

# Empowerment of Women through Education In The Princely State of Mysore

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## Abstract

This paper explores and examines the policies towards the empowerment of women through education during the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Princely state of Mysore, the South Indian state presently known as Karnataka. The role of the Wadiyar's, the erstwhile kings of the said region played a remarkable role in the overall development of state and set precedents at the national level during the colonial rule in India.

**Key words= Princely state, Renaissance, Dewan, Wadiyar**

The British colonial rule in India for a period of nearly two centuries has brought about many changes in social and economic conditions to a great extent. The changes that were brought about in Indian society through education and intellectual activity as a result of the British colonial rule have been called by Indian historians as 'Renaissance'<sup>1</sup>, a word borrowed from the European Writers. Due to the fourth Anglo Mysore war and fall of Tippu Sultan in 1779, major parts of Karnataka was subjected to British colonial rule and from this period onwards I. e. early 19<sup>th</sup> century is to be considered as the beginning of modern period in Karnataka history<sup>2</sup>. This modern age witnessed Renaissance in Karnataka in particular and that of India in general. Renaissance led to the growth of nationalism and social reformism in India. Social reforms and nationalism were the two facets of Renaissance influenced on began to convulse Indian life<sup>3</sup>. The Ideas and institutions popularized by the British had an adverse effect on themselves. Having been taught in the democratic ideas and liberty and equality the Indians began to have an introspection of their own rights and privileges. They also realised what the defects were in their own social and political set up. It naturally propelled them to think seriously on bringing about changes.

The Indian national movement was also responsible for taking up social reforms as one of its important programmers. The Great social reformers like Jyothy BhaPhule, Savithri Phule, M G Ranade, Gandhiji, Ambedkar and others <sup>1</sup>who gave greater priority to social reforms. Even before their entry into Indian politics and the advent of congress into Mysore princely state, there were various socio-religious movements in Mysore

state echoing the moorings of the elite all over India. The partition of Bangala and the growth of the Swadeshi and Swaraj agitations had their impact on the people of Mysore state. The newspapers also spread the ideas of Congressmen among the mass. In Mysore State the people launched the agitations for greater powers for the Representative Assembly and curtailment of the power of the Dewan<sup>4</sup>. The State of Mysore under the benevolent rule of the Maharajas of princely state of Mysore had enjoyed many advantages to bring about reforms. Due to the direct efforts on the part of the people and the government, many social reforms were brought about both by legislation and people's efforts of M.Venkatakrishnayya, M Basavaiah, Gopal Swamy Aiyer, Tagaduru Ramachandra Rao, Tagaduru Subbanna and others did a pioneering job in this respect. In this context, an attempt is made to discuss the main aspects of social reforms like emancipation and empowerment of women, removal of obnoxious practices, and eradication of untouchability and uplift of the depressed classes through education.

The inspiring influence of the pioneers in the cause of emancipation of the practices of social evils and women in India like Rajaram Mohana Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Gandhi, Ambedkar and others gradually stirred the thoughtful section of the people in the State of Mysore. The chief means by which it was accomplished was by imparting education to the womenfolk. Education to women and depressed classes was a most noticeable feature of the educational development at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century in Mysore State. From the time of Dewanship of Sir Sheshadri Iyer, the female education came to receive the encouragement and support of the State government was a remarkable achievement.

The education of women may be said to have been first begun in the princely state of Mysore by the London Mission which established the first Kannada School for girls in 1840<sup>5</sup>. In 1869-70 there were 5 government girls' schools. In the course of a decade the number increased to 12. Sri Jayachamaraja Wodeyar, the Maharaja of Mysore first who realized the importance of female education. Under the guidance of the Maharani Kemparajammanni Vanivilasa Sannidhana, the regent of this state in 1899 the government provided all this necessary help towards the establishment of Maharani's High school for Women in Mysore city and on the model of which schools were opened at Melukote and Tumkur<sup>6</sup>. The Maharani's high school, helped later on developed as a college then affiliated to the Madras University. In the year 1901-02, of the total expenditure on female education from state revenue Rs.41453 was spent on the development of Maharani's College. The share of Wesleyan Mission in the cost of female education amounted to Rs. 21,345 of the London Mission to Rs 6,039; of the Roman Catholic Mission to Rs 0,372; of the M. E. Mission to Rs 1,605; of the C.E Zenana Mission to Rs 962 and of all other private bodies together to Rs 3,697.<sup>7</sup> Thus, torch lit was soon taken up by others. The social service through education began by the Christian missionaries in the princely state of Mysore

greatly influenced on the elite class. So a 'Widow Home' was started by Rao Bahadur A. Narasimha Iyengar and M. Venkatakrisnayya from Devaraja Bahadur fund. In the first year of its establishment itself there were 20 widows taking shelter in this Widow Home.<sup>8</sup> Education was imparted to the widows in Maharani's college. In the year 1901-02 there were 10 adult widows and 4 child-widows under instruction from the F. A. class to infant class. 15 of these received scholarship from Devaraja Bahadur Charity Fund.<sup>9</sup> The Inspector General of Education remarked in 1901-02 with regard to the college as follows: "A pleasing feature of this institution is the education given to the widows. There are 8 adult and 20 child-widows under instruction most of whom receive scholarship from Devaraja Bahadur Fund. The work of the widows throughout the school was, with the exception of a few elderly widows, satisfactory."<sup>10</sup>

The Maharaja's government made a special provision to encourage the female education in the state. As a result the total expenditure on female education in the state went on increasing year by year as the following statistics would show : In 1903-04, the total amount spent on female education was Rs.1,78,280; in 1904-05, it was Rs.1,81,142; in 1906-07, Rs. 2,08,023; in 1908-09, Rs. 2,20,850; in 1909-10, Rs.2,33,303; in 1914-15, Rs. 2,69,347; in 1916-17, Rs.3,42,678; in 1917-18 Rs. 3,64,446; 1919-20, Rs.5,12,293.<sup>11</sup> Taking into consideration the contemporary purchasing power of the rupee and the amount spent on female education elsewhere in India, it was certainly a huge sum. In 1915-16 arrangements were made at the Maharani's college to give Industrial training to girls and women.<sup>12</sup>

The most important measure adopted during the year of 1916 for the improvement of education specially the higher education was the establishment of Mysore University, which was sanctioned in April, 1916. The establishment of Mysore university was the land mark event and a revolutionary achievement of the princely state of Mysore; because it was the 7<sup>th</sup> university which came up in the colonial rule and also the first ever an indigenous university established by an Indian ruler. It was an outstanding contribution of Nalvadi Krishna raja Wodeyar, the maharaja of Mysore who has been rightly called as Rajarshi and an enlightened king by Gandhiji.<sup>13</sup> During the period from 1916 to 1920 the people of the State were keenly watching the activities of the Indian National Congress which had launched a movement for the liberation of the country from the shackles of the British colonial power. The inspiring utterances of national leaders like Tilak and Gandhiji had an impact on the people of the state <sup>14</sup> and also patriotic people started newspapers, periodicals and magazines to spread the message of the Congress among the people. In a way it way it was a further fillip to the cause of female education.

During the year 1916-17, the number of Public Schools for girls rose to 607 and their strength to 35,009. The strength of Maharani's College rose to 372 during the year. In 1917-18 the total number of girls under

instruction was 54,944. During the year 1919-20, the number of Public Schools for girls rose to 768 and the number of girls under instruction in all schools increased to 57,723. The London Mission Girls High School, Bangalore, the Maharani's High School, Mysore and the Vanivilasa Institute, Bangalore, continued to maintain a high degree of efficiency.<sup>15</sup> The money for the female education was usually met with from state funds, Local funds, municipal funds, fees and other sources. Education for girls was free except in aided and European Schools where fees were levied.<sup>16</sup> Thus a casual look at the sum of rupees spent by the state on female education and the progress it made would tell us how the state of Mysore had ever been keen on the promotion of female education and thereby bringing about their emancipation and empowerment through education.

The idea of social reform through education was greatly affected on the growth of nationalism in the early phase of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The humanitarian urge to organise voluntary institutions for serving the social and economic needs of the people had received considerable encouragement from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were a number of voluntary social organizations in many places doing good work for the emancipation and empowerment of women in a variety of ways. They covered several fields of ameliorative service which government agencies alone would not have fulfilled. These institutions had been organized by associations and public spirited persons. Many of these organizations had been recognized by government and were getting monetary and other benefits. Smt. Parvathamma Chandra Shekara Iyer was the founder and the first President of the Mahila Samaj, which was started in 1913 as a branch of the Seva Sadana of Bombay.<sup>17</sup> The objects of the Mahila Samaj at Bangalore were to promote measures for the benefit and advancement of Indian women including the organization of educational, social and philanthropic and the training of Women to take part in such work. A similar institution was started in the same time in Mysore under the patronage of Keparajammanni Vanivilase Sanidhana by Lokaseva Parayana, Smt. K.D. Rukminiyamma, who was the first woman graduate of the state and a veteran leader of women.<sup>18</sup> In the earlier novels of Tirumalamba of Nanjangudu reflected the stern campaign against the injustices done to womanhood and an abiding faith in the greatness of womanly qualities. Thus, voluntary social organizations went a long way in reflected the stern campaign against the injustices done to womanhood and an abiding faith in the greatness of womanly qualities. Thus, voluntary social organizations went a long way in reforming the society by providing educational facilities.

From times immemorial the society of India had been subjected to some obnoxious practices like ban on the Brahmins to cross the sea, bar on the widow –remarriage and the prevalence of child marriage and all these were present in the state of Mysore. First of all let us consider the bar on foreign travel. The strong objection from orthodox circles against sea voyage seems to have little reason in it. That is, sea voyage and sojourn in foreign climes may necessitate flesh eating and drinking and would obliterate the fine elements of

Hindu superiority. Many attempts were made by the administration to do away with this practice. Swamy Vivekananda had visited Mysore state and then he was sent by his Highness Sri Jayachamaraja Wodeyar X, the Maharaja of Mysore to Chicago conference. From there he wrote a letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1894 in which he had thrown hints to the beneficial effects of foreign travel.<sup>19</sup> Later 4 students had been sent out to America to be trained as Electrical engineers at the expense of the government.<sup>20</sup> Further the institution of Damodar Das Scholarship also encouraged foreign travel.<sup>21</sup> There foreign travel was facilitated to lessen or heedless gradually, the tempers of ostracism and to the extent to which foreign travel gained ground it was a social reform through education.

Before Indian independence, even in early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a practice of the girls of 3 to 5 years were married to men of 50 years and more. To do away with such practices veteran public figures like M. Venkatakrishnayya and his friends strained their every nerve. The practice of selling of woman, who accused of adultery, by public auction, was frequent in Mysore state. This odious practice brought to the government revenue under the head 'Samayachar'. The practice was completely prohibited by a proclamation issued in 1834 by the British Commission.<sup>22</sup> Many social legislations were passed after the Rendition. The census report of 1891 showed horrible figures relating to child marriage. Majority of the females were married before 9 years and were widowed at an early age. With regard to male, majority of them were found married before the age of 14 years. These facts established that this was an evil of great magnitude. The progressive party in the Representative Assembly headed by M. Venkata krishnayya and others urged the government in the light of the census figures the need of some prohibitory legislation. Popular sentiments were also found to be infamous of some kind of prohibitory legislation. In 1892 as a beginning the government proposed in the Assembly to prohibit marriages of girls below 8 years. The bill was published in 1893 for discussion and criticism and it was passed in to law called the prevention of the Infant Marriage Regulation in 1894 embodying some of more valuable suggestions made at the meetings of the assembly. This regulation ruled that the marriage of the girl below 8 years in any case and the marriage of a man above 50 years with a girl below 16 years "would be illegal".

There were Pre puberty marriages common in the Princely state of Mysore. Wide propaganda was undertaken by public men like M Venkata Krishnayya and others against the evil practices. Propaganda was also carried in favour of widows to remarry if they wished. Another evil practice was the institution of Basavi. This was prostitution in the name of religion, similar to Devadasi's of ancient Indian society. These Basavis had mothers, but they did not know who their fathers were. This system was prevailing in the early decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century in the chitrdurga district.<sup>23</sup> Krishnaraja wodeyar 1V was a puritanical ruler and he tried to discourage the practice

of holding dance by public women at marriage ceremonies. Dr. Muttuswamy Reddy struggled hard to do away with this evil practice and caused the act to be passed to that effect. A law prohibiting this system is now in force in all this states. But prostitution is prevailing elsewhere.

**Conclusion:** Thus, the above analysis show that a serious and series of attempts had been made both by the state and the general public to empower the society and cleanse the society of its many evils like the practice of caste system, Devadasi system, child marriage, female infanticide, Basavi system, prostitution and others through education from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These social reforms made the task of Ghandhi, Dr.Ambedkar and others easy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to reform the Indian society with special reference to empowerment of woman on the eve of Indian National Movement to a great extent and Princely State of Mysore played a pioneering role.

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