Chapter X

PROGRESS OF EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

The Indian Education Commission made elaborate recommendations for the expansion of female education. Its recommendations could be summarised as follows. First, local, municipal, and provincial funds should be earmarked in an equitable proportion for the support of boys' as well as girls' schools. Secondly, liberal terms for grants-in-aid to girls' schools should be prescribed. Thirdly, the course of studies for girls' schools, besides maintaining certain common features with boys' schools, should have a practical bias. Fourthly, scholarships should be offered to attract girls in an increasing way to the schools. Fifthly, as for girls' secondary education, opportunities should be judiciously extended where private efforts indicated that the desire for it existed. Sixthly, provision for girls' hostels should be made mainly to help girls coming from distant places. Seventhly, local bodies should have real and effective authority over schools maintained by them. Subject to the conditions laid down by the Education Department for the appointment of teachers, it should be competent for the local bodies to appoint teachers of their choice. Male teachers could not be excluded entirely from the girls' schools, yet the trend should be towards gradual replacement by female teachers. Wives of school masters or young women of mixed parentage should be encouraged to teach their girls. Eighthly, Secular education, imparted under the supervision of ladies worthy of confidence, should be recognised and assistance should be offered insofar as such instruction could be tested by a proper inspecting agency. Ninthly, non-official co-operation from ladies and gentleman should be secured in the management of girls'
schools. It will appear from the above that the Hunter Commission did not make the Government directly responsible for the expansion of girls' education. The Government's role was that of a friendly outsider, as it were. It left this branch of education to the charge of the local bodies, voluntary bodies or organisations, religious associations, and individuals. Further, despite the recommendations for financial aid on a liberal basis specifically for girls' education, such aid was not forthcoming because special funds were not created by the provincial government. It appears that the existing social conditions and the conservatism of the people were some of the factors taken into consideration by the Commission in making the rather hesitant recommendations for the expansion of female education. In other words, the lack of initiative on the part of the Government made for the slow progress of girls' education up to the end of our survey.

It was officially recorded in the Quinquennial Review for 1899-1904 on the progress of education in India that the relatively very backward state of the girls worked 'as the most conspicuous blot on the educational system of India'. Lord Curzon appeared to agree to this remark, yet he remained content with certain palliatives — appointment of suitable teachers, organisation of model schools, and provision of larger funds. These were necessary measures, but these were not enough to wipe out the 'most conspicuous blot' on India's educational system.

The Resolution of 1915 made the point that 'the existing customs and ideas opposed to the education of girls will require different handling in different parts of India. The Governor-General in Council accordingly hesitates to lay down general lines
of policy which might hamper local governments and administrations, and has preferred to call for schemes from each province ...". Nevertheless, the "resolution commended the following principles for general consideration:

'(a) The education of girls should be practical with reference to the position which they will fill in social life;
(b) It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys nor should it be dominated by examinations;
(c) Special attention should be paid to hygiene and the surroundings of school life;
(d) The services of women should be more freely enlisted for instruction and inspection; and
(e) Continuity in inspection and control should be specially aimed at'.

All the Resolutions of the Government of India in the Department of Education for the period of our survey, did not spell out any definite policy on girls' education under Government's responsibility. Taking the cue from the central government, the provincial governments contented themselves by offering insufficient grants to private bodies engaged in the work of providing girls' education. Small wonder then that such half-hearted \textit{maller} attitude on the part of the Government led to decidedly slow progress in the field of girls' education. The Hartog Committee remarked that in the interest of the advance of Indian education as a whole, 'priority should now be given to the claims of girls' education in every scheme of expansion'.

When girls' education in India as a whole was in an unhappy state, it was more so in a comparatively backward province like Assam. Robinson stated that 'like most women of India, they were denied even the least portion of education, and are excluded from
In the prevalent agricultural society, the men were mostly engaged in agriculture and they wanted wives possessed of expertise in domestic work. This work certainly included spinning and weaving. A girl of a marriageable age had to be an expert in the art of weaving. Excessive importance to this kind of work, early marriage, the social taboo against the free mixing of girls and boys, etc., were some of the factors responsible, at the non-official level, for the slow progress of girls' education.

After the Report of the Indian Education Commission, the provincial government came forward with somewhat larger grants for girls' schools managed by religious or private bodies. In 1889, there were 187 girls' schools with 3,144 pupils, and two of the schools were M.V. schools. Thus, most of the schools were primary schools and the local and municipal boards came to manage them. A special type of very small schools came up in Sylhet; these could boast of an average attendance of five pupils in each school; these were opened by 'Gurus' of boys' pathasalas who obtained a fixed grant in addition to their remuneration in connection with instruction in the boys' schools. Some such schools came up in Nowgong also. But when the grants were withdrawn, the girls were advised to enrol themselves in the neighbouring boys' pathasalas. There was absolutely no convincing reason for the withdrawal of what passed off as grants to Gurus for the trouble of teaching a girl pupil, because a Guru received just 4 annas as allowance per head of each girl student taught by him. Adverting to the subject of closure of some girls' schools in Nowgong, the Chief Commissioner had occasion to remark that the Chairmen of the local boards ought to be careful in future so that well-attended girls' schools were not
closed down. Nevertheless, girls' schools continued to be closed down on some pretext or for reasons best known to the local boards concerned.

**Wastage:** Closing down of schools undoubtedly acted as a damper on the spread of female education. But another aspect of the matter is to be considered. Many girls left schools without completing their courses of studies. Such wastage was very considerable between classes I and II. To cite one instance, in 1914-15, about 10,070 girls were enrolled in Class I; out of them, 1,670 girls only came to Class II in 1915-16.

Similarly, out of the 9,772 girls in Class I in 1918-19, the number came down to 1,561 in Class II in 1919-20. The following table serves to indicate the extent of wastage due to dropping out of girls from classes A to III:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>13,408</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>4,153</td>
<td>2,981</td>
<td>2,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>16,242</td>
<td>7,075</td>
<td>5,412</td>
<td>4,135</td>
<td>3,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>2,834</td>
<td>2,175</td>
<td>1,259</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>1,316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to the period of 1914-15 and the years that followed, cases of dropping out were fewer by far by 1936-37. This could be attributed to the new interest in education in the wake of rise in national consciousness in the days of the national movement of the 1930s. The heavy drop out in the earlier period could be attributed to general disinterest in female education, conservatism, prevalence of the system of early marriage, the purdah system, etc.

**Expansion of girls' education as indicated by an increase in the number of schools:** In spite of the adverse situation revealed by
the wastage stated above, girls' education as such did not stagnate. This was evidenced by the increase in the number of different types of schools for the education of the girls.\textsuperscript{14}

**Primary Schools** increased from 116 in 1904 to 793 in 1936-37. Most of these schools opened by the local bodies. As for the **Middle Schools**, there were 3 M.V. and 2 M.E. schools for girls in 1904-05; these increased to 26 and 28 respectively in 1936-37. With the increase in the number of schools, student enrolment also increased. For instance, between 1904-05 and 1936-37, the number of girls increased from 144 to 2,707 in M.V. schools, and from 184 to 4,427 in M.E. schools. As for **High Schools**, there was no high school for girls in the province till 1910. By 1915, however, three girls' High Schools came to be established with an enrolment of 680 students. In 1936-37, there were 13 girls' High Schools with an enrolment of 3,664 students. Private enterprise also contributed to the expansion of female education at the high school level. Of the girls' high schools, two schools only were government schools, the rest were either aided schools or unaided private schools.\textsuperscript{15}

Assam came to have a separate college for women in 1936, the **Lady Keane** College. But there were girls in other colleges also; by 1937, about one hundred girls studied in such colleges.

It has been observed that the rate of progress in female education was quicker by far during the period of dyarchy. Several factors contributed to the increase in the number of schools. First, the changed pattern of administration brought about a changed outlook among the people and thus they recognised the need for girls' education with a view to enabling women for intelligent participation in the affairs of the society. Secondly, economic hardship made sections of people look for sources of livelihood to be had
through education. The traditional dependence on agriculture came to be lessened to the extent opportunities, howsoever limited, were secured for jobs through education. Thirdly, in the 1930's, the prejudice against girls' education no longer operated with the same force as it did earlier. The loosening hold of conservatism on the people led to a welcome in enrolment in girls' schools. Fourthly, early marriage of girls acted as an inhibiting factor in the matter of expansion of girls' education. However, the Sarda Act of 1929 slightly increased the age of marriage for girls to 14 and people now no longer had any fear of social disapprobation when they sent girls to schools. Fifthly, educated women themselves made an immense contribution to the cause of women's education. The political and social reforms movements in the 1920's and 1930's and the commendable role played therein by women, encouraged as they were by Mahatma Gandhi, led to a remarkable growth in sentiments and action in favour of female education. These, then, were the reasons for the growth in female education.

Expenditure: Expenditure on girls' education increased during the period covered between 1889-90 and 1936-37. The sources generally for expenditure on primary education were grants by the provincial government, grants by the local bodies, and 'other sources'. At other levels of education, fee income was another source. Fee income acquired some importance as a source at the M.E. and High School stage. For instance, Rs 10,634 was realised as fees from girls' M.E. schools in 1936-37; in the same year, a sum of Rs 27,257 was realised from students in girls' high schools. It goes without saying that provincial grants constituted the biggest source for expenditure on different types of schools, although the local boards spent a larger sum on M.V. schools: in 1936-37, the government spent Rs 7,098 on
M.V. schools, while the local boards spent Rs 12,837 and the municipal boards spent Rs 4,684. The following table gives an idea of the total amount spent on different types of schools devoted to girls' education:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lower Primary</th>
<th>M.V.</th>
<th>M.E.</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1889-90</td>
<td>9,580</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919-20</td>
<td>72,532</td>
<td>25,276</td>
<td>32,040</td>
<td>14,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-37</td>
<td>141,559</td>
<td>27,087</td>
<td>91,958</td>
<td>131,875</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be stressed, however, that increasingly larger expenditure over the years on girls' education did not really lead to quantitative expansion. In 1936-37, out of an estimated total population of 8,622,251, the female population numbered 4,085,045; out of the latter, 40,939 or 2.2 per cent were literate. This means that in spite of all the social upsurge and consciousness of the parents for female education, about 98 per cent of the female population was illiterate. This was indeed a very sorry state of affairs. Conclusion: The above discussion makes it clear that in terms of the needs of the entire female population of the province, very little was done to lift it out of the morass of illiteracy. The Government did not earmark the necessary funds for the expansion of female education. A great majority of the schools was managed by the local bodies, some were aided by them, while the Government also managed a number of these institutions. But then, financial difficulties affected the healthy growth of the schools. Not only that. At times there was not money enough to build or repair houses, provide the schools with the minimum teaching aids, and to pay salary to the
At the non-official level also, equally depressing was the response to the need for girls' education, and this was particularly true in rural areas. Parents depending on agricultural pursuits needed the helping hand of their daughters when they became physically fit and, therefore, at that stage they withdrew their daughters from the high schools. There were other reasons also for the disinterested attitude of the parents. School education was not related to the needs of life, and the parents were yet to be educated in the value of liberal education. Further, parents were afraid of sending girls to boys' schools or to schools run with male teachers, especially after the attainment of puberty.

But a decided change in sentiment had set in with the rise in national consciousness. The wind of change blew in the towns and in many villages as well. Thus, co-education became popular, if only for the reason that the boys' schools provided better facilities than the girls' schools did. In 1936, the number of girls in boys' schools was 48,136, while girls in girls' schools numbered 42,876.

Coming back to the point of slow rate of progress, it has to be pointed out that lack of trained women teachers did act as an inhibiting factor. The Hartog Committee commented: 'The shortage of women teachers, particularly at the primary stage, is due to lack of adequate training facilities, the unwillingness of women who are brought up and trained in towns to work as teachers in rural areas, and the inadequacy of the pay offered.' The Committee recommended that special attention must be paid to the removal of these difficulties and especially to the training of girls from rural areas to become primary teachers. But, generally speaking, official attitude
toward effective teachers' training programme was rather cool. This was evidenced by the fact that certain normal schools were closed down during 1930-34, and this had certainly disorganised the training scheme.

Inadequate supervision was exercised over the girls' schools. The post of Inspectress was abolished in 1924 on grounds of financial difficulties, and even the Director's recommendation to revive it was of no avail. It was not possible for an Assistant Inspectress to supervise, for instance, 868 schools with 40,939 girls. Further, the powers of the Assistant Inspectress were far too limited and her functions were mainly advisory. Thus, lack of vigilance on the part of the Government in the matter of proper inspection led in effect to the neglect of female education.

There were drawbacks and difficulties. We made the point that despite wastage, girls' education made progress, although it was not up to the desired extent. It appeared a crash programme was necessary to expand girls' education effectively in order to make the products of that education useful members of the home and the society.