



(L) A part of the Eden Mohila College campus. (M) The educational institution, which began with only a handful 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 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 Mitra Babu – stepped forward with a similar initiative.

Arrangements were made for the education of girls at several houses. One such school was established by Pranab Kumar Das at Nabakanta Chattopadhyay's house in Dhaka's Farashganj.

Nabakanta Babu's school was later merged with a girls' school established by Babu Ananda Mohan Das to form the "Dhaka Female School" in Old Dhaka's Laxmi Bazar.

Based on Mary Carpenter's report, the school went through another transformation in June 1878, and a month later in July, its management committee completed all formalities for its nationalisation, and made a proposal to rename the school as "Eden Girls' School" in honour of Sir Ashley Eden, the then lieutenant governor of Bengal.

In September 1878, Eden Girls' School came under full government control to become the first and only government school in Bengal that provided education to girls for many years.

In 1896-97, the school had 130 female students, according to "Progress

of Education in India, 1892-92-1896-97, Third Quinquennial Review", published by London Dasling and Sons, in 1898.

In 1897, the school was shifted to Advocate Sri Ishwar Chandra's house as the former building was badly damaged in an earthquake in Bengal region.

In the early 20th century, the school was shifted to Portuguese Kuthibari in Sadarghat. At this time, intermediate education was incorporated into the college, and it was renamed Eden Girls' High School and Intermediate College.

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 temporarily relocate in 1947 to Curzon Hall, where it was somehow run by setting up some chairs and tables in the balcony.

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 as 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.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAJOR MOVEMENTS

The students of the institution have played pivotal roles in every movement in Bengal and have consistently earned a respectable place in society.

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 Siddiqua 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 Mahfuza 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.