



GOVERNMENT'S SPECIAL POLICY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Education Commission discussed the problem of female education with great insight in 1881-82 and it pointed out that even, in the most advanced States of India 98 percent of the female children of school-going age were still outside the schools, and that out of the total female population covered by its enquiries, no less than 99.5 million were returned as unable to read and write. As such it therefore, stressed the need to give special treatment to the education of women and recommended the provision of larger funds for it from all sources—municipal, local or provincial. In order to attract more girls to schools and retain them for a longer period, it recommended liberal grant of concession in fees, award of prizes and institution of scholarships, especially for those who were above 1 year of age. As an encouragement to private effort, it recommended that conditions for the grant of aid to girls' schools should be easier, and the rates of grant-in-aid higher than those prescribed for boys' schools.



KEY WORDS: All India Women's Conference, Female Education, Government's Policy, Report of the Commission.

INTRODUCTION :

The two decades following the Report of the Commission were a period of financial stringency, and it was not possible for the Government to organize special programmes for the development of education for women or to assign adequate grants for the purpose. The expansion of private enterprise was so great that, in spite of the lukewarm support from the government, the education of women evinced some progress by the end of the nineteenth century.

Even in 1901-02, the burden of providing educational facilities for girls lay heavily on private efforts. Of the 12 colleges for women, only one, the Bethune College, was conducted by the Government. Of the 422 secondary schools, as many as 356, were conducted by private efforts which also accounted for 3,982 girls' schools out of a total of 5,305.

A significant development of the nineteenth century was the opening of careers for women outside the home. The careers to be opened were that of teachers and nurses. A career in medicine was the next to be opened and in 1901-02 there were 76 women in medical colleges and 166 in medical schools. Besides, there were a fairly large number of women undergoing training of nurses, midwives, etc. An important event

of this period was the creation of the Lady Dufferin Fund with the sole object of developing medical education among women. Liberal encouragements from other sources were also available at this time. Most of the students in medical and art courses were Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Indian- Christians and Zoroastrians. The Hindu and Muslim women had not yet taken to these careers. The education of women showed some progress during the next twenty years, mainly owing to the great public awakening created by the national struggle for independence and the First World War. The number of colleges increased in 1921-22 and the number of the students in medicine rose from 256 in 1902 to 905 in 1921-22.

In order to encourage the employment of women teachers, a few points were suggested:

- (i) the adoption of pupil-teacher system,
- (ii) the establishment of additional normal schools under, government control,
- (iii) the payment of liberal grants-in-aid to private schools and so on.

Training institutions were also conducted by private efforts and the offer was given to the wives of school masters to qualify themselves as teachers. The widows were trained as teachers for primary schools and the offer of liberal prizes were given to girls as well as to the teachers who trained themselves and would agree to become teachers. The grant of special assistance was given to girls' schools with hostels attached to it. Regarding the supervision of girls' schools, it was, recommended that the organization and strengthening of a special Inspectorate was necessary to assess the work of girls as well as teachers. The inspectorate team were to be formed from among the educated women. It also recommended the adoption of special measures to promote the secondary education of girls.

The general opinion at this period was strongly in favour of differentiation of curricula for boys and girls and the Commission recommended:

- (i) that the standards of instruction in girls' schools, whether primary or secondary, should be simpler than those for boys' schools;
- (ii) that they should be drawn up with special reference to the requirements of home life and the occupations open to women' and
- (iii) that special text books should be prepared for girls schools.

Four colleges were established by the Government. Of the 675 Secondary schools, only 115 were conducted by the Government and more than 70 by the local bodies. Even at the Primary stage, the aided and unaided schools numbered 16,810 in the total of 21,956 institutions. The burden of providing education for women depended on private efforts. The extent of direct state effort had increased considerably between 1901 and 1921.

Another very significant development of this period was the considerable rise in the age of marriage, especially in the urban areas and among girls of the upper classes of society. This was due mainly to the pressure of changing social and economic circumstances and the progress of feminist movement in India. This trend was further increased by the demand of the educated men themselves to have educated wives, and preferably those who had been educated in secondary schools and colleges. M.E. Cousins writes: "The young men of the middle and upper classes insist on securing educated brides". Educated girls began to be preferred in marriage and the education of girls received a very strong impetus. Hindu and Muslim girls, therefore, began to attend the secondary schools and colleges in increasing numbers during this period.

The establishment of the Indian Women's University in Bombay by Maharshi D.K. Karve in 1916 with the help of a magnificent donation made by the late Sir Vithal Das Thackersey was an important milestone. It was originally an unrecognized private institution but it has since been raised to the status of a statutory university must be pointed out that women began to choose a number of new careers during this period. In 1901, their education was mostly restricted to the primary stage of learning and the main careers open to them outside the home were teaching and medicine. The careers in Science, Commerce and Agriculture, etc., were important additions during this period. The girls joined schools and colleges for training in

technical and industrial, careers. They also joined commercial and agricultural careers and entered the different respectable professions required by a civilized society.

A University Commission was appointed by Lord Curzon but it had nothing special to say about women's education. This was followed by the appointment of the Calcutta University Commission in 1916 popularly known as Sadler Commission. In 1919, the Commission made, the first survey of women's higher education in Bengal and made recommendations for two distinct types of female education.

Scrutinizing the fifty years of the western system of Education and finding that it was merely a means for gaining Government jobs than to build character, the Indian leaders came forward with their own projects in the field of higher education. Banaras Hindu University was founded, in 1911 with a women's wing attached to it. The Commission said that "The need of the vast majority who will spend their lives in Zenana, and their education will cease at an early age and who ought to be trained, on the one hand, to perform their Zenana duties with interest and knowledge, and on the other to understand and sympathize with the interest and work of their husbands, brothers and secondly the need of the small but very important minority who will go out into the world to serve their fellows in professional calling or will play their part in the intellectual activities of the progressive section of Indian society and " desire a high training to avail the opportunity different." Inspired by national feelings, the Muslims founded the famous Aligarh Muslim University. The Visva Bharti was founded near Calcutta, Gurukul at Hardwar, and S.N.D.T. Women's University at Bombay. Many women began to appear in the examinations in different faculties of these universities.

NEED FOR FEMALE EDUCATION

The need for female education was widely acknowledged and the demand increased in volume. The women themselves realized that they should strive for a better standard lifestyle. In the words of the Maharani of Baroda, "Far and wide throughout the world today, a new energy is spreading amid the ranks of women of every class. Rich and Poor, educated and ignorant, all alike feel the dawn of an era of fresh usefulness for their sex The women of the East, like the woman of the West may depend on this that in the proper use of education, lays the salvation of her sex. As long as she is ignorant, so long will she remain dejected, oppressed and incapable, if she organizes her efforts, she will respond to the changed environment.

OBSTACLES FOR FEMALE EDUCATION

Female education had to face three obstacles like apathy, early marriage and lack of funds. The apathy was vigorously attacked by public propagation and the second was condemned by the passing of Sarda Act. Want of money which became a most formidable difficulty, confronting, the extension of women's education in British India was met by opening girl's schools financed by the Indians themselves and by Popularizing co-education. Yet in 1921, the disparity in literacy between men and women was persistently increasing.

Between 1922 and 1927, the increase in the number of girls under instruction was 4,00,000. It was a very substantial increase, but the increase in the number of male pupils was 24,00,000. Thus the difference between the number of boys and girls at school, already great, was increased by two million. Many girls attended boy's primary schools and some went to men's colleges. It was the most hopeful event and the Indians were happy to know about it.

The leading men and women came forward to declare aloud that the national prosperity and the place they desired India to occupy among the advanced nations of the world, depended on the women as well as the then of India becoming educated. All members, including the three Indians of the Hartog Committee (1928) went so far as to claim priority for girls' education.

The few educated women who had tasted the fruits of the new learning, sincerely felt that "education was a great social problem of India, and that until female education was lost under the restraints imposed upon it by Indian social traditions, India cannot attain the place to which she aspires as a modern

nation.” In the matter of women’s education, therefore, the progress made during the last fifty years has been little short of marvelous. K. Natarajan writes, “It is a remarkable fact that while during and since the war, there has been, owing to the economic stress, some retardation of the advance in men’s education, these causes have had little effect in checking the steady growth of the girls’ education.” Female education in India passed through total apathy, indifference, ridicule and criticism but finally it reached the point of ready acceptance. Rani Saheb of Sangli declared in 1927, “It may now be safely stated that anywhere in India, the need of education for girls as much as for boys is recognized as a cardinal need of progress—a sine-qua-non of national progress.”

CHANGING TREND TOWARDS FEMALE EDUCATION

A changing trend towards female education became clearly visible due to the efforts and activities of All-India Women’s Conference. The Maharani of Baroda in her presidential address underlined this transition when she noted that, “it is pleasing to watch the signs of the general awakening of interest throughout the country in the cause of the advancement of women.... In the field of education, especially higher education, there have been some brilliant achievements in individual area. Yet a few individual achievements, however, brilliant, cannot make up for the lack of general and well-ordered advancement of the women of the country in the matter of primary and secondary education.”

There was a huge increase in demands for science subjects in higher studies which almost submerged the older domination of literary subjects. The vocational and technical subjects gained wide popularity. Referring to such changes Margaret Cousins remarks, “At least these are getting more demand due to the needs of the country, and to bring a flesh breeze into the stuffy atmosphere of girls’ education of the past twenty years They have also opened the door to the medical profession for those fortunate and brave enough to complete the difficult, costly and lengthy- degree courses.”

REFORM INITIATIVES BY ALL-INDIA WOMEN’S CONFERENCE

The All-India Women’s Conference largely became responsible for the reform in education for women. Its branches conducted adult women classes and- the girls, schools. They also conducted classes for vocational training of women In order to initiate reforms particularly in the curriculum of girls and to bring into existence a new type of college for Indian girls, the Lady Irwin Home Science College was founded in New Delhi to fulfill their aspirations.

The object was to enable women to utilize the advantages of science in their homes and to provide them the knowledge of Art interwoven with that particular heritage embodied in India’s own culture and tradition, in its national games and dances, arts and crafts, sagas and songs and spiritual aspirations. The College took a firm hold on growing desires of parents for a curriculum for their girls, that is both ‘national’ and groomed the young women to be new types of teachers, up-to-date home-makers and mothers, and capable organizers of public services, such as, their new status as responsible citizens

The general interest in women’s education led to the establishment of a number of schools and colleges exclusively for girls and the popularity of co-education even in the face of social restrictions existing in the country M E Cousins insists that “the return to favour of co-education is a very hopeful sign of the times and promises to bridge the unnatural gulf that has existed between the sexes in India since the end of the Buddhist era.” The growing recognition of the utility of education made the girls themselves eager for schools and colleges. Their mothers, having been denied education themselves, tried to secure it for their girls as a rule, especially in the urban areas.

CONCLUSION

The highest aim of women’s education in India was considered to equip them to work freely and bravely with men; or if not with them then alongside them for the benefit of human race. In the very first Conference on Educational Reform, the women had themselves demanded that, “moral training based on spiritual ideals should be made compulsory for all schools and colleges.” The general impression, though

gaining ground in favour of female education, was that it did not favour women to become literary luminaries and scientific prodigies so as to enable them to question the superiority of men and claim equal rights with them. It was enough if besides being loving and sweet spoken, they became helpful companions to their husbands in passing through the life's wilderness.

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