

# Madanmohan Tarkalankar and Women Education in the First Half of 19th Century Bengal

## Abstract

Madanmohan Tarkalankar (1817-1858) was a leading personality in the field of spreading women education in nineteenth century Bengal. He was contemporary of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, a noted social reformer and educationist. Inspired by the light of renaissance, he came forward for the welfare of women despite belonging to an orthodox Brahmin family. He joined Bethune School when it was first opened in 1849 by J.E.D Bethune, the then president of Education Council. In spite of enduring many hurdles, created by conservatives, he proceeded to admit his two daughters to Bethune School which was set up for the girls of native gentlemen. He also took important initiatives for the betterment of the school by executing many progressive works concerning it. In this paper I have exhibited his endeavours in spreading female education to judge his role in the history of female education in nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** Madanmohan Tarkalankar, Women Education, Bethune School, Female Education, Sanskrit College, Nineteenth Century's Bengal, Renaissance, Missionary.

## Introduction

Since early nineteenth century initiatives were taken to educate women in Bengal in spite of several hurdles in the way. In those days conservative Bengali society considered female education as a mischievous thing. In fact they started to proclaim that the girls would become miscreant if they were instructed. Other than that, it would lead them to widowhood.<sup>1</sup> As a result female education was in subdued condition in the society. Although it was in vogue in some elite families<sup>2</sup> most of the girls were deprived of the fruit of it. At that situation few liberal persons, inspired by western culture and education, proceeded to rescue the female from the darkness of ignorance. They raised the question of female education as it was very necessary for the betterment and empowerment of women and hence for the society. Madanmohan Tarkalankar, the professor of Calcutta Sanskrit College (now Sanskrit University), was one of them to take the initiative for spreading education. He was the first to send his two daughters to 'Calcutta Female School,' known as Bethune School, avoiding the bar of the conservative society.<sup>3</sup> In addition he imparted gratuitous instruction to the pupils of this school and composed elementary books for their use.<sup>4</sup> Besides he started promulgating the importance of education for girls. All his efforts were very significant in the history of female education in Bengal.

## Review of Literature

Jogendranath Vidyabhusan, wrote a biography of Madanmohan named 'kobibar Madanmohan Tarkalankarer Jibonchorit O Tad Grantha Samalochona' (1871). It describes the life and works of Madanmohan. Here we find Madanmohan's effort to educate girls. F.W. Thomas' 'The History and Prospects of British Education in India' (1891) is the work containing an account of educational condition of contemporary India as well as in Bengal. In 1901 Shibnath Shastri wrote 'Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangaswamaj', a fabulous work on renaissance in Bengal. Here we find the description of female education in early nineteenth century Bengal. Jogeshchandra Bagal's 'Women's Education in Eastern India' (1956) depicts the initiatives taken for female education. B.D. Bhatt & J.C. Bhatt edited 'Educational Documents in India' (1969) which contains educational condition of India from 1813 to 1968. In 1949 'Bethune School and College Centenary Volume', edited by Kalidas Nag and Lotika Ghosh, was published. This book describes the history of Bethune School. In 2008



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Nirmal Das edited 'Madanmohan Tarkalankar Smarak Grantha' which is a noteworthy work on Madanmohan's life and achievements. 'Streesiksha' (2014), edited by Swapan Basu, is a remarkable volume on female education. Amal kumar Mondal's 'Dwishatajanmabarshe Madanmohan Tarkalankar' (2016) is a book written on Madanmohan's life and works. The article entitled 'Prak Panchadash Shataker Prachin Janapad Bilwagram O smrita Monisha Madanmohan Tarkalankar,' composed by Dilip Mazumder, was published in 'Bonami,' (issue-47&48, year-32) in 2017. Lakshman Ghosh's 'Contemporary relevance of Madan Mohan Tarkalankar: The worshipper of Value-based Education' is a paper published in 'IRJIMS' on June, 2017.

### Objective of the Study

This paper investigates the following questions:

1. What were the initiatives taken for spreading women education in early nineteenth century?
2. What was Madanmohan Tarkalankar's role in this respect?
3. What is the significance of his efforts concerning female education?

In the first decade of nineteenth century the condition of women education was very deplorable. The girls were not allowed to enter school. Female education was considered as social evil. In those days the value of women's life was restricted to house-hold works. But women of some elite Hindu families would get the scope of education although it was merely confined to home.

In the second decade of nineteenth century the condition of women education started to be changed. Few native gentlemen thought about the issue of cultivating the girls. In 1817 'Calcutta school society', an organization of native gentlemen and British administrators for promoting education by opening schools, raised the question of educating girls in their schools. Some of the members were against the proposal. In spite of this, the School Society finally decided to instruct girls along with boys. Radhakanta Dev, a renowned person and member of the society, took prompt action in this regard. But the subject of educating girls in society's school did not go on further due to intense opposition of most of the members.

By the year 1818 few missionaries started expanding female education in Kolkata and her adjoining areas. They are said to be the pioneer of female education in Bengal. Although their motive was to promulgate Christianity and proselytize women by the name of education<sup>5</sup> we can't refuse the importance of their attempts for bringing the scope of education to women of Bengal.

Reverend May, a missionary, opened a girls' school at Chinsurah in 1818. But the school did not run subsequently. In 1819 the lady teachers of 'Mr. Lowson and Pearce's Seminary School' in England constituted 'Female Juvenile Society' in Bengal for promoting female education by opening free schools. Charles Lushington wrote about the society's origin as follows:

The old adage that good may come out of evil, has been verified in the

establishment of this institution; for it took its rise from one of the preposterous misrepresentations that ever proceed from credulity of ignorance. Allusion is here made to an address written, apparently, by some members of the Calcutta Baptist Missionary Society in April 1819, to the young ladies of Mrs. Lowson and Pearce's Seminary proposing the formation of a school for the education of the Hindoo girls. The object was certainly unexceptionable and praise-worthy; ...<sup>6</sup>

Rev. W.H. Pearce became its president. He was also the secretary of 'Calcutta School Book Society'. Under his supervision the lady- members of the society employed themselves to set up schools for Hindu girls with full enthusiasm. Their first enterprise was to found a school at Gouribere<sup>7</sup>. Additionally the society established three new schools at Nandanbagan, Janbazar and Chitpur in Kolkata within a few months. After that the total number of schools had raised to eight within the year of 1823. In 1829 the number reached to twenty. This society was active till 1834.

In 1821 'British and Foreign School Society' of England sent a lady named Mary Ann Cooke to Bengal for the implementation of female education. She was instructed to start her work under the guidance of 'School Book Society'. After reaching Kolkata Cooke sought help from the mentioned society. But the society did not agree to assist her due to severe objection raised by the native members of the society. Under such circumstances Radhakanta Dev, a native member of the society, wrote a letter to W.H. Pearce as follows:

I beg to leave observe, that the British and Foreign School Society, bearing in the mind the usage and customs of the Hindoos, have sent out Miss Cooke to educate Hindoo females, and that I fear none of the good and respectable Hindoo families will give her access to the women's apartment, nor send their females to her school if organized.<sup>8</sup>

By this letter we can understand that the conservatives did not want their daughters to go to public school. Moreover, they were concerned about the missionary-schools as these were the centre of proselytism. So they opposed to send their girls to these schools.

However, Cooke did not get any help from the society but in 1822 'Church Missionary Society' stretched their helping hands to Cooke for fulfilling her mission. Under the auspices of this society Cooke founded eight schools for girls in different areas of Kolkata such as Thantania, Mirjapur, Krishnabazar, Sobhabazar, Shyambazar, Mallickbazar, Kumartuli. Gradually the number of the students increased to the schools led by 'Church Missionary Society'. Cooke wrote a letter in the context of her success as follows:

I trust, in another year, we shall hear of girls' school, at every station where any kind of missionary work is going on. Mrs. Derawne of Burdwan formed five schools in six weeks. When the ice is once broken, the works, through mercy, runs on delightfully. I have now twenty three little schools and five hundred girls- eight Brahmin's daughters in a new school.<sup>9</sup>

In 1824 'Church Missionary Society' vested the charge of their girls' schools in the hands of 'Ladies' Society,' founded in the same year for promoting native female education. Lady Amherst was consented patroness of the society. David Hare, a philanthropist and educationist, rendered financial help to the society. Within several years the number of the students of the schools of 'Ladies' Society' had increased. Inspired by this progress, the society opened several new schools. A contemporary newspaper wrote about the success of the society as follows:

In less than three years, 30 native female school have formed, and between 5[500] and 600 hundred girls are now under instruction in the different schools, supported by the Ladies Society for Native Female Education several of these have made rapid progress in reading the Bible the first classes can all write and many of them can perform interesting specimens in needle-work.<sup>10</sup>

In 1826 'Ladies' Society' established a central female school with the assistance of native zamindar Baidyanath roy and many others.

Like 'Female Juvenile Society' and 'Ladies' Society', 'Calcutta ladies association' also worked for the implementation of female education in Bengal. Other than that, the missionaries at Serampore like Carry, Marshman and Ward also became enthusiastic for spreading Female education. In this respect they formed 'Serampore Native Female Education Society' in 1823.

The respectable Hindus were suspicious of the activities of missionaries for propagating female education. The native Hindu gentleman thought that it was high time to take the responsibility to educate girls. At that time many organizations arranged meetings in favour of female education. Derozio, professor of Hindu College and his pupils tried their best to from public opinion for female education. They started writing articles in the support of female education. Periodicals such as 'Parthenon', 'Jnananneshwan' and 'Enquirer' played an important role in this matter.

By the year 1845 Joykrishna Mukherjee and Rajkrishna Mukherjee, zamindars of Uttarpara, jointly planned to set up a school for girls of respectable natives.<sup>11</sup> They prayed for help to the Education Council, led by British government, to implement their project. But no response was received from the

government. Few years later they again wrote an application for the same as follows:

Many respectable people of this neighborhood concurs with us in thinking that if an experimental school for the education of female children should be established here under the patronage of Government, it may be successful, eventually lead to the establishment of others all over the country. We therefore beg to propose to place in the hands of Government, landed property yielding a clear monthly income of 60 rupees, provided the Government will pay a like sum for the furtherance of the object – the cost of the building will be about 2000 rupees, which shall be equally borne by the Government and ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

The Council did not agree with the mentioned proposal. However, the zamindars duo took the effort in this regard. Pearycharan Sarkar, kalikrishna Mitra set up a girls' school at Barasat in 1847. This was the first school for the girls of aristocratic Hindu families. The Education Council wrote a report (1849) about the school as follows:

Female education – in connection with this subject the council have much gratification in placing on record the fact that a native female school has been established at Barasat by certain educated and philanthropic gentleman of the district.<sup>13</sup>

But the patrons of the school were interrupted to run it as the conservative villagers were against the female education.

The year 1849 was a landmark year in the history of female education. In this year a girls' school was set up by J.E.D Bethune, the then president of Education Council. It is said that Bethune decided to set up a school like Barasat female school after visiting it. On returning to Kolkata he consulted with Ramgopal Ghosh, a famous Derozian, regarding the school he had wished to open, though the condition was not in favour of founding a school publicly. At last the school was established on 7<sup>th</sup> May with the help and support of some enlightened men. It was named 'Calcutta Female School' which is familiar as Bethune School.

Madanmohan Tarkalankar was closely associated with this school. His effort of spreading female education was mainly centered on Bethune school. He was highly influenced by the movement of female education of early nineteenth century. In the first phase of his career he selected the profession of teachership. He taught in the institutions like Hindu College Pathsala, Barasat School, Fort William College, krishnagar College, Sanskrit College.<sup>14</sup> By teaching in such institutions he gained experience about the state of contemporary education. He realized that the women were deprived of the benefits

of education. He also thought that women must be educated for the betterment of society. So he moved to spread female education. At that time he came in contact with Bethune who planned to establish a school for girls of respectable Hindu natives. In spite of belonging to an orthodox Brahmin family Madanmohan supported Bethune for setting up a school for the native girls. Jogesh Chandra Bagal said in this context as follows:

Amongst other who helped Bethune to mature his plan, the name of Madanmohan Tarkalankar deserves special mention.<sup>15</sup>

Bethune sought help from Ramgopsal Ghosh, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay and also Madanmohan to fulfill his plan. Here a question arises in this context - why did Bethune join Madanmoh with the work of founding girls' school? There is a possibility that he might have heard about Madanmohan from Ramgopal or Dakshinaranjan or from other sources. This is why Bethune communicated with the enlightened man like Madanmohan to fulfill his mission. Madanmohan, too, tried his best to stabilize the school.

Madanmohan's efforts in imparting women education, based on Bethune School, bear an historical importance. As Bethune school was first to bring the scope of secular education for the girls of upper class Hindu families<sup>16</sup>, Madanmohan played a prestigious role in shaping the school. At the starting point, the school went through an adverse situation because the orthodox Hindus were the severe antagonist of it. Even some educated persons of the society opposed to send their girls in such a public school. Under such circumstances Madanmohan came forward first to admit his daughters to the school without caring the objection of the conservatives. The total number of students admitted to Bethune school was twenty one. But eleven were present on the first day.

Madanmohan not only sent his daughters to Bethune School but also employed himself as a gratuitous teacher of Bengali language. It is noteworthy that at the same time he was employed as a professor at Sanskrit college. He used to teach in the morning session of Bethune School and then he used to teach at Sanskrit college. This proves his intense eagerness to educate female. Bethune was very pleased with the job he had done for the school. This is why Bethune included his name as member of admission and syllabus committee of his school.<sup>17</sup> Madanmohan performed this duty perfectly. Realizing lack of good text book he composed 'Shishusiksha', an elementary work for children, in three parts. This book was designed according to child psychology and it became very popular among the pupils. Besides he wrote an article named 'Streetiksha' (1850) in favour of female education. Here he argued for the necessity of education for girls by refuting the misconceptions of the antagonists of female education.<sup>18</sup>

Madanmohan tried his best to make Bethune School a successful educational institution. His intimate friendship with Bethune and his high enthusiasm in female education led him to accomplish

this work. In 1851 Bethune wrote a letter (29<sup>th</sup> March, 1850) to Lord Dalhousie expressing his gratitude to Madanmohan:

The three natives to whom I desire ...Pundit Madan Mohun Tarkalankar, one of the pundits of Sanskrit College, who not only sent two daughters to the school, but has continued to attend it daily, to give gratuitous instruction to the children in Bengali, and has employed his leisure time in the compilation of a series of elementary Bengali books expressly for their own use.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Based on the above we see that Madanmohan played an important role in spreading female education in nineteenth century Bengal. When he took such an endeavour, it was not easy thing at that time. He had to face many hurdles in executing his work of educating girls. In the early stage of nineteenth century the missionaries tried seriously to spread female education by opening schools. But no girls, belonging to higher caste, joined their schools due to proselytism. Bethune school was the first institution to bring the scope of secular education for the girls. From this point of view Madanmohan's role for the establishment and betterment of Bethune School deserves special mention in the history of female education in Bengal.

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