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WOMEN EDUCATION UNDER THE COLONIAL TAMIL NADU – A HISTORICAL PROSPECTIVE

D. Senthil Kumar¹ and Dr. M. Lakshmanan²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of History, Government Arts College,
Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.

²Associate Professor, Department of History, Presidency College (Autonomous),
Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

ABSTRACT

Women education was an important segment of colonial India and Tamil Nadu. Women's education was acknowledged in 1854 by the East Indian Company's Programme: Wood's Dispatch. Slowly, after that, there was progress in female education,



but it initially tended to be focused on the primary school level and was related to the richer sections of society. The overall literacy rate for women increased from 0.2 per cent in 1882 to 6 per cent in 1947. In western India Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitri Bai became pioneers of female education when they started a school for

girls in 1848 in Pune. In 1878, the University of Calcutta became one of the first universities to admit female graduates to its degree programmes, before any of the British universities had later done the same. This point was raised during the Ilbert Bill controversy in 1883, when it was being considered whether Indian judges should be given the right to judge British offenders. The role of women featured prominently in the controversy, where English women who opposed the bill argued that Bengali women, whom they stereotyped as "ignorant" and neglected by their men and that Indian men should therefore not be given the right to judge cases involving English women. Bengali women who supported the bill responded by claiming that they were more educated than the English women opposed to the bill and pointed out that more Indian women had degrees than British women did at the time.

KEYWORDS : Women Education, Colonial Tamil Nadu, Women Technical Education.

INTRODUCTION

Human life, the best creation of God, has acquired two distinct characteristics such as the

biological and the sociological or cultural aspects. The biological aspects are maintained and transmitted by food and reproduction, whereas the sociological or cultural aspect, the rare distinction of human life is preserved and transmitted by education. Man is capable of being educated. Through education, he tries to seek new ways of life and promotes his intelligence. As education was a continuous process it deals with ever growing man in the growing society. Education in India has passed through many stages, since the vedic period. Different philosophers, educationists, statesmen, politicians, artisans, and priests according to their own outlook on life and circumstances, attempted to define the term of "Education".

Women education is a catch-all term for a complex set of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, and health education in particular) for girls and women. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education, and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Also involved are the issues of single-sex education and religious education in that the division of education along gender lines as well as religious teachings on education have been traditionally dominant and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussions of educating women as a global consideration.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EDUCATION

Women education refers to every form of education that aims at improving the knowledge, and skill of women and girls. It includes general education at schools and colleges, vocational and technical education, professional education, health education, etc. Women education encompasses both literary and non-literary education. Educated women are capable of bringing socio-economic changes. The constitution of almost all democratic countries, including India, guarantees equal rights to both men and women.

MAGNITUDE OF WOMEN EDUCATION

- **Economic development and prosperity** - education will empower women to come forward and contribute towards the development and prosperity of the country.
- **Economic empowerment** - as long as women remain backward and economically dependent on men, the helpless condition of them cannot be changed. Economic empowerment and independence will only come through proper education and employment of women.
- **Improved life** - education helps a woman to live a good life. Her identity as an individual would never get lost. She can read and learn about her rights. Her rights would not get trodden down. The life or condition of women would improve a lot, if we take a broad outlook in the field of female education.
- **Improved health** - educated girls and women are aware of the importance of health and hygiene. Through health education, they are empowered to lead a healthy life-style. Educated mothers can take better care of both herself and her baby.
- **Dignity and honor** - educated women are at the present looked upon with decorum and honor. They become a source of inspiration for millions of young girls who make them their role-models.
- **Justice** - educated women are more informed of their rights for justice. It would eventually lead to decline in instances of violence and injustice against women such as dowry, forced-prostitution, child-marriage, female foeticide, etc.
- **Choice to choose a profession of her choice** - educated women can prove to be highly successful in the fields of life. A girl-child should get equal opportunity for education, so that, she can plan to become a successful doctor, engineer, nurse, air-hostess, cook, or choose a profession of her choice.
- **Alleviate poverty** - women education is a pre-requisite to alleviate poverty. Women need to take

equal burden of the massive task of eliminating poverty. This would demand massive contribution from educated women. There cannot be many social and economic changes unless girls and women are given their rights for education.

Women Education under the Colonial Tamil Nadu

The tradition of the history of the educated women in early times conserved in classical literature had become almost a thing of the past. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of educated women was negligible. Systematic survey on education of women was taken only in 1826 thanks to Munro. According to it only 5,480 girls were in school out of total enrolment of 18,110. Education among them was almost confined to dancing girls who needed it as a complement to their profession. To other women reading and writing were almost unknown as Munro says "To the women of Brahmans and of Hindu in general, they (reading and writing) are unknown, because the knowledge of them prescribed and regarded as unbecoming of the modesty of the sex and fit only for public dances, but, among the women of Rajabundah and some other tribes of Hindus, who seem to have no prejudice of this kind, they are generally taught".

To some extent, domestic education for them was in vogue. But it was limited to a few well to a few well to do who had time and leisure for such pursuits. This neglect was due to child marriage and the practice of *pardah* which were the chief obstacles to their educations. As there was a strong social prejudice against the education of women, the company did not want to meddle with it for the fear of suspicion and revolt as that of 1806.

They did not have any definite policy in regard to female education before the despatch of 1854 which was an antithesis to policies pursued hitherto. Only some Christian missionaries were interested in their education. The first attempt to educate them was made by the Church of England Societies in Tirunelveli in the early years of the nineteenth century. But they, out of compassion, concentrated mainly on the education of the daughters of the Christian converts. Only in 1841 the missionaries of the Scottish church took interest in the education of the Hindu girls in Madras. In 1845, with the help of some Indian gentlemen, they opened a school for girls. In 1854, according to the Despatch (1854) only 8,000 girls were found in missionary school and 1,110 of them were in boarding schools. There were roughly about 256 schools for them. Only in 1854, some serious concern was shown to their education. The Wood's Despatch, 1854, clearly states: "the importance of female education in India cannot be overrated; we have already observed that schools for females are included among those to which grant-in-aid may be given, and we cannot refrain from expressing our cordial sympathy with the efforts which are being made in this direction. For the first time thanks this Despatch, the policy of non-intervention pursued so far was given up and an active support of the government to it was set in motion. The Despatch of 1854, thought stressed the importance of female education, was silent about ways and means to promote it even fourteen years after the passing of the Woods Despatch, the Government of Fort St. George did not have any concrete plan to foster female education. In 1868, the Government of India in a plan envisaged starting of a female normal school at each of the presidency towns which needed such school at each of the presidency towns which needed such school very badly. Accordingly, a female normal school was started in Madras. In 1880, the Inspectress of girls' schools was appointed to supervise and suggest ways and means to promote female education. Mrs. Isabel Brander was the first Inspectress of school (appointed in 1880) to encourage female education.

A great step was taken towards that direction only in 1882 by the education commission which suggested that "Female education should be treated as a legitimate charge alike on provincial or municipal funds and must receive special encouragement. The greatest care was to be exercised in the

selection of suitable text-books for girls' schools and that the preparation of such books must be encouraged. The female teachers in girls' schools must gradually be superseded by female teachers. A female inspecting agency is to be set up". This had given a great thrust to female education. By 1900 there were three women's colleges (i) the Sarah Tucker college, Palancottah, (ii) the Presentation Convent College, Vepery, (iii) St. Mary's Presentation Convent College, Black Town and Madras in which there was an aggregate strength of 10 in each. Parents did not evince any interest in sending their girls to these colleges due to the stigma attached in sending grown up girls to these colleges due to the stigma attached in sending grownup girls to colleges. In the beginning of the twentieth century, their literacy percentage was only 0.9. Female education practically was confined to primary stage only as the following table indicates.

Though the number of females receiving instruction at every stage had increased during the above period, the number had greatly decreased at the upper secondary stage. This is a clear evidence to prove that female higher education was not favored.

Table – 1: Women in Higher Education during 1896-1902

Details of Education	1896-97	1901-02
Upper secondary	328	491
Lower secondary	3,196	3,575
Upper primary	5,350	6,078
Lower primary	97,680	106,855

Source: Report of Education Commission, 1882, Government of British India

The Government, to accelerate the progress of women's education, in addition to the establishment of Model Primary Schools for girls at important centres, initiated a number of measures such as liberal grants, appointment of additional female staff and creation of inspecting agency. As result of such steps taken, there was some visible progress in their education. In 1902-03 there were 478 primary school exclusively meant for them with strength of 3,975. After a decade (1911) the number of schools increased to 883 with strength of 54,337 pupils. At the secondary stage also the growth was impressive. The number increased from 2,800 in 1902-03 to 3,348 in 1911-12. During 1911-12 there were 19 girls in colleges. It is to be noted that during the quinquennium 1897-1902, there women students took the M.A. Degree of the Madras University. In order to make their education real and meaningful instruction was given in health, house management, music, domestic science and some industrial subjects. Despite such measures, only one percentage of them was in schools in 1912. Even after a quarter century (1927), the percentage was only 2.5.

During the period between the year 1900-25 in the field of their higher education also not much advancement was made. There were four colleges exclusively meant for women in which the strength was 348. It was far from satisfactory and hence it could hardly be said that there were even the faint beginning of higher education among the girls. During the second quarter of the twentieth century it is gratifying to note that about 155 of them received instruction in Indian medicine and 2 in medical schools. During 1933-34, 77 of them were in Medical Colleges and 2 in Law colleges. After 1940, large number of them took to higher education. Between the year 1937-42 out of every 200 persons who took to higher education, 40 were females. The post war educational reconstruction report, 1944 was fully aware of the importance of their education and emphasized that "whatever are needed boys and

men even apply to technical education not so many years since”.

Madras University is one of the earliest to provide special courses suited to women and women’s education has flourished in this University to a much greater extent than in any part of the country. Degree courses like B.Sc., and M.Sc. in Home Science were offered in order to make them good wives, mothers and citizens. It is most disheartening to note that despite all such laudable attempts, the women who were in schools and colleges were roughly about 3 per cent even on the eve of Independence. Yet disparity in education between the men and women continued throughout the period under review and Indian Universities, as has been rightly said, mostly were “places of preparation of a man’s word”. Despite many attempts to introduce education suited to women, it is still a far cry.

Women Technical Education in Colonial Tamil Nadu

There are many evidences (Silapadikaram, Purananuru, Pathittrupathu) to show that women in ancient Tamil Nadu had a much higher status than what they came to have in later period. The women of ancient period had distinguished themselves in their cultural attainments and virtuous living. The girls of the sangam age were given a good training in literature, music and drama. Many sangam poems are attributed to women scholars. The education received by women was different from that imparted to men. The girls were given good training in domestic science. “Ancient India was able to build up her economic life and prosperity and figured in the ancient world as the chief exporting country supplying foreign countries from time immemorial through the ages with luxuries and other articles turned out by her cottage industries and handicrafts. The 64 Kalas as in the given in the different texts namely Kamasutra, Sukra Nitisara and Lalita Vistara do not agree in all particulars and in the terms used for the Kalas, but the essentials are the same. Vatsayana in his Kamasutra lays down a list of the sixty four arts considered appropriate for young ladies.

The economic and the cultural life of the ancient times and the diversity of occupations in which women indulged in are well depicted as we go through the list. For women’s technical education there were classes in the home arts or domestic economic subjects, as they were called plain, needlework, dressmaking, laundry work and cookery but as their name imply, these classes were not of a professional or commercial character and the first two subjects were taught in centres by domestic economy teachers. There appears to have been but little idea of the necessity for broad training of girls and women in craftwork.

In modern period women’s education made some progress by the contribution of Christian missionaries in the Madras Presidency. The number of literates per thousand among women in the Madras Presidency was mainly due to the Christian missionaries, that women’s education progressed. Many missionaries like the London Mission, Roman Catholics Mission, Baptist Mission Free Church Mission and Lutheran Mission established schools in the Madras Presidency exclusively for girls. Social reforms in the presidency appreciating the work of the Christian missionaries, themselves began to make serious attempts to spread women’s education.

The Calcutta University commission made important recommendations. It suggested that a Purdah schools should be organized for Hindu and Muslim girls whose parents were willing to extend their education, up to 15 to 16 years of age. A special board of women’s education should be established in the Calcutta University and should be empowered to propose special course of study more particularly suited for women and to organize co-operative arrangements for teaching in women’s colleges more particularly for the training of teachers and in preparing for medical course.

The home was the centre of all productive processes literary and vocational and the girl was

taught to read, write, to preserve food, to cook, to spin, to weave, to draw, to paint, to knit, to embroider, to nurse, to look after the old, to take care of children, to sing, to accelerate herself, to decorate the house, maintain garden, to listen to stories with morals, prepare for worship and thus be generally useful to the family. Our polytechnics should help young women of India. Diversified, practical type of training in technical, vocational, commercial, welfare, and home economics should be included in the technician education. The needs and the demands of the emerging socio economic order should be catered to while planning the courses. We have just seen now ancient. India trained her women in all the secular arts at home.

TECHNICAL TRAINING FOR WOMEN

Technical and industrial education of women and girls in accordance with the commission's recommendations were placed under the control of the department of industries. The list of industries included for them were spinning, weaving, lace-making, embroidery, down thread work, plain needlework, mat-making, basket-making knitting, leather modeling, book-binding, toy-making, button-making, crochet work and domestic economy (specially fine laundry work) later tailoring were added. The system of providing instruction for them was of school-cum-factory type of institution. Cottage industries acted as central depots for training of recruits and their employments. A central body or agency was set up at Madras for the purchase of raw materials in bulk for distribution to the various institutions catering to those particular industries and for selling the products produced by them. They consisted exclusively of ladies. The Lucy Perry Noble Institute for women, Rachanayapuram, in Madras district was recognized as a special school. The institute combines sewing, embroidery, tailoring, weaving gardening and farming as well as in general cultural educational subjects.

WOMEN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Miss Fearn, (England) the women specialist in physical training, continued to do extremely useful work by supervising the physical activities in girls schools in the city of Madras and by conducting classes for the training of teachers in physical exercise. Prior to the appointment of Miss Fearn there was no accepted system of physical education in general use in girls schools in Madras. In some large schools there was no drill at all in several schools. No provision for physical activity and games, other than Kummi, and Kollattam, was made. The first step necessary to alter this state of affairs was to train teachers who would be capable of supervising with understanding physical exercises and work, who would be able to pick out children requiring individual attention and treat them separately and who could organize games suitable to the prevailing local conditions and grade the exercises accordingly. To this end weekly classes had been taught drill, the theory of gymnastics and exercises suited to Indian life. They had also learnt how to make up their own drill tables and to select and teach games. The same lessons had been given to the students in the government training schools in Madras. At the end of the course in March 1923, an examination for a teachers certificate was held, for which 25 candidates entered of who 20 passed out of the 20, 8 were teachers from Indian aided schools and 12 were students from the training schools.

In 1923-24 number of arts colleges for women was four, but number of women admitted to these colleges rose from 367 to 390. The Lady Willingdon Training College for Women Madras commenced working as a separate college during the year under review. The number of women reading in the Madras Medical College rose from 31 to 38" in the same year.

SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

The number of training schools for mistresses both in government and aided schools rose from 30 to 31 with the opening of a training section in the R.C. Fort Girls School, Tiruchirappalli. There were under training 1,551 women in these schools as against 1,393 in the previous year 1922. The number of teachers undergoing training in the secondary and elementary grades was 198 and 1,353 respectively against 150 and 1,243 respectively in 1922-23. The demand for training women teachers was however, in excess of the supply. The preparatory classes in the government training schools for mistresses at Mangalore, Calicut, Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli, Thanjore and Cuddalore provided additional facilities for the general education of Hindu and Muslim women whose general education was not up to the standard required for admission to the training classes but who wished to be trained as teachers. Five scholarships in the Government Training School for Mohammedan Women, Tiruchirappalli were given to enable Muslim girls to complete their general education with a view to being trained as teachers.

CONCLUSION

Women education was an important segment of colonial India and Tamil Nadu. Women's education was acknowledged in 1854 by the East Indian Company's Programme: Wood's Dispatch. Slowly, after that, there was progress in female education, but it initially tended to be focused on the primary school level and was related to the richer sections of society. The overall literacy rate for women increased from 0.2 per cent in 1882 to 6 per cent in 1947. In western India Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitri Bai became pioneers of female education when they started a school for girls in 1848 in Pune. In 1878, the University of Calcutta became one of the first universities to admit female graduates to its degree programmes, before any of the British universities had later done the same. This point was raised during the Ilbert Bill controversy in 1883, when it was being considered whether Indian judges should be given the right to judge British offenders. The role of women featured prominently in the controversy, where English women who opposed the bill argued that Bengali women, whom they stereotyped as "ignorant" and neglected by their men and that Indian men should therefore not be given the right to judge cases involving English women. Bengali women who supported the bill responded by claiming that they were more educated than the English women opposed to the bill and pointed out that more Indian women had degrees than British women did at the time.

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D. Senthil Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Government Arts College, Tiruchirappalli , Tamil Nadu.

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