



(L) A part of the Eden Mohila College campus. (M) The educational institution, which began with only a handful of students, now has over 22,000 students, along with six modern administrative and academic buildings, and six hostels. (R) A rally marking the college's 150th anniversary.

PHOTO: COURTESY

**EDEN MOHILA COLLEGE**

# 150 YEARS of history and glory

**After 1945, when Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq became the education minister, the institution was shifted to Abdul Gani Road, now known as the Secretariat, for the next two years until it was again forced to relocate in 1947 temporarily to Curzon Hall, where it was somehow run by setting up some chairs and tables in the balcony.**

MD ABBAS AND SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

The Eden Mohila College is noted not only for its academic excellence and its pioneering role in promoting women's education in erstwhile British Bengal and present-day Bangladesh, but also for its glorious past and major contributions in shaping the nation's history.

Located in Dhaka's Azimpur, this institution recently celebrated its 150th founding anniversary. The event turned into a grand reunion with participation of many former students.

The educational institution, which began with only a handful of students, now has over 22,000 students, along with six modern administrative and academic buildings, and six hostels.

Professor Supriya Bhattacharya is currently serving as the 60th principal of the college.

"It is a privilege for me to become the principal of the country's oldest college," said Prof Bhattacharya.

"The college was established at a time when education for women was unthinkable. It played a pioneering role in educating and empowering



A wing of the Academic Building of the college in the 60s.



Eden Mohila College at Sadarghat in the 40s.



Students building a Shaheed Minar on the campus in memory of the Language Movement martyrs.

women of the country," she added.

**INCEPTION HISTORY**

In 1873, leaders of the then Dhaka Brahmo Samaj took an initiative to promote women's education in the community and established the Zenana Education Society. Later in the same year, initiatives were taken to provide education to girls in a domestic environment and a school named Shubha Shadhini Sabha (a philanthropic society) was set up, according to "The World of Muslims in Colonial Bengal" by Dr Sonia Nishat Amin, published by EJ Brill Leiden in 1996.

Renowned English educationist and social reformer Mary Carpenter visited the school, and in her report she recommended establishing it as a full-fledged educational institute.

Around the same time, two activists of the Dhaka Brahmo Samaj – Nabakanta Chattopadhyay and Braja Sunder Miura Babu – stepped forward with a similar initiative.

At that time, Meherunnesa Islam took charge of the school. Some time later, it was shifted to Kamrunnesa School and College in Tikatuli, and operated there for several years before it was relocated again.

In 1948, the college branches of Eden School and College and Kamrunnesa School and College were merged and relocated to Bakshi Bazar, becoming Eden Girls' College, while the school branches were merged and remained in Tikatuli as Kamrunnesa School.

In 1962, the institution finally settled permanently in its own building on the present Eden Mohila College, on 18 acres of land in Azimpur. At this time, the degree classes were conducted in Azimpur, while the intermediate classes were held in Bakshi Bazar.

Later, due to an increasing demand for girls' education, a new intermediate branch was added to Azimpur branch,

and degree classes were opened at Intermediate Government Girls College in Bakshi Bazar. Eventually, this led to the complete separation of the Bakshi Bazar from Eden Mohila College, and it later became Begum Badrunnesa College.

Meanwhile, Eden Mohila College continued to expand operation in Azimpur, and started offering honours courses from 1962-63 session.

Eden's students joined the call of Mahatma Gandhi in the struggle for independence from British rule. Among them, former students of the college such as Lila Nag (later Lila Ray), Kamala Sen, and Helena are worth mentioning.

Also, Pritilata W a d d e d a r , a martyred revolutionary who was actively involved in the anti-British movement, was a former student of the college.

After the looting of the Chittagong Armoury led by Master Da Surya Sen, injured Pritilata embraced death by consuming potassium cyanide, preferring her demise over capture by the British.

Additionally, Eden's students were actively involved in the Language Movement of 1952 and took an active role in the movement to cancel the Hamidur Rahman Education Commission.

During the Liberation War in 1971, the college's students stepped forward and spontaneously participated in the

war. The later anti-Ershad movement also saw noteworthy contribution and participation of students from this institution.

NOTED ALUMNI AND WHAT THEY SAID

The college has over the last one and half century produced many talented individuals who established themselves in their respective fields.

Apart from the former students mentioned earlier, the noted alumni of the college include incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Deputy Leader of the House Matia Chowdhury, Language Movement hero Siddiq Zaman, educationist and cultural personality Prof Sanjida Khatun, Swadhinata Padak and Ekushey Padak awardee singer Ferdousi Rahman, Swadhinata Padak and Ekushey Padak awardee actress Ferdousi Mazumder, Ekushey Padak and National Film Award winner Dilara Zaman, Ekushey Padak awardee and freedom fighter Laila Hasan, National Film Award winner Dolly Zahur, Ekushey Padak awardee and freedom fighter Mahfuz Khanam, educationist and journalist AN Rasheda, singer Ferdous Ara, and gold medalist swimmer Nargis Ara Anny.

Reminiscing about their days at Eden College, Dilara Zaman said she, along with Matia Chowdhury, waged a strong protest to cancel the Hamidur Rahman Education Commission in 1962-63.

"Following the movement, Ayub Khan was forced to cancel it," she said, adding that her curiosity about literature started when she was a student at the college.

Singer Ferdous Ara mentioned that Eden Mohila College paved the way for her to embark on her journey as a singer.

"After being enrolled at the college, a cultural week started at its intermediate branch. At first, I hesitated to participate in those programmes, but I prepared myself slowly and started participating in those events, which helped shape my career as a singer," she said.