi
Rammanikya : Radhamadhob Kar
Kumudini : Amrinalal Mukhopadhyay (Bel Babu)
Jibanchandra : Isanchandra Neogi
Saudamini : Mahendranath Das
Kanchan : Nandalal Ghosh
Nakur : Mahendranath Bandyopadhyay
Nati : Nagendranath Pal

5 According to Radhamadhob Kar and Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi, the first performance of Sadhabar Ekadasi was held on Saptami of 1868. But in his autobiography, Dharmadas Sur
mentions 1869. Again Radhamadhab Kar and Amritalal Basu believe the fourth performance to be on Saraswati Puja of 1869, while Ardhendu Sekhar puts it in 1870.

6 Dinabandhu Mitra is said to have incorporated the character of Michael Madhusudan Dutt in Nimchand. He represents a young man of high education and culture, who has taken to drinking. Girischandra was therefore required to recite various passages of English poems. It was therefore believed that only an accomplished actor could do justice to this part and people were not quite sure about Girischandra. The actor, however, dispelled all their doubts and was highly praised by all.

7 The cast for the first show was:

- Lalit : Girischandra Ghosh
- Haribilas and maid-servant : Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi
- Kshirodbasini : Radhamadhab Kar
- Naderchand : Jogendranath Mitra
- Saradasundari : Amritalal Mukhopadhyay (Bel Babu)
- Bholanath : Mahendralal Basu
- Mejokhuro : Matilal Sur
- Rajlakshmi : Kshetramohan Gangopadhyay
- Jagjiban : Jadunath Bhattacharya
- Srinath : Sibchandra Chattopadhyay
- Lilabati : Sureschandra Mitra
- Raghu Ure : Hingul Khan

8 According to Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi, Lilabati was staged in the monsoon of 1871. Many have quoted him. But a letter published in the Education Gazette puts the date of the show on
Baisakh 20 (May 11). The Madhvastha wrote on Jyaishtha 6, 1279 that the play was staged on the previous Saturday. Radhamadhab Kar too says that there was a nor’wester on the day of performance of the play and nor’westers are a common in the months of April – May in Bengal. Thus May 11, 1872 is the most probable date of the first show. Ardhendu Sekhar’s memory was playing truant when he said that Lilabati was staged in the monsoon of 1871.

Bhubanmohan Neogi was the grandson of Rasikmohan Neogi, the famous zamindar of Baghbazar.

Amritalal Basu mentions the word ‘table harmonium’ in the obituary article ‘Bhubanmohan Neogi’ (Amritalal Basur Smriti o Atmasmriti 185). Binodini Dasi too talks about the table harmonium in her room (A. Bhattacharya 35). In her translation of Binodini’s Amar Katha, Rimli Bhattacharya flatly calls it a ‘table harmonium’ (37). In the editorial of Amar Katha o Anyanya Rachana, Saumitra Chattopadhyay and Nirmalya Acharya refer to Binodini’s tenant who said that the actress used to sing as she played the organ (Chattopadhyay and Acharyya xxiii). Now, was it an organ or a piano? Both can be crudely referred to as ‘table harmonium’.

In a scene where Nabinmadhab was lying in his deathbed, Sairindhri had to wail. Amritalal Basu had to take much trouble to master the art of wailing. He unsuccessfully tried to learn it from one of his neighbours. He then decided to try on his own. During the afternoons he used to visit a desolate and dilapidated house in the neighbourhood and practice wailing. And needless to say, his wailing was indeed natural. However the women of the locality spread the rumour that the house was haunted and one can hear ghostly wailing.

In his reminiscences Amritalal Basu says that they had taken the ground floor of Nimaicharan Sanyal’s house at Jorasanko, which was also called the Ghari-wala house on a monthly rent of Rs. 40.
The cast was distributed as follows:

Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi : Mr. Wood, Golok Bose, Ryot, Sabitri
Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay : Nabinmadhab
Nagendranath’s brother Kiran : Bindumadhab
Sibchandra Chattopadhyay : Gopinath Dewan
Matilal Sur : Torap, Rai Charan, Gopal Mukhtear
Mahendralal Basu : Padi Mayrani, Magistrate, Sadhu Charan
Sasibhushan Das : Amin, Pandit Mahasay, Kabiraj
Purnachandra Ghosh : Lathiyal
Gopalchandra Das : Aduri, Ryot
Jadunath Bhattacharyya : Ryot
Abinaschandra Kar : Mr. Rogue
Golok Chattopadhyay : Khalasi
Kshetramohan Gangopadhyay : Sarala
Amritalal Mukhopadhyay
(Bel Babu or Captain Bel) : Kshetramani
Tinkari Mukhopadhyay : Rebati
Amritalal Basu : Sairindhri
Dharmadas Sur and
Jogendranath Mitra : Stage Manager
Kartikchandra Pal : Dresser
Benimadhab Mitra : President of the Committee
Nagendranath Bandyopadhyay : Secretary of the Committee
This list is prepared from Hemendranath Das Gupta's *The Indian Stage II* and Bipinbihari Gupta’s *Puratan Prasanga*.

14 In 1860, there was an abortive attempt at opening the Calcutta Public Theatre by Radhamadhab Haldar and Jogendranath from Ahiritollah. On March 30, 1872 the youths of Dhaka staged *Ramabhishek Natak*, written by Manomohan Basu, by selling tickets priced at Rs. 4, Rs. 2 and Re. 1. However they did not continue to stage plays by selling tickets and therefore the credit of being the first public theatre goes to the National Theatre.

15 Amritalal Basu recollects an incident associated with the second performance of *Nildarpan* (December 2, 1872). That night the Deputy Commissioner of Police was present at the show. People got the idea that he was here to arrest a few actors. This stirred their patriotic sentiment and they got exited. Matilal, who was playing the part of Torap, said that if he is imprisoned, he would court it in the lungi that he had to wear for his part. When the police officer heard about this idea of the actors, he informed them that he was a friend of Dinabandhu Mitra and was here only to see the performance of his play.

16 'In order to set up the theatre, Rs. 18000 was raised as capital through the sale of shares to eighteen shareholders’ (R. Bhattacharya 173).

17 At present the Beadon Street Post Office stands here.

18 Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi, Amritalal Basu, Amritalal Mukhopadhyay, Kshetramohan Gangopadhyay and others were well past their boyhood.

19 As Amritalal Basu himself confessed, the boys were generally found to be indisciplined and disinterested, in sharp contrast to the actresses.

20 Women appeared on the *yatra* stage as early as the Chaitanya age. A contemporary of Chaitanya, Ray Ramananda had women in his theatrical troupe. Even in the nineteenth century,
there were two *yatra* troupes, Bau Masterer Dal and Bau Kundur Dal that were run exclusively by women. But these were indeed rare instances.

21 The *Hindu Patriot* published two unsigned essays titled ‘The Bengalee Stage’ in the January and February issues of 1913. Hemendrakumar Ray said that the author was Bipinchandra Pal. The article of the month of February is referred to in this section.

22 Tinkari Dasi was famous for her eponymous role in Rajkrishna Ray’s *Mira Bai* at the Bina Theatre. She earned Rs. 20 per month. A young man offered her mother Rs. 200 in addition to the salary that she was drawing, if she would leave the theatre. All tried to force her. But she was adamant. She did not leave the theatre even in face of extreme physical torture and the lure of money (Vidyabhushan 115-118).
CHAPTER 3

A STUDY OF SURENDRABINODINI AND SARAT-SAROJINI

FROM THE SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini, plays written by Upendranath Das are domestic plays centering on the lives of men and women who have received liberal education. Readers do not ‘see’ them in their student life, but the plays show them to have completed the process of education. They show the characters to be concerned with various social issues of the day. Readers come to know how it was to live in the nineteenth-century Bengal. The period referred to in the plays is that point of history when most of the major reform projects had been attempted. But the mentality of the people had not yet changed. While the liberals were happy with the changes that had been brought about, the orthodox ones were seen criticizing the former. Thus one can easily understand that the latter group made the lives of Raja Rammohun Roy and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar difficult. The gulf between the liberal and the orthodox and superstitious is created by liberal education. Those who have received education are enlightened and try to remove the social evils and prejudices. The second group, on the other hand, fondly clings to those. This results in the clash of ideas. Besides the major reforms, the other aspects of the society are also touched upon in the plays.

Many minor writers of the nineteenth century dealt with the problems of the country in their works. As Dilip Bhattacharyya writes: ‘These writers had their own level of social consciousness and their own points of view which they had gathered from the prevailing circumstances. In presenting the picture of the period they wrote books, many of which, from the literary point of view, are not worth much’ (Ray and Roy 19). These writers used their literary works, whether plays or novels or poems, to reach out to the masses. They were eager to improve the society, but
whatever little they could do, was sadly insufficient. So they made the protagonist of their literary work act as their mouthpiece and thus tried spread their messages.

However it must be noted that social reforms also came from quarters which were not blessed with education. In the eighteenth century, there were many religious groups like Kartabhaja, Balarami, Biswasi, Baul, etc. who were against idolatry, caste discrimination and other such superstitions. These religious groups were monotheistic and the members belonged to the so-called lower non-brahmin castes of the mofussils. Muslims could also join some of these groups. In some groups, even Brahmins could be initiated by Muslim ‘gurus’. It is obvious that the founders of these groups had not come in contact with the western enlightenment. This proves the fact that medieval dark ages were not all-pervasive. Tools for reformation of the Hindu society, in the lines of liberal humanism, already existed in the country.

Existence of Evils in Absence of Education

The early nineteenth century was plagued by various types of superstitions and religious rituals that did not have any logic behind their pursuance. Raja Rammohun Roy was so hurt at seeing the condition of the society around him that he wrote to his friend John Digby on January 28, 1828: ‘[…] The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and sub-divisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification, have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise [...]’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 109). He was afraid that this system of religion that was being practiced by the Hindus would never promote their political interest. Indeed the predominance of sectarianism prevented them from uniting as a nation. He therefore felt that the Hindus urgently needed some change in their religion to bring about some positive change in the society.
Raja Rammohun Roy found the Europeans to be ‘more intelligent, more steady and more moderate in their conduct’ (qtd. Raychaudhuri 28) in comparison to the Indians. He sincerely hoped that the association with the British would bring about ‘[...] the amelioration of the native inhabitants’ (qtd. Raychaudhuri 28) and lead to an all-round improvement in their character and intellect. Rammohun himself found consolation in the company of his British friends during the period of his conflict with the Brahminical orthodoxy. He was of the view that in matters of vice, the Hindus were as worse as the Christians in general, but the former also lacked patriotic feelings due to their obsession with rituals.

The condition of the society was indeed deplorable. It was a time when ‘[...] নাখাটুকু সংস্কৃতির জোরায় তখন ভালমান হয়েছিল এমন যুগের সময়’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 110) ‘The nouveaux riche were adrift in luxury and adultery. It was the high-tide of decadence in Calcutta with the jingling of the bells of the prostitute’s anklets, kabi, akhrai and kheur songs’. Slaves were openly sold in the markets even at the close of the eighteenth century. It was a time when it was not shameful to amass wealth by means of forgery and bribery. Instead people praised their tactics. It was also a time when the rich spent money in competitions for their European guests and prostitutes during the festivals. The same would again be seen during the wedding ceremonies or funerals. Sibnath Sastri writes in Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalini Bangasamaj: ‘[...] কে কে মান দাতা, কে কে দুর্গাপ্রণয়ী কে কে কা গো দাতা, ইংরেজ [রাজা] সুখাড়ি ও অপরাধি সকল জীবনে এবং সাধারণগণের মন ও মোহিন সংস্কৃত গোর ধরায় কর্ম করিতেন। ইংরেজ কে কে অপরাধির ভয়ে, কে কে প্রশস্ত লোকের আহ্বান দিয়ে এক্ষণে ভাষাযুক্ত ভাষার সাহিত্যিকে মানুষ দান করিতেন’ (126) ‘The Brahmins used to spread the praise and disgrace of the rich through Sanskrit slokas mentioning the bounty of the rich and the money they spend during funerals and Durga Puja. People made lavish presents to the uneducated Brahmins, either out of fear or to gain fame’.
There were other sorts of superstitions as well. In 1802, the custom of drowning children in the Ganga was abolished by law. Partha Chattopadhyay says that in spite of the law, there were stray incidents even in the second decade of the nineteenth century. On March 2, 1811 a woman from Orissa drowned her six-year old son in the Ganga and this was done ceremoniously in the presence of many people. When the child was crying in water, people were praising God! The sick and aged people were left in the open on the bank of Ganga to die and if they happened to recover, they were ostracized. Hutom Pyancha writes: "জলে চড়াক, বালকের চড়াক, মররর করিয়া দেনে জলবায়ুর।" (Nag 49) ‘During the festival, many people love to watch the rituals of piercing oneself with a shaft or sword’. Hook-swinging was a very important part of this festival. People were pressurized to participate in the festival of Charak. In 1814 the staff of the press under the aegis of the Serampore Missionary Society was forced to seek the protection of Ward. On January 6, 1820, in a letter to G.C. Villiers, Ward complains about the state of affairs in India where even the jury and witnesses can be bribed. He also mentions the presence of a lot of beggars.

The atrocity of the zamindars was another problem that tormented, specially, the rural population. It was as if the laws of the state did not apply to their estates. As Kalyan Kumar Sengupta says: ‘This form of dominance [...] originated from overlordship, the principal character of which was a sort of defiant disregard for the land laws of the State. The Permanent Settlement gave the zamindars a great position in the countryside inspite [sic] of the official knowledge that they were not the most suitable persons in Bengal who could shoulder this responsibility’ (Chakravarti 12). Zamindars used to maintain their own private armies. It consisted of local musclemen and bandits. Sometimes they also had ‘ex-soldiers of the disbanded militia of the former independent chiefs’ (Chakravarti 15) and also anyone who was in search of employment. These zamindars were like Sibcharan in Saratchandra Chattopadhyay’s
Harilakshmi, who could say: ‘এ গাছে চাঁদ বল, মালিকের বল জার প্রাণস্তল পুলিশ বল সব এই থেন। সম্প-সাহিত্য, ক্ষীরন্ত-কাহিনী এই যার’ (qtd. Chakravarti 15) ‘Whether you mean a judge or a magistrate or the police, it is I myself. I have the power to allow someone to stay alive or die’. Contemporary literati also portray the atrocities committed by the zamindars. Mir Musharraf Hussain’s Zamindar Darpan, Lal Behari De’s Bengal Peasant Life or Gobinda Samanta, novels of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay like Palli Samaj, Dena-Paona, Biraj Bau, Srischandra Majumdar’s Kritajnata, Haridas Bandyopadhyay’s Ray Mahasay, Kshetramohan Sengupta’s Madanmohan and Harachandra Rakshit’s Dulali are among the few that provides the readers a true picture of the village life.

Rammohun Roy’s social consciousness was directed to the miserable state of Hindu women. ‘He found them uneducated and illiterate, deprived of property rights, married before puberty, imprisoned in purdah and murdered at widowhood by a barbaric custom of immolation known as sati’ (Kopf Brahmo Samaj 15). Rammohun Roy’s writings mostly deal with some form of man’s inhumanity to women. He felt that India could develop only if women are given their due respect. It is but natural that in absence of liberal education the people were not enlightened. People lived as if in the dark middle ages. Women, whether in childhood, youth or old age, had to live under a male guardian who ‘rarely took the trouble to understand imaginatively the helplessness of the women, far less to try to remove their grievances’ (Chakraborty 23). The seclusion of the women and denying them the benefits of education helped to perpetuate male domination in the orthodox society. This prevented them from fighting back against the odds by cultivating their intelligence. Even if a woman’s husband be devoid of all qualities, the wife is bound to revere him as a god, and even ‘to submit to his corporeal chastisements, whenever he chooses to inflict them [...]’ (qtd. Chatterjee Nation and its Fragments 118).
For the first few years of their lives higher caste Bengali girls were brought up with the boys, though recreation meant playing with dolls. Characteristic responsibilities came after they reached the age of five. The mother would now begin to train her in the arts of cooking, sewing, alpana or floor decoration, maintenance of the house and also worship of family gods. She was also trained to perform various bratas to earn divine favour for herself and the members of her family.1 There were many bratas but the girl would be specialized in a few. They believed these bratas to be the means of achieving ideal womanhood. When a girl got married, she would perform bratas designated for married women. The bratas performed by a married woman were ‘[…] however counterbalanced by feminine rituals meant to reduce the husband, through occult means, to the position of a bleating sheep meekly obeying the wife’ (Raychaudhuri 68). Poor girls married late in life. Only a few of them attended schools. They did not perform bratas. They were trained to face the hardship of their lives with courage. They accompanied their parents to the fields to share in their work. This helped them do the same in their married life as well. Their training made them aware of the practical needs of the life.

The condition of women in the nineteenth century was absolutely pathetic. She was denied of the respect that was due to her as a human being. She did not receive education and spent her day in the kitchen. She was not even allowed to look at a man unless he happened to be her close relative. She could not join the family during meals. She had to endure a lot of hardship for the sake of maintaining the cultural heritage of her family. There existed in the society cruel practices of burning widows on the funeral pyre of her husband, lifelong austerities to be practiced by her if she chose to live, prevalence of child marriage and the polygamy among the kulin Brahmins. New education made people sympathetic towards women. Therefore the reformers engaged themselves in movements to secure liberation for women.
The first reform was directed against the cruel practice of sati or the immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband. Raja Rammohun Roy worked hard to legalize the abolition of this practice. He was enlightened and so could not tolerate this brutal practice that had absolutely no logic behind it. The orthodox society wanted people to abide by this because it was one of the dicta of the scriptures. They said that a woman who died on the funeral pyre of her husband would stay in heaven in the company of her husband for as many years as there were pores on her skin, besides bringing grace to her family. This practice of sati, orphaned many children.

Even before Raja Rammohun Roy began his movement, the English journals and Christian Missionaries got involved with this issue. The English newspapers often published accounts of the witnesses of sati. On his way to Chuchura (Chinsura), a British staff of the East India Company happened to see one such incident. He reports in the Calcutta Gazette on January 6, 1785: ‘I however perceived from the redness of her eyes that narcotics had been administered’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 114). This cruel custom also distressed a section of Indians. They too wanted its abolition. A letter was published in the Calcutta Gazette on September 1 of the same year where the writer says that he and his friends believe that imposition of a hefty fine might gradually end this evil practice.

The Serampore Missionaries also tried to bring an end to this inhuman custom. They talked to the Hindus to create awareness. Rev. Carey also conducted a survey of the number of sati in and around Calcutta, to draw the attention of the Government. He also collected sections from the scriptures that did not sanction sati. An appeal was prepared and given to Lord Wellesley and the Supreme Court. The Nizamat Adalat was asked for its views on February 5, 1805. The judge Ghanasyam Sarma said that widows who were pregnant or had young children or were
themselves very young were not eligible for sati. He also added that scriptures do not permit taking the oath for sati under the influence of narcotics.

There was a debate at the House of Commons in 1813 over the question of sati. Many like Henry Montgomery wanted it to be abolished by law. However some like William Smith wanted to abolish the practice, not by law, but 'by a more extended effort for the dissemination [sic] of Christianity' (qtd P. Chattopadhyay 115). In the same year the East India Company brought out a new regulation. No one could now be forced to become a sati. If someone wanted to become one, her relatives were required to inform the police. The magistrate would come to dissuade the woman. If, however, one followed all the rules and wanted to become a sati, the Government was powerless to prevent it.

In 1818 the chief justice of Dewani Adalat asked Mrityunjay Vidyalankar for his views on sati. He too echoed Ghanasyam Sarma. He said that it is not mandatory for the widow to mount the funeral pyre of her husband. It is solely her decision. He added that leading a virtuous life was another option and a better one indeed. Thus Rammohun Roy could understand that the only way this cruel practice could be stopped was abolishing it by law. He wrote a booklet in 1818 titled Sahamaran Bishaye Prabartak o Nibartak Sambad 'Dialogue of Two Persons for and against the practice of self-immolation of women'. He quoted the same scriptures, as his opponents to drive home his point. He did so because he knew that scriptures, and not logic, could convince his superstitious countrymen. Circulation of Rammohun Roy's books helped to draw others into the movement. Some came out in support of the Raja, while others desperately tried to defend their holy injunctions from any attack from the outside world.

In reply to Rammohun Roy's booklet, Kasinath Tarkavagis wrote Bidhayak Nishedhaker Sambad to contradict the former. The Raja too came up with a sequel of his booklet. In the
review of Kasinath Tarkavigis’s booklet, the *Friend of India* wrote: ‘They lie bound as sheep for the slaughter; and thus they must remain suffering in silence, till British feeling and sympathy shall duly realize their hitherto unknown unpitied misery’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 116). The *Calcutta Journal* also hoped that ‘... ultimately Government will abolish entirely a custom which involves the murder of the helpless and the innocent, almost without a shadow of support from the Hindoo [sic] Superstition itself’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 116). There were meetings against *sati* in Bedford (1813), Manchester (1825) and Coventry (1829).

The Bengali journals split into two groups over the question of *sati*. The *Samachar Darpan*, *Sambad Kaumudi*, *Bangadut* and *Jnananweshan* were against the custom, while the *Samachar Chandrika*, *Sambad Timir Nasak* and *Sambad Ratnabali* supported *sati*. They constantly published articles to counter their opponents. In reply to the repeated attacks on *sati* by the *Samachar Darpan* and the *Sambad Kaumudi*, the *Samachar Chandrika* published an article on March 18, 1822 that argued ‘against the cultural interference of foreigners (and of Rammohun) who did not understand the virtuous aspects of this self-sacrificial act’ (qtd. Kopf *British Orientalism* 191). It said that the widow showed her faithfulness to her dead husband and also heroism by her act of self-immolation.

Ultimately on December 4, 1829 the British Government abolished *sati* by law. The conservative Hindus and their association Dharma Sabha strongly condemned this act and said that it would bring about a disaster for the Hindu religion. However they could not prevent someone from merely enjoying the right to live. They submitted two separate petitions, one from Calcutta and the other from mofussil, supported by 772 and 374 people respectively, to the Governor General to show that the Act was unacceptable to the Hindu community. ‘The Christian missionaries submitted a monster petition to the Governor General to congratulate him
on the Anti-Sati Act. Here the number of petitioners was 1100, of which 300 came from the Hindu liberals and 800 from the Christians. Indeed it was this strong counter move that foiled the effort of the Hindu-orthodox to restore the old shameful practice of widow-burning’ (Chakraborty 70).

Dharma Sabha persecuted Hindus who failed to abide by the age old rules. The Brahmo Samaj and the Young Bengal were beyond its ambit. But the ordinary Hindus were victimized. Madhusudan Mitra invited the wrath of the Dharma Sabha by marrying his son into a lower caste and was ostracized. He was accepted into the society only after he sent back his newly-wed daughter-in-law and expiated for the sin. The Bengal Spectator strongly condemned this act. It pointed out that fanaticism could be so severe as to compel one to throw out a newly-wed bride and refuse to acknowledge relations. People were so narrow-minded without liberal education that it took long to remove the deep-rooted tentacles of superstition from the society.

The next reform movement tried to give some dignity to the widow who was spared from dying on her dead husband’s funeral pyre. She had to endure such mortifications that at times one was left to wonder whether it would have been a better option had she committed herself to the flames. In that case her pain would have ceased with her death. But after the abolition of sati, she had to endure life-long sufferings. An Englishwoman portrays the state of widowhood: ‘As a widow she is doomed to all sorts of indignity, the name of a widow is reproach. All her fine clothing is taken from her, she is stripped of ornament which can never wear: her beautiful hair is frequently shaved off and she then becomes a slave in the house where she formerly was mistress. Thus it is that the Suttee [sic] becomes a willing sacrifice’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 112).

The question of widow remarriage was discussed by Rammohun Roy at his Atmiya Sabha and also by the Young Bengal. But the things could not go any further. Rammohun Roy was too
busy to get sati abolished by law to devote any time for this reform. In 1837 the Law Commissioner of India wanted to legalize the marriage of child widows after proper debates. J.P. Grant, the Secretary of the Law Commission wanted to know from the judges of Calcutta, Allahabad and Madras whether widow remarriage would hurt the religious sentiments of the Hindus. They wanted to legalize it on humanitarian grounds, but were afraid it would inflict a cruel blow on the Hindus. It would be like slighting their scriptures.

In 1842, Ramgopal Ghosh and other students of Derozio came forward with the Bengal Spectator. They discussed the legitimacy of widow remarriage. A long letter was published on April 1 of the same year, written probably by one of the editorial group. This letter also quoted the following sloka from the Parasara Samhita that was in support of widow remarriage:

If a woman’s husband died, was missing, impotent or had some serious moral flaw, she was free to remarry. A woman who had practiced celibacy after her husband’s death, after her own death, goes to heaven like a celibate. A woman who burns herself on her dead husband’s funeral pyre, stays in heaven for as many years as there are pores on her body’. Interestingly Vidyasagar also quotes these verses in his book on widow remarriage. Parasara has three options for the widow in the kali-yuga – marriage, lifelong austerities and self-immolation on the husband’s funeral pyre. Sibnath Sastri wonders in Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalim Bangasamaj whether Vidyasagar or
Madanmohan Tarkalankar selected the passages and gave them to the writers of the *Bengal Spectator* (248).

The society again split into two groups over the widow remarriage movement. Most of the Bengali journals came out in support of widow remarriage. The *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, *Sambad Bhaskar*, *Sarbasubhakari Patrika*, *Bamabodhini Patrika* and *Somprakas* wrote articles in support of the movement. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *Sulabh Samachar* of the 1860s also supported the movement. The *Bengal Spectator*, *Bidvadarsan* and *Jnananweshan* were already writing for the cause of the widows as early as the 1840s. Newspapers of the mofussils also wrote in favour of the movement. Though widow remarriage was never popular in the society, these newspapers always regarded it as an important milestone of the nineteenth century.

The opposite bench was occupied by the *Samachar Chandrika*. The *Sambad Prabhakar* had a curious reason to speak against widow remarriage. On April 26, 1842 a letter was published in this newspaper that wondered who would give away the bride in a widow remarriage. After giving her away in her previous marriage, her relatives were no longer eligible to give her away once more. The *Bengal Spectator* replied in July 1842 that after research, they have found that in widow remarriages, the ritual of giving away the bride does not exist. The widow herself invites for the marriage. This newspaper believed that if some youths married widows, people would soon overcome the stigma.

Sambhuchandra Vidyaratna writes that many rich people were eager about the widow remarriage because they wanted to alleviate the suffering of their widowed daughters. Though many like Raja Rajballabh sincerely wanted its introduction, they could not muster enough courage to do so. Among the Brahmins who were approached, some felt that there was no scope
of widow remarriage, while others approved of it. However they lacked the courage to convert their plans into action. They did not have the courage to overstep the scriptures.

In 1855 Vidyasagar published the book *Bidhaha Bibaha Prachalita Haowa Uchit Kina Etadbishayak Pratham Prastab*. It created a wave of diverse reactions in the society. A little before Vidyasagar wrote this book, Syamacharan Das of Pataldanga wanted to get his widowed daughter married once again. He got a certificate of approval from Brahmins. Vidyasagar mentions this certificate in the Preface to his book. The *Tattwabodhini Patrika* reprinted this in the Phalgun issue of 1776 Saka. The editorial of its Chaitra issue says that Vidyasagar’s work created ripples in the society. They wrote: ‘[...] রাজ্যের পারিষদ মহাপক্ষের শাসক ও মহিলা বিধবা বিবাহের নিষেধক বলের অভেদের সত্ত্বা বিবর্ত, কীট বিস্ফোর, গুরুদত্ত স্বীকার পুরুষ প্রকৃতি অনুযায়ী এই উপাদান ও সর্বকল্পনা করিয়াছেন, কৃষকের পরস্পর প্রাচীন সমাজের মহাজ মহাপক্ষের আদালতের পরিকল্পনা পাকিয়ে লেখেন প্রসাদের আঘাত নিয়া বিন্যাসদর্জন প্রণীত গুরুদত্ত পুরুষকে নিরাময় নিয়ন্ত্রণ করিয়াছেন’ (P. Chattopadhyay 132) ‘The terrified Brahmin scholars in search of something against widow remarriage are discovering and perusing innumerable old, discoloured, worm-eaten tattered books. The rich, superstitious, old-fashioned people are engaging pandits, in return of honorarium, to refute Vidyasagar’s book’. Like Rammohun Roy, Vidyasagar too refers to verses from the scriptures for the same reason as the former. He attacked with the scriptures those people who fondly clung to the illogic of the medieval era.

Vidyasagar’s book created a storm in the Hindu community. People began writing for and against the issue. But Vidyasagar remained firm in the face of all attacks and brought out the sequel of his book within a few months. He proved the logic behind the first book by a detailed discussion of the scriptures. He lashed out against the customs of the country and the blind faith in religion. He wrote: ‘ধনে দে দেওখাও। তেজ কি স্বভাবাচলীয় মরিন। ভুই তের অক্ষুড় ভক্তগুলো পুরুষের দানের স্বাভাবক কথা রাখিয়া কি একাধিকতা করিয়েছিল।...যা ধর্ম। তেজার স্বাভাবিক নৃত্য ভাব। কিন্তু ভোজ রচা হয়, আর কিন্তু ভোজার লোগ হয়,
Vidyasagar’s pleading with his countrymen shows his profound sympathy for the womankind. He says that the innumerable instances of licentiousness and abortions are due to the tortures inflicted upon the miserable widows. He adds that people are so hard-hearted that are still not moved. His heart cries out for the womankind: ‘या जानानाथ! चौमासा कि पाप भारतवर्ष आन्या
सम्प्रभु करना, बलित पार्व ना’ (qtd. K. Mukhopadhyay 45) ‘Alas women! I can’t say what sins resulted in your birth in India’. Vidyasagar realized that without legalizing widow remarriage, it would not be accepted in the society and neither will the children born to her be regarded as legitimate. Though people like Iswarchandra Gupta attacked Vidyasagar with satirical poems, the weavers of Santipur came forward with saris, on the borders of which was woven ‘लौट भाक बिन्दूबालातिहासी

On July 26, 1956 the British Government legalized widow remarriage by Act XV of 1856. The first widow marriage was held on December 7, 1856 between Srischandra Vidyaratna and Kalimati Devi. About his efforts in effecting the enactment, Vidyasagar said: ‘बिन्दूबाला बिन्दूबाल
अभी नहीं संस्कार आमार कीवन संस्कार धर, ए आमार इथा अपेक्षा अविभक्त आर कदाच संस्कार करिडो पारिब, जाल आमार नाही। ए बिन्दूबाला जना संस्कार हर्षगिनी एवं अविभक्त हिलन प्राप्त शीवारो गरावृष्ण नाही’ (qtd. K. Mukhopadhyay 43) ‘The introduction of widow remarriage is the most virtuous deed of my life; there is no scope of doing something more virtuous in this life. I have become a pauper for this and if needed, I am ready to give up my life’.
Indeed the movement left Vidyasagar disappointed. People who had promised financial aid for the marriages turned away. Vidyasagar was immersed in debts, while fulfilling the duties that were to be shared. Besides greed for money made some grooms engage in polygamy, in the name of widow remarriage. This forced Vidyasagar to make them sign agreements before marriage. In a letter to Durgacharan Bandyopadhyay, he lamented: ‘আমাদের দেশের লোক গ্রেহে এসেছেন। আমি সামুদ্রিক অর্থপ্রাপ্তির জন্য তাদের সাহায্য প্রার্থনা করিতাম না। তবুও তাদের কাছে মূল্যায়নের কোনো প্রতিশোধ প্রদান করিয়াছিলেন, তাহাদের আমি সাহস করিয়া এ প্রক্রিয়া প্রবর্তিত হইয়াছিলাম বহু প্রয়োজনীয় প্রার্থনা বিবাহ ও আইন প্রচার প্রয়োগ করিয়া স্বল্প পান্থ পাইতেছি’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 141) ‘Had I known my countrymen to be so worthless, I would never have proceeded with widow remarriage. I got the courage for carrying out marriages only at their encouragement; otherwise I would have stopped at the marriage and formulation of the law’.5

The Amrita Bazar Patrika was started after widow remarriage was legalized. In spite of its legalization, the society did not go out for it. The newspaper therefore wrote:

বিবাহের পর কোন মাংস জাতি কেন যায়, কুঠির পরিবার না, আমারা, এক জাতির আত্মা জাতির সাহিত বিবাহ হিন্দু একশা বলি মা। ঠিক এখন বেদের ভবে কুঠির তথা হিন্দু হিন্দু প্রার্থনা হইব। প্রার্থনা করার হাতে প্রার্থনা; কি কাণ্ড কম্যান্ডর হাতে কাণ্ড কম্যান্ড হাতে ইয়াত কেন জাতি হইবে [sic]? বেদের প্রথম, পঞ্চমী রাত্রি, সাহিত্যের আমাদের দেশে জাতি যায় না, ইয়াতে জাতি কেন কলার জাতি আরে? (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 142) ‘We do not understand how one loses caste by marrying a widow. We are not talking of intercaste marriages. If, after checking the other criterion that are seen in Hindu marriages, a Brahmin bride is given to a Brahmin groom or a Kayastha bride to a Kayastha groom, only the bride being a widow, how does one lose one’s caste? People do not lose caste by going to the prostitutes, keeping concubines, or engaging in licentiousness. If these did result in losing one’s caste, how many people have caste’? 
Marriage of 4–5 year old girls with 10–12 year old boys was very common in the first half of the nineteenth century. Due to such early marriages, the girls were weak in body and so were their children. Since the parents themselves did not reach maturity, proper upbringing of the child was not possible. This resulted in the Bengalis being weak as a race. The educated youths were greatly opposed to this practice. In January, 1839 Maheschandra Deb read a paper titled ‘A Sketch of the Condition of the Hindoo Women’ at a session of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge at the Sanskrit College. He said: ‘That absurd and pernicious system of early marriage amongst the Hindoos is another mighty evil to which the unfortunate women of our country are exposed’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanan Itihas 161). He wanted a girl to be about 10–12 year old before she could get married. After the death of David Hare, his admirers created a Hare Prize Fund. They organized an essay competition in 1847 on the bad effects of child marriage. The prize went to Sitanath Ghosh, a student of the Hindu College.

During the 40s and 50s of the nineteenth century, many articles denouncing child marriage were published in various journals. Iswarchandra Gupta was among the more prominent contributors. In 1850 Vidyasagar composed Balyabibaha Dosh ‘Evils of Child Marriage’. In 1871 Ramdayal Chakrabarti delivered a lecture in Purulia against child marriage. It was later published in the form of a book. During the same time a group of youths, mostly belonging to the Brahmo Samaj, formed an association named Balyabibaha Nibarani Sabha. In 1873 they brought out a journal that published articles showing the ill effects of child marriage. They fixed the minimum marriageable age for girls and boys as 16 and 24 respectively. The Somprakas, Bamabodhini Patrika, Jnanankur, Amrita Bazar Patrika and others also wrote about the evils of child marriage. However some journals like the Bengalee upheld child marriage.
The nineteenth century wanted the widow remarriage Act to be complemented by another law abolishing polygamy amongst the kulin Brahmins. In a speech in 1835 Alexander Duff mentions that out of a group of 850 people, each had eight wives. Some had even more than a hundred. A 2-year old girl could be married to an 80-year old man and conversely a 70-year old woman could be married to a 17-year old boy. A girl and her aunt could be married off to the same person. Marriage became a means of livelihood for the kulin Brahmins. They could neither support nor give shelter to their innumerable wives who continued to be a burden on their parents. The husband may kindly grace his in-law’s house once in a year and take lots of money and gifts. Some girls were not even fortunate enough to see their husbands after marriage.

Girls married to the kulin Brahmins were open to temptation and became common objects of abduction. But after abduction, the society would never readmit them into the respectable circle. Consequently the only option open to these unfortunate women was suicide and prostitution. Indeed a substantial portion of the prostitutes were the wives of the kulin Brahmins. The Vidyadarsan wrote in 1842, addressing the kulin Brahmins:

O kulin brothers, we indeed cannot comprehend what secret pleasure makes you indulge in this perverted deed when both the scripture and logic speaks against it [...] Lastly, before quitting I make one request. Before embarking on a journey for an auspicious work, do have a look at the back door where an amazing dance of sin is going on'.
Indeed polygamy was an ugly scar on the face of the newly enlightened society. In 1855, Kisorichand Mitra, on behalf of the Suhrid Samiti, wrote to the British Government to abolish the practice. The orthodox also submitted another appeal requesting the Government not to interfere with a custom sanctioned by the scriptures. Matters ended here. In August, 1866 the Bengal Government created a committee of seven members, one of them being Vidyasagar, to judge the social implications of the abolition of polygamy by law. They submitted their report on February 7, 1867. The majority was of the opinion that polygamy will cease with the spread of education. Besides using marriage as a means of income was also on the verge of extinction. However Vidyasagar placed his independent view that polygamy was not showing any sign of being reduced in number so as to make its abolition by means of law unnecessary. The Government too was not eager to impose a law since the practice of polygamy was not as cruel as the practice of sati, nor did it affect the society on a mass scale as the fate of the widows. The Government was afraid that the enactment of a law might create obstacles in the path of the self-interest of some prominent people. They felt that it would unnecessarily create complications and misunderstanding, thereby hampering the smooth running of their colonial rule.

In 1871 Vidyasagar composed Bahubibaha Haowa Uchit Ki Na Etadbidhayak Bichar 'Debate on the Abolition of Polygamy', its sequel being published in 1873. He wrote these books for the Sanatan Dharmarakshini Sabha that was trying to bring about the abolition of polygamy. He again quoted passages from the scriptures and stated his views with logic. Though the Somprakas was against polygamy, Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan was against abolishing it by law. Gradually many liberals too shared in his views. The Somprakas felt that approaching the Government for social welfare was not quite seemly. An imposition of a fine of Rs. 500 would be enough to deter the unemployed marriage-mongers. To this Vidyasagar replied that both
enactment of law and levying a fine required Government intervention. Considering both the options, he preferred the former. The Somprakas had earlier said that since the members of the Sanatan Dharmarakshini Sabha were prominent citizens, much could be achieved if they stopped polygamy in their families and among their subordinates. They also suggested a meeting where the kulins would be invited and some sort of solution to the problem reached at.

Though polygamy was never abolished by law, the debate over it brought the society on the same platform. Everyone directed their attention to this issue. Gradually with the spread of education, polygamy fell out of practice. Thus the dual problems of child marriage and polygamy were solved without Government intervention. Awareness was created among the masses with the help of journals and the effort of the enlightened ones.

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was an unsparing critic of social reforms. Not that he denied the urgency of reforms, but he was against their enforcement by legislation. He regarded the reformers to be hypocritical because they tried to persuade the British to legislate on the social issues by appealing to their reason and rationality, and tried to neutralize the orthodox opinion by quoting scriptures to show that the reforms were sanctioned by it. As Partha Chatterjee says: ‘he [Bankimchandra] had little faith in the efficacy of legislation to bring about a genuine reform of social institutions. Reform, in order to succeed, must flow from a new moral consensus / in society’ (Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World 73-74).

What Bankimchandra says is indeed true. But one should keep in mind the period of history when these reforms were carried out. Only a handful of people were enlightened enough to be able to understand the urgency of the reform by using their reason and intellect. But the majority of people were so engulfed in superstitions that reason would need much time to crack the shell. They therefore had to use the quicker way. It has to be said to the credit of the reformers that
‘[t]hey struggled […] against deep-rooted conviction in Hindu society of the superiority of the established tradition which was supposed to be the outcome of ancestral wisdom of the ages’ (Chakraborty 24). The reformers not only brought some relief to the women but also infused them with the strength to somewhat shape their lives.

While education has enlightened some of the characters in Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini, others remain narrow-minded and cannot let their belief in superstition slacken. The man in Sarat-Sarojini is shocked by the liberal ways of Sarat and the women of his house. Education has not refined him. He fails to understand that people are at liberty to do whatever they want with their own lives. He is at loss to understand why Sarat, a handsome and rich man has not yet married at 25. He is also left wondering as to why the 16 – 17-year old girls in Sarat’s house are yet to be married. He goes so far as to tell Bhagaban that it is shameful to keep such girls unmarried and wants the former to talk to his master about this. He is surprised to know that these girls freely interact with people, do not cover their heads and put on very few pieces of jewellery. But he is left aghast to hear that the girls wear petticoat and blouse with their sari and also sport socks and shoes. This man, however, enjoys khemta dance, something that abhors the educated people. He thus shows himself to be lacking in refinement that comes with education.

Nyayratna of Surendra-Binodini is an expert of the Nyaya-sastra (Logic). One who reached a certain degree of proficiency in this branch of Sanskrit learning was given this appellation. But the traditional knowledge cannot make him open-minded enough. He belongs to the camp of the orthodox Brahmins. He belongs to that class of Brahmins about whom Sibnath Sastri says:

‘তথ্যকার ব্রাহ্মণবিনিমেয় নায়কত্ব ও মূর্তিবিকার অধিক মানোন্যায় নিহিত এবং তৎকাল বাঁকসার নত অনুসারীন যদিগুক্ত, তিনি তত্ত মানা ও প্রতিষ্ঠানজন ইহেকেন’ (Ramtanu Lahiri 126) ‘Brahmins of those days studied Nyaya-sastra and
Smriti-sastra with close attention. The more his depth of knowledge the more was he honoured and established. But, as Raja Rammohun Roy had said, these are not liberal education that can bring about enlightenment.

In the play, Nyayratna is shown as a greedy Brahmin, the greed being for food. When he takes the name of God and utters maxims, even the servant-boy knows that he is being hypocritical. He too is for early marriage and is very much surprised when he is told that Binodini is only betrothed. The Brahmins used to indulge in overeating. In the past, there were Brahmins who used to stuff so much in their bellies during some feast that they could not walk back home. They had to be carried on a cot. When asked how much sweets can make him full, Nyayratna says that it is a prejudice of the non-Brahmins and the educated people that the stomach is full. According to him, the stomach is never full. One stops eating when one feels tired of the exertion, and not because of the stomach being full.

Matilal in Sarat-Sarojini has received education at the Wards' Institution. It was a school for the children of the zamindars. They were given such training as would help them in future. They stayed at this school for a period of 4 – 6 years. In spite of his education, Matilal remains a villain because he does not try to improve himself with the knowledge that he has acquired. He is seen committing forgery, hiring criminals and misappropriating property. He abuses his servants and his wife, consumes alcohol, keeps concubines and enjoys lewd songs in company of nautch girls. He reminds one of Dewan Gajanan in Chandrasekhar Bandyopadhyay’s Gangadhar Sarma oraphe Jatadhari Roinamcha. Gajanan has ‘an insatiable thirst for money, a mind which is best engaged in formulating diabolical plans, a heart that is cruel beyond description, and a moral sense which knows nothing wrong on earth and is a perfect stranger to remorse or compunction’ (Ray and Roy 25). Matilal too is seen wading through crimes without batting his eyelids.
Education helps one get over superstitions. Bindubasini, Matilal’s wife, genuinely sympathizes with Binay when she sees her husband hell bent in ruining him. She gives him some money from what little she has, while saying in an aside that it is actually Binay’s own money. But she cannot protest when her husband misappropriates the money left to the latter by his dying father. She is the typical Hindu wife who has pledged unconditional loyalty to her husband. She cannot imagine going against him, even when he is doing something that is revolting to her. Neither does she complain when she sees her husband in company of fallen women. She is the meek wife, ever mindful of her husband’s comfort, so much so that she is afraid Matilal might have hurt his foot while kicking her. She lacks the self-esteem that comes with education.

Spread of education and consequent widening of outlook

‘As Thomas has quaintly remarked, “Education is no exotic in India. There is no country where the love of learning had so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful an influence. From the simple poets of the Vedic age to the Bengali philosophers of the present day there has been an uninterrupted succession of teachers and scholars”’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 1). It is indeed true that scholastic spirit was never totally absent in India. This spirit pervades the bulk of literature that has been produced. However it must be added that education lost its excellence with the passage of time.

Though India had a long tradition of learning, it was traditional Hindu and Islamic forms of learning. According to Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, ‘the introduction and spread of western education with its natural concomitant of spread of western ideas was responsible for social change in nineteenth century Bengal’ (Chakravarti 27). It is therefore needless to say that the spread of western education was not without any social opposition. The project succeeded only
due to the educational idealism of the Bengali elite and the economic need of the middle class. The introduction of western science and philosophy infused the secular spirit of rationalism into the society, which was pervaded by irrational customs. This led to the emergence of the "bhadralok," the new middle class in Bengal, who were ultimately responsible for bringing about various social reforms.

However, before discussing the introduction of western education in India, a study of the existing state of traditional learning in the late eighteenth century is worth attempting. The system of traditional education failed to secure the material prosperity and political advancement of the people. In spite of the deterioration in political and social life, there was no dearth of traditional learning. This learning left the Indians totally unaware of the progress that Europe had made in different branches of secular learning. The few schools imparting primary education was no match to their European counterparts.

During this period, the prevalent system of education had two different branches, completely independent of each other. Higher education, meant for the learned classes, was confined to the study of classical Sanskrit in tols and chatuspathis and Arabic and Persian in maktabs and madrasas. Elementary education was looked after by pathsalas or vernacular schools. This was to cater for the trading and agricultural classes. It was limited to reading, writing and keeping accounts and therefore did not broaden the minds of the students. Moreover these schools did not have competent teachers and many of them were as 'ignorant as owls' (qtd. Hundred Years 1).

According to Ward, there were three main types of Sanskrit schools. One was for the study of grammar and poetry, the other concerned itself with the study of Purana and Smriti (law) and the last devoted itself to the study of Nyaya (logic). There were some schools for the study of Hindu philosophy, astronomy and Tantras as well. There were schools for medicine, because medical
lores were part of Sanskrit treatises. The period of study varied from 8 – 10 years. Grammar was studied for 2, 3 or 6 years, while Smriti and Nyaya required 6, 8 or 10 years of study. Teachers of these institutions imparted gratuitous education. They supported themselves with the gifts they received on occasion of festivals and with the patronage of the zamindars.

People who devoted themselves to traditional Sanskrit learning were so overwhelmed with reverence for the past that they began to believe that their forefathers had absorbed all knowledge. By simply memorizing vast masses of ancient writing, they thought, they would achieve all wisdom. The Sanskrit learning thus became stagnated and soon decay set in. It was in urgent need of resuscitation. Even the pandits were ignorant of the Vedas and the Bhagavadgita.

Sibnath Sastri said that there was no such knowledge that would exalt the mind and help in understanding the world.

Maktab or the Persian school existed almost invariably where there was a mosque. It taught elementary grammatical works, forms of correspondence, tales and popular poems. Sometimes treatises on rhetoric, medicine or theology were also taught. Arabic numerals were used to teach arithmetic. Elegant penmanship was considered a great accomplishment. The madrasas taught Arabic, sometimes along with Persian. They dealt with grammar, literature, theology and law. There were elementary Arabic schools in villages where instruction was given only in the reading of certain passages of the Quran.

Many noted Muslims presented a petition to Warren Hastings in September, 1780, requesting him to help in founding a college for Muslim learning. 'The visit had been occasioned by the arrival of a famous teacher and scholar, Muiz-ud-din, whom the petitioners hoped the government would employ to direct the madrassa' (Cohn 47). Eager to appease the Muslims deprived of their kingdom and to ensure a regular supply of Muslim law officers, Hastings
readily agreed. The Calcutta Madrasa was founded by Hastings in 1781 and were donated a landed property that would annually fetch Rs. 3000. Meanwhile Jonathan Duncan suggested the foundation of a Sanskrit College at Benaras to ‘endear our Government to the native Hindus by our exceeding in our attention to them and their systems [...]’ (qtd. Hundred Years 4). However the subjects taught in these traditional centres of learning had no value in either practical life or in widening the outlook of its students. Subjects like science, mathematics, history, geography, economics or political philosophy were not taught. Though India had accumulated much knowledge in the middle ages, she remained standing there, while the world made progress in various branches of secular study.

The Englishmen, who came to India had to undertake journeys in various parts of the country to attend to the administrative works, knew absolutely nothing about the language, culture and the people of the country. This hampered their work. Therefore Lord Wellesley set up the Fort William College in 1800. In 1801, Gilchrist was entrusted to prepare text books and also ‘develop a complete system of Hindoostanee [sic] Philosophy’ (Kopf British Orientalism 81). Bengali text books were written by Mrityunjay Vidyalâñkar, William Carey, Ramram Basu, Haraprasad Ray and others between 1800 and 1818. In 1802 Gilchrist launched Hindoostanee Press and published books. The oriental subjects taught at the college included Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali. To qualify for graduation, students were required to be proficient in two subjects. Since the third decade of the nineteenth century, there was a wave of indiscipline among the students. Throughout the decade, the college produced only a handful of proficient scholars. Added to these was the problem of indebtedness of the students. Bentinck dissolved the College Council in 1831 and dispersed the library in 1833. In 1835 he completed the dismantling of the college structure by closing the dormitory at the Writers’ Building.
Marshall struggled to reactivate the institution but was unable to reverse the process of decay. In 1853, after investigating the condition of the college, Dalhousie made a very bad report. In January, 1854, Governor General Dalhousie officially and completely dissolved the College of Fort William.

Though many believe that the British Government introduced western education to ensure a regular flow of clerks, R.C. Majumdar says: ‘Nothing can be further from truth. The English education was introduced in this country, not by the British Government, but in spite of them’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 14). Even before the Government came forward to introduce liberal education, there was keen demand for it among the Indians, mostly from the Bengalis. There was an advertisement in the Press on April 23, 1789, announcing the humble request of several Bengalis: ‘We humbly beseech any gentleman will be so good to us as to take the trouble of making Bengal [sic] Grammar and Dictionary in which we hope to find all common Bengal [sic] country words made into English. By this means we shall be enabled to recommend ourselves to the English Government and understand their orders; this favour will be gratefully remembered by us and our posterity for ever’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 17). Before the Government answered to this call, the Christian missionaries and broad-minded English philanthropists had already come forward.

In early eighteenth century, the East India Company was afraid to allow the missionary to preach Christianity in India lest that should hamper their business. They were afraid of wounding the religious susceptibilities of the Indians and thereby inviting trouble. Thus, both in matters of education and social reform, the initial attitude of the Government was one of strict neutrality. Besides, many of the Englishmen, themselves being not so educated, were superstitious. Many of them held the Hindu rituals in reverence and were afraid of stopping them. Major General
Charles Stuart performed Hindu rituals every morning by the bank of the Ganga. In spite of the opposition of the Company, many missionaries were struggling for permission to preach in India as early as late eighteenth century. Wilberforce too pleaded in vain before the passing of the Charter Act of 1793 in the British Parliament.

Charles Grant, who had served in Bengal, wanted to follow the Roman emperors by civilizing their conquered nations. He wrote: ‘By planting our language, our knowledge, our opinion and our religion in our Asiatic territories we shall put our great work beyond the reach of contingencies’ (qtd. Hundred Years 5). Preaching Christianity in foreign lands was the aim of Church Missionary Society (1799) and British and Foreign Bible Society (1804). They tried to make the public aware of their holy duty of converting the ‘fallen’ Indians from their spiritual depravity. Wilberforce argued: ‘Our Christian religion is sublime, pure and beneficent. The Indian religious system is mean, licentious and cruel... It is one grand abomination’ (qtd. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 63). As a result of these movements, the Charter Act of 1813 allowed the missionary to ‘help’ Indians. Many missionaries began coming to India and they achieved much success.

The number of conversions steadily increased. Alexander Duff, the Scottish missionary, mentions three methods might be used by the missionaries. They may lecture on the Bible to elders. It may be introduced in the curriculum at schools and lastly the Bible and other holy texts may be translated and then distributed amongst the Indians (S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 64). Ramkamal Majumdar of Sukchar mentions three ‘ricks’ adopted by the missionaries. They published books attacking Hinduism and Islam and vilifying Hindu gods and goddesses. These books were distributed amongst Indians. They declared the glory of Christianity and the apathy of other religions in front of the houses of non-Christians or on main thoroughfares. They also
provided jobs and looked after the daily needs of those who got converted out of greed for some material gain, so that others would follow suit. Referring to this trick, Rammohun Roy said that ‘by means of abuse and insult, or by affording the hope of worldly gain’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Ithas 64) the missionaries converted the people.

As the English established themselves as the rulers of the country, courts were established for administrative works. The English merchants too carried on their business zealously. This made the middle class people eager to secure the benefits of English education to their children, so that they might prosper in commercial enterprise. Many schools were established, but these catered to the needs of the middle class and did not bother about study of the English language and literature. However Drummond’s Dhurrumtollah Academy was an exception.

As the missionary wanted to proselytize people, they wanted them to be at least that much educated so as to be able to read the Bible in translation. They started a free vernacular school at Serampore in 1800 and reported to their parent society: ‘We are endeavouring to instill into their [the scholars’] minds divine truth as fast as their understanding ripen’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 48). The Serampore Missionaries wanted to use the educated converts so that, after learning Bengali, they could translate the holy texts into the vernacular and thereby reach the masses. But they gradually realized that to fully appreciate the Christian doctrines and western learning, the Indians had to master some European language. This is why the Serampore College and the Bishops’ College were founded.

Education given by the missionaries was generally free. However students were encouraged to pay or buy books, if they could afford. Bishop Heber says that parents sent their children to the schools because they knew that their children would not be baptized nor given such food as would make them lose their caste and not be forced to curse their gods. The missionaries also
published text books and books of reference for primary and high schools. They also took interest in developing Bengali literature and language and worked in association with the Calcutta School Book Society and the Asiatic Society. Gradually many schools were opened. Marshman of the Serampore Mission believed that merely teaching the Bible would not be of much help. They must be taught mathematics, geography, history of the ancient India and also extracts from Hindu scriptures.

The Serampore Mission opened many schools. In 1816, Marshman published a pamphlet titled Hints Relative to Native Schools Together with the Outline of an Institution for their Extension and Management. He laid emphasis on Bengali as the medium of instruction because that was how the ‘great body of the people could be rescued from the evils of ignorance and superstition’ (A. Mukherjee 55). He was of the opinion that the rich should be encouraged to learn English. But it would be futile to teach English to the masses. Thus the stance of the Serampore Mission was different from the Orientalists and Anglicists who respectively wanted Sanskrit and English to be the medium of instruction.

Serampore College was opened in 1818 with Bengali as the medium of instruction. Though they taught Sanskrit, Arabic, English and western sciences, it was considered as ‘pre-eminently a divinity school’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 59) where Christian youths would be taught theology. However the college was open to students without any distinction of caste. The administration was initially vested in the then Danish Governor of Serampore and Carey, Marshman and Ward, the three senior missionaries. In 1827 'King of Denmark granted a charter of incorporation to the college, empowering it to grant degrees in all faculties' (A. Mukherjee 60). It may be regarded as a missionary counterpart of the Hindu College.
Captain James Stewart of Church Missionary Society opened some vernacular schools in Burdwan in 1816. ‘Introduction of printed books at first caused a sensation among the local people who were so long used only to manuscripts’ (A. Mukherjee 61). The Calcutta Committee of the Church Missionary Society also opened schools at Calcutta, Khulna and Krishnannagar. They also had schools outside Bengal at Agra, Chunar and Meerut.

The schools of London Missionary Society at Chinsurah represented a joint Government–Missionary enterprise and were known as ‘the Company’s Schools’ and ‘Government Chinsura Schools’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 64). In July 1814 May opened a free school at his house for Indian students. When the number of students greatly increased within three months, Gordon Forbes, the then Commissioner of Chinsura, gave an apartment at the Chinsura fort for the school. By January 1815, May opened fifteen more branches. Books brought out by the Calcutta School Book Society were used. Students learnt history and geography as well. May and his assistants regularly visited the schools. Negligent teachers were punished and diligent ones rewarded. Since May did not interfere with the religious prejudices of the local people, the adversity against his schools was gradually removed.

The Calcutta Diocesan Committee of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge was founded by Bishop Middleton. They too regarded establishment of schools to be the means of their evangelical mission. They began functioning schools in 1818. They established school-circles, each containing five vernacular schools and a central school where English was taught. They taught non-controversial sections of Scriptures, *Niti-Katha, Bhugol-Brittanta, History of Joseph*, etc. Bishop Middleton planned a mission college where Christian youths would be imparted sacred knowledge and the principal Indian languages so that they would be qualified for teaching and preaching. The foundation stone was laid on December 15, 1820. The college
was later open for students of all religious communities for a liberal education. The Bengal Auxiliary Missionary Society (1817) and the Calcutta Church Missionary Society (1823) also founded schools in and around Calcutta. Duff also opened schools in Calcutta.

Though the Christian missionaries were working so that they could convert as many Indians as possible and used education as a means to achieve their end, it cannot be denied that that rendered great service to the cause of mass education in Bengal. They introduced better methods of teaching suited to the local conditions. They also helped to create a body of Bengali teachers who were properly trained. Moreover they tried to raise the standard of education by imparting western learning through the vernacular medium.

There were a few more schools that were not missionary enterprises. Dwarakanath Tagore was a student at Sherburne's school. Matilal Seal was a student at Martin Bowle’s school. Nitai Sen and Advaita Sen studied in the school of Arratoon Petres. Derozio was a student of Drummond’s Academy. Radhakanta Deb studied at Cunningham’s Calcutta Academy. Besides these, there were schools founded by many other Europeans. Within a year of his coming to Calcutta, Raja Rammohun Roy got acquainted with the Serampore missionaries and offered Carey a piece of land to build a school. He started his own school at Suripara in 1816. Later he opened an English class at his garden-house at Maniktala, where the bright students of his Suripara School were transferred. He also started an Anglo-Hindu School near Cornwallis Square to impart free English education to Hindu boys. He also helped Alexander Duff to found his first school. Gaurmohan Adhya founded the Oriental Seminary. Vidyasagar opened the Metropolitan Institution.

In early stages, the schools taught merely English words and their meanings. They did not teach grammar and sentence construction. The Serampore missionaries gave certificates
declaring that the candidate knew these many words. Therefore some students tried to learn dictionaries by heart. Rajnarayan Basu gives examples of ‘poems’ through which scholars learnt English. Sometimes these were set to music. An example may be quoted: ‘भाषण बन - बाल तुलिन।
नाई (Nigh) काओ, निर्द (Near) काओ, निर्दार (Nearest) कवि काओ / कट (Cut) काट, कट (Cot) खाट, मलारिया (Following) गान’ (R. Basu 21) ‘Ragini Khambaj – Tal Thumri Nigh काओ, Near काओ, Nearest अधि काओ / Cut काट, Cot खाट, Following गान’.

Ramram Misra was the first Indian to learn English. Later Ramnarayan Misra, Anadiram Das, Krishnamohan Basu and others ‘were celebrated as complete English scholars’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 114), ‘complete’ being limited to a spelling book and a word book! They opened schools and charged heavy fees. Wards of the newly formed middle class were their students.

The establishment of the British rule brought about a ‘bourgeois social revolution’ (A. Mukherjee 15). This led to the growth of a new middle class. English was absolutely necessary for communicating with the English trading companies. The establishment of the Supreme Court in Calcutta in 1774 made the middle class even more eager to learn English. However clerical and administrative jobs were rather limited because Lord Cornwallis could not trust Indians.

Besides these utilitarian motives, the upper classes of the Bengali society nourished a profound love and veneration for learning. They were eager to assimilate new ideas, thoughts and political traditions of the west.

Things continued in this manner. Lord Minto’s minute of March 6, 1811 says:

It is a common remark that Science and Literature are in a progressive state of decay among the Natives of India [...] The number of learned is not only diminished, but the circle of learning even amongst those who still devote themselves to it, appears to be considerably contracted. The abstract sciences are abandoned, polite literature neglected,
and no branch of learning cultivated but what is connected with the peculiar religious doctrines of the people. The immediate consequence of this sort of things is the disuse and even actual loss of many books; and it is to be apprehended, that unless Government interpose with a fostering hand, the revival of letters may shortly become hopeless from want of books or of persons capable of explaining them’ (qtd. Sastri Ramtanu Lahiri 148).

Lord Minto was of the opinion that the credit of the British national character would be affected if the state of decay of learning was not urgently answered. This minute was probably behind the introduction of the clause in the Charter Act of 1813 which said: ‘That a sum of not less than a lac of Rupees in each year shall be set apart, and applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the British territories of India’ (qtd. Sastri Ramtanu Lahiri 149).

In 1814 Raja Rammohun Roy came to settle permanently in India. He felt the dearth of knowledge in the city. David Hare too sold his establishment of watch-making and dedicated himself as a full-time worker for the cause of education. They became friends. The former had formed the Atmiya Sabha to discuss religion with his friends. David Hare was also present in one of the sessions of this Sabha. When the proceedings of the session were over, Hare raised the question of the means of elevating the native mind and character. Rammohun suggested the establishing an assembly where the dogmas of Vedanta might be taught. David Hare wanted to found an English school or college for the instruction of Bengali youths. The proposal was unanimously accepted and they decided to set up an English school.11

Hare prepared a paper containing his proposal. Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay was deputed to collect subscriptions. This circular was then given to Sir Edward Hyde East, Chief Justice of the
Supreme Court. He extended a helping hand and a meeting was held at his house on May 14, 1816. The meeting was attended by more than fifty Bengalis of rank and wealth. The proposal was unanimously accepted and nearly Rs. 50,000 was immediately subscribed. Since one of the orthodox pundits objected to taking subscription from Rammohun Roy on the ground of his association with Muslims, the Raja retired from this group. Hare was also absent at this meeting thus leading to the mistaken notion that East, and not Hare, was behind the foundation of the college. But Duff clearly mentions Rammohun Roy and Hare to be the originators of the Hindu College in course of his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee of 1853. East does not mention Hare, but writes in one letter about the role of Rammohun Roy. The Calcutta Christian Observer also said on the authority of Derozio that 'the merit of originating the Hindoo College must in justice be ascribed to Mr. Hare' (qtd. A. Mukherjee 27).

On the second meeting held on May 21, 1816, a general committee consisting of ten Europeans and twenty Indians was formed. Later the European members withdrew in a body lest their presence be interpreted as official intervention. However they promised to help in organizing the college. The objective of the proposed college was 'the tuition of the sons of the respectable Hindoos, in the English and Indian languages and in the literature and science of Europe and Asia' (qtd. A. Mukherjee 28). Though the institution would be exclusively for the Hindus, it was to impart completely secular and western education. It was resolved that the Hindu College would include a school and an academy, the school commencing first. English, Persian and arithmetic were to be taught at the school, while the academy would teach history, poetry, geography, chronology, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry and other sciences.

The most important landmark in the spread of western education was the establishment of the Hindu College on January 20, 1817 in a rented house at Garanhatta. It shifted to many rented
places before it was finally housed in the new building in the College Square in 1826. It was entirely a non-official and non-missionary enterprise. Its foundation was the starting point of ‘organized instruction in modern lines’ and ‘the beginning of liberal education in Bengal’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 33). Respectable Bengalis were eager to get their children admitted to this institution. However the college faced much difficulty due to the absence of proper text books.

The Calcutta School Book Society was founded on May 6, 1817 to supply ‘lessons and books in the Native languages’ (qtd. Kopf British Orientalism 184). The committee of managers had both British and Indians under the leadership of William B. Bayley. Their objective was preparation, publication and cheap or gratuitous supply of books that would be useful in schools. The books were to be in Bengali, Hindustani, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, the first preference being given to Bengali. Religious books, whether of the Hindus or of the Christians, were prohibited, but works inculcating moral duties were permitted. The Society also translated some British textbooks into Indian languages and also brought out new editions of indigenous works.

The first annual report of the committee of managers of the Calcutta School Book Society said that the number of Indian readers ‘desirous of acquiring a knowledge of European science is continually increasing’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 38). They therefore published Joyce’s Scientific Dialogues to acquaint people with the basic tenets of natural and experimental philosophy. Some other books published by the society include Radhakanta Deb’s Spelling Book, Harle’s Arithmetic, a Bengali dictionary, a Bengali encyclopaedia, Bhugol Vrittanta, Tarachand Dutt’s Manoranjan Itihas and Pearson’s Familiar Letters.

The Calcutta School Society, a sister institution of the Calcutta School Book Society, was inaugurated on September 1, 1818. The Society was formed
To assist and improve the existing Schools and Seminaries [...] To select pupils of distinguished talents and merits from elementary and other schools and / to provide for their instruction seminaries of a higher degree with the view of forming a body of qualified teachers and translators [...] When the fund of the institution may admit of it, maintenance and tuition [sic] of such pupils in distinct seminaries will be an object of importance (qtd. M. Gangopadhyay 37-38)

The society spread vernacular education, but the content of that education was 'more in harmony with the new spirit of the age' (A. Mukherjee 36). The first annual report of the Society stated that soon after its formation, they split into three sub-committees 'to achieve three different objects namely, (a) supporting a limited number of regular schools under the complete control of the Society, (b) encouragement and improvement of indigenous schools started by local people and (c) providing for English and higher branches of tuition' (A. Mukherjee 42).

The Calcutta School Society started few model schools. One of those was Arpooly Pathsala. It was under the direct supervision of David Hare who bore all the expenses of the school. Rev. K.M. Bandyopadhyay was a student of this school. High expenses forced the Society to hand over three of its schools to Rev. Corrie of Church Missionary Society. In 1823 the Calcutta School Society started an elementary English school. Advanced students of the vernacular schools were to be transferred to this school, whose advanced students would be transferred to the Hindu College. The English school was later merged with Hare’s school. By 1825, financial crunch forced the Calcutta School Society to relinquish the management of all vernacular schools, except the Arpooly Pathsala. They applied to the Government for financial help. In spite of the help, the society gradually curtailed its activities and became practically defunct in 1833.
A Committee of Public Instruction was formed in 1823 and was given the fixed sum of one lac Rupees to carry the development work. Soon two groups came to exist within this Committee. The Orientalists wanted Sanskrit and Arabic to be the medium of instruction, while the Anglicists wanted English. In 1834 Thomas Babington Macaulay became the President of this Committee. In 1835, he produced his 'Minute on Education'. He justified the introduction of English education as being the means of creating a class 'who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in colour and blood, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (qtd. Basu and Chaudhuri 421). He continues sarcastically, 'The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity [...] can we reasonably or decently bribe men, out of revenues of the State, to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what texts of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?' (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 148).

Lord William Bentinck approved Macaulay's Minute. He announced that the 'objects of the British Government ought to be promotion of European literature and science' (qtd. Hundred Years 43) and that the Government funds would be used only where instruction was given in English. In March 1835 his successor Lord Auckland too agreed with the Court of Directors that spread of education should be confined to the rich people who had influence over the minds of their countrymen. They believed in the filtration theory. Those who were educated would in turn educate their less fortunate countrymen.

In 1836 Macaulay wrote: 'No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. It is my firm belief [...] that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty
years hence (qtd. Anderson 87). Here Macaulay makes too tall a claim. The Hindu College was already a little less than twenty years old and the missionaries did not have much to celebrate.

Macaulay did not have much regard for the oriental classical language since ‘a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature in India and Arabia (qtd. Kopf British Orientalism 249). According to Kopf this statement shows how Macaulay obscured his real intention and confused the reader with a comparison that was highly imperialistic in tone. He tries to defend Macaulay. According to him, the latter might have meant that compared to the accomplishments of modern European literature, those of each and every classical civilization were trivial. He showed the same contempt for his own western heritage as well: ‘Words, and more words, and nothing but words, had been all the fruit of all the most renowned sages of sixty generations’ (qtd. Kopf British Orientalism 249). Again the apparently ‘racist’ Macaulay speaks in favour of the Indians: ‘It is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars….Less than half the time which enables an English youth to read Herodotus and Sophocles ought to enable a Hindu to read Hume and Milton’ (qtd. Hundred Years 18). He even says that no foreigner in the continent can speak better English than the Hindus.

Some members of the Committee of Public Instruction wanted to improve the state of traditional learning of India. ‘One of the first things it did was to complete the organization of the Sanskrit College at Calcutta’ (qtd. Hundred Years 9). Raja Rammohun Roy wrote a letter to Lord Amherst on December 11, 1823 protesting against the Government plan for the foundation of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta. He wrote: ‘This seminary […] can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtleties since produced by speculative men, such as is
commonly taught in all the parts of India’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 147). He appealed to the Government to ‘promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy with other useful sciences’ (qtd. Palit 13).

Derozio joined the Hindu College in 1826. He lectured on Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Kant and Bacon. He stood for the supremacy of reason in the new system of education and therefore encouraged his students to think for themselves. While lecturing on a topic, he would present all the arguments in support as well as against the topic. He would then allow the students to judge and draw correct conclusions. He would simply help them see the logic behind the argument. He thus naturally attracted the students towards himself. In the words of his biographer Thomas Edwards:

The teaching of Derozio, the force of his individuality, his winning manner, his wide knowledge of books, his own youth, placed him in sympathy with pupils, his open generous chivalrous nature, his humour and playfulness, his fearless love of truth, his hatred of all that was unmanly and mean, his ardent love of India...his social intercourse with his pupils, his restricted efforts for their growth in virtue, knowledge and manliness produced an intellectual and moral revolution in Hindu society since unparalleled (Basu and Chaudhuri 105).

The students were so dedicated to truth that ‘college boy’ became synonymous with truth. Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay writes in The Persecuted: ‘A father versus truth...No a father’s cries are not stronger than those of truth’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 33).

Derozio’s scholarship and enthusiasm greatly appealed to the students or the Young Bengal, as they were commonly called. It helped in moulding their attitudes.
Under the influence of Derozio, his students came down heavily upon the superstition and lack of logic in the Hindu rituals. They attacked the religious and social institutions of the Hindus with their newly acquired knowledge. They openly declared ‘Down with Hinduism! Down with Orthodoxy!’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 34). The Young Bengal did what Raja Rammohun Roy could not. They removed their sacred thread and developed taste for food prohibited for Hindus. Lal Bihari De explains this change in the attitude of the Young Bengal due to the enlightenment they had after receiving western education. ‘They began to reason, to question, to doubt’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 35). They began to hate everything that was associated with Hinduism. Madhabchandra Mallik openly wrote:

> If there be anything under the Heaven that I or my friends look upon with utmost abhorrence, it is Hindooism. If there be anything that we regard as the best instrument of evil, it is Hindooism. If there be anything that we behold as the greatest promoter of vice, it is Hindooism. And if there be anything that we consider to be most hurtful to the peace, comfort, and happiness of society, it is Hindooism. And neither insinuation nor flattery, neither fear nor persecution, can alter our resolution to destroy that monstrous creed (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 97).

The young generation regarded everything that was connected to the West to be good.

By introducing English education in India, policy makers like Macaulay wished to anglicize India and the missionaries wanted to Christianize the country. The colonial elite, on the other hand, was eager for western education, believing that access to western science and philosophy would bring about progress. However the long-term effects proved to be contrary. India was not Christianized. The logic which shook the Hindus’ faith in their own traditions came in the way of the acceptance of Christian dogmas. To the horror of the missionaries, Paine’s Age of Reason
was very popular among the youths. Liberal, democratic and egalitarian ideals appealed more to them than that of monarchy in Britain. Things went so far that [...] at one time educational administrators seriously considered the exclusion of British history, with its record of struggle for citizens’ rights from the curricula of Indian schools and colleges’ (Raychaudhuri 169).

One of the chief reasons for dismissing Derozio from the Hindu College was because angry parents were withdrawing their sons from the institution to protect them from the baneful influence of the Eurasian teacher. Letters of angry parents were published in the Samachar Chandrika during 1830 – 1831. They saw with horror that their sons did not abide by the traditional ways. They were modern in both their dress and outlook. Their English was strong, but their Bengali was unintelligible. They were ignorant in matters relating to their country. They looked upon Brahmins as thieves, hypocrites and fools and were ashamed of their ignorant relatives. When Derozio was charged as being the person responsible for these, he replied that he was ‘guilty of nothing beyond the encouragement of independence in thinking’ (Raychaudhuri 53). If this encouragement made his students hate Hinduism, he felt that it was not his fault. Still Derozio was dismissed in 1831. The fault of the Young Bengal was that they blindly imitated the West. Furthermore they failed to comprehend what India had to learn from the West and what she needed to reject as harmful. Still it must be said to their credit that the Young Bengal, that despite all their limitations, they were the first to ‘catch and reflect the dawn’ (qtd. G. Chattopadhyay liv).

Captain David Leicester Richardson replaced Derozio at the Hindu College. He too was a free thinker. His emphasis on rationalism made him hate everything associated with Hinduism. But this hatred was not supplemented with a corresponding reverence for Christianity. Hume, Paine and Gibbon were his favourite authors. The logic that made the youths hate Hinduism, also
happened to keep them at a distance from Christianity. The youths would not believe blindly. They questioned anything that was not rational. Amitabha Mukhopadhyay says: ‘[...] পিছাই প্রাণের / ফেলই চিন্তাচিন্ত সমাজ বক্ষা এবং সাধারণ ঐতিহ্য সমাজে বাঙালীর মনে সংঘর [...] হয়’ (A. Mukhopadhyay 171-172)

‘Bengalis began to question the age old social structure and the orthodox tradition only because of the spread of education’.

In 1835 Lord Bentinck engaged William Adam to prepare a report on the state of vernacular education in Bengal. He travelled extensively for three years to collect his data. He believed that education in vernacular schools were superficial and defective. ‘Even at the Sanskrit College at which grammar, law, rhetoric, literature, and logic were taught, following William Ward’s assessment, few attained very high levels of knowledge and only five out of thousand students in the colleges knew anything of the philosophical systems of the Veda, even though they could chant from memory long passages in Sanskrit’ (Cohn 52). He came to the conclusion that English could not be the universal instrument, but that European knowledge was absolutely necessary. Adam’s Report was among the best reports ever written. He collected data meticulously, so that the report did not have errors.

The Despatch of Charles Wood minutely discussed primary education as well as higher education. Education was recognized as a duty of the Government. It created the Directorate of Public Instruction. The main cities of India were to have their own Universities. Teacher training schools were to be opened. ‘The broad principle of “English for the select few and vernacular for the masses” was adopted’ (qtd. Basu and Chaudhuri 421). It also made provisions for women’s education. As per Wood’s Despatch, the University of Calcutta was founded in 1857. The Wood’s Despatch limited modern western education to the rich and middle-class Bengalis. It stated: ‘University Degrees and distinctions’ (qtd. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamai 149) aimed at
success in the various active professions of life' (qtd. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 149) that are to benefit only the rich. In other words, the aim of the British Government was to develop such an intellectual class in India that would always support the ideals and morals of the rulers.

Even before Wood’s Despatch, a Council of Education was formed in 1845. It made a proposal for the establishment of a University of Calcutta. The Council believed that the ‘advanced state of education’ (qtd. Hundred Years 44) in Bengal, required ‘the establishment of a central university armed with the power of granting degrees incorporated by a special Act of Legislative Council of India and endowed with the privileges enjoyed by all chartered universities in Great Britain and Ireland’ (qtd. Hundred Years 44). They drew up a draft similar to the constitution of the University of London for the not-yet-established university. The recommendations were sent to the Court of Directors who outright rejected it.

The project was again revived on the eve of the renewal of the Company’s charter. C.H. Cameron, the President of the Council of Education, in a petition to the House of Lords argued in favour of the project. A similar petition was signed by Raja Radhakanta Deb and others on behalf of the British Indian Association and Indians in general and submitted it on April 18, 1853. It was not easy for Charles Wood to prepare the despatch.14 ‘The despatch of 1854 is one of the wisest state-papers framed by the Court of Directors’ (qtd. Hundred Years 52). It gave permission to the Government of Bengal to establish a university and thus the University of Calcutta came into existence on January 24, 1857. It was to offer exclusively secular education.

Introduction of education created a new middle-class in Bengal and they too played their part in bringing about a change in the society. To some it brought dedication to truth and revolt against injustice. The charter of 1833 allowed the educated Indians high posts in the Company. This gave special position to the middle-class from the wealth it amassed in service. Education
thus opened up a new vista to the middle class. About this class, Broomfield writes: ‘Education, especially English-language / education, professional and clerical employment, and the literate culture to which that education gave access, as well as the acceptance of high-caste proscriptions, were the measures of bhadralok status’ (Mostly About Bengal 4-5). They began to question age-old evil customs of the country.

Introduction of western education caused a social upheaval and saw the emergence of three groups in the Bengali society. The orthodox were not in favour of the change. The other group was moderate, also known as ‘half liberal’ and ‘half-reformer’. They were the rich and middle-aged who were in favour of social change without completely forsaking the traditional customs. They could create a stir in the society but failed to effect a change. The last group consisted of radical reformers. They constituted the young middle-class of Bengal and were pragmatic, being enlightened with western education. They were impatient to bring about a total change in the society and were prepared to forego of their traditional beliefs and customs.

The middle-class, armed with their newly acquired liberal education, set about making reforms. In the words of Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, ‘The capsule of English education containing western ideas, imbibed in the society with its ripe economic background, stimulated a reforming zeal in various social movements’ (Chakravarti 28). It is indeed true that the social, religious and educational reforms that brought about the Bengal Renaissance were all due to this newly emerged middle-class. They selected newspapers and journals as a medium for voicing their protests and airing their views. Newspapers were also used to carry on debates related to these issues. There were articles that called on the restless youth to come forward and carry out all reforms in practice, without which progress and liberation of the country was impossible.
The educated middle-class was at the helm of most of the organizational activities. They functioned as leaders of the cultural and political change. Their presence could be seen in the organizational structure of the Hindu Mela. Rabindranath Tagore says: ‘With the assistance of our family, a mela (fair) called the Hindu Mela was begun. [...] This was the first effort to realize with appropriate adulation the notion of India as swadesh, i.e., one’s own nation’ (qtd. Chowdhury 31). The members of the Hindu Mela included the Tagores of Jorasanko and their relatives, journalists like Nabagopal Mitra, Krishnadas Pal, Kaliprasanna Ghosh, scholars like Jaynarayan Tarkapanchanan, Rajnarayan Basu, Pearlycharan Sarkar and the enterprising Durgacharan Laha who founded the Calcutta City Banking Corporation in 1863.

The purpose of the Hindu Mela was to kindle the patriotic feelings of the Bengalis. It aimed at the recovery of the heroic past which was hardly possible in the state of degeneration and hopelessness of the nineteenth-century society in India. The change could be brought over by the sons of the Bharat Mata only after they were instructed in the craft of manliness. Their programme included promotion of Hindu exercises (yoga), Hindu music, Hindu medicine (ayurveda) and culture of Sanskrit and Bengali languages. They wanted to get rid of the habit of consumption of alcohol that was introduced by the foreigners. They also promoted the traditional Indian civility like folding hands to greet someone equal and touching the feet of someone older.

The first Hindu Mela was held in 1867. Its secretary Ganendranath Tagore described the aim: ‘ভারতবর্ষের এই একটি প্রধান জড়িত থাকা না, আমাদের সকল কর্মকার আমরা রাজপুরুষদের সাহায্য নামা করি, কেন কি সাধারণ শহর বিদ্রোহ? কেন, আমরা কি মানুষ হয়ি? ... অন্য সাধারণ এই আজ্ঞানিক ভারতবর্ষ পরিপূর্ণ হয়, ভারতবর্ষ বদলুন হয়, তব এই সমার বিহীন উদ্দেশ্য’ (Sastri Ramtanu Lahiri 312) ‘One of the major drawbacks of India is that we pray for the help of the rulers in everything we do. Isn’t this absolutely shameful? The second aim of the Mela is to make self-dependence deep-seated in India’. The Hindu Mela tried to make
Indians feel proud of their rich heritage and engage in exercises so that they are strong and self-dependent. Tagore said: ‘[...] তাঁকি অতি মন্ত্রায় নিরীহ ভাষাক পদ পদে আর্ধে ও অসমান হইতে রক্ষা করিয়ে কোনো গবর্ণমেন্টের কৃতকরণ হইতে গেলে না। এই-সকল কৃপ বিপদ হইতে নিজের যোগ্যতাই নিজেকে উদ্ধার করে। ইহার জন্য কাহাও কাহার কাজ নিত্যা নিয়া ফিরে মাতা মন্ত্র আর নাই’ (Prasanga Katha (1) 73c) ‘No government can succeed to rescue an excessively meek race from injury and insult. One has to defend oneself from these little disasters by exerting one’s personality. There is nothing more shameful than falling at somebody’s feet, crying for help’.

The Hindu Mela organized various types of competitions – essay, music, wrestling, etc. in order to revive the past. Nabagopal Mitra instituted a National School that imparted physical education. He got the idea after seeing the gymnastic skills of Peter, a Portuguese, at the Sobhabazar Palace. Bengalis wanted to master the art and soon many other gymnastic schools were founded. 17 At the 1868 Mela, a poem was read emphasizing the need for exercise and physical activity amongst Bengalis in order to restore strength and promote well-being: ‘If you discipline your body even as you study, / You’d be blessed with a healthy mind in a healthy body. / Why oh why are Bengalis so weak? / Because they exploit the toils of the meek. / Every other race labours oh so gladly / Thus they enjoy so many luxuries’ (qtd. Chowdhury 21). The published programme of the second Hindu Mela reported that there was a demonstration of indigenous wrestling, lathi-khela or fights with bamboo staves and pole-vaults. They exhibited agricultural produce, machinery and handicrafts to put up a competent self-image.

The Mela also helped in uniting people from different walks of life and different provinces. Apart from regular lectures and songs, they engaged in cultural activities like staging of Kiranchandra Bandypadhyay’s Bharat Mata. Prizes were awarded for the best essay and song as well as the best gymnast or athlete. They also engaged in nationalist activities like National
Society in 1870 and National School in 1872. ‘The Mela’s display of competence at multiple levels attempted to challenge the power of the state to control all aspects of the colonial subject’s life through law or trade regulations’ (Chowdhury 12). For the first five years the Mela was restricted to Calcutta. Later the Mela was instituted at Dinajpur and Baruipur as well. The last Mela was held in 1880.

Education gave people the courage to do what was just. They ceased to be afraid of the society. Even in the nineteenth-century Bengal, a woman who had fallen out of the domestic circle due to poverty, abduction or temptation, prostitution or suicide was the only available option. Many such women sought shelter in the fold of the Brahmos, who in turn helped in their rehabilitation. They were not afraid to give shelter to someone whom the society had rejected.

Since the days of the Hindu Mela, Bengali youths trained themselves in gymnastics and wrestling. They gradually got over their ‘effeminacy’. Bengalis now came to the rescue of anyone who needed help. Sibnath Sastri mentions an incident about his uncle, Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan, editor of the Somprakas. A rich man of his neighbourhood tried to misappropriate a widow’s landed property. One day when Dwarakanath was writing for the Somprakas, he got the news that the rich man, accompanied by goons was going to the widow’s house to attack her. He took his brother with him and rushed to her house. He held the rich man by his neck and threw him out of her house. Such was their respect for Dwarakanath that none of the goons protested.

Surendra and Sarat in Upendranath’s plays belong to this group of sikshita madhyabitta. The plays do not let the reader know how these men were educated or which school they attended. Neither do they throw light on whether all of the young men were educated at the newly established University of Calcutta. Nyayratna mentions in Surendra-Binodini that Surendra has
received western education and Matilal in *Sarat-Sarojini* used to think Sarat to be a conventional book-worm. The plays also show that Surendra and Sarat like to dedicate their leisure in study of literature and science. These make the reader conclude that these men are indeed the products of western education. But they are not like the Young Bengal. The liberal education that they received has cleansed them of the superstitions that had crept into the social fabric of nineteenth-century Bengal and also of the foreign accretions like drunkenness. They combine in themselves the best of the Indian and British cultures. They know how to show civility to others and respect to women. Surendra and Sarat are kind-hearted and take care of the people working under them. When Bengal was affected by famine, Sarat was staying at Calcutta. In a letter he tells Sarojini to ensure that none in the village stays without food. He also instructs his *sarkar* to follow the orders of Sarojini in their efforts of famine relief.

The educated youths became socially aware. Sarat complains that the Government is not doing enough for the famine relief. Some permanent benefit could have been achieved had the money been timely expended during the famine of 1865 – 1866. With the memory of this famine still fresh in their minds, people panicked during the drought of 1873. But the Government had artificially kept down the prices by selling rice from the Government granaries, thereby incurring financial loss (Bhatia 83-84). *Sarat-Sarojini* was composed in 1874. The famine mentioned should therefore refer to the one of 1873. But Upendranath Das is actually referring to the earlier one. Whichever famine it may be, Sarat’s making arrangements for relief in his village is noteworthy. He is away at Calcutta and cannot come home immediately. He is therefore giving instructions to Sarojini to conduct the relief on his behalf.

Surendra and Sarat have imbibed the spirit of the Hindu Mela. They show none of the traits of effeminacy that was associated with the Bengalis. They have a strong sense of self-esteem and
refuse to swallow down any form of insult. They immediately retaliate and pay the offender in his own coins. When McCrindle kicks Surendra and then canes him, the latter forcefully snatches his cane, kicks him and then thrashes him for all his evil deeds. Sarat too retaliates when the sergeant hits him. He once again shows his courage when he is abducted by the Wahabis. They too cannot help praising his fearlessness and presence of mind. When they want him to work with them, Sarat is brave enough to speak of the evils of the Muslim rule on their face. He shows his courage when a gang of dacoits attack his house.

Surendra and Sarat are dedicated to the cause of their country. Education has opened their eyes and they can see the evils of colonialism. They can also understand the reason behind the present state of things. Surendra can see the corruption that has crept into British judiciary and wants to fight for his rights and the injustice that he has suffered. Sarat too is brave enough to write about the evils of the British governance and corrupt judiciary in a newspaper. He is sued for sedition and defamation. But he fights fearlessly. It is not that these young men retaliate only when their honour is at stake. Sarat is capable of helping anyone who is not strong enough to defend himself. When Binay is chased by the police, Sarat comes to his rescue. He strongly condemns the action of the police. He says that they have no right to punish one before one’s offence is proved in the court. When a drunken European is running amok at somebody’s house, Sarat is seen rushing to help the people living in that house.

Upendranath presents Surendra and Sarat as the role models of the Indians of the colonial period. Like traditional Indians, they are respectful towards their elders. But education has also brought in the good qualities of the West. They are modern in their outlook, but not at the cost of their tradition. They have simply discarded the superstitions of the nineteenth-century Indians.
They are well past the conventional marriageable age of the males, but still have not married. They want to dedicate more time to study, get matured and only then marry.

**Women's Education**

Most of the reform movements of the nineteenth century centred on women. As Partha Chatterjee says: ‘The “women’s question” was a central issue in the most controversial debates over social reform in early and mid-nineteenth century Bengal – the period of its so-called renaissance’ (*The Nation and its Fragments* 116). Rammohun Roy is famous for his campaign for the abolition of the immolation of widows and Vidyasagar for his efforts to legalize widow marriage. There were movements that fought against *kulin* polygamy and child marriage as well. The movement of introducing women’s education was equally ‘controversial’. The aim of all these reforms was to remove the neglect of the womankind and bring about their liberation.

The education of women happens to be one of the chief planks of social reform movement in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Cultured womanhood in India was not a gift of modern civilization. In ancient India, Rukmini, Lilavati, Chitrakala, Maitreyi and Lakshman Sen’s wife were famous for their learning. The sixteenth-century Vaishnava movement of Sri Chaitanya produced extensive religious literature in Bengal and also created a desire for women’s education. Among his followers, Subhadra Devi, the daughter-in-law of Nityananda wrote a book of verse in Sanskrit. Hemlata Devi, the daughter of Srinivasa Acharya, used to compose Vaishnava songs. Jahnavi Devi and Sita Devi were also famous for their learning. Anandamayi Devi, a good Sanskrit scholar, had composed with her uncle a book of verse in Sanskrit in 1772. Her relative Gangamani Devi also composed many popular Bengali songs. Hati Vidyalankar, a late eighteenth-century Bengali woman, philosopher, lived in Benaras and instructed male pupils at her *tol* in the most abstruse branches of Sanskrit learning. Other famous women scholars
include Vaijayanti Devi and Priyamvada Devi of the seventeenth century, Syammohini Devi and Drabamayi Devi of the eighteenth-century besides the two daughters of Saran Siddhanta.

Women’s education was prevalent in many aristocratic families as well. Women in the families of the Tagores, Radhakanta Deb, Baidyanath Ray, Pearychand Mitra and others were educated. Sibchandra Ray’s daughter, Harasundari was well versed in Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi. The daughter of Asutosh Deb mastered Bengali, Urdu, Sanskrit and Brajbhasha. The wives of Ramlochan Ghosh and Baidyanath Ray and Jagannath Basu Mallik’s daughter were also learned. Sursundari Devi, Prasannakumar Tagore’s daughter, was well versed in Sanskrit and Bengali. She had a beautiful handwriting and could write on various topics.

Women of ordinary households too had some acquaintance with education. They lost the practice after marriage. However they read holy texts of the Hindus at their leisure. Their afternoon nap would remain incomplete without books from Battala. In 1849, the *Calcutta Review* mentions a young woman who carried quite a few books with her to give her company during her six days’ journey to visit her ailing mother (Sinha 207). However they may indeed seem to be exceptions. Women in general were too busy with household chores to spare time for education. Most of the villagers were illiterate. A society in which men were illiterate, women’s education was indeed a distant cry. Adam’s survey of education in Bengal concluded that most of the Bengali women were illiterate. However the zamindars instructed their daughters ‘for they perceived that without a knowledge of writing and accounts their daughters would, in the event of widowhood, fail to manage their deceased husbands’ estates’ (A. Mukherjee 292).

After the Muslim occupation of Bengal, people confined their women to their homes. Gradually this gave rise to deep-seated prejudice against women’s education. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was commonly believed that education was sinful for women and would
make them immoral and profane. It was also feared to cause widowhood. Absolute ignorance thus became the general lot of women. Furthermore people could not see the logic behind educating their womenfolk who would never earn like their male counterparts. However little girls did sometimes accompany their brothers to the village schools very early in their lives.

Though girls did not receive formal education, they were carefully instructed in ‘useful’ work. Poor girls were taught spinning, weaving and making baskets. Girls of aristocratic families were carefully instructed in all types of household works. They learnt alpana, sewing and other crafts. Traditional religious training was also imparted. In other words, they were trained to become ideal mistresses of their homes. Though such trainings did increase efficiency in domestic work and inculcated home discipline, it failed to broaden their outlook.

In the colonial period the bhadralok required educated mothers and wives. The former would raise such children as could thrive in the new age, while the educated wife would help him in social intercourse with the British. ‘The Strisiksha Vidhavak [...] enumerated the advantages of education as including the ability to correspond with an absent husband, to instruct one’s children, and to do household accounts’ (Borthwick 63). Besides with her sense of hygiene, she could raise healthier children. It was agreed that education was required for proper dispensing of household duties. Indeed the gulf between the uneducated wife and her educated husband was so great that bliss in conjugal life was threatened.

Though the Government was quite indifferent and the majority of Bengalis rather apathetic to the cause of women’s education, the Christian missionaries did not give it up. They used this as a tool to proselytize women. Schools for European and Anglo-Indian girls were started by Mrs. Pitt, Mrs. Hedges, Mrs. Marshman, Mrs. Lawson and Mrs. Pyne. Robert May, a dissenting missionary of Chuchura (Chinsura) was regarded as a pioneer of women’s education. He had
noticed that quite a few girls of that locality attended school. He therefore opened a separate school for girls in 1818. After his sudden death in the same year, other missionaries got active. The Calcutta School Society taught girls, together with boys. In 1819, the Calcutta Baptist Missionary Society appealed to the young ladies of Mrs. Lawson’s and Pearce’s seminary to help in founding schools for Hindu girls. Few European women did respond to the call. In the same year, Rev. W.H. Pearce founded the Female Juvenile Society for the Establishment and Support of Bengali Female Schools. They opened the first girls’ school at Gauri Bari. Reading, writing and needle-work was taught and the medium of instruction was Bengali. In 1823, the Society got converted into the women’s wing of the Bengal Christian School Society. In 1832, they changed their name to Calcutta Baptist Female School Society.

The British and Foreign School Society, in consultation with the Calcutta School Society and the Serampore Missionary raised funds to send Miss Mary Anne Cooke to India in 1821. But when she arrived, the funds of the Calcutta School Society being inadequate, her services were engaged by the Church Missionary Society. Before beginning her work, Miss Cooke learnt Bengali. Once she went to a school run by the Calcutta School Society to listen to the Bengali spoken by students. There she saw a girl crying because she was not allowed to learn with her brother who studied there. Miss Cooke talked to the child’s mother and other women of that locality and opened a girls’ school. Within a year of her arrival, she opened eight schools.

In 1824, the Church Missionary Society formed a Ladies’ Society for Native Female Education in Calcutta and its Vicinity and handed over the schools. Lady Amherst was one of its patrons. Since the schools of Miss Cooke, now Mrs. Wilson, were scattered, the Church Missionary Society gave her the responsibility of founding the Central Female School in Calcutta. When the Society’s appeal for Government help for constructing a building was turned
down, Baidyanath Ray came to the Society’s rescue with a liberal donation of Rs. 20,000. The school opened on April 1, 1826 under the supervision of Mrs. and Mr. Wilson. In 1825, Ladies’ Association was formed with Mrs. Wilson as its President and established some schools in Muslim dominated localities.

In 1823, Carey, Ward and Marshman were active in Serampore and its vicinity, using girls’ schools for preaching the Bible. They founded the Serampore Native Female Education Society for this purpose. Conversion was their aim and they did not bat their eyelid in converting a 6-7 year old girl. This made Rev. K.M. Bandyopadhyay comment: ‘Now in public schools ... little has been done in educational, though much attempted in the catechizing way (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 169). Due to the prevalence of the purdah, girls from aristocratic families did not attend schools. As Swapan Basu says in Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas, “আসত ছাড়া পরিচ্ছে, [...] যাদের প্রাণ সবার নিচে। অবশ্য তারা কতোনি শিক্ষার্দ্ধদের জন্য আসত, তার কতোনি তুলা প্রলঙ্গনে (কুকুমোনে বন্ধোপাধ্যায়ের ভাষায় “artificial encouragements”) তা বলা মুখকিন” (169) ‘Those who came were poor [...] and belonged to the lowest strata of the society. However it is difficult to ascertain how much they came for education and how much for other material gain (in the words of Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay “artificial encouragements”).

In spite of the dedication of Mrs. Wilson and the best efforts of the missionaries, the respectable Hindus were reluctant to send their women to these schools. Firstly, the caste prejudice came in the way of free interaction. Secondly, the purdah system prevented them from coming out in the open. And finally, they did not approve of the religious character of education. Excesses in this sphere annoyed Radhakanta Deb, Raja Baidyanath Ray and Prasannakumar Tagore, who were otherwise the forerunners for the cause of women’s education.
Even in 1881, as Usha Chakraborty mentions, only 0.87% of women attended formal school (3). The aristocrats preferred educating their women either on their own or through private tuition. Kailasbasini Devi was taught by her husband Durgacharan Gupta. Pearychand Mitra and Sibchandra Deb taught their wives Bengali. Many English-educated youths taught their wives English. Rassundari Dasi holds a unique place as she was educated by dint of her own efforts. Though Radhakanta Deb supported the cause of women’s education, he was against their attending schools. He felt that girls attending schools would fall victims to the lust of men and would become immoral (P. Chattopadhyay 169). He was for educating girls at their homes, before marriage, by female tutors trained in missionary schools. Girls of poor families may attend schools and then serve as private tutors in wealthy Hindu families.

Miss Cooke took up the scheme of private tuition of the ladies of wealthy families. She herself coached the wife of Raja Baidyanath Ray at the latter’s house. A women’s organization founded in London in 1834 started home education for the secluded Parsi women in Bombay in 1842. Scottish missionaries were the first in 1854 to start educating women in their secluded apartments in an organized form. Miss Toogood instructed Swarnakumari Devi in the Tagore household. Women were instructed at their homes in Bowbazar first by Mrs. Sale and then by Mrs. Hannah Catherine Mullens.

Rev. K.M. Bandyopadhyay wanted a government sponsored zenana education scheme where some ‘wealthy and influential gentlemen can also be induced to give up rooms in their inner courts for the use of private schools, where none but ladies shall be admitted as tutoresses or visitors, nor any except girls from select families allowed to enter as pupils’ (qtd. Borthwick 70). The Hindu Patriot wrote on August 17, 1854 that the zenana educational system provided a reasonable compromise ‘combining […] the advantages of tutorial instruction at home with those
of a public education’ (qtd. Borthwick 70). However fear of public criticism and Christian influence created obstacles in its success.

Two main hindrances in the path of women’s education was the prevalence of child marriage and the purdah system. By the time the girl began acquiring some knowledge, she would be married off. Education would not continue at her in-laws’ place. Again the prevalence of purdah prevented the bhadramahila from freely acquiring knowledge. People were prejudiced against women’s education. While one group believed it would lead to widowhood, the other believed it would bring about laxity of domestic duties and moral degeneration. Anarchy would thus prevail upon the society. The tutors being Christians, people further feared that education would shake these women’s faith in Hinduism and lead to conversions, as happened in the case of men. Besides, lack of competent female teachers and girls’ schools together with complete absence of economic inducement created further obstacles. The Government took the responsibility of women’s education after Wood’s Despatch was sent in 1854. However much could not be done due to the differences between the conservatives and the liberals.

In 1845, the zamindars of Uttarpara, Jaykrishna and Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay appealed to the Government for help in establishing a girls’ school in their locality. They did not get any reply. After four years they appealed once again. It was then that the council of education replied that they would see the school perform for sometime without any government aid, before they could make any commitment. However the Barasat Girls’ School takes the credit of being the first school for the bhadramahila. It was founded by the educationist Pearycharan Sarkar, Kalikrishna Mitra and his brother Nabinkrishna. This philanthropic group was ostracized for their noble endeavour. People who sent their daughters to this school were persecuted by the orthodox community both physically and through legal harassment [....] Although the school
was not very well known, it did set a precedent for the public education of girls' (Borthwick 73). It may have been the inspiration behind the girls’ school at Nibadhai. It was founded in 1848 without any opposition. Many believe that that this school at Barasat, which John Drinkwater Bethune had come to inspect as the President of the Council of Education, inspired him to open a similar one in Calcutta.

Bethune wanted to establish a school for girls from respectable families. Ramgopal Ghosh was the first to help him in various ways, including gathering students for the school. Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay gave the drawing room of his Sukia Street house for the school and later donated a piece of land worth Rs. 10,000. Madanmohan Tarkalankar admitted his daughters Bhubanmala and Kundamala, gave free service to the school besides composing text books. It was decided that the school would admit girls from respectable families, aged between 4-10. Bengali would be the medium of instruction and English would be taught only if the guardians permitted. Sewing and embroidery was taught by Mrs. Risdale. Education at the school was emphatically secular. Bethune arranged for covered carriages for the students’ conveyance. However purdah could not be totally maintained due to the presence of male teachers.

The school functioned in the face of stiff opposition from the society. Families that sent their girls to the school were ostracized. Bethune wrote to the Governor General Lord Dalhousie on March 19, 1850: 'Every kind of annoyance and persecution was set on foot to deter my friends from continuing to support the school and with such success that at one time the number of enrolled pupils dwindled to seven, and on some occasion not more than 3/4 were present in the school' (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 171). When the school carriage rolled down the streets with the Mahanirvana Tantra sloka ‘कन्यापरं खोलियाधिकारिण्य’ ‘Like the son, the
daughter should also be brought up with care and given education’ written on it, people used to
stare in surprise and pass nasty comments directed at the little girls travelling in it.

Ramnarayan Tarkalankar used to say: ‘वाग्गर वाग्गर मोहेंले कोल्ला पेप्पर कि आर रचा आषे। एक “आन”
निमित्त किन्ना नाहीं। या आन, डाल आन, कपड़ू आन करिया जावऱी करू, अन्य कंबरबुल्ला पेप्पर कि आर रचा आषे!’ (qtd.
Sastri Ramtanu Lahiri 252) ‘My my! Is there any respite by teaching the girls? There is no
respite by teaching them one an (bring)°° Their demands – bring tea, bring pulses, bring clothes
– make you mad. What shall be the outcome once they learn the other letters’? Iswarchandra
Gupta prophesied: ‘नव चुप्पीलुला चुप्पी मोर कन्तरा ताड़ निदेष खाव / ए वि निदेष, व्रमी खेड़, विलाजी बोल काबैं खाव /
आर कियू निद थाकरे भाई। गावैं खाए नेत्रेत खाव /आदन खाते हाँकिए बनी, गडंर माठ धारा खावे’ (qtd. Sastri
Ramtanu Lahiri 252) ‘When the girls are so easily taking books / They shall learn the English
alphabet, dress like a bibi°° and speak in a foreign tongue / If you wait for some time, you are
bound to see / How they themselves ride their bogey in the Maidan’.

Not that everyone criticized Bethune’s endeavour. The Sambad Prabhakar, Sambad Bhaskar,
Sambad Purnachandrodaday and several others praised him. While thanking God for having at last
a school which girls could attend, the Sambad Rasarai lamented: ‘[...]' याव, आरामा कि निन्दू, पूचने
विलासने प्रायें करू, कन्तरा कानी करिया रावू, अं फि नेत्रा विषय, नित्रमाचा / कंबरबुल्ला कानी करिया रावून एणं विपश्य
होण यावू कावू नं. गावू केर नेत्रीकात काचू खावू कातर करून नाही [(...)]’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar
Itihas 294-295) ‘Ah, how cruel we are in sending our sons to school and letting our daughters
remain one-eyed. Alas! What a pity that the parents too keep their daughters one-eyed and after
their marriage neither the in-laws nor the husband give them eye’. It urged the public to help in
this mission by simply sending their daughters to the school. They would not even have to bear
expenses for this. They also warned: ‘[...] ए नव विषयात नागरा कोल्ला करिया ताण्या निदेषवै कानीकात नव
विञ्जयत, अं तेव अवगुणाचे शरदना उपर गबैम्हर करिया [...]’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas
295) ‘Someone who remains slack in such an endeavour is indeed an enemy of the girls, and God shall take on the task of repressing them’.

The Sambad Bhaskar on May 31, 1849 lamented over the shallowness of the Hindus. It argued that while Bethune, embracing a different faith, was spending his own money and labour for a school that would benefit Hindu girls, the latter were busy vilifying him. They hoped that the Hindus would change their attitude. Lack of enough support for Bethune’s endeavour compelled the Sarbasubhakari Patrika to write: ‘এবং প্রার্থনা দিবা বিপদ বিজয়া প্রকৃতি যে কিছু মহৎ কর্ম মন লাওন, তখন বিয়ের লোকের [...]
হস্তরাই সম্পাদিত হইবে, তথায় লোক কেবল হা করিয়া চাহিয়া রহিতেন। বরং পাতন তা সামান্যগত প্রতিবিশ্বকরণ করিতে হইত করিতেন না। কি স্ত্রীর বিষয়?কি স্ত্রীর বিষয়’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 173) ‘Whatever major reform, be it women’s education or widow marriage, is always due to the efforts of foreigners. The natives of the country will simply keep staring. Rather they shall try to create as many obstacles as they can. What a shame! What a shame’. In a speech Bethune said:

[…] The education of your females is the next great step to be taken in the regeneration of Hindu character […] For her own sake and in her own right I claim for women her proper place in the scale of created being. God has given her an intellect, a heart and feelings like your own and these were not given in vain … I may not live to see this desirable goal attained but it is my firm belief that another generation will not pass away before it will be universally conceded that whoever neglected the education of his daughter disgraces himself (qtd. Bagal 225).

Bethune used to spend Rs. 800 per month for the maintenance of the school and visit it almost everyday. He used to pamper the little girls and fulfill all their little demands. He often carried the two daughters of Madanmohan Tarkalankar to his house. Bethune also bought a piece of land worth Rs. 10,000 adjacent to the one donated by Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay and exchanged
it with a Government plot beside Hedua, so that the girls might easily reach the school. Matilal Seal too vacated the land few months before the due date, so that the construction of the school building could commence. Soon after the foundation stone was laid, Vidyasagar was appointed its secretary. Bethune bore the major share of the expenditure for the school. The building was completed in September, 1851, but sadly after Bethune’s death on August 12, 1851. By his will, he donated property worth Rs. 30,000 to the school. Bethune was indeed a pioneer of women’s education. Sheer love for the little girls made him write: ‘The eagerness of the children to learn, and their docility and quickness to correspond fully with what we have seen of Bengali boys, and in the judgement of their teachers far surpass what is found among European girls of the same age’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 173).

After Bethune’s death, many who patronized the school for selfish motives stopped being involved with it. The school somehow survived due to the eagerness of Lord Dalhousie and his wife for women’s education. The Government too changed its attitude after Wood’s Despatch of 1854. However the school did not suffer because as per previous understanding, the Government took over the responsibility of the school after Lord Dalhousie left India.

Some other girls’ schools were also founded. Radhakanta Deb and Jaykrishna and Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay opened one at Sobhabazar and Uttarpara respectively. Later, Vidyasagar opened some fifty schools in Burdwan, Nadia, Hooghly and Midnapore at Halliday’s request. Since he did not have any Government Order, the President of the Council of Education refused to grant any financial aid. After the Sepoy Mutiny, when the controlling authority of India passed from the East India Company to the British Crown, the new despatch of Lord Stanley sent out in 1859 reaffirmed Wood’s Despatch. Liberal grant-in-aid was then given to the private girls’ schools.
opened by Vidyasagar. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the activities of Bethune and Vidyasagar in the mid-nineteenth century gave a great fillip to women's education in Bengal.

Miss Annette Akroyd founded a boarding school for girls, named Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya in November, 1873 with five boarders. All the girls were Brahmos. In spite of her competence, she had little success with Bengali girls. She had even tried learning Bengali before coming to India, but her stiff cultural rigidity came in her way of understanding the situation of the students. She relinquished control of the school after her marriage in 1875. The responsibility was taken over by her former associates Durgamohan Das, Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay and Anandamohan Basu. The school ceased to operate for a short while before reopening as Banga Mahila Vidyalaya in June 1876. After a few years this school merged with the Bethune College which was opened a wing of the Bethune School, to offer higher education to girls.

Missionaries again proved themselves to be the pioneers in training of lady school teachers. In 1828, the Ladies' Society for Native Female Education opened a resident Normal School under the Church Mission Society. It trained European and orphan country women. In 1852 the Normal School for Training of Christian Female Teachers was started by the missionaries. European Female Normal School was started in 1861 for European women. A lack of progress was seen in non-missionary schools because they were managed by untrained teachers.

Mary Carpenter pointed this out to the Government in 1866 resulting in a teachers' training section being opened in 1869 in the Bethune School. Vidyasagar stayed away from this because he felt the social condition would prevent securing students from respectable families. He was later proved to be correct when the project failed. Even the inspector Woodrow was afraid whether the women would get into a carriage driven by a male coachman accompanied by a male groom. The Bamabodhini Patrika could not help commenting:
In this country women are neither that educated nor do they enjoy so much extent of liberty as to be able to do this work. The sahib has now gone to his country and if he brings 2-3 female coachmen and grooms then he may hope for a “female school”. None except the foreign women have enough daring to try this. We earnestly request the sahib to bring 2-3 female coachmen and grooms on his way back to India.

In 1871, Kesabchandra Sen started the Native Ladies’ Normal School under the India Reform Organization.

Insufficiency of existing schools and drawbacks of home education by the Christian missionaries made Kesabchandra Sen start the Brahmabandhu Sabha in 1862 for the uplift of women. They organized the Antahpur Strisiksha Sabha, for the education of women at home by their husbands and fathers. Whoever had taken on the task of instruction had to give a progress report to the Sabha every three months. They also conducted annual examinations where prizes were awarded. Definite syllabus was formulated, consisting of mathematics, geography and grammar. Examinations were regularly held. Soon this Sabha ceased to function due to shortage of students. The task was now handed over to the Bamabodhini Sabha. They published journals to improve the mental framework of their female readers. They also organized essay
competitions for women and declared prizes. Within a year, they merged with the Antahpur Strisiksha Vidhayak and jointly worked for secluded women and formal education to girls at regular schools.

The Hitakari Sabha was started in Uttarpara in 1864. They attempted to educate their students even after they left their school following their marriage. Students were encouraged to continue their study at home. Teachers visited them and conducted examinations at their houses. They imparted purely secular education. Though their main attraction was regular schools, yet many girls passed the home examinations conducted by the Sabha. Mary Carpenter later prevailed upon the Government to help such societies. Within a few years many such organizations sprang up for conducting home education.

Not happy with the instruction available for women, Kesabchandra Sen organized a women’s society in 1865, known as the Brahmika Samaj. He imparted religious instruction at the society premises. Handicraft was taught by a European lady. This was the first attempt of adult women assembling outside their homes for the purpose of education. Needless to say, the persons concerned were excommunicated by their Hindu relatives. However the number of students kept on increasing. Finding the education of grown-up women still lacking, Kesabchandra Sen started a school in 1871 under the patronage of the Bharat Samskar Sabha on secular lines. Miss Pigot, a former Headmistress of the Bethune School, helped him in this work. The curriculum consisted of English, Bengali, geography, mathematics, science, composition and translation.

The liberals started journals for women to discuss their problems and work out solutions. They wanted to present such information as would benefit women, besides giving them space where they could freely and fearlessly express their opinions. Pearychand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar were the first to bring out the *Masik Patrika* (1854) and declared in their first issue that
this journal was especially for women. They wanted to prove that superstitions regarding the ill-effects of women’s education, perpetuated by the conservatives, were absolutely baseless. They tried to explain why women should overcome the darkness of ignorance and step into the enlightened world of education.

The Bamabodhini Patrika (1863) edited by Umeschandra Datta had space in each volume where women could voice their opinions and protests. But the instruction regarding the duties of women and the limit of the freedom that they could enjoy were set by men. Sometimes it so happened that men wrote under a female pseudonym. The Patrika therefore demanded proof of authorship. They published articles on science to remove the mistaken ideas of women. However even the articles on science too glorified God for everything. A lengthy poem that discussed the process of digestion in rhyming couplets concluded with: ‘ধনা কর্মসীর ধনা রোমার কনুনা / এত শুভ্র গণিতের কিছুই জানি না’ (qtd. Basu and Mamun 307) ‘Glory to God! Glory to Your grace / I didn’t even know the care that you take for me’.

The Abalabandhab (1869) was published by Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay for the cause of women’s liberation. It was first a bi-monthly and from the sixth year, it became a monthly. The aim was stated in the first issue – to gradually improve the condition of women, to increase their knowledge and sense of duty, to increase their bonding in social sphere as well as within the family, besides removing their superstitions. Other journals for women include the Bangamahila (1277 B.S), Hembata (1280 B.S), Abala Hitaishini (1281 B.S), Anathini (1282 B.S), Bangabala (1292 B.S) and Mahila (1302 B.S). Women wrote in many of these journals, besides being regular readers. These served as platforms for their apprenticeship, before they emerged as professional writers. Krishnakumari Dasi’s Chittabialisini (1856) was a book of poems and was regularly sold in the market. Kailasbasini Devi started her writer’s career from 1863 and wrote
many books that sold well in the market. Many women followed suit and maintained themselves with this new mode of earning.

Gaurmohan Vidyalankar was the first to bring the issue of women’s education to the sphere of literature. He published the Strisiksha Vidhayak (1822) with the help of Radhakanta Deb who gave it to the Female Juvenile Society. Since the name of the author was not mentioned, many attributed the authorship to Deb. But in his letter to Bethune, dated February 21, 1851, Deb gives all the credit of the first part to Gaurmohan. He mentions his contribution for the second part only. This book advocated the cause of educating girls. It believed that education would help women enhance their wife-mother role.

In 1849 the committee formed in memory of Hare announced a prize for an essay on promoting education among Hindu women. The prize went to Tarasankar Tarkaratna. He divided his essay into four parts. The first part shows how scriptures make provision for the education of women and traces their present degradation to the absence of education among women. The second part deals with the logic behind women’s education. The next part shows how the society would change for better with women’s education. In the final part he mentions the methods to be adopted and the problems to be overcome. It was published in 1850 under the title Bharatvarshiya Striganer Vidyasiksha.

In 1857 Dwarakanath Ray published Strisikshavidhan. The argument with which he supported education is astounding. He negated the views of his opponents and went on to prove that nothing discriminates the daughter from the son. He showed that the country cannot prosper until the women are educated. In Strisikshar Apatti Khendan, published in two issues of the Sulabh Patrika, Dwarakanath, without specifically naming any person, negated all the objections raised by his opponents with reason and also a great restrain in language. Ramsundar Ray's
Stridharma Vidhavak (1859) is among the more prominent works supporting women’s education.

In the clash over the question of women’s education, numerous journals of the nineteenth-century Bengal took sides. Some joined hands with the liberals and reformers and published articles in support and praise of their endeavour. Yet others occupied the opposite bench and would pay no heed to what others say. They would simply keep their eyes shut lest they happen to ‘see’ the validity behind women’s education.

Rammohun Roy was an avowed supporter of the cause of women’s reforms. In his Second Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive (1820), he says: ‘If, after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught him, we may consider him as deficient; but as you keep women generally void of education […] you cannot, therefore, in justice pronounce their inferiority’ (qtd. A. Mukherjee 288). In 1842, Ramgopal Ghosh announced that gold medals would be awarded to the two best essays on women’s education at the Hindu College. Michael Madhusudan Dutt stood first and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay came next. When the question of women’s education was discussed everywhere, Harachandra Datta boldly spoke in its favour at a meeting in 1855: ‘The education of females is a duty which we owe to ourselves, and the more speedily it is fulfilled it is better’ (qtd. S. Basu Banglar Nabachetanar Itihas 175).

While the Samachar Darpan and Jnananweshan supported the cause of women’s education, the Samachar Chandrika and Sambad Prabhakar vehemently opposed it. They believed that there was no need for women’s education and neither do the scriptures permit it. In a letter to the editor of the Sambad Sudhakar the writer lamented as to why the editors were against women’s education. He agreed that women will not earn after being educated. But it would enlighten them
and help them in distinguishing good from bad. He also rubbished the views that education
would make them immoral and widowed. One is reminded of Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay's oft-
quoted lines "ना जानिए सब भारत-पल्ला / द भारत आर जाए ना जाने ना" (qtd. B. Ray 171) 'Till the women
of India are not enlightened / India can never prosper'.

The Sulabh Samachar edited by Dwarakanath Ray, in reply to the issue of widowhood caused
by education asked: 'विद्या का नारकपत्र वाला? ' (qtd. B. Ghosh Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj 222) 'Is
education a man-eating tiger'? It rather found this objection absolutely ridiculous. If education
indeed had such 'power' it would have killed the person who acquired education. It asked why
the husband did not lose his wife after being educated, when the wife's education was fatal to her
spouse. The Sambad Bhaskar challenged the Hindu Intelligencer: 'किंतु वाणिज्यकार विद्याके बाहिये विद्याक्यास
करिब कि किंतु असिंह साधना वाणिप्राणिकेष्म भावग्रहण करुन, तत्परता मनोगति प्रतिभाशार उठत विन, वाणि उत्तर प्रदान
अभ्यर्था इ डेड वाणिय करी श्रेष्ठ' (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 173) 'Serially publish all the evil effects of
girls receiving education at schools and we shall reply to each of the points. Consider yourself
victorious if we fail to reply'.

Kailasbasini Devi laments the miserable condition of Hindu women in her Hindu
Mahilaganer Hinabastha. She says that when compared to any other civilized country, the Hindu
women lead the most pitiable lives. She holds the age-old superstition to be the reason behind
this. She prays to the Lord Almighty: 'या जग्गविता [...] अबादर इह मनानोना करनिसिन दूर हइव? करनिसिन एह
करिब जानसूर् उदर अहा अदालाह अन्तकार नह करिब?' (qtd. B. Ray 17) 'Alas God! [...] When shall our
miseries be wiped away? When shall the sun of knowledge rise over this Bengal to shatter the
darkness of education?' In Apurba Sati, Sukumari Datta puts into the mouth of Nalini: 'अज्ञानिता कि
व्याहदिकाके एह निच [sic] उपदान सुखन करिहैलाह बस बाबारा पूरव इहा दीविता अज्ञाना तरुणा महिना शही देशियो देखियागे पान ना?'
(qtd. B. Datta 130) 'Has God created them of such inferior stuff that being men, they deliberately
fail to acknowledge the merits of women’s education”? As can be clearly seen, people were eager to see the women around them properly educated. Anyone who opposed this was held in contempt by the champions of the cause of women’s education. They would try their best to bring their opponents to their camp by logic, sarcastic comments and even caustic remarks.

Iswarchandra Gupta, the editor of the Sambad Prabhakar, holds a unique position regarding his attitude to the cause of women’s education. Earlier he used to call its supporters ‘shameless babu’. He used to say that it was the holy duty of the Hindus to restrain themselves from sending their ‘daughters’ to schools, thereby making them ‘prostitutes’. This same person later eagerly waited for the day when ‘Mothers and sisters would teach lessons from text books instead of teaching them prejudices’. He even prayed to God so that all might work for the cause of women’s education.

The Tattwabodhini Patrika also changed their stance. In one of its issues, it commented that the country cannot have any overall development until its women are educated. Education would enable them to take right decisions. But when the question of women’s education was widely discussed, this journal was strangely silent. Hurt by their silence, Iswarchandra Gupta urged them to come forward and work for the education of women. He wanted them to explicitly state their motives behind remaining inactive and also added that such an act would be sinful. The Tattwabodhini Patrika still remained silent and was not pleased when the Calcutta University allowed girl students to appear in its examinations in 1878.

People working for the cause of women’s education did not stop at making them literate. They knew that education should be accompanied with the liberation of women to produce the effects that were actually being sought. Unless they could ensure freedom to women, their
education was meaningless and incomplete. The journals portrayed the miserable lives of the women in general and demanded equal rights and human dignity for them.

The *Somprakas* wrote about the condition of newly-wed brides at their in-laws’ houses: ‘সুন্দরী পাইলে বিয়ের পরিবে না, … কোন ইচ্ছা ইচ্ছা পূরণ করিয়ে পাইলে না—ভিক্ষার করিয়ে বলিয়ে পাইলে না—নীড়ে ইচ্ছা বলিয়ে পাইলে না।… এমনি থিক বরষাসমার্গ নির্মাণ’ (qtd. B. Ray xviii) ‘Can’t mention her hunger…can’t mention her wants – can’t cry if scolded – can’t mention her sickness…such was the rule of the Bengali society’. Thus it may be said that women in the house did not enjoy more respect than the cows in the cowshed or the horses in the stable. In fact her condition was worse. The animals at least got their share of fodder in time, but women in the house were not even that fortunate. This echoes Mahendranath Deb who said that men suppose women are born to cater to their comforts and ‘consider that man is absolute lord not only over the fishes in the sea, the fowls of the air and the beasts of the forest but over female world. They therefore look upon their wives as household slaves […]’ (G. Chattopadhyay 94). The *Jnananweshan* wrote in 1837: ‘God having made men and women in this way would never have thought that one was to be counted as inferior to the other […]/ […] But gradually men’s cunning has replaced God’s wishes with his own restrictive fetters’ (qtd. Borthwick 31-32).

In July, 1867 the *Bamabodhini Patrika* regretted that most of the people regard women as bonded labours and believe that they are incapable of doing anything better. Before Vidyasagar’s movement, in the unfortunate event of widowhood, women could not remarry. But there was no problem for the widower to marry. A fallen woman was abhorred, but it was not so for the man. The *Bamabodhini Patrika* writes: ‘[…] এখন গুরুরমহাস্তকর প্রভু আমাদের লক্ষ্য হয়ে তিনিও বিবিরাম পারিবারিক জীবন এবং স্বামীরক্ষণের পরিপালনের ব্যবস্থা প্রকাশ করিয়ে বিশ্বাসা মান্য ও ভুলি করিয়ে শিক্ষা করিয়ে প্রীতি করিয়ে আপনাদিগের নীচ সংস্কার সকল পরিত্যাগ করিয়ে মাধ্যম জীবনের নায় […] আপনাদিগের অন্যা উৎপত্তি করিতে স্বল্পতা হউন’ (qtd. Basu and
Mamun 268) ‘[...] we now request the men to give up their pride and selfishness and treat women with due respect and the women to stop being superstitious and improve their condition like a free agent’.

Upper-class Bengali girls over 10 years of age were traditionally forbidden from coming out of their homes or attending public gatherings, except on religious occasions. Even the early group of English-educated people lived in two worlds – the outer shell where the educated bhadralok felt himself the peer of the educated in every land and the inner sanctum where old-worldliness still reigned supreme. However this purdah system was not universal. For example, ‘in the Tagore household of Jorasanko, the wife had some opportunity and an honoured position like the male members. Wives in such families had tutors, would take meals along with others and one or two even then could go for a walk or ride out’ (Chakraborty 7). Satyendranath Tagore’s wife Jnanadanandini Devi accompanied her husband to places outside Calcutta and even abroad. She is credited for introducing the modern way of wearing the sari and shoes by women in Bengal.

The women-centric social reforms of the nineteenth century produced the ‘new woman’ of the nationalist ideology. She enjoyed a status of ‘cultural superiority to the Westernized women of the wealthy parvenu families spawned by the colonial connection as well as to common women of lower classes’ (Chatterjee Nation and its Fragments 127). Her attainment of the superior national culture showed her newly acquired freedom. Modern education became a requirement for the bhadramahila when they realized that she could acquire cultural refinements without forfeiting the womanly virtues of ‘chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and the labours of love’ (Chatterjee Nation and its Fragments 129).
The bhadramahila could also be distinguished by how she carried herself. She had new items of clothing like the blouse, the petticoat and shoes with her U, and wore little jewellery. She was seen in mixed social gatherings and was a member of various philanthropic women's organizations. She read domestic instruction manuals and refined fiction. She could run the house in a competent manner, could support her husband, and teach her children in an 'enlightened' way. It was her duty to give up the defects of both old and new women and had to adopt their good qualities.

The Bamabodhini Patrika wrote in Baisakh 1296 B.S that proper education of women is impossible without the right of freedom. It argued: ‘জলাভ বিবিধ পদার্থ এবং দৃষ্টান্ত না দেয়া কে ডোমীল মন প্রর্কর যোগ কবর করুন? সাহিত্য ইন্দুরা বাতাই সাহিত্য না হইলে তদের মন ঘোলা প্রবেশ কর না’ ([...])’ (qtd. Basu and Mamun 268) ‘How will one’s outlook broaden if one does not see the various objects and sceneries of the world? Knowledge does not make its way into the heart till the sense organs come into direct contact [...]’. It argued that ideally a woman should not be confined to her inner quarters, but move freely all over the outside world while learning things of which she was earlier unaware. Education makes her ‘refined’ enough to understand the worth of her life.

An article in the Bamabodhini Patrika urged women to forcefully break the fetters of slavery imposed upon her by the patriarchal society. It argued that the male-dominated society deliberately kept women uneducated so that the males could lord it over her. The article continues: ‘[...] পুনরাত্মা প্রকৃত ঘাটিতে মাতি নহে। যাহার কেবলমাত্র প্রকৃত নহি, পুরুষ আমি সকলকার জনা তিনি প্রকৃত ইন্দু করে কবর স্বল্প বিদ্যান করতে গর্বের স্বল্প’ (qtd. Basu and Mamun 267) ‘Men are not prepared to let go of their supremacy. One, who cannot exert his authority anywhere, relieves his grudge by becoming the lord of his house for some time. Whoever would like to relinquish such an easy sovereignty?’ Kesabchandra Sen and his followers sang in the
Satyendranath Tagore believed women’s liberation to be the cause of the prosperity of the West. In a letter, written to his wife Jnanadanandini Devi, from England, he wrote:

> The prosperity and development of the society here [the West] is due to the fortune that women enjoy. When shall our country have this fortune? Fortune and prosperity are far from a place where women cannot rule over absolutely anything, where their lives are ruled by superstitions, their husband’s orders and other people’s censure. Women are the flowers in the garden of life. Where is the scope of any good being achieved by keeping them shriveled and emaciated in a room away from open air and sun.

Though many journals acknowledged the need of women’s education and opposed the injustices committed against them, all did not want them to enjoy equal liberty with the men. Leaving apart the Abalabandhab and a few others, the rest were conservative in this regard. The Bamabodhini Patrika did not support women’s liberation, as it did in the case of women’s education. They wanted to educate women so that they could properly raise their children, look after the smooth functioning of the house, remain single-minded in their devotion to their husbands and also ‘to keep the husband satisfied so that he does not develop any “bad habit”’. Though they published articles that reflected liberal outlook, their own attitude was far from liberal. The
Dhaka Prakas was not exactly against women’s liberation and wanted them to enjoy freedom by coming out of the ‘prisons’ of their houses, just as their European counterparts did. But they went on to add that they could not support the excesses indulged in by the ‘progressive’ husbands by having their wives wear shoes and freely move around. They were against women engaging in social intercourse with outsiders.

The women in the dramas by Upendranath belong to this newly emerged class of bhadramahila. Bhagaban’s description of Sarojini and Sukumari demonstrates that they are the typical bhadramahila in their demeanour. They wear blouse and petticoat with the sari. They sport socks and shoes. They do not put on much jewellery. They never paint their feet red. They marry late in life, just like the contemporary progressive women of the West. They also enjoy liberty. They can go on social visits, though accompanied by a male relative. They do not feel ill at ease in presence of men who do not belong to their family.

The women in Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini are educated. Upendranath Das does not, however, let his readers know how they were educated. The first named drama is set in Hooghly, while the other in Rishra. Vidyasagar had founded few girls’ schools in Hooghly and the school of Jaykrishna and Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay of Uttarpara was not far from Rishra. They may also have been taught at home by private tutors. Birajmohini once says that Surendra took care of her education. He might have sent her to school, engaged the services of a tutor or himself taken the responsibility of educating his sister.

When the women of the plays by Upendranath Das meet, they do not engage themselves in petty talk. Their discussions show that they are well-read. They subscribe to the Abalabandhab and Bamabodhini Patrika. They also contribute articles to these journals. Sukumari has read a book about the Parsi community of Bombay. She talks about it to Sarojini who has not yet read
it. Birajmohini is also seen reading the Bandhab. She and Binodini discuss Swarnalata and the Jnanankur. These women do read fiction, but not the popular fiction of Battala. They read ‘refined’ fiction.

Education has allowed the virtues of the women in Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini blossom forth. This is exactly what the Bamabodhini Patrika and other journals had been arguing. In Sarat-Sarojini, Binay says that women are by nature soft-hearted. If they are not married off early in life and receive education till they have grown up, they become angelic. Indeed Birajmohini, Sarojini and Sukumari can nurse the sick sympathetically. Birajmohini has a little garden on her terrace where she has grown verbena.

Sarat being away from home during famine, Sarojini manages the famine relief in her locality. The former wants her to ensure that none in their village stays without food.

Like the true bhadramahila, the women in these plays imbibe whatever is good in the old and new woman. Like the traditional Indian girls, they are bashful. They show respect to their elders and care for their subordinates. They look after their well-being. Like traditional Indians, they give alms to anyone who comes begging for it. Even in the nineteenth century, it was common for anyone on their way to pilgrimage or on some business trip, to visit the first house that falls in their way and ask for food and shelter. On one such occasion, when Sarojini and Sukumari were eating their meal, they have visitors. Since the two cooks would find it difficult to cook food for thirty odd people, these women help them in the kitchen. They take their meal only after their guests have been fed.

Women are generally portrayed as weak, both physically and mentally. But the women in Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini retain their calm in the face of emergency. When dacoits attack Sarat’s house, Sarojini picks up a revolver and shoots at an Englishman, thereby killing
him. Had she not shot at him from behind, he would have killed Sarat. When Birajmohini has been locked up in an isolated house and McCrindle tries to assault her, she looks for all possible ways of escaping from that place. When she finds no other means of preserving her chastity, she rushes out of the room and jumps down a verandah. For her, suicide is better than losing her honour. Sarojini too once comes across four boozers, one of whom proposes to marry her. When she too cannot get away, she does not hesitate to attempt suicide. Later in the same play, when Sarojini reads in the newspaper about Sarat being seriously ill, she comes to him in disguise. She is afraid that if he is indeed sick, sudden joy at seeing her may prove fatal.

Thus the plays demonstrate how women's education has proved beneficial to the society at large. Earlier women used to lead lives that did not do anything to benefit the society. Their lives ended with doing nothing, but managing their household. The better they managed the house, the more was their praise. But with education, they learned things about which they had earlier been unaware. This makes them lead meaningful lives. They can get involved in various philanthropic works. Such a woman is indeed the companion whom the bhadralok had been desperately searching to aid him in bringing about a total reform of the society.

Societies

According to Pollard, there can be no middle class without commerce and industry. In the earlier feudal society, there were landed gentry and penniless labourers. But with the rapid growth of industry, a new class came into existence. They neither belonged to the upper strata of the society, nor to the lower one. They occupied the 'middle' part and were commonly known as the middle class. They had so much money at their disposal as to have no worries about their sustenance. With this money, they could educate themselves and settle down to some comfortable job. Having no worry about food and shelter, they engaged themselves in various
social reforms. It will not be too sweeping a statement to say that there would have been no Renaissance or Reformation without this class.

Closely connected with the education and enlightenment of the middle class is the creation of societies, both literary and philosophical. Thus, '[...] societies of the type became centres of reforming zeal as well as of literary and philosophical illumination' (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 60). Education made this newly emerged class notice the flaws in the society and they directed their energy to remove these. Common cause brought different sorts of people under a single banner. The consequent reformation was, therefore, a combined effort. Thus various associations and societies sprang up in the nineteenth century where people regularly met to discuss different issues.

The Friend of India once commented that Calcutta is not just a city of palaces; it is the city of journals as well. Swapan Basu says that as many as 1400 journals, both English and Bengali, were published in the nineteenth century (Sambad-Samayikpatre Unis Sataker Bangalisamaj 5). The same can be said about the societies as well, because most of the journals happened to be the organs of one or the other society. Seeing the intellectual climate of Bengal on his arrival in India in 1830, Alexander Duff commented: '[...] we fairly came into contact with a rising body of natives, who had learnt to think and to discuss all subjects with unshackled freedom...we hailed it as heralding the dawn of an auspicious era' (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 21).

The foundation of the Hindu College led to the foundation of the Calcutta School Book Society and the Calcutta School Society. Both Englishmen and Indians worked for these organizations. According to Manomohan Gangopadhyay, due to the direct influence of the spread of education, the youths were seen engaging themselves in social, political, scientific, philosophical and literary discussions. Their inquisitiveness together with their eagerness to
supplement their knowledge with whatever additional information they could gather made them organize themselves into groups. This led to the foundation of more societies and associations.

The aim of the various societies was the propagation of the ideals of their members. They tried to spread their influence among the masses. As Binay Ghosh writes in Banglar Bidwatsamaj, ‘These learned associations were the chief institution and medium of propagating the ideals of the new age. It was through these that the intellectuals used to spread their moral influence over all classes of the society’. The educated youths used these associations to liberate the society from the evils of child marriage, polygamy and the suffering of the widows. Binay Ghosh rightly says: ‘It is true that these Associations increased the urge of cultivating literature and science; but another urge seems to have been stronger and that is the urge for social reform’. Both Englishmen and Indians began to freely express their views in the associations and the topics discussed clearly pointed to the evils of the contemporary society. It must however be noted that these associations were not confined to the middle class. Elites were also associated with many of these.

Many of these societies were founded by the British around the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Indians were not associated with these. These were strictly for the ruling class. The first among these societies was the Asiatic Society founded in 1784. David Kopf says: ‘The Asiatic Society was not properly the conception of any one man, be it [Warren] Hastings or [Sir William] Jones, but the expression of a collective need. After a decade of studying facets of Hindu and Muslim civilization in India, the Hastings generation now required
The Atmiya Sabha (1815) was the first Bengali association. The meetings were held at the founder, Raja Rammohun Roy’s house as well at the house of other members. Members included Gopimohan Tagore and his son, Prasannakumar, Dwarakanath Tagore, Rajnarayan Basu’s father, Nandakisor, the zamindars of Telinipara and Taki and the rajas of Bhukailas and Andul, among many others. The weekly sessions of the Sabha began with Vedic chanting, Brahma Sangit and was followed by discussions of social and cultural issues. About a meeting held at Brajamohan Majumdar’s house on May 9, 1819, the Calcutta Journal reported on May 18:

At the meeting in question, it is said, the absurdity of the prevailing rules respecting the intercourse of several castes with each other, and of the restrictions on diet were freely discussed and generally admitted – the necessity of an infant widow passing her life in a state of celibacy – the practice of Polygamy and of suffering widows to burn with the corpse of their husbands, were condemned – as well as all the superstitious ceremonies in use amongst idolaters (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 65).

The proceeding of this session itself indicates the purpose behind the foundation of this Sabha. It did not restrict itself to merely religious reform, but wanted to flush out the evils of the society.
The Gaudiya Samaj (1823) was founded by the Bengali elite for the purpose of cultivation of education and acquisition of knowledge. Its members included conservatives like Radhakanta Deb, Bhavanicharan Bandyopadhyay, Ramdulal De, Kasinath Tarkapanchanan as well as liberals like Raja Rammohun Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore, Prasannakumar Tagore, Tarachand Chakrabarti and others. Rammohun Roy’s reformation had not yet created a rift in the society and hence the peculiar combination of the members in the Gaudiya Samaj. Members read essays and extracts from their books. Though they were not united in their ideals, they were liberal enough as members of an intellectual society. They could freely express their views, though others could respectfully disagree.

When the practice of sati was abolished by law, the conservatives under the leadership of Radhakanta Deb felt Hinduism was under attack. Within a month they founded the Dharmasabha on January 17, 1830 to protect their religion from outside attacks in the guise of ‘reforms’. Binay Ghosh says in Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj: ‘সাধারণ লোক […] ধর্মসভাকে বললেন ‘গুরুমসভা’ […] ধর্ম শেষ শান্ত শেষ ধর্ম ধর্মজ্ঞান আর প্রতিবাদ করত এবং কোনোদুরে ভোলিয়াঁ করত বলল, তবে নাম দেওয়া হয় ‘গুরুমসভা’’ (100)

‘General public gave the Dharmasabha the name of “Gurum Sabha”. It was so named because its members protested at the top of their voices that religion and scripture were in peril and fired cannon balls of foul language; hence the name’. The Dharmasabha did not go by logic, as did the Brahmo Samaj, which was named ‘Sitalsabha’ ‘Calm Society’.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, while addressing an important but thinly attended meeting, Dwarkanath Tagore had observed: Let [the] Hindu College turn out more educated men in future as it has done in the past, and in a few years these meetings will be attended by ten times the number’ (Majumdar 667). His prophesy proved true. Derozio, who joined the College in 1826, used to present all the views in favour and against a particular topic. He let the students
think for themselves and then helped them to draw conclusions. Since the classroom could not be converted into a debating session, the debate continued after college hours at Derozio’s house. It was named the Academic Association and had regular sessions from 1828.

The young students, who are generally known as the Young Bengal, found the scope of applying their newly acquired knowledge in their discussions of social, moral and religious issues. About the Academy Rev. Lal Bihari De says: ‘...it was more like the Academus of Plato, or the Lyceum of Aristotle’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj 425). The Hindu Patriot compared this Association with the famous ones at Oxford and Cambridge. Rev. Lal Bihari De wrote: ‘The general tone of the discussions was a decided revolt against existing religious institutions....The young lions of the Academy roared out, week after week, “Down with Hinduism! Down with Orthodoxy!”’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamai 71). The educated youths of the city wanted to get attached to the Academy. The older and matured people too could not resist the temptation of attending its sessions. Edward Ryan, the judge of the Supreme Court, David Hare and the Deputy Governor, Bird, frequented the meetings.

The Young Bengal, inspired by new human rights and liberal ideas, attacked the conservatives. They were armed, like their opponents, with the twin weapons of societies and journals. But the latter had some additional advantages. As Binay Ghosh writes in Banglar Bidwatsamaj: ‘প্রথমত ধর্মিকদের আর্থিক পোককড়া বিল, বিষ্ণুরত কুকুরপাতের কুকুরপাত লেশিকা নেবার সুগন্ধ বিল এবং সমাধান যাবে কাই বো বিলই। ইঙে কোনসার প্রথম সম্ম বিল “মুক্তি” (77) ‘Firstly the rich had money at their disposal. Secondly, they could incite the demons of superstition, besides the excuse of Hinduism. The Young Bengal mainly had recourse to “reason”.

These turmoils in the social life led to the mushrooming of the various societies. Robert Eisler believes that such associations are found in a society with various problems and clashes. As Rev.
Lai Bihari De writes in *Recollections of Alexander Duff*: ‘Debating societies multiplied, in which bigotry, high-handed tyranny, superstition and Hindu orthodoxy was denounced in no measured terms’ (qtd. B. Ghosh *Banglar Bidwatsamai* 77). About the emergence of various association and societies, Duff also says: ‘New societies started up with utmost rapidity in every part of the native city. There was not an evening in the week, on which one, two or more of these were not held; and each individual was generally enrolled a member of several. Indeed the spirit of discussion became a perfect mania; and its manifestation, both in frequency and variety, was carried to a prodigious excess’ (qtd. B. Ghosh *Banglar Bidwatsamai* 78).

Indeed the Academic Association created a desire among other students in Calcutta to form similar organizations. Students of Rammohun Roy’s Anglo-Hindu School, Hindu College and Hare School formed Anglo-Indian Hindu Association (1830). Members could discuss any stream of knowledge. But discussions relating to religion were prohibited. Same rules were followed at the Jnansandipan Sabha (1830) founded at Umananda Tagore’s Pathuriaghata house. The Debating Club was founded at the house of Lakshminarayan Datta about the same time. Students of Rammohun Roy’s Anglo-Hindu School also formed the Sarbatattwadipika Sabha (1832) to bring Bengali out of the neglect it had fallen in. Bengali was the medium of discussion at this society, while English was used in others.

Indeed there were so many societies that Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay could not help writing: ‘পৌরাণিক তিনি [হিন্দুরা পুত্র] অক্ষিকার মুল বিচিত্র নাই; যত হইল সভার খালার বাক্সার হইতেন। রামরাজনী, প্রমুরাজনী, জন্মাজনী, জন্মাজনী প্রভৃতি সভার খালার তিনি কলিকাতা ঘড়িতেন সপ্তম নাই। কলিকাতা ঘড়িতেও কিছুত গাইয়েন, এমন নাই। পাড়া গেলে গোটিতেন, সর্ব সকল সভা সংগ্রামের জন্য অন্তর্জ নাই গোড়াইতেন’ (qtd. B. Ghosh *Banglar Bidwatsamai* 62) ‘Fortunately he [Iswarchandra Gupta] is not alive today. Otherwise he would have been fed up with the societies. He would have surely left Calcutta to get rid of societies like..."
Ramrangini, Syamtarangini, Nababahini, Bhabadahini, etc. Not that he would have got any respite even if he left Calcutta. Had he gone to some village, he would have seen societies desperately hunting members'. It is indeed true that the craze for societies and associations knew no bounds.

The excesses of the Young Bengal created such a situation that Derozio was forced to leave the Hindu College. It was said that his teachings were ‘dangerous’ from the point of view of the conservatives. His ardent followers were persecuted and often socially ostracized. But the radicals re-grouped their forces repeatedly, brought out a number of journals, held meetings and set up different societies, schools, etc. Binay Ghosh says in Vidyasagar o Bangali Samaj: ‘মন্দুড়ের মজা একবার কাটা বিদর্ভ তরুণদের মধ্যে “শানসারি, হো আমি রে, মুখার সেদিন” অব হলো, ইহ বেলে দলের বয়েজোড়ারা তখন পাসিক্ট রক্ষিত হয় উঠিয়েন’ (132-133) “Though few greenhorns like Madhusudan were still in the stage of ‘Folly, come breaking open the door’, the older members had somewhat returned to their senses’.

When the first flush of enthusiasm was over, the Young Bengal was no longer satisfied with sporadic meetings and small organizations. They wanted something more stable. A manifesto bearing the signature of Tarinicharan Bandyopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghosh, Ramtanu Lahiri, Tarachand Chakrabarti and Rajkrishna De was circulated. It mentioned the absence of a prominent debating society, requirement of in-depth analysis of a topic and refusal to remain content with superficial knowledge. It stressed on discipline in the proceedings of the association and discussion of subjects related to their country.

The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge27 was established on March 12, 1838. They met regularly and oral or written discourses were delivered in all the sessions. One is bound to be amazed at the range and variety of the subjects discussed. There were discussions on
history, geography, scientific discussions on anatomy, literary discussions, abstract
philosophizing, condition of women and need for social reform, whether Bengali should be the
medium of instruction and official language. The British also participated in the sessions. Some
discussions on politics or economics did make them feel uncomfortable; still the Society being
highly disciplined, they could not help praising it. The advocate of the Supreme Court, George
Johnson wrote: ‘One of the most meritorious of the native association is the Society for the
Acquisition of General Knowledge’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 87).

The Bangabhashaprakasika Sabha was established most probably after Macaulay’s
declaration in 1835 of English being the medium of instruction for higher education. It aimed at
the cultivation of the Bengali language and literature. Any discussion of religion was strictly
prohibited. On March 2, 1852, Iswarchandra Gupta wrote in his Sambad Prabhakar: ‘কেবল একজন
ফরে এই সভার উদ্দেশ্য হইয়াছে, রাজ কালীনাথ চৌধুরী প্রতি মহান্যেরার রহস্যক্ষ সিক পঞ্চ প্রধানতার দাতার ভাবে
সত্য্য সজ্জন নাই […]’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 91) ‘This society ceased to exist only due
to lack of unity. Just because Ray Kalinath Chaudhuri and others supported the Brahmo Sabha,
people who owed allegiance to Dharmasabha would not get attached to it’.

The aim of the Tattwabodhini Sabha28 founded by Debendranath Tagore at their Jorasanko
house on October 6, 1839, in the founder’s words: ‘আমাদিগের সমূদ্র যাত্রার নিচু ভাষা ও বেদব্যাপী প্রভাব
বৃদ্ধির প্রচেষ্টা’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 91) ‘To preach the profound essence of our
scriptures and the Brahma-Vidya taught by the Vedanta’. This society came in reaction to the
moral decay of the English-educated Bengali youth and the problem of their conversion into
Christianity. Presentation of papers and discussions, on education and culture, was a part of the
weekly meetings of the society. Divine service used to be held once a month. Their journal, the
Tattwabodhini Patrika published articles on literature, history, politics, economics, religion,
philosophy, etc. Unlike the Academic Association or the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, the Tattwabodhini Sabha inculcated Indian culture, shorn of its accumulated superstitions while imbibing the good aspects of Western culture.

There was a constant flow of new ideas from the West. People got more eager to discuss topics related to education, culture and society at the associations and secure self-esteem through these. More matured after the clashes of the first half of the nineteenth century, people now wanted to direct their energy to improve the society. However, none of these associations continued for long due the loss of interest and commitment with the passage of time.

The Perseverance Society (1847) was founded for literary discussion and social reform. The person behind this society was Gaurdas Basak, an intimate friend of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The Bangabhashanubadak Samaj (1850) was founded with the aim of publishing books for the general public. However they published only two journals, Vividartha Sangraha and Rahasya-Sandarbha with Rajendralal Mitra as their editor. The Sarbasubhakari Sabha (1850) was founded by few students of the senior section of the Hindu College. Their aim was mentioned in their journal, the Sarbasubhakari Patrika (1850): to remove the prevailing evil customs and practices of the country. Vidyasagar and Madanmohan Tarkalankar were associated with this society.

At a meeting held at the Calcutta Medical College on December 11, 1851, Dr. Muatt stressed the need of having a society and ‘pointed out the great necessity of devising some means of bringing the educated natives into personal contact with each other (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 98). It was decided that a society should be established for the discussion of science and literature. Since Bethune died a few months ago on August 12, the society was named after him. The members of the Bethune Society included Englishmen like Long and Marshall and educated Indians like Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore, Rev. K.M. Bandyopadhyay, Ramgopal
Ghosh and Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay. It also had a few Muslims as its members, Maulavi Abdul Latif Khan being the most prominent among them.

Discourses could be in English, Bengali or Urdu. Discussion of politics and religion was prohibited lest it should create a rift amongst the members. Thus Hindus, Brahmos and Christians remained associated with the Society, while forming smaller groups where religion could be discussed. The Preface of the 1861 report stated that the Society brought the British and the educated Indians together for the purpose of ‘mutual intellectual culture and rational recreation’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Bidwatsamaj 100). The Society had a branch at Dhaka named ‘The Branch Bethune Society of Dacca’. The topics show the inclination towards discussion of issues related to education and society, these being urgent issues of the second half of the nineteenth century. These show how the educated people were aware of their social responsibilities. The Bethune Society had five sub-groups working on literature and philosophy, health, science, technology and social science. The heads of these groups had to present a report on their achievement and future plans in the annual convention.

The Vidyotsahini Sabha was founded by Kaliprasanna Sinha in 1853. He converted the intellectual society into a typically informal Bengali one. The discipline and restraint at the Bethune Society made some Bengalis feel uncomfortable. The homely atmosphere together with some laxity in following rules attracted them towards the Vidyotsahini Sabha. It may be called a Bengali edition of the Bethune Society. Discussions could be in Bengali and English, preference being given to the former. The society also presented plays on its own stage. They felicitated literati like Long and Michael Madhusudan Dutt.

The Suhrid Samiti was founded in 1854 at the house of Kisorichand Mitra. He stressed the need for social reform and added that merely composing essays and giving speeches would not
help. It was decided that all the members would work to remove superstitions from the society. They would abstain from doing anything that went against truth and logic. They would work for female education, widow remarriage and try to stop child marriage and kulin polygamy. They wanted the members to spread the ideal of righteousness. The members included Pearychand Mitra, Debendranath Tagore, Akshaykumar Datta, Harischandra Mukhopadhyay, Chandrasekhar Deb, Rajendralal Mitra and Digambar Mitra.

The Family Literary Club (1857) was founded by Rev. K.M. Bandyopadhyay. Anyone could be its member. The meetings were held at the houses of the members by rotation. Topics of discussion were the same as in the Bethune Society. Englishmen also participated in the meetings. It did not have much difference from the Bethune Society, except in the atmosphere, as the name suggests.

The Burrabazar Garhasthya Sahitya Samaj (1857) had considerable influence on the educated Bengalis. They read essays in English and Bengali. The best essays were given awards and were also published as books. Their annual convention was celebrated on a grand scale. They also felicitated deserving people. They had given a letter of congratulatory address to Long, who had been the secretary of the society in the period 1859 – 1867.

At a meeting of the Asiatic Society, Mary Carpenter proposed opening of a branch of England’s National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in Bengal. A committee comprising Long, Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore and others was formed to consider it. The Committee rejected the proposal but suggested the founding of an independent organization named the Bengal Social Science Association. This proposal was accepted on January 22, 1867. The aim of this association was to create social awareness besides trying to find logical solutions to the problems of social life.
Among the societies committed to other causes are the Brahmo Samaj, British India Society, British Indian Association, Surapan Nibarani Sabha, Indian Reform Association, Indian League and Indian Association. There were societies for various purposes. In an article, the Paricharika complained that it was not seemly for the bhadramahila to fight with her maidservant. Yet sometimes it was difficult to avoid it, especially when the latter remains engaged in persistent stealing. In jest, they suggested a Chakrani Hitakari Sabha along the lines of the Brahmo Samaj or the Indian Reform Association to ensure an improvement in the situation, thereby allowing the bhadramahila to remain ‘bhadra’.

The urge of the educated youths to organize associations also figures in Upendranath Das’s Sarat-Sarojini. Sarat and his friends have the same purpose behind founding the society, as had the real-life people of the nineteenth-century Bengal. The youths of this play are well educated. They prepare essays and present them at the meetings of their association. The society that figures in Sarat-Sarojini is modelled on the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, the Bethune Society and the Vidyotsahini Sabha. A wide range of subjects are discussed in the Society for Spreading the Light of Science. Topics ranged from Darwin’s theory of evolution to the ill-effects of over-indulgence in the emotion of love. As in the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, here also the topic of presentation and the name of the speaker were announced in advance. The discipline with which the meeting is conducted in Sarat-Sarojini resembles the discipline to be found in the prominent societies and associations on the nineteenth century. Finally the name ‘Vijnanalok Vistarini Sabha’ closely resembles the ‘Sadharanjnanoparjika Sabha’ (Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge), ‘Tattwabodhini Sabha’ and ‘Vidyotsahini Sabha’. 
Alexander Duff said that societies had become a perfect mania among the people and that things were carried a bit too far. The same can be seen in the society of Sarat and his friends. It is generally beyond one’s expectation that a lecture can be on a topic as ridiculous as the over-indulgence in the emotion of love. The audience does not always use logic while listening to a particular speech. Whenever the pitch of the speaker rises, they catch the cue and highly applaud. They again do the same when someone else contradicts the speaker. An intellectual society can never remain content with such a set of audience. It seems that the audiences are occupying the chairs simply because they have nothing better to do.

Upendranath Das further ridicules the ‘fanaticism’ of the members of the society. To the faithful, nothing is impossible for God. For the newly educated youths, belief in science has either dislodged God from His throne or has Him share it with the glory of science. It is this ‘faith’ in the power of science that makes Sarat hope that one day science may do away with the biological process of reproduction. The society’s name suggests that it is dedicated to science and logic. But the chairperson ‘warns’ Sarat against uttering the name of an atheist like Comte because it is a sin to utter or even listen to his name. The mockery is continued when the chairperson asks people to literally hold their heads high, even while walking. In the stumbling of all who really do so, Upendranath metaphorically suggests that if anything, however good, is carried to excess, it is bound to come to an end.

Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini thus draw a true picture of contemporary Bengal. Indeed the reading of the plays transports one to those bygone days of the Raj. It portrays a time when the reform has just been achieved. Though one does not actually see the period of the Bengal renaissance, a reading of the play gives the same feeling as would a record of the actual movement. All the aspects of the society are touched upon in the plays. Introduction of liberal
education in India had made the youths get over superstitions. Besides it had helped them see the flaws of the society and make necessary rectifications. It made them show respect towards women and also help them get the benefit of education. Education had helped women to further improve their nature. They could serve the society as well as their homes. Nineteenth-century Bengal had a huge number of societies and associations through which the educated youths tried to win over the general public. It was a tool in the hands of the reformers. The same is seen in Sarat-Sarojini, where Haridas tries to make people believe that they have indeed evolved from monkeys and Sarat tries to make people discard the 'abominable' over-indulgence in the feeling of love. Thus the plays by Upendranath indeed present a cross-section of nineteenth-century Bengal.
NOTES

1 In a typical Dasaputtalika brata, ten figures would be drawn on the ground and prayers would be offered to each of those: to have a husband like Rama, a father-in-law like Dasaratha, a brother-in-law like Lakshmana, a mother-in-law like Kausalya, to attain chastity like Sita, efficiency in cooking like Draupadi, be blessed with worthy children like Kunti, true womanhood like Goddess Durga, tranquility like Ganga and forbearance like Mother Earth.

2 Immediately after the death of her husband, the widow would take an oath of becoming sati. She would not even realize the consequences of such an oath at that moment of shock. And once the oath was taken, there was no scope of back-tracking. Sometimes she would also be administered narcotics. When she mounted the funeral pyre, she would be literally tied to the corpse to prevent her escape. Big bamboos would also be used to forcefully keep her down. The site would be filled with the smoke of dhuna, incense used during Hindu rituals, so that the onlookers may not see her agony, while the deafening beats of the drum would ensure that her cries are also drowned. These were done so that none of the onlookers is suddenly moved by pity, thereby attempting to rescue the unfortunate woman.

3 The helplessness of these little orphans is portrayed by Derozio in his The Faqeer of Jungheera.

4 The Young Bengal also wanted to have a marriage registration Act added to the Widow Remarriage Act as an amendment. However it had to wait till 1871 when the Civil Marriage Act III was enacted.

5 In the marriages of the widows, Vidyasagar bore the expenses, besides giving ornaments and gifts to the bride and the groom. He founded the Hindu Family Annuity Fund. Bengali families are generally dependant on a single male earning member. On the event of his death, his family
faces grave financial crisis. Under the new plan, the death benefit would be lifelong monthly pay
back of a little more than the double of the monthly premium paid by the policy holder.

6 Broomfield defines ‘bhadralok’ as cultural elite. He belongs to ‘a socially privileged and
consciously superior group, economically dependent upon landed rents and professional and
clerical employment; keeping its distance from the masses by its acceptance of high-caste
proscriptions and its command of education; sharing a pride in its language, its literate culture,
and its history; and maintaining its communal integration through a fairly complex institutional
structure that it had proved remarkably ready to adapt and augment to extend its social power
and political opportunities” (Broomfield Elite Conflict 12-13).

7 Jagannath Tarkapanchanan was acquainted with the Vedas, Nyaya, Smriti, Tantra, kavya, the
Puranas and other sastras. He was famous for his encyclopaedic knowledge and was perhaps the
last giant of traditional learning.

8 William Dalrymple writes: „Not much is known about this strange Irishman who in the 1780s
came out to India while still in his teens; but he seems to have been almost immediately attracted
to Hinduism, and within a year of his arrival in Calcutta had adopted the practice – which he
continued to his death – of walking every morning from his house to bathe in and worship the
Ganges according to Hindu custom […] He explicitly refers to himself as a “convert to
Hinduism” (42). He employed a group of Brahmins to cook his food. The Asiatic Journal called
him ‘Hindu Stuart’. His friend Gardner who thinks ‘The General is an odd fish’ (qtd. 43) refers
to Major General Stuart under the pet name ‘General Pundit’ or ‘Pundit Stuart’.

9 There are frequent references to ‘[…] Company’s officials attending pujas, presenting gifts in
temples and participating in sacrifices. James Grant, for example, gave a bell to the Durga temple
in Benaras after the priests there had prayed for his safety when he and his wife with their
children were caught in a whirlpool in the Ganges immediately opposite the temple. About the same time the British celebrated the treaty of Amiens by marching with the military bands to the Temple of Kali' (Dalrymple 45).

10 This peculiar style of learning caused amusing incidents. Once when an Englishman got very angry at his clerk, the latter said, 'Master can live, Master can die' (R. Basu 21) to mean that the master can kill him or let him stay alive. The Englishman got even more angry and was about to hit his clerk when the latter realized the mistake. He raised his hand and said, 'Stop that' (R. Basu 21) to mean 'Don’t beat me'. Then pointing towards himself with his finger he said, 'Die me' (R. Basu 21) meaning 'You may kill me if you want'. He continued: 'If master die, then / I die, my cow die, my black-stone die, my fourteen generation die' (R. Basu 21-22), the black-stone referring to the family deity worshipped as the salagram sila.

11 The institution was termed 'Vidyalaya' 'school' for some years in the official records. However since 1826 the records of the General Committee invariably refer to this school as the Hindu College.

12 English education was in a manner forced upon the British Government; it did not itself spontaneously originate it. The system of English education commenced in the following very simple way in Bengal. There were two persons who had to do with it. The one was Mr. David Hare. The other was a native Ram Mohan Roy [...] (Hundred Years 10).

13 The Court of Directors also wrote in 1824, ‘in proposing to establish seminaries for the purpose of teaching mere Hindu or mere Mohammadan literature you bound yourselves to teach a good deal of what was frivolous, not a little of what was purely mischievous and a small remainder in which utility was in any way concerned’ (qtd. Hundred Years 15).
14 In August, 1853, Wood wrote to Lord Dalhousie: ‘I am in a good deal at sea on education, as indeed we all are in England. Everybody is for doing more than we do, and no five people agree as to what ought to be done. I have had no time to look into it myself, and I don’t see any body who can give me a very unbiased opinion, so I shall be more obliged to you for enlightening me about it’ (qtd. Hundred Years 50).

15 There was a bhadralok preference for the term ‘sikshita madhyabitta’ ‘educated middle class’ despite the presence of zamindars and professionals and a remarkable extent of nobility among them.

16 Nabagopal Mitra, the editor of the National Paper was referred to as ‘National Nabagopal’ in contemporary circles. Manomohan Basu said about him in Madhyastha in February, 1873: ‘He incarnates [sic] the National’ (qtd. Chowdhury 32).

17 Amritalal Basu writes:

Give the dog a bad name and hang it [...] But to speak the truth, I have myself seen Sir George Campbell himself awarding the athletes to the Mela. [...] The British generally do not want the Bengalis to be strong and brave. [...] They teach us that wrestling is the worst of all arts, but they practice it upon others to show its might! The goddess of mischief played some trick with Sir George. Though he was not a well-wisher of the Bengalis, he did not
want them to remain chicken-hearted. He was the first to appoint Syam Ghosh the teacher of gymnastics at the Chuchura (Chinsura) College. Later gymnastics teachers were recruited in Calcutta and mofussils at his order."

18 The Bengalis were portrayed as ‘effeminate’ at different moments of colonial rule. Macaulay once described Bengalis as physically ‘feeble even to effeminacy’ (qtd. Chowdhury 4) and mentally ‘weak even to helplessness’ (qtd. Chowdhury 4).

19 In Pearychand Mitra’s ‘Griha-katha No. 1 Strisiksha’ published in the Masik Patrika on August 18, 1854, while discussing with her husband the education of her daughter, Padmabati says:

‘What shall a girl do with her education? Will she earn money? Instead people shall spread slander. On Sunday I went to my sister’s house. Aunts were also there. When I told them about daughter’s education, all of them asked where was the benefit of educating girls? Some even said that education made women widowed. My my! Since I heard that, my heart is palpitating. To hell with education! Let my daughter remain as she is. I shall tell Churamani to offer tulsi to our family deity to expiate the sin of attending school for those few days’. 

20 Saudamani Ray of Barisal, as a child, was sometimes sent to the village school along with her brothers. The teacher did not pay any attention to her. However, being a quick learner, she
absorbed his instructions well. One day when she had written something quite advanced, the teacher's amazement soon turned into a reprimand: 'For women to pursue education is a terrible sin. The education of women leads to destruction, if they are educated, they will become widows, so from now on, don't come to my pathsala again' (qtd. Borthwick 61).

21 Kasinath Mallik and Matilal Seal also helped the missionaries in their spread of women's education.

22 In Bengali, ৩ঝান means 'bringing' as well as 'anna' – one sixteenth part of the whole.

Ramnarayan Tarkaratna is using pun on the word ৩ঝান.

23 Traditionally Indian women draped a single piece of sari. Someone who wore blouse and petticoat with the sari, adorned herself with little jewellery and wore shoes was called bibi. She was the consequence of modern education and was disapprovingly called so.

24 The eagerness of learning was indeed very strong among the girls in India, even after the initial period of its introduction. In his Nation and its Fragments, Partha Chatterjee tells the story of how Santa Nag, a middle-class second generation woman learner of the closing years of the nineteenth century, learnt to read the alphabet. Her mother would sit across the table, teaching her elder brother. She would stand by her mother and silently watch. In a few months, without anybody suspecting it, Santa Nag could read the first two books of the Bengali primer, but only after holding it upside down (140).

25 In Amar Jiban 'My Life', Rassundari Dasi describes the various incidents that resulted in her being absolutely starved for two days. In that condition, she carried all her household chores and could not even tell the people in the house about her being without food (31-32).

26 Mary Carpenter made suggestions for the education of Hindu girls. She proposed to include the cultivation of beautiful flowers to soften the girls' minds and music for their refinement.
By the third decade of the nineteenth century, many societies were formed in England. These created a desire amongst Indians to have similar ones in their country. Similarity in the names of the Indian and British associations is to be noted. There was a Mechanics Institute, both in India and England. The names of Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge and Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and Society for the Diffusion of Political Knowledge of England are also similar. However the difference in ‘diffusion’ and ‘acquisition’ can be explained by the difference in the social conditions of the two countries. In England, it was the question of ‘diffusion’ that had become difficult. But in India ‘acquisition’ was the problem.

The Tattwabodhini Sabha was first named Tattwaranjini Sabha. It was later changed by the advice of Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis.


The full name of this society was Samajonnatividhayini Suhrid Sabha.

Rammohun Roy adapted Unitarian social reform to Bengali circumstances. He attributed the social evils of idolatry and the undermining of 'the pure Upanishadic belief in the “unity of the Supreme Being as the sole Ruler of the Universe”' (Kopf Brahmo Samaj 14). Rammohun Roy abandoned the Unitarian Committee and formed Brahmo Sabha in 1828, bringing 'to a focal
point this comprehensive scheme of religious, social, intellectual and political reforms’ (qtd. Basu and Chaudhuri 163). Debendranath Tagore changed the name to Brahmo Samaj in 1843.

32 The British India Society was an organization where both the Indian zamindars and the British were members.

33 The British Indian Association (1851) was founded by Debendranath Tagore. They did not have any European member. It may therefore be called the first political organization of India. Indians of various groups and the zamindars as well as some belonging to the middle class were its members.

34 Kesabchandra Sen and Pearycharan Sarkar began a movement against consuming alcohol. They were influenced by the Temperance Movement of England. In 1863 Pearycharan founded the Surapan Nibrani Sabha, modelled on the Temperance Society.

35 Kesabchandra Sen formed the Indian Reform Association in 1870.

36 The Indian League (1875) was a consciously designed middle-class organization founded by the editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika.

37 The Indian Association (1876), founded by Surendranath Banerjea was a political organization.

38 What Duff says about the craze for societies is also true in the case of drama. About the ‘drama-mania’ of the Bengalis, the Rahasya-Sandarbha wrote on 1923 Sambat vol. 46:

“পৃথক-দন-নাটক” [যন্ত্রণ ভক্তরিত্ব প্রতিবেদী] – নাটক নিব মুক্তন রঙ। এক সময়ে মূল্যের গর্ভের বিষ্ণু ছিল না, এবং ভক্তিরূপ “ডায়নমিক”, “কাসিমিরীপাড়া”, “কাসিমীরিপাড়া” প্রকৃতি বাঙালিরাকাবিষ্ঠাতে বাঙালীর অভি চুর্ণ হইবার উপরে হইলেন, ভাব সমস্ত মধুসূদনন্দনের নজর হইলেন। ভাবের মধুসূদন ধ্বংস ভাবে বিদ্যমান হইয়াছিল। পুনরায় নাটক সারা সংগীত সংগতি প্রাপ্ত হইলেন। এবং পুনরায় নাটক বিশ্বাসী প্রাপ্ত করিলে নাটক স্বপন্ন তত্ত্ব নাটকের বিপন্ন নাটক পরমাণুর রঙ। এক করণের উপর সাহিত্য। ভাবের মধুসূদনের ভাবঘোষ ভাবে বিশ্বাসী প্রাপ্ত নাটক স্বপন্ন তত্ত্ব নাটকের বিপন্ন রঙ। এক করণের উপর সাহিত্য।
There was a time when the printing machine was roaring non-stop and produced a hailstorm of poems like “Gopalkanta”, “Nalinikanta”, “Kaminibilas”, “Dutibilas”, etc., that almost broke the bones of the goddess of learning and offended any genuine lover of the Bengali language. By sheer fortune the poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt rescued the Bengali language from that disaster. Now there is a similar calamity as a result of the hailstorm of plays. Plays being staged in almost every lane, any person having nothing to do is as crazy to compose one. They do not hesitate to publicly present the orphan Bengali language, distorted to their satisfaction. They present whatever they write as plays. There are people who waste paper making famine the subject of plays. Most probably plays on typhoid and cholera would not be impossible.'