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Development of women's education in Tamil Nadu: A study

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Abstract

A country can advance politically, socially, culturally and economically, only if both men and women have access to education. Education of Women is far more important than men. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, men's education is the education of an individual but women's education is the education of the whole family. Unless women have the right to education, a nation cannot advance and achieve its goal of development. Tamil Nadu played an important role for the growth and development of Women's education from the beginning. The writings and speeches of social reformers gave new impetus to fight for their rights. The emergence of Social Reformers created an atmosphere and paved the way for Social Reforms in general and the Emancipation of Women in particular. This paper traces the growth and development of women's education in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: women education, social reforms, pre-primary, primary, secondary, college professional, technical, educations

1. Introduction

The old African proverb - "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)" was a pioneer in its time for realizing the importance of women's education when men predominated education opportunities. This maxim recognized the benefits of education and has repeatedly become the motivation for global development efforts to offer education opportunities for women. Female Education has been the key to the progress of each and every nation. Educating a girl means educating a mother and in turn, educating her children, the future citizens of the country. While underlying the importance of Women's Education, Jawaharlal Nehru, said: "Education of boys is education of one person, but the education of a girl is the education of the entire family.

2. Pre-primary education in Tamil Nadu

Prior to 1947 little attention was paid to Pre-Primary Education. It was intended to help children to cultivate good habits such as cleanliness of person, good manners, charity and decency in speech, kindness, consideration for others and the promotion of group consciousness. Few Nursery Schools at Palayamkottai, Karaikudi, Kumbakonam, Mylapore, Washermenpet and Tondiarpet were started soon after Independence. Municipal Councils, keen on starting Nursery Schools, were given Subsidies. In 1950, the Corporation of Madras obtained a subsidy of Rs. 8,552 from the State Government for the above purpose. During 1957-1958, there were 30 Pre-Primary Schools in Tamil Nadu and 1,516 girls received instruction.

3. Elementary education

Since 1947, a drive towards Mass and Compulsory Primary Education to all school-going boys and girls under a phased programme is in operation. Besides, steps were also taken to prevent "wastage and stagnation". Owing to the above measures in 1946-47, there were 1,776 Elementary Schools for Girls and 2,34,497. Girl Students were receiving instruction in these schools. This indicates that the percentage of enrolment in the age group of 6-11 constituted 52.5% of girls.

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4. Secondary education

Since 1947, with regard to Secondary Education, the Policy of the Government was to introduce bifurcated Courses to suit the needs of the Girls. The bifurcated Courses were introduced during 1948-49 and for the girls, the study of Domestic Science, Music and Dance were included in the curriculum. Though much was spoken of Women's Education in the Secondary Education Commission (October 1952-June 1953), its recommendations were not given effect due to lack of funds. When Kamaraj assumed office a Scheme of Diversified Courses such as Engineering, Textile Technology, Secretarial Course and Home Science, were introduced. In 1958, to find out the ways and means to improve Women's Education, the Government of India appointed a National Committee. The Committee on Women's Education recommended that the Education of Women should be given special consideration and special funds should be allotted for their development. Stressing the importance of Women's Education, the Kothari Commission observed: "for full development of our human resources, the improvement of homes and for molding the character of children during the most impressionable years of infancy, the Education of Women is of greater importance than that of men".

Owing to the measures taken by the State, the progress in Secondary Education was also worthy of mention. The number of Secondary Schools and Students increased from 101 and 32,861 in 1946-1947 to 145 and 68,762 in 1956-57 and again in 1966-67 the number increased to 395 and 4,18,609 respectively.

5. Growth of women's colleges

The Progress of Female Education at the Higher Level was also appreciable. In 1946-1947, there were five Colleges for Women in the State and in these colleges, 1,236 Women were receiving instruction. To study the problems of Higher Education, the Government of India appointed the University Education Commission in 1948, under the Chairmanship of S. Radhakrishnan. The Report is a valuable document which deals with all the major problems in Higher Education including the Female Education. Since 1950, all Women's Colleges got improved. The Government improved their libraries, laboratories, hostels and play grounds. In 1956, the Collegiate Education was re-organised and the new pattern consisted of a one year P.U.C., followed by a Degree Course of three years and Post-Graduate Course of two years after the first degree. To raise the Standard of Collegiate Education Refresher Courses in English, Science and World History were conducted at Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli.

As a result of the above measures, in 1948, Ethiraj College for Women of Madras, Lady Doak College of Madurai and Nirmala College of Coimbatore were affiliated to the Madras University. The Queen Mary's College, Madras, started Intermediate Courses in household Arts. For the benefit of employed women who wished to continue their studies, an evening College was started at Queen Mary's College, Madras. The strength in Women's Colleges grew enormously.

6. Professional and technical education

Women showed keen interest in professional and technical education also. Since Independence, their interest in

studying professional courses such as Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture and Law is appreciable.

7. Impact of western education

The introduction of Western System of Education, along with the growth of Female Education, led to a great social awakening among women. K. Natarajan has stated that, "If a person who died a hundred years ago came to life to-day, the first and foremost important change that would strike him is the revolution in the position of women." While taking measures to emancipate women, the reformers had two divergent views. One section preferred 'Women's Uplift'. The meaning attached to 'Women's Uplift' was reform of social practices so as to enable women to play a more important and more constructive role in society. The other section preferred, 'Equal Rights for Men and Women'. The meaning attached to 'Equal Rights' was 'the extension of the civil rights enjoyed by men in the political, economic and family spheres to women also.' However, a close study will reveal the fact that the Women's Uplift Conception was primarily educational. It was also realized that there cannot be educated people without educated women. As a result of the Growth of Education among Women, "women were coming out of their shells. She is no longer cabined, cribbed, confined in the details of Zenana." Today the status of women is one of equality and dignity. The modern women are no longer bound by false standards of modesty and reserve. Owing to the growth of female education, she no longer considers feminine etiquette to be one of total subordination and helpless dependence on man. She has the confidence, born of ability, to compete with others on an equal footing. To accelerate the process of the emancipation of women, the educated elite among women were engaged in a variety of public activities. Annie Besant, Muthulakshmi Reddi and Kamala were the pioneers in this regard. The Movement was geared to securing equal rights in inheritance, marriage, requirement of the consent of both parties for marriage and the right to share equal responsibilities along with men in offices as well as in domestic affairs.

The birth of a prose literature in the Tamil Country in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries served as a powerful weapon of thought and expression. The writings of Bharathiyar and Bharathidasan gave new impetus to fight for their rights. The emergence of Social Reformers like Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker and Thiru V.Kalyana Sundaram created an atmosphere, conducive to Social Reforms in the Tamil Country. While these measures paved the way for Social Reforms in general and the Emancipation of Women in particular, it was the introduction of Western System of Education that had created the climate for these reforms.

8. Conclusion

The dawn of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a new era in the annals of the History of Education of Women in the Tamil Country. During the British Period, the diffusion of Western and Non-Hindu Ideas created a stir in the Tamil Country. The British Administrative System was based on the 'Rule of Law' and the reforms of Bentinck and Dalhousie and no wonder the Missionaries questioned the unequal treatment of the various sections in Hinduism. Further, the reformist zeal encouraged Mrs. Annie Besant to

organize the Theosophical Society at Adyar near Madras. The Society stood for the Emancipation of Women in the Tamil Country. This was followed by the establishment of 'The Women's Indian Association,' and 'The South Indian Women's Association' which stood for the abolition of social evils and thereby helped the elevation of the status of women in the Tamil Country.

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