



Role of Women in Swadeshi Movement of Bengal with special Reference to the role of Muslim Women

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(The three aspects of Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Movement are – i) Boycott, ii) Swadeshi and iii) National Education. Swadeshi and Boycott are the reverse and obverse of the same Coin. Swadeshi is constructive and affirmative or positive and Boycott is negative. On the other hand National Education is completely native education. The participation of the Indians in the three streams of Swadeshi Movement was remarkable. The participation of the Women in this movement was eye arresting. The Women society of Bengal actively participated in Swadeshi Movement. The urban Women, even the rural women actively participated in this Movement. Not only Hindus or Brahmons women but also Muslims women participated in Swadeshi Movement directly or indirectly. Though it can be mentioned that muslim women participated in the National Congress was marginal during the first three decades. In Swadeshi era, the formative thinking of partition spread by khairunessa was indeed rare for the contemporary time. She said that these could set up many factories in our country if women started to use clothes made by this country. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was politically conscious but she did not engage herself in politics directly. But she inspired the women to join Swadeshi movement. The causes of the involvement of the Muslim women in this national women movement were their social consciousness and political awareness. In my research I have tried to show the roles of the Women, specially the muslim Women of Bengal in the aforesaid movement.)

Index Term: Swadeshi , Vanguard, Partition, Gathering, Charka, Movemen

The purpose of this study is to highlight the part played muslim women with others in Swadeshi movement of Bengal. Historically the women of Bengal must have influenced by the then rising currents of Indian nationalism.

In India there have many movement against British rule. The Swadeshi movement is one of them. By the beginning of the 20th century the Bengalis, in fact, became the vanguard of Indian nationalism. “What Bengal thinks today India thinks tomorrow”.- commented by Gokhle. The progressive and nationalist Bengal was a matter of great anxiety to Lord Curzon. He planed and made the Partition of Bengal a reality in order to weaken the spirit of nationalism. The partition ushered in the Swadeshi movement. This movement might be looked upon as the beginning of the all India protest against the British rule.¹

Although the partition of Bengal taken place during the rule of Lord Curzon. The partition of Bengal was implementing on October 16, 1905. Against this implement the Indians started the Swadeshi movement. The Swadeshi movement showed three majors trends –i) Boycott, ii) Swadeshi and iii) National education. The Indians actively participated int this movement and women also.²

The Women society of Bengal actively participated in Swadeshi Movement. The urban Women, even the rural women actively participated in this Movement. Removing the veil, the women of Hindu-Muslim participated in the meetings, gathering, processions, picketings etc. ³ Among such women are Sarala Devi Choudhurani , Hemangini Das, Kumudini Basu, Lilabati Mitra, Nirmala Sarkar, Subala Acharya, Khairunnesha Khatun et al though the participation of the Muslim Women was very little. The Partition of Bengal of 1905 and the consequent Swadeshi Movement goaded the women society of Bengal towards politics. The movement against the Partition of Bengal started on 7th August in 1905 through a meeting in the Town Hall of Kolkata. The historic proposal of avoiding the British commodities is accepted in the meeting of 7th August. After the announcement, many meeting are held during few weeks in the remote districts. The scop –poet Mukunda Das urges through his song---

“Chhere de reshmi churi

Banganari kovu hate ar poro na.

Kacher mayate vule, shonkho fele kolke hate poro na.”⁴

As the same time the women of the Bengal was sang a song –

“Suren dada bole geche moti dadar bari

Meyera sob shakha poro kacher churi chhari”⁵

They also sang-

“Bhupen dada bole geche sonore khokar ma,

Ranna ghore bilati noon r kokhono eno na”⁶

16th October, 1905 is celebrated as the Partition of Bengal opposition day. The women celebrate the ‘Arandhan’ and ‘Rakshabandhan’ on that day with surging enthusiasm.⁷ The Vishakabi Rabindranath uttered union song----

“Bangalir pran Bangalir mon
Bangalir ghore joto bhaibon
Ek houk houk
Ek houk he vogoban.”⁸

The women took part in the propaganda of Native Industry assumed the shape of anti Partition of Bengal Movement. With the initiation of avoiding of the foreign commodities Sarala Devi Choudharani opens a show-room namely ‘Laxmibhander’ only to start the native craftsmanship. When the avoidance of foreign commodities assumes the shape of mass Movement, the women of Bengal participate in the agenda such on Shakticharchabrata, Arandhan, Rakshabandhan through the ‘Birostomi Mela’. Nabashashi Devi, Kamalkamini Gupta, Sushila Sen et al led this Movement.⁹ Girindra Mhini Dasi, Swarnakumari Devi, Prosanyamoyee Devi, Kamini Roy, Mankumari basu, Biraj Mohini Devi, Banalata Sen, Nagendra BalaMustafi, Krishnaoriya Chowdhury, Ponkojini Bosu, Nirjharini Devi, Hemanta Kumari Chowdhury, Ashalata Sen, Labonyaprabha Dutta, Kumudini Mitra et al engaged in this Swadeshi Movement. Bamabodhini Patrika and Antapur Patrika etc played active role in uniting the women. The women through their involvement in the Swadeshi Movement gave the message to the world that they could play the role in outer world like those of western women.¹⁰ Dukodibala Devi of Birbhum district took active part in this movement in Birbhum.¹¹ In 1312 bongabdo (Bengali era) Ashin (Bengali month) edition of Bharati patrika ‘Abhaibani’ title composition of the country’s men are assured of all help. It is that- **“ Hai vatrigon, tomra nirvoi hoy. Amra tomadiger utsahe badha dibo na. Tomadiger protigya vango koribo na. matar mongoler uddeshe tomra je sonkolpo dharon koriacho taha amrao dharon korilam; tahar sebar jonno tomra je broto grohon koriacho taha amrao grohon korilam. tomra nirvoi hou, tomadiger protigga atol houk, tomadiger broto obadhe utjapito houk.”**(In Bengali)¹²

During the year 1905-1908 the movement against the Partition of Bengal takes the acute form and the women of Bengal increasingly participated in this Movement. Being provoked by the national fever, the women start to produce and use the native materials. In Charka kata , making cloth with cotton and its use etc were in vogue in the houses. The intensity of the movement spread from cities to remote villages.¹³ The women start to donate their jewellerys in the National Fund. In 1906 during Kolkata session of National Congress Kadambini Ganguli arranged an association for the women. The women engagement through the avoid of the foreign things, native things acceptance , donating jewellerys to National Fund increased and it impact spread from villages to towns. The Swadeshi Movement becomes intensified in Barishal under the leadership of Aswini Kumar. His Humanitarian alacrity influences the women society. Many women donate money and Jeweller to his ‘Swadesh Bandhab Samity’. In 1908 Kadambini Ganguli forms a woman committee in support of Gandhiji’s non-violence movement. For Swadeshi Movement Aswini Kumar’s ‘Swadesh Bandhab Samity’ is banned in January, 1909. Among the banned samities ‘Broti Samity’, ‘Dhaka Anushilan Samity’, ‘Suhrid Samity’, ‘Sadhona Samity’ may deserve mention. Through these institutes many women participated in the Swadeshi Movement.¹⁴

Many armed freedom movements started through this Swadeshi Movement. In the beginning the women participation in the armed movement was little. The leaders of such movement did not take the women member for risk. Domestic and social environment was not congenial to the women. Still some women participated in it. With the increment of such Nationalist movement, the active participation of the women increased. The students of Schools and Colleges came forward. For the women participation in the freedom movement, the British are scared.¹⁵ The women start to work through various institutions. As a result, many women came to lead this movement. These Samities took various agenda publicly, but its main function was to mite the women with the revolutionary party. In spite of family barrier, the women engaged themselves in many dangerous works. Among such samities, the name of ‘Dipali Sanghs’ established by Leela Nag is remarkable. In the words of revolutionary lead, Kamala Dasgupta--- **“most of the women joined the movement for their own sake. Some time many of them would not get consent from their family member, impossible to have the permission to revolutionary work. The guardians had many fears. These are- social scandals, lifelong bachelorship of girls, looking the jobs, oppression of police etc.”**¹⁶ Not only Hindus or Brahmins women but also Muslims women participated in Swadeshi Movement directly or indirectly. Though it can be mentioned that muslim women participated in the National Congress was marginal during the first three decades. Few muslim educated women such as Jobeda Khanam Chowdhury, Samsunnahar Mahmud et al participated in it. Besides, Doulatunnesha of Gaibandher, Razia Khatun of Moimonshing, Rousunara Begam, Halima Khatun, Rajju Banu Begam, Badrunnesha Begam et al participated.¹⁷ During this Swadeshi Movement Khairunnsha with her native writing awakened the nationalism in the Muslim women. In 1905 her writing bearing the headline ‘Swadeshanurag’ was published in the ‘Nabanur Patrika’. She appeals the Muslims women with emotional words to forsake the foreign commodities and adopt the native commodities. She appeals to Muslim women- **“Vagnigon, aiso, amra protigga boddho hoiya bideshi sharee porityag kori: bilati bodies, semies o moja ghrinar choke dekhi, levenderer poriborte atar o golap babohar korte shikhi ebong lady shoe paye diya huchot khayoar dai hoite niskriti pai. Tabe amra swadesher onek upokar korte parbo. Bambah, Dhaka, Pabna, Nadia o Murshidabad proviti isthane nanarokomer dhuti o reshmi sharee o chikon kapor prostut hoi. Ei sokol bostro jemon chakchikyoshali seirup teksoi. Iha babohare amader desher taka deshe thakia jaibe, swadesher shilpokarjer prochur unnoti hoibe ebong gorib tontobai o shramjibira khatia duita shak onner songsthan koriya loyte paribe”** (in Bengali)¹⁸ It should be noted that a group of muslims considered national congress to be Hindu organization. That is why they distanced themselves from the movement led by national congress. In addition, they tried to keep their women folk away from the national movement led by congress and did not follow the foot steps of the Brambha women. In this situation, the spread of patriotic ideas of Khairunnesha inspired the Muslim women. In the early stage of the movement, this belief was rooted in the Muslims that the result of the partition of Bengal would improve their material. Nawab Salimullah of Dhaka, Nawab Ali Chowdhury of Mayamansingha, Mahammad Mehsenullah and some of first series Muslim leaders supported the partition of Bengal and opposed the Swadeshi movement.¹⁹ Muslim propagations considered Swadeshi movement to be the movement of Hindus. Because Hinduism and it’s ideas were mixed in this movement. At that time, the music written by Rabindranath Tagore was considered Bengal to be Devi Durga . Arobindranath Tagore in these contemporary paintings portrayed India as “Bharat Mata”.²⁰ The attempt of creating Hindu nationalism through the imagination of kali and Durga in our country, caused adverse reaction among Muslims regarding Swadeshi movement.²¹ But in spite of having this adverse situation, the extent reasonable and liberal Muslims joined with Hindus in this movement. Sumit Sarkar said about this: **“In view of the formidable barriers to unity set up by tradition, British policy and**

attitudes of many Hindu nationalists, what is surprising is not the eventual alienation of the bulk of the Muslims, but the extent of their participation in the Swadeshi movement. That this attained quite respectable dimensions is a largely forgotten fact which deserves emphasis.”²² Liberal muslim leader thought that the partition of Bengal would not improve Muslim society materially.²³ That is way they supported swadeshi movement opposing the partition of Bengal. Prominent Barrister Abdul Rasul , landlord of Tangaiel and famous lower of Kolkata . Abdul Halim Ghagnabi, leading congress leader Abdul Kasem of Burdwan, Muzibur Rahaman the editor of the journal ‘The Musalman ’ and famous Bengali poet Ismaile Hossain Siragi joined Swadeshi movement.²⁴ Besides , Samsul Hoda , Sirajul Islam, Delwar Hossain and Amir Hossain opposed the partition of Bengal . The principles of all these muslim bengalees inspired, Khairunesha to spread Swadeshi ideas among Indians.

In Swadeshi era, the formative thinking of partition spread by Khairunessa was indeed rare for the contemporary time. She said that these could set up many factories in our country if women started to use clothes made by this country. If the bulk of cotton and silk produced by this country, was used in this country it self , the foreigner could not deprive us by taking of our wealth loaded by ship over seas . Khairunesha’s opinion about the drainage of Indian wealth astonished us. Foreign sharp and fragile utensils of enamel destroyed the gravity of our traditional utensils of copper and brass. That is why Khairunesha said to women of Bengal, “come sisters, we promise – we will not touch these enamels. We will see whether we can rouse our indigenous utensils of copper and brass”²⁵. For awaring the women of Bengal khairunessa said “coming from distance the foreign merchants are bagging Indian wealth deceiving the women folk of Bengal by jewels of German – silver and foreign bangles ” She said that India could give all the materials to the world because what we had in the whole world , everything was there in India . A strong protest against foreign British deprivation was made with immense hatred by saying that the merchants of America , England , Scotland, German Australia , Switzerland and Japan were taking our hand Laboured gains to their countries in exchange of little rations and here we were wondering only for one time meal in a day,²⁶ . Khairunesha gave her opinion about the re creation of indigenous industries. She advised the mothers for using our cow milk in place of foreign packet milk. She believed that using cow milk in place of packet milk was healthy and cattle rearing for the purpose would help to improve our economy. She requested all to use indigenous sugar in place of foreign refined sugar. Khairunesha said “In every year, refined sugar costing give and half crore rupees is imported and an amount of thirty lakh for cheroot and cigar goes to foreign. She requested to all the sons of our country to leave / give up the addiction of cheroot and cigar. For the development of our country she summoned the women and said, “I hope everyone of you will try hard for the improvement of our country. Nothing be done to your poor India if this movement. This is chaos of the British rule”.²⁷

Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) was politically conscious but she did not engage herself in politics directly. But she inspired the women to join Swadeshi movement. Rokeya criticised the usage of foreign transparent clothes in place of indigenous handmade clothes and negligence to them with this, she emphasized on renovating the moribund Endy industry of Rangpur .²⁸

In this time, Some Indian women went foreign for taking training from international freedom fighters for organizing struggle to free our country from the bondage of British rule. Among them the name of Ambika khan Luhani should be noted. In 1911, the partition of Bengal was banned because of the result of the immense struggle of the large people our country. The success of the national movement inspired the women movement.²⁹

In point of fact, the women movement firstly was organized in the eve of nineteenth century and again it took place after hundred years in the second decade of twentieth century. Behind the inclusion of Muslim women in the national women movement, social and political awareness of them played a great role, The causes of the involvement of the Muslim women in this national women movement were their social consciousness and political awareness. The objectives of this women movement were to uplift it the status of women in the society as well as family, to spread the women education and to break the restricted condition of them etc. In the course to implement these, the elite Muslim women realized that to free women from traditional shacks, first ‘Bharat Mata’ must be freed. And it was the dictum of their movement in the outset. Not only in town but also in the remote rural areas women joined the Swadeshi movement with the hope to free themselves. Patriotism was the very essence of their movement which inspired them to take part in the movement actively. The wall of Muslim cultures could not suppress the Muslim women and they joined with much enthusiasm and mixed in the heart of women movement, made themselves available in the cause of national freedom movement. Love for country and liberation for women inspired them to play an important role in this movement

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