WOMEN EDUCATION IN HYDERABAD: AN INDIGENOUS EFFORT OR COLONIAL INITIATIVE

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Abstract

The paper presents an insight into the women education in the Princely state of Hyderabad that whether it was an indigenous effort or a colonial initiative. As the British education system had influenced the educational set up of British India, the Imperialist historians claim that the education system in Princely states is also a colonial projection. As far as women education in the Princely state of Hyderabad is concerned, it was mainly an indigenous effort within the conceptual frame work of British education system, rather than a colonial initiative. Even before the introduction of girl’s education in British India, the Hyderabad State started a number of girl’s schools, and imparted education in the religious as well as secular subjects.

Introduction:

The Britishers came to India as traders and on part of available opportunities and with the passage of time they became the rulers of the Sub-continent. In order to perpetuate their rule in India, the Britishers studied the Asiatic culture and religions and initially did not interfere in the social and religious aspects of Indians. But due to the Evangelical and Utilitarian pressure, the British Crown allowed Christian missionaries to enter India and commence an era of proselytization through the charter Act of 1813 and other developmental activities. The Act set apart an amount of one lakh rupees to be spent on education annually. According to the Macaulay’s Minute, the Britishers started to impart education in English medium through the download filtration theory. The Princely states of India, like Hyderabad, Bhopal, J&K also followed the suit and introduced a number of educational initiatives.

Women Education in Hyderabad:

Edward Said’s oriental interpretation explains the colonial subjugation in South Asia which discusses the relationship between British colonialism and emergence of oriental knowledge about Asiatic society. Through these oriental studies, the European researchers have represented Indian customs, traditions and institutions which imperial authority has tried to reform and refurbish. However, the imperial interference in social and cultural system was resisted by the people in colonies. It has often led to the emergence of debate or the situation called by Jamal Malik as ‘mutual encounters’ between the imperial and nationalist historians. While talking about British India these mutual encounters and initiatives came to an end in 1857. However, the native princely states used to continue the interaction between the British and Indian activities till the end of British rule. The author wishes to explain the mutual encounter in the Hyderabad princely state in the aspect of establishment of Mahbubia Girls
School in 1909 and a number of other Girls Schools, which imparted education through English medium to the veiled girls of Sharif families.

Were educational initiatives in Hyderabad really introduced by British? Was Mahbubia girl’s school first girl’s school according the opinion of Florence Wyld? So in order know these we have delve the history of education of Hydrabad state.

The first school under the Governmental control was Darul uloom in Hyderabad known as ‘Centre of Oriental learning’, started by Salar Jung in 1853-54. It provided education for Maulvi and Munshi degree and taught Arabic, Persian, literature, law and Jurisprudence, logic, philosophy and theology. English and sciences were taught, however the sciences were taught through classical Arabic treatises. Another initiative of Salar Jung was the establishment of Madrasa-e-Aliya in 1877 for the education of his sons and the sons of his friends. It later acted as the feeder institute to the Nizams College, which became a prominent college and was affiliated to the Madras University in 1891. Both the institutes were considered as the elite institutes, because only sons of nobles and important officials were studying in them. And the pass outs of these colleges were later required for running the administrative machinery of the state.

Margrit Pernau mentions “Neither one of these schools owes their existence to a British initiative, nor were they necessarily pro-British in orientation.”1 Meanwhile Britishers ruled British India, the princely states also suffered a lot due to colonial and ambitious policies of British. As in British India, the earliest girl schools in Hyderabad State were introduced by Christian missionaries, like, St. George’s Grammar School since 1834 with a section for girls since 1860 was founded by Church of England, All Saints High School in 1855, Stanley girl’s High School founded by American Methodists in 1895. Also the missionary schools not only imparted education to lower classes but also to upper classes. They established St. George's Grammar School for European children, All Saints High School for the children of Nizam’s army, etc. Here it is important to mention that these Christian Missionaries received the Grants-in-Aid from the Nizams.

“Aghorenath Chattopadhyaaya established a Hindu Anglo-vernacular school for girls in 1881, educating 76 girls, both Hindus and Muslims.”2 Tayyaba, daughter of Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami Imad ul Mulk (Director of Public Instruction) became the first lady who passed the Bachelor of Arts examination from Madrassa Aizza Niswan established in 1889 for the women of nobles only, and was aided by the state.3 Madrassa Niswan was another school which was founded and aided by Nur-un-Nissa Begum, eldest daughter of Salar Jang. From her Karim-un-Nissa, daughter of Salar Jung II, learnt Persian, Urdu and English.4 Another school called as ‘Zenana School’ used to impart education in English, Arabic, Persian and Urdu. The educators in the school were three European and two Indian matrons who imparted

1 Margrit Pernau, Schools for Muslim girls- A colonial or an Indigenous project? A case study of Hyderabad, p. 271.

2 Sheila Raj, Medievalism to Modernism: Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Hyderabad 1869-1911, p. 245


4 Sheila Raj, Medievalism to Modernism: Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Hyderabad 1869-1911, p. 246.
education to girls who claim themselves to belong from noble or Sharif families. But, the students often faced transport problems.

In 1890, Nampalli school was founded which offered free transport facilities to the girls. The curriculum for matriculation was framed according to the Madras University and Hyderabadi Middle school Examination. The school was not granted affiliation by the Madras University and the result for the first batch was poor. In 1909, when Florence Wyld came to Hyderabad, Nampalli school had enrolled 77 girls. When Amina Pope, a convert to Islam, was appointed as the Principal of the school, the roll started to increase.

Florence Wyld, first Principal of the school, believed that it was solely due to the initiatives of the British which had made change in the world of women. Also, a number of efforts have been made by men and women to reform the traditional and conventional education of girls with the help of British resources. Florence Wyld had studied at Oxford and taught at many institutions.

When the Prince of Wales visited to Hyderabad in 1906, a number of women discussed on the need of a school at the moment. They even demanded a grant of Rs. 1500, to the Nizam, established the ‘Ladies committee’ which worked for the foundation and supervision of the school. The school started in 1907 and Miss Queenie Jeffries was its Principal. Florence Wyld came to India in 1909 and took with her three other young teachers and appointed them in Hydrabad. She had assumed that these schools would be established according to the British system, but the girls would be Indian. However, on reaching to Hyderabad, her dream was shattered.

In this struggle, she had to face a number of problems, which are discussed as under:

1. The first was that the girl education was always resisted by the deep rooted traditional elements of the society in Hyderabad, the remnants of which can be seen experienced at the present. But the sources of resistance against the girl education cannot be accurately located at the present moment. Florence Wyld often used to remain vague on trying to understand the nature of enemies of the girl schools that many times schools had to face closure. The introduction of these schools was a sort of venture which was taken up by some nobles and intellectuals. But the reactionaries were more opposed to the nobles and less to the idea of education and enlightenment. It can be said that the people were unknown to the idea of education, so they used to perceive it from the characteristics of the nobles. Besides this, the people were caught in the vicious web of social obscurantism. That is why, they used to resist the education. Therefore, it was important for these schools to continue the practice of purdah for their own survival. Khujista Begum, granddaughter of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal emperor actively supported and participated in teaching.

2. The second was that the idea of emancipation of women cannot be discussed in open, as realised by Florence Wyld. According to Margrit Pernau “Although the girl’s mothers had a faint longing for freedom, if not for themselves, then for the generations to come, they could never have admitted this desire to change the purdah system even to themselves.”

3. Florence Wyld has to create the atmosphere of initiating the modern education in the traditional and conservative society. While imparting modern education she experienced the traditional character of the girl students in the schools that they often

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5 Margrit Pernau, Schools for Muslim girls- A colonial or an Indigenous project? A case study of Hyderabad, p 266.
used to come to the school along with the traditional ornaments. But, with the passage of time, she taught them about the futility of wearing these ornaments in the schools.

In this situation, Florence Wyld went for the Cambridge system of examinations instead of the local Hyderabadi system. When the school was inspected by Arthur Mayhew for assessing the functioning of the educational system of the state and to prepare its report and put forward the suggestions for its re-organisation. The inspector was very much impressed by the system and functioning of the school.

The girls studied and succeeded in achieving better grades than the boys in spite of the curriculum which was made for the students who would be able to assess the observations and experiences of the outdoor life. The prevailing purdah system not only secluded the women and prevented them from the male gazes but also kept them aloof from the happenings of the outside world. Therefore, such a situation needed a particular system of education. Florence Wyld tried a lot to impart the education based on reason and logic. She inserted among the students the curiosity of knowing how and why of a specific topic. She not only dispensed knowledge to the students but also make them able to testify it through the analysis of logic and reasoning. She focussed on the pedagogies or the teaching methods through which girls could develop a habit of self learning. She also succeeded in persuading the girl students to not to wear the jewellery in the schools and to give up the use of traditional titles.

From the number of 22 students on 1909, it rose to 41 in 1910, and crossed the number of one hundred in 1916. When Florence Wyld left India the number had reached to 116. Florence Wyld earned great respect and love from the girls whom she taught. She maintains that “Hyderabad perfectly matched with the contemporary British idea of the typical princely state.” As the Britishers were perceiving the Orient as the ‘Other’, so was the conception of the princes of the native states towards their subjects, from which Britishers analysed that the Princes of orients are irrational, uncivilized and despots who oppress their women and deny their accession to outside world, education and medical services. She denies the vision of Mahbubia School which had been founded and administered by a group of ladies belonging to nobility.

Therefore, all the above institutions were either instituted by the indigenous people, like, Salar Jung I, his relatives and the nobles. Due to these educational ventures, the pass outs often proved as beneficiaries to the state as well as to the society during the period. The idea of establishing schools thus meant a lot to these nobles and elite sections of the society. But, women education still remained confined to the elites and to the main city of Hyderabad.

“The literacy rate for women changed from 0.2% in 1891 to not more than 0.4% in 1911.” So the percentage of educated women was still very less. “In 1909 there were 79 primary schools for girls in the city and the districts, only 37 of which were financed by the state, the rest being either private or paid for by local funds. Apart from this, there were two middle schools and three high schools in Hyderabad city, two of them were financed by the state.”

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6 Margrit Pernau, Schools for Muslim girls- A colonial or an Indigenous project? A case study of Hyderabad, p 269.

7 Census Report, Hyderabad, 1911.

8 Margrit Pernau, Schools for Muslim girls- A colonial or an Indigenous project? A case study of Hyderabad, p 273.
After knowing all this, how it can be accepted with certainty that princely states were backward in the educational aspect as compared to British India. The Muslim girl’s schools in British India were founded only after the end of 19th century. Aligarh Zenana School was established by Sheikh Abdullah and Sakhavat Memorial Girl’s School by Rokeya sakhawat Hussain in 1906 and 1911 respectively. Karamat hussain college in Lucknow was established in 1912. Contrary to this, the female education institutions started in Hyderabad state earlier than these. The educational ventures in Bengal would have influenced women education, but unfortunately these ventures were very short-lived. On the other hand, the first Muslim Girls school, Madrassa Sulmaimaniyya, was established in Bhopal by Sikandar Begum, the ruler of Bhopal in 1866, and that of Hyderabad as mentioned above.

The Nizams had acted as the patrons of art, education and culture. They patronised not only the institutions and scholars in the state, but also donated handsome grants to the universities outside the state. “The scholar, the artist and the poet were valued and supported for what they could contribute to this eternal re-creation of culture.”\(^9\) The nobles aided and appreciated the scholars in the educational ventures, and wished for the polite, well mannered and cultured citizens. The state needed not only the men of culture, but also the men of technical skills. The girls who left the schools were proficient in English language and literature, and possessed sufficient knowledge about history, geography and biology, and were very much aware about the world around her. Not only this, she learnt in these schools the knowledge of cooking, sewing, hygiene, etc. She also learnt Quran, Bihishati Zewar and etiquettes of daily life.

The women education was the means through which a class of people called as lower nobility who considered themselves ashraf, acquired social ascendancy. Actually the process of education was considered as the need of the hour by these activists. Salar Jang I, who has started the process of reformation in the administrative affairs, needed the educated women on different posts, which led them to have close contacts with the Aligarh College. The graduate pass outs of Aligarh College were often invited by Salar Jang I to hold the important positions in the administration. Salar Jang I intended to create the men with technical knowledge and keep them away from becoming social fermentation, isolate them from old nobility and British Residency. But this dream of Salar Jang I did not came out true. The Hyderabad state has grown up at the close of 19th century. It had become a blended society of Hindus, Muslims, traditionalists, reformists, Nawabs and Ashrafs alike.

\textbf{Conclusion}

During the early period of Asaf Jahi’s, the process of education worked at a snail’s pace because it was mostly ignored due to the political confusion and the traditional and conservative outlook of the people. In imparting education to the women class, the role of Christian Missionaries, Sir Salar Jung and functionaries of women journals (like, Annisa, Zebunissa, Khatun, etc.) was significant. During Sir Salar Jung I, women education took its feet on the threshold of transitory stage from medievalism to modernism, as opined by Sheela

\(^9\) Madrassa Sulmaimaniyya was an educational institution, which was started by Sikandar Begum in Bhopal.

\(^{10}\) Margrit Pernau, Schools for Muslim girls- A colonial or an Indigenous project? A case study of Hyderabad, p 275.

In answering to the colonial historians, it can be argued that the project of women education was an indigenous phenomenon, rather than colonial interference. However, the Nizams imparted this education in the British or Colonial framework rather than in indigenous or oriental framework, because they carried on it through schools, colleges and universities, which is a western conception (rather than in Maktabs, Madrasas and Pathshalas). These establishments can be considered that they maintained the oriental counterpoise to the colonialism.

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