A country or a nation 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. According to 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.

**Importance of Female Education**

Female Education has been the key to the progress of every nation. Educating a girl means educating a mother and, in turn, educating her children, the future citizens of the country.\(^1\) 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".\(^2\)

---


Missionaries and Female Education

Long before the Government took up the cause of Women's Education, the Missionaries were already at work. They came to India mainly to spread Christianity. They selected education as a tool to carry on their missionary work. They worked for Women's Education in the Madras Presidency. Gradually, their work in the field of Female Education also increased. The greater part of Female Secondary Education was provided by the Missionaries. But, in the beginning, the progress in this direction was very slow because Female Teachers from suitable social position were not available.

Till the Advent of European Missionaries, every village in Tamil Nadu had a Pial School, popularly known as ‘Tinnai Pallikudam’. The Christian Missionaries converted this Pial System into Permanent Schools. The students did not have to go from Verandha to Verandha for education purpose because the Pial School was shifted from one house to another. At the same time, the Missionaries strengthened the Pial Schools at first to bring students to the established schools of their area. This led to the European Model of Permanent School System. In order to educate the youth, a number of Colleges and Seminaries were opened. Thus, Higher Education was extended to all levels of students, irrespective of caste, creed and colour.
With the arrival of the Protestant Danes at Tranquebar on the South East Coast in 1706 begins the History of European System of Indian Education. The activities of the English Missionaries began in the year 1727 and the first Protestant English Mission began to adopt the work of the Danes. Utilising the services of Schultze and Schwartz, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge started schools at Madras, Tanjore, Cuddalore, Palayamkottai and Trichinopoly. The Missionaries were very particular about including Christian Instruction in the curricula of studies. The Western Missionary Societies continued to be very active in the field of education. The Missionary Societies contributed to the operation of schools and Zenana Education was the most effective means of establishing contact with the people. The Christian Girls were not forced into early marriage and thus it was possible for them to continue their education beyond Primary School.

In Madras, the first attempt of the Missionaries for opening a school for Indian Women was made in 1821. In the same year, the Church Missionary Society opened at Tirunelveli, first of the Madras Boarding Schools. The Missionary Societies limited their work to the Elementary Level. But after the Act

---

of 1833, they paid greater attention to the Secondary and Collegiate Education. In the early 1820's, the Court of Directors of the East India Company instructed the Provincial Governors to undertake Educational Surveys within their respective Provinces.

**Role of Munroe**

Sir Thomas Munroe, who was the Governor of Madras Presidency from 1820 to 1827, was the first person to take steps for the promotion of education in a systematic manner. By his efforts, the number of women in schools increased. He undertook a detailed study on education in Madras and submitted his Minutes to the Government, on June 25, 1822. It recommended that education in India should be made more universal. In 1826, he constituted a Board to organise a System of Public Instruction in the State. The Board had been authorised to establish two Principal Schools in each Collectorate and one Junior School for each Taluk. A separate schools for girls were a rarity, they continued their education at boys' schools. He founded a Primary School in every village. Through these schools, the women, including tribal women, received some sort of education. By the effort of

---

10 Packiam, S.,*op.cit.*, p.20.
Sir Thomas Munroe, one woman in a hundred could read in the Madras Presidency by the beginning of the Nineteenth Century.  

**Opening of Girls’ Schools**

In 1835, Lord Macaulay, as the President of the Committee on Public Instruction, presented a lengthy minute to the then Governor General of India on the condition of education. In this Minute, he emphasised the importance of English Language and Literature as the basis of a good system of education in India.\(^{14}\) In 1840, with the assistance of Reverend Issac Wilson, six schools were opened for Hindu Girls in Madras, with a total strength of two hundred pupils.\(^{15}\) In 1845, the First Girls’ School was opened under the Joint Management of the Indians and Europeans\(^ {16}\) at Madras, which continued to work for the cause of Female Education. The Government recognised the importance of Women's Education after the Woods Despatch on Education in 1854. This Despatch gave greater importance to education in India in general and Female Education in particular, and as a result, many women of India obtained the benefit of

---


\(^{16}\) Lakshmi Misra, *op.cit.*, p.31.
education.\(^{17}\) In 1854, there were probably 7000 girls at schools, conducted by Missionary Societies.\(^{18}\)

**Role of Reformers**

But the anachronistic practices like Purdah, Child Marriage, Sati and Widowhood, limited the scope of girls to receive the Elementary Education. Therefore, Social Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, made efforts to remove the evils present in the society. A number of institutions like Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj, Arya Samaj and others rendered valuable services to the promotion of Women's Education. Lord Dalhousie, during his Governor-Generalship, allocated separate funds for the education of girls. But this awakening through education was confined only to Cities.

**Role of Arbuthnot**

The year 1855 was a great landmark in the Educational History of Tamil Nadu. A Department of Public Instruction was instituted and Sir Alexander Arbuthnot was appointed as the First Director of Public Instruction in Madras.\(^{19}\) He brought about radical changes in the field of Women's Education. The establishment of the University of Madras in 1857 was an Event in the History of

Higher Education.\textsuperscript{20} It was established on the recommendation of the Raleigh Commission, which was constituted in 1857.

\textbf{Increase and Changes}

After a few years, there were few changes in the field. In 1866-1867, the Women Schools and Schools under Grant-in-Aid in the Madras Presidency were only 75.\textsuperscript{21} In 1868, the Central Government sanctioned a Grant of Rs.12,000/- to the Madras Presidency to start Educational Institutions for Women. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, there were 34 Girls' High Schools and three Women's Colleges in the Presidency. The Madras Medical College was the First Medical College in the then British Empire to admit Women Students in the Certificate Course in Medicine in the year 1875. Enrolment of Women in Universities commenced in India at first in the Madras University in 1876.\textsuperscript{22} In 1881, for the first time, the Missionaries of the Scottish Church started working for the Education of Hindu Women.\textsuperscript{23}

During 1881-1882, the total number of girls in schools throughout India was 515. For a long time, co-education was restricted. In 1882, only 4207 girls attended

\textsuperscript{20} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.27
\textsuperscript{21} Prem Kirpal, \textit{A Decade of Education in India}, New Delhi, 1968, p.191.
\textsuperscript{22} Manmohan Kaur, \textit{op.cit.}, p:24.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.24-27.
mixed schools. Grant-in-Aid was liberally offered to Girls’ Schools in Madras between 1858 and 1881.

**Recommendation of Education Commission, 1882**

The Education Commission, constituted in 1882, recommended the expansion of Girl's Education. As a result, the post of Inspectress of Girls’ Schools was created and a few Training Schools for Women Teachers were also established.²⁴ Further, the Report of the Education Commission emphasised the need for Affirmative Action by establishing Scholarships and Women's Hostels to encourage Women's Education in the Madras Presidency. The need to start Teachers Training Institutes exclusively for Women Teachers, who could teach at schools exclusively for girls, was felt.²⁵ Between 1907 and 1912, the University of Madras admitted external female candidates to examinations. Consequently, the percentage of Educated Women Candidates was 17.2% in the Madras Presidency.²⁶

**Annie Besant and Muthulakshmi Reddy**

Mrs. Annie Besant, who entered politics in 1914, delivered a memorable Series of Public Lectures in Madras entitled, "Wake Up India", in which she

---

emphasized the need to abolish Child Marriages and to give every Woman the opportunity to literacy.\(^{27}\)

The First Women's College, the Queen Mary's College, was opened in Madras in 1914. Fresh discussions began on School Education and College Education for Women. The subjects taught in the schools were devotional music, basic principles of Hinduism, and ideals of Hindu Womanhood and so on.\(^{28}\) In 1921, the Madras Legislative Council passed a Resolution which allowed women to be enrolled on the electoral list for Legislature and by 1926, every other Provincial Legislature followed suit. S.Muthulakshmi Reddi was the first Woman to be returned to Madras Legislature, and also the first to be elected as the Vice-President of the Madras Legislative Council.\(^{29}\)

With the assumed of power by the Congress Party in 1937, the Madras Presidency had taken the lead in providing Education to Women. The enrolment of girls in schools grew enormously. In the same year, the Central Advisory Committee was established and it guided the State Government to look into the Development of Women's Education in the Presidency. As a result, Women's Education had rapidly spread in the Madras Presidency. Further, the State Government wanted to impart technical and vocational education to women. Even

\(^{27}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.190.  
\(^{28}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.24.  
\(^{29}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p.68.
before Independence, the girls were encouraged to undergo courses in technical and vocational education.

**Collegiate Education**

From 1936 to 1937, two Arts Colleges for Women were opened in Trichinopoly. St. Therasa'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.\(^{30}\) In 1940, Women Candidates were allowed to enter into Engineering College for the first time. In order to give vocational training, industrial centres 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.\(^{31}\) At the same time, a Comprehensive Scheme was launched to extend Compulsory Education to Girls from all communities in rural areas.\(^{32}\) 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. 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.

**Increase in Primary Education**

In 1901-1902, 106,855 Girls were studying in the Primary Stage. 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 favour of Girls' Higher Education. Hence in 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

---

33 Ibid., p.100.
34 Ibid.
Chairmanship of Sir Philip Hartog pointed out the importance of Women's Education and recommended special measures to be taken for the same. 36

Since the 1930s, to induce greater number of Girl Students to take to Education, Free Supply of Books and Slates, Fee Concessions and Scholarships were also granted to them. 37 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. 38 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. 39 In other words, the progress of Female Education upto 1947 was slow.

**Pre-Primary Education**

Prior to 1947, little attention was paid to Pre-Primary Education. 40 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

37 G.O. No. 621, Education Department, 27 March 1934.
39 G.O.No. 554, Education Department, 10 March, 1939.
40 Pre-Primary Education was meant for children who were not less than 3 years of age.
Palayamkottah, 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.

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 2,34,497 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.

42. G. O. No. 3068, Education Department, 16 November 1950.
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 to 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 moulding the character of children during the most

46 Bhatt, B.D., Educational Documents in India (1831-1968), New Delhi,1969, p.168.
47 Madras Information, Madras, March, 1958, p. 4.
impressionable years of infancy, the Education of Women is of ever greater importance than that of men".\textsuperscript{49}

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 \textsuperscript{50} to 145 and 68,762 in 1956-57 \textsuperscript{51} and again in 1966 – 67, the number increased to 395 and 4,18,609 \textsuperscript{52} respectively.

**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 in these colleges, 1,236 Women were receiving instruction.\textsuperscript{53} 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.\textsuperscript{54} Since 1950, all Women’s Colleges were

\textsuperscript{50} *RPIMP, 1946-1947*, Part II, Madras, 1947,pp.149-224.
\textsuperscript{51} *RPIM, 1956 - 1957*, p. 344.
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 3 years and Post-
Graduate Course of 2 years after the first degree.\textsuperscript{55} To raise the standard of
Collegiate Education, Refresher Courses in English, Science and World History
were conducted at Madras, Coimbatore, Madurai and Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{56}

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
were affiliated to the Madras University.\textsuperscript{57} 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 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.

\textsuperscript{55} *Madras Information*, Madras, 11 March 1956, pp.5-6.
\textsuperscript{57} University of Madras, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, Madras, 1957, pp. 142-147 and 185.
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. 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

---

58 Jana Matson Everett, Women and Social Change in India, New Delhi, 1981, p. 82.
the confidence, born of ability, to compete with others on an equal footing.\textsuperscript{60} 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.\textsuperscript{61}

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 organise the Theosophical Society at Adayar 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

\textsuperscript{60} Ved Dan Sudhi, \textit{The Crisis of Changing India}, Delhi, 1974, pp. 197-198.

\textsuperscript{61} Jana Matson Everett, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 15.
of women in the Tamil Country. Besides, 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.