

# Women's Education in Madras State

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### Abstract

*Lack of educational facilities, child marriages, prohibition of widow remarriages, prevalence of Devadasi system, etc. were some of the social factors responsible for the low status and misery of women who were reduced to the position of glorified slaves but industrialization and urbanization in the state made significant development in the areas of women's education and social status in society, none in their estimation. They were more like puppets which move when someone else pulls strings, than individual human being with minds of their own. The position of women, a vital part of the society, has also changed. These are unmistakable signs that traditional conceptions regarding the status and role of women are slowly changing in contemporary India, particularly in the urban sector of the society.*

**Keywords:** Women education, Primary education, secondary education and higher education and status, society

Indian women have played an important role from the very beginning of independence in different walks of life. Women have taken bold steps in all nation-building activities, which started with education and have not blossomed into women's involvement in every activity of India. They have participated in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. In practice, however, they were subjected to suppression, many deprivations, and were exploited by men. They were denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields. They were assigned a subordinate status. The marriage ideals, power and authority exercised by joint family and the caste system, combined with illiteracy, age-old traditional seclusion within the four walls of the house, made it difficult for them to seek to fulfill personality development. They had a scant personal identity and few rights. The women had no status in society, none in their estimation. They were more like puppets which move when someone else pulls strings, than individual human being with minds of their own. The position of women, a vital part of the society, has also changed. These are unmistakable signs that traditional conceptions regarding the status and role of women are slowly changing in contemporary India, particularly in the urban sector of the society. In post-independence era, the process has been ensured equality of status. Theoretically, they have been ensured equal status. The equal rights of women have been guaranteed by Articles 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution. Other legal measures, like the Hindu Code Bill and acts relating to marriage, divorce, adoption, succession, etc., have further contributed to their equality with men. Women have also been granted political equality and given a right to vote.

Emancipation, education and industrialization have opened up a new vista for them. As a result, one can find more women participating in politics, social life and economic field. More girls go to schools and colleges today than ever before.

### **Increase in Primary Education**

In 1901-1902, 106,855 Girls were studying in the Primary Stage.<sup>1</sup> Between 1897 - 1902, three women of South India took the M.A. Degree from the Madras University. In 1901-02, only one female student qualified for the B.A. Degree. This indicates that the public opinion was not in favor of Girls' Higher Education.<sup>2</sup> Hence at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the State Government of Madras fully accepted the proposition that "the active extension of primary education was one of the most important duties of the state." In 1911, an attempt was made by Gokhale to introduce Compulsory Primary Education for all the school-going boys and girls. Besides, the Calcutta University Commission (1917), appointed under the Chairmanship of M.E. Sadler, stressed the importance of Women's Higher Education. It was only in 1920 that the Madras Elementary Education Act was passed by making Elementary Education compulsory for boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 10. Again in 1929, the Indian Statutory Commission under the Chairmanship of Sir Philip Hartog pointed out the importance of Women's Education and recommended special measures to be taken for the same. <sup>3</sup> Since the 1930s, to induce a greater number of Girl Students to take to Education, Free Supply of Books and Slates, Fee Concessions and Scholarships were also granted to them. Despite these measures, the percentage of Female School-Going Children to the total number of females had increased from 0.9 in 1901 to only 2.6 in 1931. <sup>4</sup> By the closing years of the British Period, the State Policy on Education was one of Concentration and Consolidation of Schools than Expansion. Hence the Government granted aid to only complete Primary Schools with five standards. <sup>39</sup> In other words, the progress of Female Education to 1947 was slow.

### **Pre-Primary Education**

Before 1947, little attention was paid to Pre-Primary Education. <sup>5</sup>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 Palayamkottah, Karaikudi, Kumbakonam, Mylapore, Washermenpet and Tondiarpet were started soon after Independence.<sup>6</sup> 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.

### **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 1776 Elementary Schools for Girls and 2,34,49744 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.<sup>7</sup>

### **Secondary Education**

Since 1947, about 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, <sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> When Kamaraj assumed office, a Scheme of Diversified Courses such as Engineering, Textile Technology, Secretarial Course and Home Science, were introduced.<sup>9</sup> 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 a 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 ever 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.

### **Collegiate Education**

From 1936 to 1937, two Arts Colleges for Women were opened in Trichinopoly. St. Theresa’s College and the Maharaja’s College for Women in Trivandrum were raised to the Status of Degree Colleges. In 1937, nine arts Colleges for Women were established.<sup>11</sup> In 1940, Women Candidates were allowed to enter into Engineering College for the first time. To give vocational training, industrial centers were also set up for women. Between the years 1937 to 1947, rapid progress was made in Women’s Education in the Madras Presidency. The enrolment of girls in all institutions had increased.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, a Comprehensive Scheme was launched to extend Compulsory Education to Girls from all communities in rural areas. During the War Period, a large number of women were employed in Government offices, business concerns, schools, etc. The tendency among educated women to seek a career and economic independence became more noticeable at this time. In 1946-1947, Short-Term Training Courses were started in Madras to train a large number of teachers. <sup>13</sup> All these developments took place by the efforts and services of the Christian Missionaries. The foundation stone was laid by them for Women’s Education.

### **Colleges for women**

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 these colleges, 1,236 Women were receiving instruction.<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Since 1950, all Women’s Colleges were improved. The Government improved their libraries, laboratories, hostels and played grounds. In 1956, the Collegiate Education was re-organized and the new pattern consisted 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. <sup>55</sup> 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, the Ethiraj College for Women of Madras, Lady Doak College of Madurai and Nirmala College of Coimbatore was affiliated to the Madras University. <sup>16</sup> 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 enormously increased.

### **Professional and Technical Education**

Women showed a keen interest in professional and technical education also. Since Independence, their interest in studying professional courses such as Medical, Engineering, Agricultural and Law is appreciable.

### **Impact of Western Education**

The introduction of the Western System of Education, along with the growth of female Education, led to a great social awakening among 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 the reform of social practices 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.’ <sup>17</sup> However, a close study will reveal the fact that the Women’s Uplift conception was primarily

educational. It was also realized that there could not 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”. 18 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. 19 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, the 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 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. Besides, the birth of prose literature in the Tamil Country in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century’s served as a powerful weapon of thought and expression. The writings of Bharathiyar and Bharathidasan gave new impetus to fight for their rights. 20 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 the Western System of Education that had created the climate for these reforms.

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