

PARTITION, EMIGRATION; INDIAN MUSLIM WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AIMED AT EAST PAKISTAN

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Abstract:

Until August 1947, the program of the democratic movement was to eliminate the economic crisis of the workers, farmers and common people and to solve the unemployment problem. But after the creation of Pakistan in 1947, there was a need to remove the backwardness of the Muslim women community, to bring them out of the siege, because the Muslim women of East Pakistan were far backward in education and culture. Muslim women thought that the creation of Pakistan would provide them with more opportunities. They would be equal to Hindu women in education. Later on, they realized that the purpose for their dream of Pakistan would not be fulfilled. Women who were infatuated with the idea of creating Pakistan saw the hard reality and became disillusioned where Pakistan came into being. At this stage few determined Muslim women migrating from India to East Pakistan played an important role in social, cultural and community-building activities that brought the Muslim women out of social oppression in East Pakistan. They tried to bring women out of the veiled society. Women's participation in the literary work in East Pakistan was very low. Standing at that situation, it was beyond imagination on women to participate in cultural events. Breaking this barrier, Laila Samad played the female role in a stage play for the first time. Women's organizations sheltered the Mohajirs, who migrated from West Bengal in various camps. Women's organizations set up camps for refugee women in Dhaka. Moreover, the women protested unitedly against the price hike of rice. They played an important role in securing women's right to participate in elections, to work in various governmental

sectors and to have medical and nursing privileges. of doctors and nurses and the formation of independent Bangladesh from East Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakistan, East Pakistan, migration, Women's Organizations, Riots, language.

Introduction:

In 1943, Mohila Atma-rakksha Somiti was formed in undivided Bengal. The association was declared illegal in East Pakistan on 26th August 1948 after the partition of the country. Liaquat Ali Khan formed the Dhaka branch of 'All Pakistan Women's Association' in 1949 with the patronage of the Government of Pakistan. The first atma-rakksha somiti President of East Pakistan branch was Nurul Amin's wife, and the Co-President was Begum Shamsunnahar Mahmud. The work of women's organizations, policy making, everything was going on under the government's instructions, under the system of the government. The East Pakistan government used women's organizations not for protection women interests of the but to protect its own political interests. Most of the members of there women's organizations were wealthy women from the ruling party in West Pakistan. These organizations had to work in accordance with government plans subject to governments approval. The women's organizations established under the efforts of East Pakistan were - Women's Voluntary Association, Pakistan Women's Naval Reserve, and Pakistan Women's National Guard. Without taking any measures in terms of their social development, the government encouraged them to perform family responsibilities while keeping them tied to social customs and traditions. with the help of these women's organizations, the pakistan government gathered about four hundred women and divided them into different battalions for training. There were trained also for anti-Indian activities particularly for organizing protest against any assumed indian attacks. (khawar.1987, p.521) Womens voluntary organization it was againts this backdrop that several voluntary women.

Emerged in East Pakistan out of governmental control through the efforts of determined women, migrating from india who were not associated with the official women's organizations. Sofia Kamal played a significant role in creating this organization. Apart from her, migrant Indian women who joined this organization were Hasina Morshed, Nurjahan Morshed, Laila Samad, Nurannecha Khatun Vidya Binodini and others. All came together and formed 'Wari

Somiti' by visiting different areas of Dhaka city on foot. The East Pakistan government banned the Wari Mohila Somiti for its anti-Muslim League activities. In 1948, when the Wari Mohila Somiti was attacked, the women took to the streets. The East Pakistan government issued Section 144 against the movement, but even though, the women continued the movement. More and more women's organizations joined the movement, defying government repression in various districts. In the peasant movement of Sylhet, the Wari Mohila Somiti tried to mobilize women from peasant families. In Barisal in 1948, the association stood by the starving people against the increase in the price of rice and daily necessities. (Roy, 1986, p. 56)

Bihar riots broke out on 24th October 24, 1946. About 25000 to 30,000 Bihari Muslims died in these riots. Also a large number of Biharis had fled leaving behind their homes and took refuge in Patna. About 23000 Bihari Muslims took shelter in camps at Tarapur and Saltanganj in Patna. (Biswas, 2016, p. 61) Suhrawardy rescued thousands of displaced Bihar refugees and sheltered them in West Bengal without waiting for permission from the Bihar government to rescue Muslim women and children endangered by the bloody riots in Bihar. Due to the large number of refugees, various camps have been set up in different districts of West Bengal adjacent to Bihar to accommodate them. After 1947 the refugees who took refuge in West Bengal from Bihar left for East Pakistan instead of returning to Bihar. By 1950, 152420 Muslim refugees had taken refuge in East Pakistan from West Bengal. (Ananda Bazar Patrika, 1950) Many refugee camps were established in East Pakistan to provide shelter to refugees in the first instance. One hundred and sixteen camps were established in thirteen districts of East Pakistan. Bihari and Bengali refugees were sheltered in these camps. Six Bihari camps were established in Mohammadpur, such as Geneva Camp, Community Center Camp and Staff Quarter Camp. The asylum camps in Dhaka were Jagannath College, Tejgaon Polytechnic Institute, St. Gregory's School and Lakshminarayan Cotton Mill etc. (Biswas, 2016, p. 585)

women in movement:

A major challenge for independent Pakistan was the resettlement of Mohajirs who had taken refuge in East Pakistan from West Bengal and Bihar. As the financial condition of the government of Pakistan was very weak, they had to face financial crisis for the food, clothing and shelter of the Mohajirs. They were treated by young women doctors of West Pakistan at the call of the Women's Voluntary Organization established in 1948. (Begam, 1989, p. 121)

Women's Voluntary Organizations worked for relief rehabilitation and aid to refugee women and children.

The Wari Mohila Somiti joined the Sylhet Peasant Movement. Women's organizations played an important role in organizing the farmers of Sylhet. A woman named Kaloi Bibi was the leader of this peasant movement. When the women's organization and the farmers came together to complain about their lack to the District Commissioner, he ordered to fire on the unarmed women. (Khawar, 1987, p. 504) Several farmers were killed in police firing and some women leaders were imprisoned. Even after government repression, it was not possible to keep the women suppressed. Under the leadership of Manorama Basu, a member of Wari Mohila Somiti, the hungry women had gathered and appeared at the District Magistrate's office in Barisal to protest against the increase in the price of rice and other essential commodities in Barishal. That day was a haat day in Barisal, so the common poor people of the market place took part in this women's movement. The district magistrate refused to accept the women's demands and the women continued their agitation without backing down.

The women's movement demanding food was lathi-charged by the police, many women were injured and several leaders were jailed. (Chakraborty, 1987, p. 126) The League protested against the government demanding various democratic rights for women, including the release of royal prisoners led by Nivedita Nag and other women, on 11th September 1948 at Coronation Park. The police had cordoned off the entire meeting shouting '*Naraye Takbir*' and detained the women. The day of the women's movement was Jinnah's birthday. Moreover, the police were angry with the women's organization. Nivedita Nag went on hunger strike for 58 days staying within the Jail. (Nag, 1987, p. 64) Students of Tolaram College protested in front of the jail gate demanding the release of Nivedita Nag, but there was no reliable.

The Challenge of riots:

The Muslim League government created communal riots to suppress the progressive movement in East Pakistan in 1950. Sufia Kamal, Lutfunnesa visited different areas of Narayanganj and delivered relief to the people devastated by the riots. Many women activists including Ella Mitra of Nachol were arrested on 7-8 January 1950. (Hossain, 2006, p. 220) The East Pakistan government claimed that members of the Mohila Atma-rakksha Somiti had encouraged the

rioters by visiting various villages. After physically torturing Nadera Begum, the police imprisoned her in Rajshahi and later in Dhaka Jail. Leaders like Laila Samad, Nurjahan Morshed, Sufia Kamal, Rokeya Rahman Kabir, the strong leader of the women's movement along with the progressive student at Dhaka University, Kamrunnessa Layli, organized the women's society against the riots.

After the suppression of the riots in Dhaka in 1950, Juiphul Roy tried to reorganize the Women's Association. She started assimilating women's society with Muslim progressive women like Begum Sufia Kamal, Noorjahan Morshed, Halima Khatun and others. At this time Gaibandhar Daulatunnessa joined the women's organization in Dhaka. The women of the Women's Self-Defense Committee established a school with 60 students in Nawab Katara Basti, Dhaka in 1950. Two teachers started to run the school. Bengali, Urdu and social studies were taught in the school. (Azad, 1950, p. 6) Mohila Atma-rakksha Somiti built five more health protection societies in different parts of the city, one next to Katra School and in different parts of the city. In East Pakistan, maternal and infant mortality rates were high due to underdeveloped and inadequate medical facilities. Keeping this aspect in mind, the women of Mohila Atma-rakksha Somiti provided training in midwifery, various ways of protecting the health of adult women in health protection societies. (Azad, 1950, p. 4) In 1951, a gathering of members of Dhaka Mohila Somiti was held in a school in Shantinagar. (Hossain, 2006, p. 220) In this gathering, Begum Sufia Kamal was elected as the President, Daulatunnessa Khatun as the Secretary and the Dhaka City Children's Protection Society was formed.

Press, club and culture:

Various newspapers and magazines played a significant role in promoting the women's movement in East Pakistan. Laila Samad published a magazine entitled 'Ananya' in Dhaka from Calcutta. This magazine was for women only (Nag, 2003, pp. 18-19) and it became the voice of society and women. It is not that this magazine made men complete out, rather the magazines edited by men made women society out. Women's society played a historic role in making women visible. (Begam, 2000, p. 21) Begum newspaper and Begum Club played a leading role in social development and women's rights. The periodical 'Begum' was first published on 20th July, 1947 from 12, Wellesley Street, Kolkata. Sufia Kamal was the first Editor, followed by Nurjahan Begum. After partition, there was no organization of leading

women in the fields of literature, art and culture in East Bengal. Begum newspaper was shifted to Dhaka in May 1950 with the efforts of Mohammad Nasiruddin. 'Begum' was republished from 3rd December. It had given an accurate picture of the women's society in post-partition East Pakistan. In a state based on religion, women did not have the courage to hold a pen. Women who migrated from Calcutta to East Pakistan were the first to dare to write in Begum. Sufia Kamal has illustrated the predicament of life when a woman starts a new family with her husband and children in East Pakistan after partition in her book *Ekale Amader Kal*. (Hossain, 1966, p. 26) A similar picture of the women's struggle in East Pakistan can be noticed in Suraiya Begum's book *Khandito Uthon Akhando Smriti*. 'Begum' played a significant role in providing opinions on various issues of women's society movements, various news of women's society, providing opportunities for women writers to write literature and developing the latent talent of girls in rural Bengal. With the efforts of Laila Samad, Razia Khan and Fazal Sahabuddin, the magazine 'Chitrita' was published. (Begum, 1969, p. 67) This magazine also helped the women's movement. Several women's magazines were published from 1947-1971. For example, Naobahar, Mansi, Masikpatra, Shatadal, Obrudha, Sultana, Shyamali, Madhumita, Sucharita, Maa, Lalna, Bangla Girl, Labani etc. which did not last long. (Begum, 1961, p. 295)

Begum Club was established on 15th December 1954. Begum Club an assemblage of women philanthropists played a significant role in East Pakistan in the exchange of ideas, in the realization of women's rights, progress and dignity of women. It had a special role for everyone, regardless of whether they were men or women. (Hoque, 1961, p. 20) Various journalists, writers, writers, singers and artists of the country joined this club. Begum magazine and Begum Club played a significant role in resisting the various injuries and setbacks that came to women's society. (Begum, 1961, p. 133)

The movement for language

Laila Samad had a great interest in plays. She formed a theatre group 'Charnik' for the practice of theatrical literature with her own efforts. (Azad, 1954, p. 3) Many theatre stars were associated with this organization. Laila Samad founded a Cine Club with cultural minded women. It was established from the realization that Cine Club was a chapter of the cultural

movement. (Samad, 2015, p. 17) Laila Samad took it upon herself to collect monthly subscriptions, convene staff committee meetings and mobilize members for the Cine Club.

Even before the language movement took its final shape in 1952, the women's community of East Pakistan was united and the government repression towards the women's community continued. Since the creation of Pakistan, English and Urdu were used in order forms, money and postage stamps. In 1952, students marched to demand Bengali as the state language. The firing on the student procession caused extreme reactions on the women's society. Women gathered at 12, Abhay Das Lane and protested against the killing of students. (Azad, 1952, p.5) The police arrested Mumtaz Begum from that meeting and tried to quell the protest movement. A few days later, women's meeting was held at Purana Paltan on 28 February 1952. Laila Samad and Nurjahan Morshed addressed the meeting. In the speech, they had vowed to honour the language martyrs and expressed their condolences. (Hamid, 1996, p. 91) As Laila Samad was a staff reporter of the newspaper at that time, she gave a speech raising demands for freedom of the press, repeal of Article 144, resignation of the Nurul Amin government, freedom of speech, etc. (Choudhury, 1996, p. 14)

The language movement was preceded by blockade measures imposed by the East Pakistan League government, attacks by goon forces, tightening of curtains etc. When the women went out, the rickshaws were covered with cloth. Since the language movement, screen stiffness had decreased somewhat. (Begam, 1961, p. 133) In addition to East Pakistan Wari Mohila Somiti, Child Protection Somiti took a particularly active part in the language movement. Women like Sufia Kamal, Noorjahan Morshed, Halima Khatun and others played a vital role in leafleting, holding meetings about women and conveying the right message to them despite government repression. (Mumtaz, 1987, p. 55)

The political front:

After the language movement of 1952, the women's movement stagnated due to government pressure. But until the imposition of military rule in 1954-1958, the women's society formed several movements based on their own demands. The five-year term of the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly ended in 1952, but after the language movement, the Muslim League postponed the election, thinking that the defeat of the government was certain. As a result of

the democratic movement in East Pakistan, the Muslim League government announced the date of elections on 7th to 12th March, 1954 a year later. The women's society took part in the general elections of the United Front government to demand education, culture, democratic rights, etc. The Muslim League government imposed official repression on the participation of women. On August 7, 1954, the Electoral Amendment declared "A woman candidate for a center must be a suffragette of that center." (Selina, 2015, p. 22)

In United Front elections of 1954, Maulana Bhasani nominated Laila Samad as the female parliamentary candidate from Dinajpur. But since Laila Samad's name was not in the voter list of Dinajpur, she applied to the Election Commissioner in Rajshahi but there was no solution. Therefore, Laila refrained from becoming a candidate of the United Front. Three women were elected as candidates of the United Front - Nurjahan Morshed, Badrunnesa Khatun, Daulatunnesa Khatun. The women's society became vocal against the repressive policies of East Pakistan in the united efforts of women involved in social and political activities for a long time. The success of the three women further boosted the spirit of self-confidence and empowerment within the women's community. This success of the United Front government alarmed the Central League government. The League government incited riots between Bengalis and Biharis in Adamji Jute Factory to destroy law and order in East Pakistan. 92(a) was issued on false pretexts to cancel the 21st February as a holiday. In protest, the students called a strike in which women took an active part. Many women activists were arrested and jailed by government repression. There was no democratic atmosphere in East Pakistan for almost a year. Even the elected members of the United Front could not take any action against it. (Khoka, 1986 pp. 145-146)

In 1957, the price of rice suddenly increased from Rs. 30 to Rs. 75 per maund in Sylhet. Women protested in Maulvi Bazar demanding rice on 15th April. Many veiled women participated in this movement. The women's society gradually took part in the anti-government movement. (Azad, 1957, p. 5) The Government of Pakistan under pressure formed the Social Work Conference comprising women involved in social welfare work at all levels. This organization was formed with men and women from both provinces of Pakistan. Its Co-President was Nurjahan Morshed. This committee was formed to join the international organization. (Anwar, 2006 p. 222) In 1957, Nurjahan Morshed attended the third session on human rights.

Women's Education:

Dhaka University was the only university in Dhaka before the establishment of Pakistan. It was under Calcutta University. In 1947, through government order, Dhaka University was empowered to be the guardian of all colleges in East Pakistan as a full university itself. As a result, the center of gravity of education shifted overnight from Kolkata to Dhaka in East Bengal. The number of primary schools in East Bengal in 1947-1948 after the partition was twenty-six thousand. The number of primary students was fifteen lakhs eighty one thousand eight hundred and twenty. (Government of Pakistan 1951) In 1958, the number of primary schools stood at thirty-nine thousand with eight million students and the number of teachers was less. (Government of Pakistan 1961) The picture of decline in students and teachers was the same in all schools and colleges. One of the reasons for the decline in student numbers was the exodus of millions of Hindus. Due to the decrease in the number of students, the East Pakistan government closed many educational institutions to reduce the number of schools and colleges. In many cases two colleges were merged into one college. (Badriddin, 2024, p. 91) The government decided to close women's colleges in Sylhet due to the decrease in the number of female students. Jabeda Khatan Chowdhury Governor Feroze spoke out against the reduction of women's education. Zabeda Khatun along with some other assistants went door to door to collect students and tried to keep the college running. One of the reasons for the stagnation of the education system was the lack of qualified teachers. As a result of partition, highly educated working class Hindus left East Pakistan for West Bengal and there was a shortage of teachers. The shortage of teachers in educational institutions was partly filled by educated Muslim youths from West Bengal. Abuhena Mustafa Kamal, a resident of Bheramara station in Rajshahi district, said that after partition, he moved from Bhagbangola in Murshidabad district. He joined primary school teaching in East Pakistan. The salary of the job was not very high, and the salary was often stopped. Their lives were spent in hardships. (Azad, 1950, p. 4) The major problem in the education system was the shortage of text books and the crisis-ridden state of the syllabus. With no paper production in East Pakistan, they had to depend on paper from India. (Azad, 1952, p. 4) The Pakistani government was anti-education and more acutely anti-women education. They had tried to hinder women's education and wanted to keep women confined to the veil and housework. Condition of the girls' schools grew poorer. The students protested by blocking the streets of Dhaka demanding alleviation of Ak Balika Vidyalaya in Dhaka, but no solution was found. (Azad, 1952, p. 5)

Service for Health:

Dhaka Medical College was established with some doctors who left Calcutta in mid-1946, but a year later when the country was partitioned a number of students and nurses passed through Calcutta, including Major Virgin, Dr. Gauri Dutta and other teachers of anatomy and physiology. (Rafique, 2019, p. 56) Hospitals cannot be run without educated nurses and East Pakistan lacked them in the hospitals. Therefore, Dhaka Medical College Nurses Training School was opened. The Health Secretary of East Pakistan, Mr. Habibullah Bahar, appealed to the countrymen on 19th March, 1950, “My appeal to the mothers, fathers and guardians of the schoolgirls of East Pakistan is to encourage your daughters to get nursing training. Shortage of nurses will not be removed unless the girls of East Pakistan take up nursing scholarships and help in the service of the state.” (Azad, 1950, p. 5)

Despite the demands of Habibullah Bahar, there was not much encouragement from the students’ families. Out of the small number of seats in Dhaka Medical, 40 seats were vacant. The government specified several categories and salary scales for nurses. First Class Nurse - Educational Qualification -Matric Pass; First Year Monthly Pay - 55 rupees; Second Year Monthly Pay - 60 rupees; Third Year Monthly Pay - 65 rupees. Second Class Nurse - Ninth Class Pass; First Year Monthly Salary - 50 rupees; Second Year Monthly Salary - 55 rupees; Third Year Monthly Salary - 60 rupees. This amount would be given to them during the course. The duration of education for nursing course was fixed at 4 years. Apart from salary they were provided with other opportunities. For example, female students were paid 5 rupees for laundry, 5 rupees for hiring clothes and 2 rupees per day for food. Nurses were also provided with well-furnished accommodation with furniture, electric lights and fans. (Azad, 1950, p. 5) The women of East Pakistan Gandaria Somiti and Mohila Atma-rakksha Somiti held meetings in various cities including Dhaka to promote women’s nursing education. As a result, the shortage of nurses decreased somewhat during 1955. The shortage of nurses and doctors was made of the migrants from West Bengal. (Ramprasad, 2011, p.21) But even then East Pakistan lacked sufficient number of hospitals and nurses. There was one midwife for 8 lakh deliveries and one nurse for 2 lakh 80 thousand babies. (Maleka, 1989, p. 137) As a result there was dissatisfaction among doctors and nurses. The nurses of the medical college protested demanding salary arrears, lack of adequate medicines, lack of visiting rooms, reduction of night

duty etc. East Pakistan women's organization stood by the nurses and helped them in their various demands.

The Family Act:

The 'Family Act' was enacted in 1961 as a result of the women's movement since the establishment of East Pakistan. In this act, it was said to prevent polygamy, make registration of Muslim marriages compulsory, maintain social security for girls, prevent child marriage, set the age of marriage at 16 for women and 21 for men, abolish the practice of *Talak* etc. (Mumtaz, 1987, pp. 86-87) East Pakistan's fundamentalist, an anti-women's interest group, opposed the family act. Maulana Abbas Ali Khan ran the most harmful campaign in East Pakistan. Maulana Maududi vehemently protested polygamy. Under the leadership of Shamsunnahar Mahmuda and Sufia Kamal in Dhaka, Wari, Apwa, Child Protection Association held a meeting at Begum Club on 5th October, 1963 protesting the opposition to women's interests. Despite opposition to the Family Law, the Act was adopted without any amendment in November 1963 in view of the women's movement politics. In 1962, anti-Ayub government movements emerged in East and West Pakistan. In 1963, two students were martyred in police firing when the East Pakistan Students' Society protested for Education Day. In 1964, the East Pakistan government used the Hazratbal incident in Kashmir as an excuse to suppress the democratic movement. Sufia Kamal, Noorjahan Morshed, Rokeya Rahman formed an organized resistance in the neighbourhood against the communal thugs. At this time 'Purbabanga Rukhiya Darao' call of the women's organization inspired the people. (Hafizur, 1982, p. 215) Moreover, the women's organizations bravely resisted the riots.

During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965-1966, many women took part in defense training but the women's society did not find it difficult to understand that West Pakistan used the women of East Pakistan for its own interests and women denied to join it. In the post-war period, the Pakistan government's discriminatory treatment of East Pakistan resulted in endless poverty and food shortages. (Hafizur, 1982, p. 215)

People of various professions formed the womens Sangram Parishad to demand independence against the military rule of East Pakistan. 'East Pakistan Mohila Sangram Parishad' was formed in 1969 comprising women from all walks of life. Sufia Kamal was the leader of this committee. Moreover, among other women, Nurjahan Morshed, Raziya Banu and others were worth mentioning. With the help of this organization, the 1970 referendum supported the

women's society with the hope of establishing the rights of electing women to reserved seats, establishing a parliament with women powers, establishing children's hospitals, stopping violence against women, reducing food prices etc. But the 1970 referendum was not accepted by the military ruling group of Pakistan and the liberation war began. On 25th March, 1971, Pakistani forces fired on the students and teachers of Dhaka University, killing many intellectuals and students. Sufia Kamal was in her residence in Dhaka for nine months of the liberation war. Her house was closely watched by the Pak military. Sufia Kamal had provided refuge to many women and helped the women freedom fighters by with food and fund, despite strict surveillance. During these nine months of the liberation war, about 4 lakh women were brutally raped. (Farid, 1991, p. 56)

Conclusion:

From the period following the Partition of 1947, women's organizations played a particularly important role in addressing the refugee crisis in East Pakistan, protesting against price hikes at different times, and helping women gain greater prominence in the social and political spheres of East Pakistan. In addition, they also played a highly significant role in the Liberation War of 1971. During the liberation war, people from East Pakistan took refuge in various camps in West Bengal. Women were trained for the liberation war in various camps. Sajeda Khatun trained women at the Gobra camp in Kolkata. Sufia Kamal's two daughters, Sultana Kamal and Sayeda Kamal looked after the refugees who took shelter in Kalyani. Bangladesh became independent on 16th December, 1971. The first mass meeting was held at Shaheed Minar in Dhaka under the leadership of poet Sufia Kamal. Refugee Muslim women contributed greatly to the changes in East Pakistan's education, literature, culture, politics and social rights.

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