



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN PROTESTANT MISSIONARIES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION TO THE WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU, 1890-1901

KEY WORDS: Christian missionaries, Tranquebar Mission, Sarah Tucker

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The contributions of Christian missionaries is unquestionable with regard to women's education and their service in higher education among women is incomparable. Tamil girls who were educated till 1880s up to a maximum of teacher training course in schools began to feel the need to take up high school education and even collegiate education due to the motivation of women missionaries. The Pietistic Movement in Germany spread a wave of missionary zeal in Europe. The first Protestant Mission in Tamil Nadu called the Tranquebar Mission was the outcome of that movement which came to be established in 1706. From then onwards many Protestant Missions came to be established in Tamil Nadu.

Most of the women missionaries who arrived after 1880 were graduates and well qualified. They were not content with the minimum education obtained by the Indian women. They challenged that the Tamil woman could qualify themselves for a higher degree and share the responsibilities of teaching in High Schools and Colleges for women along with European missionaries. Mrs. Anna Sathianadhan's book *Good - Mother*, which projected the ultimate aim of a girl to become only a good mother and nothing more, was taught to the girls in the primary schools as a scripture truth due to patriarchal mind set of the early Women missionaries, conditioned by their times as revealed.¹ Slowly this concept lost its relevance and the book, which was widely circulated among women lost its appeal, as missionary ladies with higher educational qualification and better understanding of women's role in society entered into the arena of missionary movement. These missionary women were influenced by latest feminist ideologies like the *Woman's Bible*² of Elizabeth Candy Stanton, a prime theoretician of women's suffrage in America. She said, "Women fill the editors and the professors chairs, plead at the bar of justice, walk the wards of the hospital and speak from the pulpit and the platform and such is the type of womanhood which the bridegroom of our enlightened public sentiments welcomes today and such is the triumph of wise virgins over the folly".³ A few changes that had occurred in the Provincial towns in India also removed the prejudices against women's higher education.

Native Response to Higher Education

The growing sensitiveness to western thinking and the desire of educated men to have educated wives became a definite reason to encourage women to take up higher studies. Men, who remained a stumbling block in women's progress earlier, now took the lead in changing the general apathy towards women's education. Secondly, the missionaries themselves set a model to the natives for their active involvement in various programme challenged the wrong notion that a woman had no Vole to play outside the family. Thirdly the Indian Education Commission of 1882, in its reports presented the fact that female education was still in its extreme infancy and backward condition and it needed to be fostered in every legitimate way.⁴ When the Government took additional interest in secondary education, the Missionary Societies moved further by introducing English as the medium of instruction in High Schools and paved the way for the promotion of collegiate education. Sarah Tucker Institutions took the lead in it and reorganized to become an English High school for women in 1888⁵ in order to enable women to pursue higher studies. In Madurai for the first time, female candidates appeared, for Government Middle School Examination in English in 1895.⁶ In 1906, English became the medium of instruction in all High Schools⁷ for there appeared proficiency in English even among the local women.⁸

Even in higher education only the native Christians took the lead and grabbed the opportunity in qualifying themselves with higher degrees. There was still reservation among Hindu women to take up higher education; Mrs. Brander, Inspector's of Schools remarked that High School for caste-Hindu girls had not been found possible even in 1888 and the number of rich girls at school was still quite insignificant.⁹ As per the educational statistics, it was

formed about four-fifth of the educated.¹⁰ The Hindu, a local English newspaper stated that the community of native Christians had not only secured a conspicuous place in the field of higher education but also in the education of their own.¹¹

The Christians were far ahead of the other creeds as far as female education was concerned.¹² The need for more high schools for girls to be established in the Madras Presidency became obvious. Yet, due to the absence of high schools not enough girls could pursue higher education.¹³ It was rightly said that in Madras, foreign Christian missions laid the entire foundations of higher education of girl.¹⁴

Establishment of High Schools

With the Passage of time, demand for education considerably grew among the Indians. To meet and to foster this growing demand for female education, three agencies were at work-government through education department, Christian missions and committee of Indians who started Schools with the object of counteracting the anglicizing tendency of education given by these two former agencies.¹⁵

As per as the higher education of local Christians or others were concerned, the Mission was quite specific that funds must be raised from other sources and not from the Mission.¹⁶ Again not many missionaries could spare their time here, for it demanded more advanced teaching and learning.¹⁷ Yet due to the patient and untiring efforts of a few women missionaries, the missions managed to take up the lead in introducing a number of high schools in different towns. The missions at Tirunelveli were the pioneers in promoting higher education among women. St. John's Girls Training School was started at Nazareth under the able leadership of Rev. A. Margoschis, a S.P.G, Missionary. In 1883, this was the only institution for the Matriculation course of the University. Ms. Groves, the C.M.S. Missionary supervised this school.¹⁸ The Sarah Tucker Institution, Palayamkottai which sent girls for Matriculation Examination in 1890, the North - Wick School of the U.F.C.S.M., Madras in 1892 and the Bentinck School, Madras in 1896.¹⁹ Madurai Girl's High School sent its girls for Matriculation examination only in 1900 though high school study in Tamil was introduced in 1890.²⁰

Government Schools were also established at different places more especially in Madras, which always stood in the forefront with an increase of twenty-six English and six vernacular schools for girls in 1887-88. Since 1890, the Government brought all girls under the control of two Inspectress and five Assistant Inspectress.²¹ By 1893, the number of high schools for girls increased from eight to twenty seven and the students' strength grew in number from thirty-eight to two hundred and seventy-eight.²²

The increase in the number of High Schools did not equally improve the number of students in completing the course due to the high standard of Matriculation Examination. In L.M.S. Boarding High School for Girls, Madras, only nineteen pupils had passed the Matriculation examination between 1896 and 1902 of which twelve were trained as teachers and seven went for B.A. in

Madras University.²³In 1899 – 1900, twenty two High Schools sent 149 girls for Matriculation examination of which only forty passed. The Education Department realized, that on the abolition of higher examination for women, the number of female candidates that came up for the matriculation examination would increase considerably.²⁴ The High School students studied for the Matriculation examination till 1910, then the School Leaving Certificate largely took up the place of Matriculation. The most important change effected was that success or failure did not depend only upon one examination at the end of the high school course, but much more upon the daily work, both oral and written during the three year course.²⁵ Still, the number of Hindu girls who appeared for Matriculation examination remained very low. Until 1899 in the Madras Presidency, 309 had passed Matriculation examination of whom, one was a Mohammedan, four Bramins, six Parsis, seventy-one Indian Christians and 227 Europeans and Eurasians.²⁶ In Madurai, the first Hindu girl entered the normal class in 1898²⁷ and in 1904 the first Hindu girl passed through the lower Secondary examination.²⁸

Social prejudices appeared the main constraint for this slow progress in Hindu Women's education.²⁹ Secondly, a trend developed by 1890 when a number of rival schools began to be established in different parts of the Province by local Hindu and Mohammedan men of high classes. The Mission's administration called these as rival schools, since they intended mainly to attract students from Mission Schools rather than admitting non-goers of Schools. The native agencies³⁰ seriously involved in higher education with a view to thwart the missionary influences.³¹ They carried a propaganda that the Mission Schools involved in conversion and Bible teaching and were anti-national in nature. The opening up of Gosha schools or schools exclusively for Mohammaden girls by the Mission formed another cause for this rivalry. In spite of the appointment of Hindustani teachers, the Ulemas and Muslim officials opposed these mission schools.³² The Hindus, on the other side, felt it not proper, to send their sisters and daughters to a school where in foreigners imparted education in an alien tongue. They considered it tantamount to racial suicide.³³ Though this reduced the strength of the Mission Schools temporarily, but it did not affect the growth of the school in the long run. Due to these oppositions the female education was among Hindus and Muslims confined to primary stage only and the literacy rate among women remained at a mere 0.9% in 1901.³⁴

FEMALE EDUCATION IN FIVE YEARS (1896 - 1901)

Levels of Education	1896-1897	1901-1902
No. of pupils (Girls)		
No. of pupils (Girls)		
Upper Secondary	328	491
Lower Secondary	3,196	3,575
Upper Primary	5,350	6,078
Lower Primary	97,688	1,06,855

Source: Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency 1901-02, Vol.I, p.47.

The sudden fall in number from lower primary to upper primary indefinitely due to the critical attitude of Hindus and Muslims and the social reservations against women's education. Yet, the missionaries received general spirit of appreciation; and encouragement from social reformers, the Government and the liberal-minded Indian men and women. In 1905, the Collector of Madurai said, "One of the greatest forces for the regeneration of India is the educational work that is being done for the girls of this country".³⁵ In the Madras Presidency, S. Sathianadhan, an Indian Christian social reformer encouraged his wife Kamala Krishnamma³⁶ to start a women's magazine called Indian Ladies Magazine in 1901³⁷. This was the first English magazine for women in India edited by a woman.³⁸ This progressive journal did much to highlight the various facets and aspects of women's freedom and was devoted to women's achievements for many years. It was popular throughout India especially in the south. It opened up samities, women's clubs, and associations.³⁹

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