

CHAPTER - I

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN BENGAL IN THE CONTEXT OF COLONIAL AND ANTI-COLONIAL POWER RELATIONS

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This chapter is like a prologue to all the other chapters and provides a paradigm of the entire project. It attempts to contextualize the women's art education in the nationalist context of early 20th century India. Nationalism was a dual concept. It became a political movement on one hand challenging the supremacy of the colonial power and on the other hand it became a cultural project. The colonizers viewed the condition of women in India as indicative of degenerate native cultures. Hence some steps were taken by the colonizers to improve the condition of women like introducing them to the formal educational system, this also became a pretext of colonialization. This colonial initiative was perceived as an intrusion by the nationalists. The nationalists found a different pattern of education for women based on the idea of indigenous identity formation. Nationalism as an idea thus became extremely gendered. Ania Loomba points out that the nation state or the guiding principles are often imagined literally as women and compares Delacroix's Liberty leading the people to Abanindranath's Bharatmata. She mentions that- "Resistance itself is imagined as a woman."¹ Women became the metaphor of indigenous culture as Partha Chatterjee has rightly pointed out in his discussion on the association of nation with the family.

The most important fact is that prior to this phase of reformation there are references to female education but the question was not politicized. The references are of formal education and non-formal education. The domain of knowledge was highly male and brahminical. Women's education was related to the *grihasutras*. There are two interesting references of informal education

1. Ania Loomba *Feminism, Nationalism and Post-colonialism, Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, chapter.3, p.180

which are as follows:

*Purakalpe kumarinam maunji-bandhanam ishyate,
Adhyapanancha vedanam savitri-vachanantatha.
Pita pitrivyo bhrata va nainam adhyapayet parah;
Swagrihe chaiva kanyaya bhaiksha-charya vidhiyate;
Vajrayed ajinanchiram jata-dharanam eva cha.*

This passage means-'In ancient times the tying of the girdle was prescribed for girls, so also the teaching of the Vedas(to them)and the utterance of the *savitri* (gayatri).(But now) no one should teach them except their fathers, brothers or uncles; the vow of begging should be practiced by them only within the limits of their home only within the limits of their own houses; further the wearing of deer skins, barks and matted locks should be given by them. (Yama)''²

Similar familial education system was being found during the early phase of the colonial period. In the anti-colonial struggle *Griha* or home became an important aspect of female education. Education became one of the most important sphere of the reformist movement taken up by the new elites. The education system prior to the institutionalized efforts were informal ---it was in the form of zenana education. Swarnakumari Devi would reminisce- "The *Vaishnavi* would come for the ladies confined within the four walls of the *antahpur*; newlywed young wives and young married daughters of the house would receive education from her .But the young unmarried daughters of the house would go along with the boys to the village school or pathshala run by the guru .This at least ,if nothing else ,laid similar foundation for the education of both boys and girls.

That was before the time of Vidyasagar's *Barnaparichay*. "The lady *Vaishnavi* used a booklet called *Sishubodhak* to teach the letters of alphabet,

2. A passage from Yama which is being quoted in Viramitrodaya Samskara-prakasha, Edited by Swami Madhavananda and Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Great women of India, pp.402-3,

which I came across when I grew up .This single booklet taught everything from letters and spelling to invocations of Gods and Goddesses, to descriptions of various hours of the day and methods of writing."³

This was the state of women's education which was informal in nature. But in the colonial context it was a problem on which huge debates took place. The colonial period looked at the entire phenomenon of the prevalent (informal) educational system as irrational and irrelevant, not based on any scientific rationale but highly metaphysical in nature. In this context the idea of tradition should be invoked. Tradition becomes the construct to interpret the other that is the non-west. Said puts forth the idea of the monolithic, homogeneous idea of framing the non-west within the framework of 'tradition'. It becomes the oppositional binary of progress. Tradition in this context became synonymous to the religious practices and lack of scientific knowledge. This attitude of the colonizers is even visible in the prints and watercolors of the Company painters. The colonizers legitimized Imperialism in the pretext of the irrational Indian traditional practices. The concept of difference was being emphasized and education in India was situated within the colonial and anti-colonial discourse. The ideas of tradition and civilization are both linked. The missionary zeal of correction, correction without force, through epistemological writings and steps of reformations. Oriental knowledge formation was viewed as that of the barbarian's. Agency to their education, their own way of defining education was mediated by the missionaries. 'The attribution of 'tradition 'to any society is still a legitimation for domination, and an excuse to modernize i.e., to recolonize.'⁴ The visuals of the colonial times captured through the paintings

3. Swarna Kumari Devi, Words from the past by Swarna Kumari Devi, Chapter15. Talking of power Early writings of Bengali women from mid-19th c to the beginning of the 20thc, p.137

4. Himani Bannerji, Beyond the Ruling category to What Actually Happens Notes on James Mill's Historiography in The History of British India,Inventing Subjects,Studies in Hegemony,Patriarchy and Colonialism,p. 70

and prints by the British artists are either the Romantic notion of the picturesque or that of sublime. The Daniell brothers, Thomas and William and their ruins were about the picturesque and ruins of the glorious past, the wide topographies, the archaeological victories of the Britishers as the restorer of the Indian past. The paradox of the nautch girls, women objectified and the women oppressed by the laws of the colonized like Sati and child marriage thronged the oeuvre.

Hence the women's question became double ended, Partha Chatterjee mentions- "Colonial texts condemned the treatment of women in India by identifying a scriptural tradition. The nationalist response was to construct a reformed tradition and defend it on the grounds of modernity. In the process, it created the image of a new woman who was superior to Western women, traditional Indian women and low class women."⁵ It became the struggle of the colonial and anti-colonial resistance. The other idea which is again deeply entrenched within the idea of tradition is the idea of Orientalism which Said states as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. Both acculturation and deculturation happened. Deculturation in the sense that the colonizers were trying to erase the existing Indian traditions and write their cultural values on the Indian society. One can discuss the Althusserian model of the state in relation to the repressive apparatus and ideological apparatus in this context. The repressive being the army, police, bureaucracy, judiciary and the ideological being the family, school, media, culture denoting pressure which is being naturalized. The ideological apparatus which is concealed and symbolic. According to Althusser the ideological State Apparatuses are "the site of class struggle" which represent a common territory, midway between the exploiting class/classes and exploited masses, on which conflicting interests contend for supremacy. By this is meant the effort

5. Partha Chatterjee, Colonialism, Nationalism and Colonized Women: The Contest in India, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 16, no-4, pp-622-633

invested by the ruling or an emerging section in society to maintain or capture control on all the people.⁶ The other important discussion which I would very briefly like to discuss is Maculays "Minute on Education" (Feb.2, 1835) He derided any system of earlier form of indigenous education. According to him- .. "medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier,-Astronomy, which would disgrace an English boarding school, History, abounding with kings, thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long, - and Geography made up of seas of butter."⁷ His intention was to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. It would be this class's task to refine the vernacular languages, introduce new terms of science taken from Western vocabulary, and eventually make these tongues 'fit vehicles' for carrying the knowledge of the West to the 'great mass of the population.'"⁸

The colonial rule spread its power/regulated the ideologies through the establishment of the hegemony and making of a new class of clerks for their assistance in the administrative machinery. Hence we see a new class of educated elites, the bhadraloks, and the 'traditional elites' who had modernized and thereby adapted themselves to a new system. In 1813 the company's concern for establishing education system in India became important. "One ideological State apparatus certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is so silent! This is the school!"⁹ Soon in 1840s one sees the arrival of the female missionaries replacing the vaishnavis in the nouveau riche enlightened class. Mostly they had in their mind the proselytizing zeal, the reflection of James Mill's idea of rationality and civilization which is closely related to the spreading of western education. Gradually that attempt waned off and

6. Louis Althusser, Ideology and ideological State apparatuses (Notes Towards investigation), Approaches in literary theory, Marxism, Delhi, 2002 p. 155

7. Subrata Dasgupta, Bhadralok in Class, English in taste, p. 160

8. Ibid.

9. Louis Althusser, Ideology and ideological State apparatuses (notes towards an investigation), Approaches in literary theory, Marxism, p. 181

the missionaries started to establish schools for girls.

'The black person attempts to cope by adopting white masks that will somehow make the fact of his blackness vanish'.¹⁰ There takes place this erasure of the Indian self and the transformation according to the ruling class, their taste and their culture. But the colonial system of education was taking its roots along with the notion of 19th-century reform movements. Forced to defend their position the English educated middle class in Calcutta began to somehow look at their women from their ruler's perspective. Thus a new consciousness about women and family emerged; attention was specially focused on the debased nature of the husband wife relationship and the communication gap between an educated man and his illiterate wife. A letter appeared in the *Samachar Darpan* which stated that Bengali men are now receiving education and consequently their minds are being enlightened under these circumstances, how can they get along with their unlettered wife? Educated men now needed social support from their wives, therefore wanted to modernize them by giving them some formal education. The pioneering attempt in the field of women's education can be considered to be initiated by the Christian missionaries who had established the first girl's school in Calcutta, The Juvenile School, in 1820 to be followed by others. But their schools, because of their Christian inclination was disliked by a class of *bhadraloks*. Soon schools were being founded by indigenous patronage as the accusation was that the women were drifting away from homely duties. Hence, there are these discourses of what kind of education should be framed for women? There was this search for the feminine curriculum which will cater to the re-imagining of a domestic life according to the new patriarchy.

In 1816, Calcutta school society was established to promote female ed-

10. Ania Loomba, *Psychoanalysis and colonial subjects*, chapter 2-Colonial and Post-colonial identities *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, p.124

ucation. The Calcutta female Juvenile society, founded by the Baptists was assisted by that society. In 1821, with the help of this society Miss Mary Anne Cooke was brought to India. Around 31 schools were opened for Hindu girls, the school even had Brahmin pundits to teach. Hindu Balika Vidyalay opened in 1849 in Calcutta by J.E .Bethune. Its curriculum was framed as a secular one, the medium of instruction was Bengali. Brahmosamaj became a very important instrument to the spread education. In 1866 Nabobidhan, another branch of the Brahmosamaj invited Miss Mary Carpenter to Calcutta. In 1872 Carpenter, Keshub Sen and Annette Akroyd established a normal school. Later Hindu Mahila Mahavidyalay was set up by Akroyd with the other branch of the Brahmosamaj .By 1878 it merged with the Bethune school and became Bethune College. In 1893 Mahakali pathshala was established by Mataji Tapaswini. There were thirty students in the beginning, her aim was more religious, education streamlined on traditional religious folds and ethics. The art of home making, the narrations of sacrifice became part of the instructions. This institution was highly funded by the conservative section as they found the curriculum most suitable to support the national patriarchy. In Geraldine Forbes words 'This syllabus was praised by "Hindoo gentlemen of the middle class" who believed that much of the female education then in existence" demoralized and denationalized 'young Hindu women.'¹¹ Culinary skills were taught and strict gender segregation was there. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain established Sakhawwat Memorial Girl's school in 1911. Its medium of instruction had been Urdu. This school also strictly followed the purdah and almost the same gendered curriculum which centred on good home making.

According to Rokeya-

11. Latika Ghose, Social and educational movements for women and by women, 1820-1950, "Bethune school and college centenary volume, 1849-1949, edited by Dr. Kalidas Nag (Calcutta, S.N. Guha Ray, 1950), p-146; Cowan, The Education of women in India, p.-113, "The Mahakali pathshala", p.7 (This is how it was referred by Geraldine Forbes in her book 'Women in Modern India, p.50)

"The books of religions are nothing but codes of conduct and directives prescribed by men. The rulings given by male sages would have been reversed had they been given by female sages."...When the husband measures the distance of the sun and the stars from the earth, the wife measures the length and breadth of a pillow."¹² One can observe her consciousness about the gendered areas in religion and family. She wrote quietly strongly about the highly regulated and confined life of Muslim women and emphasized on the spread of education.

The other important indigenous centre of education was the Jorasanko Thakur Bari which gradually moved away from the conventional traditional systems and also from the Western mode of education. The artists I have chosen belong to this creative circuit. They are related to each other through familial bonding; it is not to demean their individual status but to show how the familial ties became important. The concept of family became important for the nationalist concern. The question of public/private opposition becomes complex and is seen in a new light. "This new domestic space was by definition oriented to a 'public' realm. For even if the Europeans dominated the arena of salaried employment nationalist activity would constitute a form of public arena "for the nationalist 'the 'home 'itself was in this sense a public arena of action".¹³

This chapter mainly focuses on Sister Nivedita—her emphasis on female education/search for a nationalist and feminine curriculum. Sister Nivedita was born as Margaret Noble in Dungannon, Ireland in the year 1867. She met Vivekananda during parliament of religions in Chicago. Vivekananda was in search of someone who could help to awaken Indian women. She came to India in

1896. Though according to Geraldine Forbes Nivedita romanticized some of

12. Miratun Nahar, Rokeya, Women Pioneers in India's Renaissance, ed. Sushila Nayar and Kamala Mankekar, p.78

13. Dipesh Chakravorty, Nationalism and the theme of Domesticity, Ch.8, Family, Fraternity, and Salaried Labour, Provincializing Europe, p.224

the most patriarchal practices. There is an attempt to bring forth her views on education here by directly quoting from her own writings and reading the very notions of the prevalent deculturation and the anti-colonial resistance to it. What interested me was the absence of the writings on Nivedita girls' school or any discussion on Sister Nivedita who was an important ideologue and who was also framing the national ideals, though also following the strictures of Hindu religion but highly concerned about the future of the women's education in India. Most of her writings though show here the concern for framing a curriculum which is Indianised /Hinduised also strive for something which is more relevant and useful, thus we see her writing on the usefulness of teaching science which is indeed very different from the other courses. As through the onward chapters one sees that how even the art education is feminised as mentioned by Geraldine Forbes that 'the nationalist question itself was feminised', so was fine arts.

According to Sister Nivedita-'It follows that in national re-construction there is no other factor so important as education. New ideals have to be approached through the old. The unfamiliar has to be reached through the familiar. It may indeed be questioned whether there is such a thing as a new ideal.'¹⁴

Nivedita calls for national restoration but not by mere imitation of the past. These arguments of race and identity feature in her writings again and again. She puts forth -'Here we come on the crime of those who educate an Indian girl to be an ornament of English and French society. The main value of education is not individual but social and communal. And a woman of merely European associations is as out of place in the Indian world as a Dodo amongst a flock of pheasants, or a deer amongst cows. As a matter of fact, however, the method in this case necessarily defeats the end, and the girl is exceedingly unlikely to realize either ideal. By false education, she has been made critical

14. Sister Nivedita, Paper on education-V., Hints on National education in India, p.35

of her own people and their institutions, without herself fulfilling the ideal of any other. It is not by teaching the Bengali girl French, or the piano, but by enabling her to think about India, that we really educate her, and make of her one with whom the world's greatest minds are proud to be associated.' ¹⁵

She like other nationalists also emphasized on home or griha. She puts forth- 'The samaj is the strength of family: the home is behind the civic life: and the civic life sustains the nationality.'¹⁶ According to Tanika Sarkar-'If the household was the embryonic nation, then the woman was the true patriotic subject. The male body having passed through the grind of western education, office, routine, and forced urbanization, having been marked with the loss of traditional sports and martial activities, was supposedly remade in an attenuated, emasculated form by colonialism. The female body, on the other hand, was still pure and unmarked, loyal to the rule of shastras.'¹⁷

Hence one sees Nivedita building up her school 'Ramakrishna Girls School'. According to her, to work, to suffer, and to love, in the highest spheres: to transcend limits: to be sensitive to great causes; to stand transfigured by the national righteousness; this is the true emancipation of woman, and this is the key to her efficient education, she says-'Let every Indian woman incarnate for us the whole spirit of the Mother and the culture and protection of the Homeland, Bhumya Devi! Goddess of the homestead! Bande Mataram.'¹⁸ She compared home and home rule, hence again and again one sees that the image of women is reconstructed in and around the idea of nationhood, nation considered as the mother, the contemporary and the mythical are woven in a singular narration to validate the present concerns of nationalism and the

15. Sister Nivedita, The education of women, The complete works of Sister Nivedita, Vol.5, p.25

16. Ibid., p.24

17. Tanika Sarkar, Hindu wife, Hindu nation, Domesticity and nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal, ch.1 p.43

18. Sister Nivedita, Future education of Indian woman., Hints on National education in India, p.65

nationalist identity. Tanika Sarkar states that-'The axis was eventually located in the loving relationship between mother and son. This time, however, this was no flesh-and-blood woman, all too easily visible within an all too accountable household, but new and supreme duty within the Hindu pantheon-the Motherland, the reified woman. With the reoriented figure of the woman came a crucial shift in the very placing of the patriotic project. It was taken out of the problematic home space and into the wider, more public arena of the Hindu community-which is an abstraction.'¹⁹

'They must see the blank spaces of need'²⁰, what she points out is the shifting emphasis from religious to secular education. The form of education which is need based, that is answers to the need of making a women economically independent. Hence one continuously sees the engagement with the issues of craft by Sister Nivedita and the creation of opportunities of teacher training for women in her school. Many of the moments in her writings also show the very nuanced understanding of the women's issues, she says-'In India, discussion centres on her right to education; in Europe, it centres on her right to political expression. In one form or another, woman is everywhere the unknown quantity, the being of uncertain destiny.'²¹ The women's question like that of any other field of reformation did not have any independent existence in the beginning. Women always suffered anonymity and it was all about reflected glory. It also resonates in the writings of Virginia Woolf when she writes-'For most of history, anonymous was a woman.'²² The contours of the actual problems of women empowerment were not always well drawn but always associated

19. Tanika Sarkar, Hindu wife, hindu nation, Community, religion, and Cultural Nationalism, Domesticity and nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal, ch.1, -p.51

20. Sister Nivedita, The education of women, The complete works of Sister Nivedita, Vol.5, Advaita Ashrama, p.28

21. Sister Nivedita, The education of Indian women, The complete works of Sister Nivedita, Vol.5, Advaita Ashrama, p.71

22. Virginia Woolf, A room of one's own, p.57

with major patriarchal formulations such as nationalism and the reformation movement.

‘We must give Indian girls their own colour. We do not want pale imitations of American or English women. We want on the contrary a womanhood that can contribute something to the circle, which would otherwise have lacked it. For this we must convince it of its own Indianness.’²³ Hence one can see the entire visualization of the women’s education in relation to identity formation. Along with Sister Nivedita one also finds Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Swarna Kumari Devi voicing out a need for a strong bonding of women and empowering them to have education, economic ability and also to feature in the nationalist political arena.

Home became the centre of discourse. As the office was the place of salaried work where Indian men were dominated and home the pristine sacred space where they could control and was a space free from interference of the state / colonizers .Hence *griha* ,*griha karma* and *grihalaxmi* became the focus of the anti- colonial discourse. ‘‘The new patriarchy stressed on Griha and grihalaxmi .To understand the Bengali valour ideation of the home and the grihalaxmi as part of a particular history of modernity and patriarchy involves an investigation of the possible imaginations of life that animated the creativity of this historical phenomenon, which now seems to have run its course.’’²⁴

According to Swami Vivekananda - ‘The mother’s heart, in the women of dawning age, must be conjoined with the hero’s will. The fire on the Vedic altar, out of which arose Savitri, with her sacred calm and freedom, was ever the ideal background.’²⁵ ‘He saw plainly enough that what was wanted was a race of women educators, and this was how he contemplated making them.’²⁶ Myth-

23. Sister Nivedita, Modern education of the Oriental woman, The complete works of Sister Nivedita, Vol.5, Advaita Ashrama, p.34

24. Dipesh Chakravorty, Nationalism and the theme of Domesticity, Ch.8, Family, Fraternity, and Salaried Labour, Provincializing Europe, p.217

25. Sister Nivedita , Woman and the people, The Master as I saw him, p.240

26. Ibidp.p.241

ification of the women's issue took place. Partha Chatterjee articulates –'Indian woman construct' in the modern literature and arts of India today is wholly a product of the development of a dominant middle-class culture coeval with the era of nationalism. It served to emphasize with all the force of mythological inspiration what had in any case become a dominant characteristic of femininity in the new construct of 'woman' standing as a sign for 'nation', namely, the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, benevolence, devotion, religiosity and so on.'²⁷

With all these things in mind she found the Ramkrishna School for girls', in 16 Bosepara lane, few children were educated in the Kindergarten pattern. 'Before one could lay down plans for the education of a people it was necessary to make a reverent and patient study of their lives and condition. She says 'Scraps of cloth will not clothe us, however great their quantity! There must be a unity and a fitness, in the garment that is worn'²⁸. This discussion becomes so pertinent in the context of the masking of identities. 'All that makes India India, must flow through the Indian home to make it Indian.'²⁹ She moves around the villages of Bengal, collects specimen of Indian crafts, admires the day today objects and their aesthetic appearance, shows them to her students and inspires them to look and create objects as such. In the coming chapters these discourses would come up again in relation to Nandalal Bose the artist and pedagogue who would be the guiding spirit of many of the women artists whom I am going to discuss.

Nivedita tried to follow or go through a phase of deculturation herself and tried to completely identify with the indigenous cultural values of the

27. Partha Chatterjee, Nation and its women ch.6, Nation and its fragments, Oxford, p.131

28. Sister Nivedita, The education of Indian women, The complete works of Sister Nivedita, Vol.5, p.72

29. Sister Nivedita, The education of Indian women, The complete works of Sister Nivedita, Vol.5 –p.75

country which she adopted as her home. As Swami Vivekananda said- "To teach against the aspirations of the taught, is assuredly to court ill results instead of good."³⁰ In the words of Mrs.Ole Bull – "The irony was that a nationalist pattern of women's education for women started with a mleccha (foreigner).No Hindu maid would work for her. She lived on milk and fruit gradually the women of Baghbazar would accept her as their own. School was funded from her income of her writings.'³¹ According to Rabindranath—"It was not out of donations, not even from the surplus that Nivedita met the expenses of the school. It was out and out part of sharing her food. This is the truth.'³² 'There is this anecdote that twenty year old Giribala Ghosh enrolled, a carriage had to be arranged, but due to some damage caused to the carriage, the girl was not allowed to attend the school. She went to the girl's house, and begged for her to rejoin the school--- "You may be displeased with me. Call me in whatever terms you may like to, but I beg of you to allow this girl from 11.a.m to 4.p.m.to go to my school. The women members of your family go to the Ganga for bath or to Kalighat. Why can you not send this girl for a few hours even?"³³ She would feed her widow students during the ekadashi.

Swamiji had advised Nivedita that in the matter of women's education one must not deviate from the traditional spiritual ideal of renunciation and service must be given the top place above everything and she tried to follow the same. The anecdote above is one such example. "You have set yourself to Hinduise your thoughts, your needs, your conceptions, and your habits. Your life, internal and external, has to become all that an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharini's ought to be. The method will come to you, if only you desire

30. Sister Nivedita Method of training a western worker, The Master as I saw him , p.253

31. Pravrajika Atmaprana, New Plans and Projects, Sister Nivedita Ramkrishna Saradamission, ,pp-160-161

32. Swami Prabhananda, Nivedita of India, p.47

33. Sister Nivedita, Woman and the people, The Master as I saw him, ,p.253

it sufficiently. But you have to forget your own past, and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory!"³⁴ This evokes in my mind the arguments forwarded by Debanjan Sengupta that the character of Gora by Tagore was inspired by Nivedita. She went to Selaidah the Tagore's zamindari, there she went to the kitchen, the dhekighar, the cowshed, how happy she was! the kantha made by the village women, the wrapper for the boys, the kulo, dala, clay doll, bamboo work, fan, stick moved her. The variety of textile woven by the Muslim weavers was also seen by her with excitement.³⁵

Though Nivedita had to face extreme insulation of the Indian society she tried to adapt the local customs and values. The parents were reluctant to educate their daughters. So she had to beg for her students from door to door to enroll students for her school. She used to teach the girls history, geography, natural sciences and little bit of English. She would also teach them embroidery, drawing and handicrafts and encourage the girls to have physical training. Her concern was the overall development of the women. She encouraged the elderly married women and the widows to be educated with basic education and know the art of sewing and other handicrafts. She gave special instructions to a few educated ladies in order to make them good teachers. Occasionally in the evening hours she would invite the ladies of the locality and hold meetings. In the open courtyard there will be arranged a recitation session of Chandi. She would also sing the name of 'The Divine Mother' and also held a session of *Kathakathas*.

Some questions answered by Sister Nivedita in the west in connection with the foregoing, shows her concern for not only informing the women about the religious instructions but also to equip them to earn their own bread. She

34. Sister Nivedita, Method of training a western worker, The Master as I saw him, p.255

35. Girijashankar Roychowdhury, Bhagini Nivedita o Bangladesh biplobbad, Jiggasha, Kolkata -9, 1960, p.49

retorts at being asked about whether proselytizing was a part of her schooling. Her aim was not only religious but also scientific education, throughout her writings she talks about the Montessori and the kindergarten system and the role of art education in school. One can get a glimpse of all these in this small piece of interview.

The Interview-

1.What is your purpose in establishing your school in India?

To give Education(not instruction merely)to orthodox Hindu Girls in a form that is suited to the needs of the country.(I recognize that if any Indian Institutions are faulty it is the right of the Indian people themselves to change them. We may only aim to produce ripe judgment and power of action. Also I consider that we should confer a direct benefit on any Indian woman whom we could enable to earn her own living without loss of social honour.

2. What class of women are they to teach?

Unfortunately our first efforts must be directed to the higher classes. Eventually, I hope to reach all partly through Hindu Girls who will be eager to specialize in various social directions.

3. Are they not educational schools only?

What does that mean? I do not seek to convert any one to Christianity .Neither any Christian to anything else. Neither any Mohameddan to Hinduism or Christianity.

Is this an answer?

4. What are they to teach?

A. Bengali and English language and literature.

B.Elementary mathematics(very thoroughly)

C.Elementary science(very thoroughly)

D.Manual training, beginning in the Kindergarten and rising to the point of reviving old industries and arts later on

D is the backbone of the plan

5. Is not your idea a humanitarian one?

To help the helpless and needy regardless of creed? And to teach no creed?

I hope so. But I would like to teach everyone the greatest respect for everyone else's creed!

Perhaps no one needs this virtue as we ourselves do. In India my friends love me for my love of Christianity and talk with me about it for hours together.

Can we not show like sweetness and courtesy .

April 2nd, 1900.³⁶

The fifth was the most important as it would only enable the women to earn her living from her home . Craft and self-reliance of the artists became an important discourse and so was the question of self-reliance and women. In this, one can see the influence of Swami Vivekananda, he said - "Revive the old arts. Teach your girls fruit modelling with hardened milk. Give them artistic cooking and sewing. Let them learn painting, photography, cutting of designs in paper, and gold and silver filigree and embroidery. See that everyone knows something by which she can earn a living, in case of need."³⁷

Another important aspect which she states and is again related to my research area is the absence of female students in Calcutta College of art in Bengal, but in Bombay there were women artists most of whom were Parsis. She points out- 'As the orthodox usually seclude their daughters after the marriage, the schooling had to end by ten or twelve. In the case of Parsis degrees are quite commonly carried off by women! But taking these and all similar instances into consideration, the total number of girls in Bengal who receive formal instruction is only six and half per cent of the population. And Bengal is said to be in this respect the most advanced province.'³⁸

36. Sister Nivedita, Hints on National education in India ,p.-80-81

37. Sister Nivedita, Method of training a western worker, The Master as I saw him, p.263p

38. Sister Nivedita ,Project of Ramakrishna Girl's school, Hints on national education in India p.76

In Nivedita's school drawing from observation, brushwork, clay modelling, mat weaving, paper cutting, sewing and games were introduced in the course of studies. Nivedita's school was inclusive from all the classes and castes, she maintained her observations about her students which shows this openness though sometimes also her racial inclinations. I would like to quote some of them, which are as following-

Subhashini Dutta: Caste kayastha .Attended 51 times out of 60.Subhashini is said to resemble her grandmother in being witty, sociable, agreeable and utterly superficial.

Bidyutmala Bose:

Caste: Kayastha .Attended 45 times out of 60.One of the strongest characters I have ever seen. She has fire and will enough for anything but will be smothered in marriage of course. Her sewing is particularly good.

MN:

Caste: Gowalla. Attended 39 times out of 60.Such a good, sweet, quiet, painstaking child! Gyanadabala:

Caste: Koyburtho. Attended 22 times. A funny low-class child, with the kindest of hearts and a mania for homework. She never liked lessons and could hardly be taught to read but if she could clean the school room or help Bett she was in clover. Afterwards in the days of plague work, she would dog me on the inspection round. It turned out that she kept a little shop for her mother. She wanted to be much more liberal than her mother one day when I went to buy bananas- and I cannot forget the quick flush of shame with which she received the mother's restrictions.

One of the best, sweetest and cleverest children I have ever known However child marriage was a big hindrance. Nivedita commented about one

girl that she has tremendous conscience and most refined feelings and plenty of strong common-sense. She takes quickly to great ideas and must be saved from marriage³⁹

The other interesting aspect of this school was the establishment of the women's section on 2nd November. It was in the afternoon, when the ladies have leisure between 12 -4pm. Labanyaprabha Bose , sister of Sir J.C. Bose ,was secured to teach reading and writing ,Yogin ma would take classes on religion and Christine taught sewing and needle work twice a week.

The school report of this period mentions how the ladies tried to finish their household duties early in order to attend the school in time, and how they behaved as amiably as they could in the family and did double the amount of household work so that they would not be prevented from going to school. ⁴⁰ Nivedita herself wrote about it - "It is unheard of that married *Zenana* ladies should leave their homes and come to lessons at the house of a European. But they do it, and there never was a moment's difficulty."⁴¹ Nivedita's school in her own words in her letter to Mrs. Legget - "I wish you could see our little house. I really think you would be charmed with it. Our first courtyard is quite a vision of red brick and green plants, and we keep it exquisitely clean, and have two or three good airy rooms .Sometimes, after dark, ladies come in to see us, and they sit down in basket chairs with cushions, while we often sit on the floor to talk with them. I know they like it, and they are so fine they never show the least surprise or shyness about foreign ways. And when we go to them they give us their things-a mat, or a stool, or what-not, with such quiet dignity! We are just living here quietly, and letting things grow about us."⁴²

39 Pravrajika Atmaprana,New Plans and Projects,Sister Nivedita,pp.160-161

40. Pravrajika Atmaprana,New Plans and Projects,Sister Nivedita,p.163

41. Ibid.p.164

42. Pravrajika Atmaprana,New Plans and Projects,Sister Nivedita,pp.160-161

Mr. S.K . Ratcliffe wrote about the school- "Beginning as a tiny kindergarten, the school grew steadily until it had a large attendance of little Hindu girls up to the marriageable age, and a still larger number of married women and widows. As conducted by Sister Nivedita and her colleagues. The school involved no uprooting from familiar surroundings. Neither child nor woman was taken from her home into a foreign world; her schooling demanded only a daily migration from one home to another in the same lane or ward. The principle was, as Sister Nivedita herself expressed it, by means of familiar factors of her life so to educate the Indian girl as to enable her to realize those ends which are themselves integral aspirations of that life. There was no attempt to convert her to any religious or social system alien for her own customs and traditions, to develop her in harmony with Indian ideals, the teachers themselves following those ideals as far as they could be made practicable."⁴³ She also conducted teacher's training classes for the senior girls and the school itself was for them to practice in. Nivedita even planned to make her school the centre of a University Settlement and promote in future the national education even in the face of Government's opposition.

Rabindranath requested Nivedita to teach his younger daughter .He assumed that she being well educated in English would be able to train her daughter in that medium properly. But Nivedita disagreed and pointed out that there is no good in imposing foreign ideals and standards. She stressed on the proper education which lies latent in one's individual potentiality and responds to one's national character. Nivedita with her intellectual prowess influenced Rabindranath, he imagined the character Gora as an Irish man born and brought up in India after his parents died. Tagore wrote- "You ask me what connection had the writing of Gora with Sister Nivedita .She was our guest in

43. Ibid,pp.164-165

Silaidah and in trying to improvise a story according to her request I gave her something which came very near to the plot of Gora .She was quite angry at the idea of Gora Being rejected even by his disciple Sucharita owing to his foreign origin. You won't find it in my story which I told her in order to drive the point deep into her mind."⁴⁴

Rabindranath like Nivedita understood that the cultural mimesis had to stop, though more than the Hindu identity it is about pan-Asian identity, though the fundamentals were being the *Veidic Brahmacharyashram* when he imagined the education system. He says- 'The educated Indian at present is trying to absorb some lessons from history contrary to the lessons of our ancestors. The east, in fact, is attempting to take unto itself a history which is not the outcome of its own living.'⁴⁵

He further also pointed the dissonance of the home and the world when he said- 'School in our country, far from being integrated to the society, are imposed on it from outside. The courses they teach are dull and painful to learn and useless when learnt .There is nothing in common between the lessons the pupils cram up from ten to four o'clock and the country where they live; no agreement, but only disagreements, between what they learn at school and what their parents and relatives talk about at home. The schools are little better than factories for turning out robots.'⁴⁶

The Brahmaavidyalaya was founded at that moment of Indian history when there is this search for indigenous identity. He emulated the Ashramasystem which was structured around the life of a *tapovan* .In August 1901, Rabindranath Tagore, in a letter to Jagadish Chandra Bose, wrote that he was thinking of founding at Santiniketan a school for the training of students

44. Rabindra-Rachanabali, vol.16, Govt. of west Bengal, 2001, p.878

45. Rabindranath Tagore ,Nationalism in India, Nationalism ,p-94

46. Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Problem of Education.' in Towards Universal Man. . pp. 68-69.

according to the spiritual ideals of the Upanishads as in vogue in olden times. In December 1901 a school with a modest boarding house was started by Rabindranath in Santiniketan. Rabindranath didn't conform to the nationalist concerns of the times but the students got influenced. Initially the British government didn't interfere with the educational system there but the vigilance of the C.I.D police continued. In 1911, The D.P.I of the newly created province of Eastern Bengal and Assam issued a circular instructing the government employees to withdraw their children from the Santiniketan Vidyalaya. There was a reduction of the students. There was penalization of an institution which was not governmental. This was in 1912, brought to the notice of Lord Hardinge and then it was nullified. New structural changes were adopted in 1924. The non-cooperation movement had been withdrawn. Many students who took part in the non-Co-operation movement now wanted to take admission in Santiniketan. There was a redesigning of the structure. The whole teaching programme of Santiniketan was divided into three categories—Patha-Bhavana, Siksha-bhava, Vidya-bhavana. The Patha-bhavana was again sub-divided into sections-Adhya Vibhag and Madhya Vibhag and these two constituted the Purba vibhag. The Purba vibhag was designed in such a manner so that one group of students could prepare themselves for the matriculation examination of Calcutta University and the other group followed Visva-bharati course. The Adhya vibhag was for students between the age group of six and fourteen. Male students between 6 and nine years were eligible for the admission to this vibhag. There was however a relaxation of age for the girls.

Siksha-Satra started in Santiniketan in 1924, then was transferred to Sriniketan. Tagore believed that the Santiniketan School failed to produce students for undergoing rural-reconstruction. Being from an urban environment they couldn't contribute to any developmental project in the village. The aims

of Siksha Satra was not to make students pass examinations, but to help them to be self-reliant and to be able to read in a better way when they go back to their villages and thereby not only improve their own lots but also inspire in others the feeling of self-reliance and eagerness to work in an organized way. A separate girl's school was set up in Sriniketan, these girls took various part in various programs. As I stated in the very beginning of the chapter that this chapter almost reads like a literature review of early female education in Bengal, I again stress on the fact that this chapter introduces the reader to the key issues that I would discuss throughout the other chapters, the opening up of spaces of visibility of women in public institutions specifically art institutions and public spaces like magazines. The importance of craft education as being developed as a form of economic sustenance and the formation of educational and women's societies/ groups participating in various activities starts from this very moment of inception of women's education. The debates of the national education in general gets reflected in the art education for women.



Fig 1. A sketch by Nandalal Bose, 1908 or 1909, Nandalal, Surendranath Kar in the Bosepara Lane house of Nivedita



Figure 2 GATE and pillars, The Sister Nivedita Girl's School, the entire building was designed by Nandalal Bose



Figure 3 The Indian flag designed by Nivedita, exhibited in the Calcutta convention of National Congress