

IMPACT OF WOOD'S DESPATCH ON FEMALE EDUCATION IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY

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ABSTRACT

This paper analysed the impact of Wood's Despatch on female education in Madras Presidency. As a result of the Despatch of 1854, the indigenous schools began to function in a better manner in imparting elementary education in Madras city. The Despatch propounded a series of propositions of first rate importance concerning elementary education. The path laid by Wood's Despatch was a basic factor to achieve tremendous change in the progress of women through education which brought self-confidence and courage in them to face the challenges of life.

INTRODUCTION

The greatest and most important contribution of the British to the national life of the Indians was the spread of Western Education. With its spread, the traditional sense of values regarding religion, education, culture and sense of beauty underwent a change and a new sense of values developed.

FEMALE EDUCATION

During the first half of the nineteenth century female education did not make much headway. Ram Mohan Roy was a great advocate of female education. The Brahmo Samaj also contributed much in this regard. In creating an urge and mentality for female education, the journals like Umesh Chandia's Bamabodhini, Girish Chandra Sen's Mahila, Basante Micra's Bharat Mahila etc., played a very important part. The contributions of Prarthana Samaj and the Deccan Education Society also deserve special mention in this regard.

GOALS OF WOMEN EDUCATION

Concerning the goals and the purpose of women's education, two divergent views have emerged in the course of its development. The one can be summarized as the demand for equality, including equal opportunities for women. The other conception, which emerged later, stresses the need for the development of human resources in the development process. In the actual educational policy of India, constant effort was made to harmonize these two conflicting tendencies.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION PRIOR TO 1854

The first step towards the development of women's education had been taken by the missionaries and the

philanthropists in the early nineteenth century. The first girls' school was founded in 1820 by David Hare in Calcutta. In 1815 J.E.D. Bethune founded the famous Bethune School in Calcutta. In 1848 several schools were started in Bombay by the initiation of Patherson. These private efforts remained limited to certain groups. The Hindus and Muslims hesitated to send their daughters to these schools. During this period Madras Presidency stood foremost in women's education. In 1821 the Church Missionary Society at Tirunelveli opened the first secondary school. In 1840 with the assistance of Rev. Isaac Wilson and his wife, the Scottish Church Society ventured starting six schools for Hindu girls in Madras.

Female education had also made certain amount of progress independently of the State, chiefly under missionary management, before the publication of the Despatch of 1854. Boarding schools were maintained from an early period by the Church of England Societies in Tirunelveli, but they were almost exclusively attended by the higher castes. This attempt had to struggle against many obstacles. In 1845 the first girls' school, partly under native management, was opened in Madras. It was the precursor of many more. In 1854 there were probably 7000 girls at schools conducted by missionary societies, and although the bulk of these were native Christians, there was also a considerable proportion of Hindus belonging to the higher castes. The nine pupils at the school of the

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free Church of Scotland in 1843, had increased to about 700 in 1854.

MAGNA CARTA OF EDUCATION, 1854

The education despatch, of the Court of Directors, dated July 19, 1854 is a document of great historical importance. It is the most memorable document on education in India. It rises to the height of the problem and comprehends it in its length and breadth. Wood's Despatch began a new era of organised educational administration, defined the aim of Indian education, and determined the Government's attitude towards the need for technical and women's education. Even though it had recommended that the British Government should support women's education and give financial assistance for the opening of girls' schools, the department of education did not take active measures for another decade or two.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In accordance with the recommendation of Wood's Despatch, a department of education was set up by the Government of Madras and the grant-in-aid system was introduced. The city of Madras witnessed educational progress at different levels. A Director of Public Instruction was appointed for the Presidency of Madras, with a staff of Inspector and Assistant Inspector under him. The Educational Department in each province acted directly under the orders of the respective Provincial Government, and had a developed system of working, more or less distinctively its own. It took over the Government or the Board instructions which had grown up under the earlier efforts of the East India Company.

OFFICIAL SUPPORT TO FEMALE EDUCATION

As a result of the Despatch of 1854, the indigenous schools began to function in a better manner in imparting elementary education in Madras city. The Despatch propounded a series of propositions of first rate importance concerning elementary education. The Governor of Madras, Lord Elphinstone, did not make any reference to the problem of women's education in his Minutes in 1823. Lord Dalhousie, on the contrary, declared: "It is the opinion of the Governor General - in - Council that no single change in the habit of the people is likely to lead to more important and beneficial

consequences to female children". This declaration of Lord Dalhousie was the forerunner of the famous Wood's Education Despatch of 1854, which laid down 'the encouragement of female education' as that of the Company's policy. It was for the first time an official decision was made to give frank and cordial support for female education.

The Despatch, though it stressed the importance of female education, was silent about ways and means to promote it. Even fourteen years after the passing of the Despatch, the government at Fort St. George did not have any concrete proposal for fostering female education. On the basis of the recommendation made by this Despatch, three major universities were established in India in 1857 in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, which created a great land mark in the field of education. Western ideas of education in general and female education in particular, received special attention under these universities.

SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS

After the transfer of power to British parliament in 1858, the subject of female education came under the serious consideration of the government, though previous to that year, several missions had taken practical steps towards the establishment of elementary schools for girls. Secular schools had been springing up in various parts of the presidency. The normal school established at Madras for the education of teachers for native girls became a great measure. The Despatch recommended that the British government should support women's education, and grants should be made to the established private schools. The Sarah Tucker Female Training School, named after the sister of the C.M.S. secretary in Madras, was opened at Palayamkottai in 1858. In 1867 it passed into the capable hands of Mr. and Mrs. Lash.

The Big Parcharry, Madras, consisted of eight divisions, but had no girls school, actually, within its limits, although one of the many good works of the Rev. C. R. Drury was the establishment of a school for this place. It was opened in 1860 in Church Street. In Black Town, Madras, school for the education of girls was begun in 1860. It was altogether a self-supporting school. Only lately it was put under government inspection, and obtained

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a grant. The first Caste Girl's School of the London Mission Society appears to have been opened in January 1862. This was in Black Town. Subsequently, three more were opened; but after a time the children of the four schools or the greater part of them, were induced to assemble, in order that they might enjoy the more continuous attention and instruction of the lady in charge. In 1866 a school for caste girls was started in Purasawakkam. It was brought under inspection, and a small grant on the result system was obtained. In conclusion it goes without saying that Woods Despatch contemplated an educational system for India. One cannot underestimate the work of Charles Wood who encouraged the establishment of schools and colleges, particularly for women, grant-in-aid system and vernacular medium of instructions. To bring the entire educational system under the supervision of a government department was indeed a unique task.

CONCLUSION

Owing to the emphasis made by Charles Wood towards female education, women who were denied the privilege of education were enlightened through the western system of education. This despatch was, no doubt, a specific directive to encourage female education. The path laid by Wood's Despatch was a basic factor to achieve tremendous change in the progress of women through education which brought self-confidence and courage in them to face the challenges of life.

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I, S. Sebastian, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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