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## EDUCATIONAL UPLIFTMENT OF WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT:

*During the period of 1947 -1967, the women got impetus in their educational advancement in Tamil Nadu. The Ministry under Rajaji, Kamaraj and Bhaktavatsam in Madras introduced many educational measures for the upliftment of the women. There witnessed phenomenal growth of female education in primary, secondary, higher professional and technical education. The Madras Government in collaboration with Central Government took all measures to improve the educational status of the women. The Congress Government formed educational commissions and recommendations were properly implemented. Women education was given a special assignment.*



**KEYWORDS:** Women, Upliftment, Education, Tamil Nadu, Madras Government, India.

### INTRODUCTION

After India got independence from the yoke of the colonial rule, there was the growth of education at all stages in India including Tamil Nadu. The growth of women's education also aimed at the upliftment of the women in the sphere of over all education.

Since Independence onwards the Madras Government had expanded its activities in this regard. Its object was to promote public education with the main aim of getting into school all the school - going boys and girls and keeping them there till they

attained full-fledged education by completing the fifth standard.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the policy aimed at bifurcating courses at the secondary stage to suit the different needs and aptitude of the female students.<sup>2</sup> During the period of Kamaraj rule, the government followed a policy of development of primary education and the free education scheme which instead gave a boost to the growth of secondary education particularly in rural side. The poor female students in rural areas were mostly benefited by this policy. The government was fully aware that the expansion of free education upto the primary stage could not help the poor females to

seek a fair living. To enable them to seek avenues of employment to a reasonable extent, the government followed a policy of free education upto the secondary stage to all irrespective of caste and sex from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1964. Then it was further extended upto the Pre-University course. Regarding higher education, the government followed a policy of bringing higher education in rural areas for the benefit of the rural people. Due to this trend, there was phenomenal growth of education. To bring the poor female students into the portals of education, incentives such as free supply of books and slates, grant of fee concessions, scholarship, supply

of milk and food and uniforms were provided by the government. In November 1957, the entire scheme was placed on a regular basis and promoted as a part of the state educational plan. Further the scheme was promoted because of the liberal financial aid of Rs. 3 crores provided by the CARE organization in 1960-1962.<sup>3</sup> These initiatives brought about many changes in the field of female education.

### PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Before Independence, a slight attention was paid to Pre-Primary Education.<sup>4</sup> It was aimed at helping the children to inculcate excellent habits such as cleanliness of person, good manners, charity and decency in speech, kindness, consideration for others and the encouragement of group consciousness. After independence, some nursery schools at Palayamkottai, Karaikudi, Kumbakonam, Mylapore, Washermenpet and Tondiarpet came into being.<sup>5</sup> Municipal Councils interested in starting nursery schools were given incentives. In 1950, the Corporation of Madras got an aid of Rs. 8,552 from the State government.<sup>6</sup> During 1957-1958, there were nearly 30 pre-primary schools in Tamil Nadu and 1,516 girls received education.<sup>7</sup> During 1964-1966, Kothari Commission recommended an enrolment of at least five per cent of the children of the age group 3 - 5 years. Further it suggested a phased programme spread over the next 20 years. The commission paid attention to the necessity of female teachers in these schools.<sup>8</sup> During 1967 - 68, there were 32 nursery schools providing education to the pre-primary school children in Tamil Nadu.<sup>9</sup> Thus pre-primary education was encouraged.

### ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Like Pre-Primary education, elementary education was also given importance. Since Independence, a thrust was given for mass and compulsory primary education to all school-going boys and girls under a phased programme. Moreover, actions were also initiated to prevent "wastage and stagnation". Due to these activities, in 1946 - 1947, there were 1776 elementary schools for girls and 2,34,497<sup>10</sup> girl students received educational opportunities in these schools. This meant that the percentage of enrolment in the age group of 6-11 was 52.5 for girls. During the 1950's, God Father Scheme and Social Improvement Conferences were undertaken and as a result, between 1947 and 1957 the number of girls in elementary schools increased from 2,34,497 to 8,76,556.<sup>11</sup>

From 1960 onwards, the Government of Madras introduced a new scheme of compulsory education for the students in the age group of 6 - 11 in 3 stages under a phased programme. It aimed at to bring under education all girl children of school-going age.

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

Regarding secondary education, since 1947, the policy of the government was to introduce bifurcated courses to meet needs of the girls. During the period of 1948-1949, the bifurcated courses were introduced<sup>12</sup> and for the girls, the subjects like Domestic Science, Music and Dance were included for study. Due to lack of funds, the recommendations of the Secondary Education Commission (October 1952 -June 1953), regarding women education was not given much effect.<sup>13</sup> During the period of Kamaraj rule, new courses like Engineering, Textile Technology, Secretarial Course and Home Science were introduced.<sup>14</sup> To find out the ways and means to improve women's education, the Government of India appointed a National Committee in 1958. This Committee advocated that the education of women should be given special attention and special funds should be allotted for its growth.<sup>15</sup> Insisting the importance of women's education, the Kothari Commission advocated the improvement of homes and shaping the character of children during their infant stage. It viewed that education of women is most needed one than of men".<sup>16</sup>

Because of the steps taken by the Madras Government, the progress in Secondary Education was phenomenal. The number of secondary schools and students increased from 101 and 32,861 during 1946 - 1947<sup>17</sup> to 145 and 68,762 during 1956-1957<sup>18</sup> and Further, during 1966 - 1967 this number increased to 395 and 4,18,609<sup>19</sup> respectively.

### COLLEGIATE EDUCATION

There was remarkable progress of women education at the higher level.. During 1946-1947, there were only five women colleges in the Madras State . In these colleges 1,236 women were studied.<sup>20</sup> To examine the issues of higher education, the Government of India appointed University Education Commission in 1948, under the Chairmanship of S. Radhakrishnan. Its report is an important document which had highlighted all the major issues in higher education including, female education.<sup>21</sup> Since 1950, all the Women's Colleges began to improve. They extended their libraries, laboratories, hostels and play grounds. In 1956, the collegiate education was re-organised . A new pattern consisting of a one year P.U.C., followed by a degree course of 3 years and post-graduate course of 2 years after the first degree was initiated.<sup>22</sup> To improve the standard of college teachers, refresher courses in English, Science and World History were started at various places like Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli.<sup>23</sup>

Owing to these measures, in 1948 the Ethiraj College for Women of Madras, Lady Doak College of Madurai and Nirmala College of Coimbatore were affiliated to the Madras University.<sup>24</sup> The Queen Mary's College, Madras, started intermediate courses in household arts. For the benefit of employed women who opted for their higher studies, an evening college was started there. The strength in Women's Colleges began to increase. During 1956 - 1957, there were fifteen women colleges and there 4,939 women received higher education.<sup>25</sup> During the period of 1966-1967, the number of colleges increased to twenty two and the numerical strength of the attendance of women increased to 21935.<sup>26</sup>

### PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Women also illustrated their interest in professional and technical sectors. Since 1947, they began to enter into professional courses like Medical, Engineering, Agricultural and Law . During the period of 1956-1957, there were around 552 women in Medical Colleges. Three women were joined Veterinary Science and eight women joined Agricultural Science. In the Madras Presidency College, there were also nineteen women students.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting to mention that during the period 1966 - 1967, there were 2976 women students in various professional institutions.<sup>28</sup> No doubt, women also pursued technical education with much interest. Hence, during 1964-1965, there were nearly 375 women students in polytechnics.<sup>29</sup>

### IMPRESSIVE EFFECT

The spread of the western education and ideas along with the growth of female education paved the way for great social awareness among women. Due to women education, the women came to life to-day and an important change occurred in the position of women."<sup>30</sup> To emancipate women , the social reformers advocated the upliftment of women. This upliftment is meant for social practices aiming to enable women to play an appreciable constructive role in society. Likewise equal rights for men and women are much spoken about. The meaning attached to equal rights was to provide the civil rights enjoyed by men in the political, economic and family spheres to women also.<sup>31</sup> However the women's uplift conception is based on the foundation of education. It was also observed that there cannot be educated people without educated women.

Due to the growth of women education, women came to public and face all the challenges laid before them. They came of their age-old restrictions which were imposed on them by the male dominated society.<sup>32</sup> Today the status of women is based on equality and dignity. The modern women are aiming at their empowerment in all the spheres of public activity. Due to the growth of women, they came out of their total subordination and dependence on men. Women cultivated the confidence and ability to compete with in employment .<sup>33</sup> To speed up the process of the emancipation of women, the elite women intellectuals engaged in a public and political activities. Annie Besant, Muthulakshmi Reddy and Sarojini Varadappan were the pioneer women leaders of par excellence. The women movement geared to secure equal rights in inheritance, marriage, and in the right to undertake responsibilities along with men in public and family affairs.<sup>34</sup>

To conclude , the educational upliftment placed women in a respectable and equal position in the modern Tamil society. The women began to enjoy a complete freedom of activity in the growing, advancing and nations like India. Thus female education is considered a major panacea for all the backwardness of the women who had undergone trials and tribulations tradition bound orthodox society. No doubt, the measures of the Madras Government in Tamil region were most beneficial for the advancement of the women in modern Tamil Nadu.

### END NOTES

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