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Genesis and Growth of Women Education in Travancore

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ABSTRACT

Mankind attained tremendous progress through the medium of education. Education was forbidden to women even from the early phases of history. Religion, caste, gender etc acted as major hindrances in the process of women education. The rigidity of caste made the possibility of women education more complicated in Travancore. The category of women either belonged to upper or lower castes had to suffer a lot of constraints and difficulties. Education paved the way for the development of female life in Travancore.

KEY WORDS: Education, Women, Missionaries, Society

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INTRODUCTION

Travancore society was immobile, highly hierarchical, combinative, non- competitive and vertically positioned, which changed structurally and functionally with the advent of the Europeans in the 16th century¹ Breaking up of the joint family and the subsequent change in the land holding patterns, the social reform movements, the influence of democracy into the socio-political and economic spheres of Travancore restructured the society to a great extent. The introduction of western education along with the vernacular education which was started here before provided an opportunity to the people of Travancore to re think the reconstruction of the caste and custom ridden traditional society. In the traditional society, caste determined the status of an individual or group.²It requires education that emphasises the need to redefine the social context through which women are positioned as a subordinate group, both inside and outside the family, with very little power to make decisions. In Travancore the laws of the land varied on the basis of caste. If some categories of women enjoyed respectable position, others were treated as slaves. From such a situation, women came into the forefront of the society by acquiring rights and power. Some parameters helped the women to enter into the civil society of Travancore which direct them to the steps of empowerment. Education worked as a prime agent in the development of womenfolk in Travancore.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To evaluate the origin and escalation of women education in Travancore introduced both by the State and Missionaries.
- Analyse the role of education in the development of womanhood in Travancore.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Analytical and descriptive methodology has been adopted to obtain the sequential investigation of data.

DISCUSSION

Education is one of the most significant instruments for changing women's subjugated position in the society. Education is a double edged instrument. It can contribute to and be an ally of structural change in society by training people in required skills, old, newly emerging and anticipated. People considered education as an essential apparatus that can empower individuals to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.³Education can open doors to emancipation, employment, political participation etc. It is the key that opens the door to

life. Actually women education is not a foreign idea; it is a part of traditional world view. A fear existed in the society that the educated women may become immoral.⁴

The main hurdle for the growth of women's education in nineteenth century was the role of religions played. Hindu parents were not in favour of sending their girls either out into the world or to schools. Education of women had been neglected in Travancore as elsewhere in India. At the age of ten, except in the low caste, girls were shut up in their houses and practically devoid of all liberties. Women were not allowed to see any man except the closest members of their family.⁵ It was thought that they had no mental capacity or quality. They were kept in sheer ignorance and illiteracy. 'To educate a girl is supposed to be doing her and society at large a positive injury.'⁶ Young girls belonging to high castes were kept in strict seclusion. This enforced seclusion dwarfed their mind and crippled their courage.

WOMEN EDUCATION IN TRAVANCORE IN THE 18th CENTURY

In the very inception, the educational development of women in Travancore was slow in the first half of 19th century. *Sabhamatts*, *ezhuthupallis* and *kalaris* were the centres of learning in 18th century.⁷ *Sabhamatts* were run by Brahmin Gurus for Brahmin education, *ezhuthupallis* were established by *Ezhuthachans* for the education of common people and *kalaris* were conducted by Kurup or Gurukkal for physical training.⁸ The society had general discrimination against female education. There were several causes for the prohibition of women's learning. It was believed that education was considered rather irrelevant and immoral by aristocratic ladies. But there was a small section of women who had received education. They were *devadasis*, the daughters of *Nairtaravads* and the Syrian girls. The girl children belonged to Nair and Syrian families were admitted along with boys in the home-grown institutions called *ezhuthupallies*.

The primary motive of girl's education in these institutions was to give training in elementary, moral instruction and some basic lessons in music. Education in schools was denied to women and low castes.⁹ But according to William Logan, the indigenous schools were freely attended by girls. Period of learning was from five to seven years of age and some girls of this age group attended school. Formal higher education was denied to them. The main defect of this indigenous system of elementary schools was the exclusion of girls. Another defect was that the children of both sexes of the low castes who formed the vast majority of population were denied admission in these schools.

Village education was prevalent in Travancore. It was provided exclusively for high caste boys and a very small section of the middle class girls including *devadasis*. So it may be assumed that except an extremely small number of women who received some rudimentary education either at

home or in schools, general or special, almost the whole of the female population of the country was deprived of formal education. It was against this back ground that the missionaries and government agencies launched a new venture of providing education irrespective of caste or sex.

ROLE OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

The introduction of western education in Travancore had generated modern life and civic engagement. The growth of English education altered the vernacular education. English education received abundant support of the governments from the beginning. Christian missionaries like London Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society and Bethel Evangelical Mission Society- the pioneers of women's development made continuous efforts to popularize women's education and empowerment. These missionaries set up an organizational entity by a group of persons on their own initiative or partly by an outside motivation which might be religious to help the people of a locality by undertaking activities in a self reliant manner.

LMS missionaries were the first protestant missionary society which sent missionaries to Kerala. Johanna Mead was the pioneer missionary in the field of women's education in Kerala. The missionaries had definite aims in starting girl's school. When the Christian missionaries began their work in India they realized that no stable and certainly no Christian community could be built up under condition where women were incompetent to teach the young. The main objective of the establishment schools in Travancore was to bring girls more completely under Christian influence in the hope that, if thus educated they could become converts and be fitted for the work of extending knowledge of truth among their countrymen. The missionaries also found that education was one of the means to raise women folk from their low status.

When Johanna Mead started the first girl's school, her primary object was to impart a plain education, united with religious instruction. So the aims of girl's education of the missionaries can be summarized as humanitarian and religious concerns. A lot of schools were started by the missionaries for the upliftment of women education in Travancore. The table shows the nature and missionary category of the schools in detail.

Table 1 Schools Started By Different Missionaries in Travancore

Missionary	School type	Place	Year	Founder
LMS	First English School	Mylady	1809	Rev Ringle Taube
LMS	Commercial School Bazaar School Christian Village Industrial School	Nagercoil Nagercoil	1820	Rev Charles Mead
LMS	Seminary School	Nagercoil		Mrs Johanna Mead
LMS	First Girls' Boarding School First Vocational School	Nagercoil	1819	Mrs Johanna Mead
LMS	Neyyoor School	Neyyoor	1872	Mrs Thompson
LMS	Boarding School First girl's School	Kannammola	1838	Mrs Cox
CEMS	Girls' School Caste Hindu girl School	Trivandrum Mavelikkara	1864 1893	Agus ta Bland Ford Miss Mary May

Source: Self prepared table from primary and secondary sources

Church missionary society was the product of Evangelical Anglicanism. Like other missionary societies, Evangelization was the main aim of the CMS Missionaries. To achieve that entity, they required to educate the people. The missionaries thought the women, who remain the atmosphere of the home, remain ignorant and superstitious. Therefore, the missionaries disclosed education to boys and girls. The main objective of female education was to provide suitable wives for pastors, school masters and other mission agents. The missionary register gives a clear picture of the objectives of women's education. According to it, all Christians who really aimed at the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in India admit that in pursuance of that object female education is one of the chief things which ought to be promoted.

IMPACT OF WESTERN EDUCATION ON WOMEN

The performance of the missionary societies in the field of women education has brought about fantastic changes in the society of Travancore. The activities of the missionaries helped to change the outlook of the people towards girl's education. The activities of the missionaries brought rapid spread of education among the Travancore women. In 1947, the percentage of literacy of males was 58.1 and that of females was 36.0. Members of each caste became aware of their rights in the society and tried to improve their conditions. Social evils such as *smarthavicharam*, *devadasi* system, *pulappedi* etc. vanished from the society. Through the introduction of western education, the synthesis of western and traditional culture became possible.

The educational and social status of women, in the eighteenth and twentieth century Travancore, explicates the deplorable condition of women. But the missionary activities helped to eliminate many evil customs and practices in the society and developed a favourable attitude towards female education. These facilities tremendously enhanced the educational and social status of women

in the society of Travancore in the twentieth century.

WOMEN EDUCATION AND STATE INTERVENTION

The rulers of Travancore were more enlightened than their counterparts in India as they took keen interest in the education of their subjects. As they tried to improve the education system of the state, their efforts became in vein because the high complex caste-ridden society was not in the yoke of development at that time. Their efforts proved in effectual in ensuring educational opportunities for members of all castes and communities. For example, Rani GouriParvatiBai issued a Proclamation in 1817 directing, that the state of Travancore should defray the entire cost of the education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants, and that the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby.⁹

The first attempt of the government to impart modern education in Travancore marked with the establishment of the Raja's Free School at Trivandrum on December 1836. In 1855, J Roberts, the successor of Rev. C Mead, opened several district schools at Kayamkulam, Kottarand Chirayinkil. In 1850, Travancore Diwan declared that at least one per cent of state revenue should be spent on education.¹⁰ By 1894-95, state expenditure on education rose to 3 per cent, by 1903-04 to 6 per cent, by 1914-15 to 14 per cent and by 1924-25 to 18 percent. By 1887, twenty two schools were established in different parts of Travancore. The question of improving vernacular education received the attention of the government only during 1865-66. There were many private vernacular schools established in Travancore before that time. In 1891, about 1,300 such schools with a total of 50,000 pupils were functioning throughout the state.

In 1866, a central school was opened in Trivandrum and also a school in every *taluk* in the state. There were 29 vernacular schools attended by 2,152 pupils at the end of 1868-69. Another important step was taken in 1871 with the establishment of village schools. It was soon realised that public expenditure on vernacular education was proving to be burdensome to the government and this led to the encouragement of private agencies through the grant in-aid system. The number of aided schools rose from 437 to 1,375 between 1881 and 1893. The grant-in-aid code was revised in December 1894. The new rules, known as the 'Travancore educational rules', related to the qualifications of teachers, buildings, accommodation and sanitation, furniture and educational appliances, admission of pupils, etc. A revised curriculum of studies was introduced in 1902, and the schools were classified as high, middle, upper primary and lower primary. In the last two sets of schools, the vernacular language was introduced as the chief medium of instruction. English was taught only as the second language.

When the missionaries were very active in setting up schools for female education, the government remained rather indifferent. The first concrete step was taken only as late as 1865-66 when the government took over the management of a private school which had existed at the Trivandrum cantonment for a few years. It is this school which was raised to a second-grade college for women in 1897. Out of a total of 3,894 ordinary schools (schools other than training schools and special schools) in the state in 1903-04, girls' schools numbered only 182 and the majority of them were run by the missionaries. It has been established that education of girls from early times has been the prime mover of social development. In Travancore, the Maharajas had never showed discrimination among girls and boys in elementary education.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Education is one of the most important apparatus for empowering women with the knowledge skill and self- confidence, what is necessary to participate fully in the development process. Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. Nowadays education had become the basic quality of women to engage in family and community affairs. If a man is educated, he himself is educated, but if a woman is educated the whole family would be educated and it leads to the educational development of the nation. The educational achievements of women can have ripple effect within the family and across generations. In Travancore, women education became widely possible with the arrival of missionaries.

The contribution of the various foreign missionaries in the nineteenth century led to the educational empowerment of women in Travancore. The history of the education of women in Travancore reveals the remarkable transformation in the quality and status of women. The education of women became popular and widespread in the state rapidly and hence motivated the people especially women, to see the realities in the society. It equipped them to transcend the barriers of subjugation and traditions with a new spirit of emancipation and progress. The Christian missionaries were the first donors of education to the women in Travancore. Women being the first teachers who prepare the future generation to take the first faltering steps into the wider world have a vital role to play in any society. The empowered women of the society have the potential to create dynamic changes in the society. Education imparted the quality of communication on women through the interaction and synthesis of ideas. To a great extent, education loosened the caste and religious orthodoxy existed in Travancore.

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