

**Title: Abala Bose: Antithesis of an Abala Nari**

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### **Abstract**

Though her name means weak, Abala Bose proved not just for herself but for women at large that “abala” will never be a correct adjective to describe women. Being brought up surrounded by her parents’ support for widow remarriage and women's education made a huge impact on her. After marrying Jagdish Chandra Bose, Abala travelled to Europe several times, visited schools, and brought back the best educational approaches to India. She was elected the secretary for Brahmo Balika Samaj and approached Sister Nivedita. They brought about curricular and educational reforms, including self-defence training and the Montessori system. Abala set up a rehabilitation centre for widows where they were given various training. She was one of the earliest participants in the Indian Suffragist’s movement. She was ahead of her time as she realized that education can eradicate social evils. Being a foremost feminist, which inherently means equality, she was also against casteism. In her efforts to broaden the educational horizon so women didn’t have to seek education themselves, she tremendously impacted India’s journey of women upliftment. Her visionary mindset is reflected in her quote, Woman like man is first of all a mind, and only in the second place physical and a body.

**KeyWords:** feminist, inherently, eradicate, rehabilitation,

### **Introduction**

Abala Bose can be considered one of the earliest feminists in India. She was a visionary and a highly knowledgeable woman with a lot of ideas for reforms in India which she implemented persistently throughout her lifetime. Bose was one of the few higher class people who could have easily succumbed to living an easy life, but instead she chose to dedicate her life to

channelling her values into creating an ideal Indian society where women do not have to give their blood, sweat and tears just to get education and be considered equals to men.

## **Discussion**

Abala Bose was born in present day Bangladesh to parents Durgamohan and Brahmamoyee Das in 1865. When Abala was five, her family was boycotted from her father's hometown due to his support for widow remarriage (Rai 13). The family moved to Calcutta after that. Her mother passed away when she was merely ten years old.

Abala studied at Bethune Girl's school and Bethune College (Kaur). Kamini Roy, the famous feminist poet, was a classmate of Abala at Bethune College and her feminism was inspired by Abala. Abala later decided to pursue medicine and applied to Calcutta University for the same but was denied permission as there was no provision there for women in medicine. This caused many discussions among the intellectual elite which resulted in the Calcutta University sponsoring Abala Bose to study at Madras University with a scholarship of rupees 20 (Sengupta 16). Unfortunately, Abala could not finish her degree due to health issues and had to return home.

Immediately after that, Abala Bose, 23, married Dr. Jagdish Chandra Bose, 29. Abala Bose became a constant companion to Dr. Bose on his scientific travels to several European countries like England, France and Italy. She compared the condition of women and education system of these countries with India. She has published various works based on her travels like *England Bhraman*, *Italy Bhraman*, *Japan Bhraman*, *Americar Balakbalikader Katha* (About the children of America) and finally she published the travelogue *Bangali Mohilar Prithibi Bhromon* (World Tour of a Bengali Woman) in the periodical *Prabasi* (Chakraborty 55). Bose has made keen observations about these countries which eventually inspire her to begin her journey as a reformist.

Abala Bose established the Nari Siksha Samiti in 1919 along with several prominent figures like Prafulla Chandra Ray, Krishnabhabini Das, Chittaranjan Das, Bimala Das, Suprava Ray and many others from the Bengal Province (Chakraborty 61). Under this, schools and institutes

were opened such as the Mahila Shilpa Bhawan, Vidyasagar Bani Bhawan in Kolkata and Jhargram and Adult Primary Education Centre. In these institutes, widowed women were given vocational training to make them financially independent. The first school that was established by the Samiti was the Ballygunge girl's school in Calcutta which initially had only 25 students but is known as the Muralidhar Girls School and College today. The Sister Nivedita Adult Education Scheme was especially started for the education of adult women. Abala Bose presented a statistic in the Modern Review in 1927 that out of the total number of girls in the educational institutions in Bengal, 95 percent are in the primary grades and the remaining 5 percent are divided among the middle schools, high schools, and colleges. This shows the absence of women in higher education. Even for primary education, eight years are required but the women in India could not fulfil this as by the time of 12 years of age, they were married to older men (Chatterjee 354). This also resulted in child widows. Abala Bose brought about many changes in the education system of India. She promoted the Montessori system which encouraged children at pre-primary level to learn according to their natural interests rather than following a set curriculum. She introduced self-defense training for girls in her schools and she also requested the replacement of Brahmin pandits with female teachers so that the girls studying in the schools feel more comfortable. Abala also set up an Industrial Co-operative Home in Calcutta for the economic rehabilitation of destitute women, which was later turned into a relief centre for women from East Pakistan upon the request of the then Chief Minister. After the partition, the institutions under the Samiti in East Pakistan were closed while the institutions in West Bengal went under the responsibility of the District Boards and Municipal Corporations. Abala Bose had realised early on that education is the solution for the prevalent state of society and for that merely setting up schools is not important. The teachers should be trained appropriately which is why she was always in search of bright women to take up the noble art of teaching. Throughout her life, Abala set up 88 primary schools and 14 adult educational institutions in the Bengal Province of British India.

Abala Bose was one of the many women in India who were able to bring about the voting rights for women in 1921. She was a part of the delegation that was supposed to meet with Edwin Montagu during the negotiations for the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms to demand consideration of women as well in the administrative reforms. However, Abala was not able to attend so she sent a telegram stating her support for the delegation and regret for not being able to attend.

Abala Bose also aimed to eradicate casteism from rural areas. After Dr. Bose's death, she donated Rs 10,00,000 to the Sister Nivedita Adult Education Fund which provided literacy classes to adult women. She also created the Sadhana Ashram and handed it over to Brahmo Samaj before passing away in 1951.

## **Conclusion**

It is very easy to have a dream but it takes a very hard-working and consistent person to actually make a difference and implement those dreams. Abala Bose had a vision for the betterment of the condition of women and she made it true. She believed that instead of waiting for women to reach out for education, we should make the education system more accessible and bring it to the women who are not able to break the societal and familial restrictions in the pursuit of education and their dreams. In a very noteworthy issue of hers in the Modern Review she has stated that education should be given to girls not just so they can make better matches for marriage but because, "Woman like man is first of all a mind, and only in the second place physical and a body." (Chaudhary 36) This quote is exactly what women today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are fighting for. Women are fighting to be heard and considered in a patriarchal society where the only place they are supposed to belong is their home. Women are also fighting to be given the same choices granted to men. There is a constant demand to consider women to be on the same intellectual footing as men. Abala Bose had secured her place as a qualified and experienced woman in a society where only the achievements of men were highlighted. Maybe that is the reason why she remains so unknown even today. It is time to uncover such great minds who were purposely overshadowed by society and let their contributions echo throughout history.

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