

**WOMEN EDUCATION IN THE COLONIAL ODISHA- A BIRD'S EYE VIEW**

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**Abstract**

*It is education that gives one personality as it is the sum total of one's personality. However the writings of women's education of nineteenth century Odisha reveals that women were fully under placed in the educational system. Besides they were trained to subordinate themselves and to accept the dominant ideologies of masculinity. Women were considered enjoyable things for men. Their whole day activities were confined to hearth and home and they were hardly known to outside world. The general feeling was that, it was "unbecoming of the modesty of the women" to attend schools. So, they were prohibited from attending educational institutions. On the eve of British rule in Odisha there was a sharp deterioration in the position of women. Psychologically she was considered an inferior species and socially she was kept in a state of subjection.. Education was imparted to boys only. Since their education had no economic value. The girls were denied of this.. In this context, the British determined to impart education to girls' children by breaking the taboo of gender disparity and raised the ray of hope for the women of Odisha by establishing a number of girls' schools.*

**Keywords:** Gender disparity, superstition, economic value, British, Girls' Schools.



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**Introduction:** Education is the process of facilitating learning. It helps to acquire knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. It helps to modernize one's behavior and is the base of building one's personality. It is a medium through which we differentiate between rights and know wrong what to follow and what to discard. That's why education plays a vital role in determining the Socio - economic development of the society. Both male and female are the

integral part of the society. Development of society definitely precedes the development of men and women. However, women have been discriminated since time immemorial in the male dominated society and considered as enjoyable things. Their all activities are confined to looking after hearth and home, bearing and rearing children and maintaining household work and were totally isolated from the outside world. However we forget that if a man is educated, he educates himself but if woman is educated than whole family is educated. However, in spite of that there was no question of education for women. The general feeling was that, it was “**unbecoming of the modesty of the women**” to attend schools. So, they were prohibited from attending educational institutions.<sup>1</sup>. (Munro-1822)

### **Objective of the study**

The main objective of this article is to highlight the role British Company, native rulers and some individual initiatives in the promotion of female education in the male dominated and conservative society of Odisha. This paper also enlightens how women were ignored and deprived of receiving education in the name of superstition and economic value and kept illiterate. In this paper, the scholar has tried to put focus on the condition of female education in Odisha in pre independent era and the succeeding times

### **Research Method**

Descriptive and Library documentation method have been adopted with analytical and historical perspective for the present study. The archival materials like the then journals, newspapers; letters, books, articles and internet archives and e-books etc. are utilised for the research article.

### **Results**

The spread of education among the women was not proportionate to that of men. The reasons were not far to seek. The scope for educated ladies to find independent livelihood was too remote. Secondly, disinclination to send a girl to co-educational school prevailed. Even the well to do people too prejudiced to send their girls to co-educational institutions. Thirdly the poor illiterate adivasis, who constituted the large portion of the population of the state, were not allowed to educate their girls. Fourthly the state administration paid very little attention to the promotion of female education. In this regards educational Educational development which resulted from the British endeavour deserves merit in the context of specific policies, measures and their outcome.

### **Discussion-**

Prior to 1803 (the year British occupied Odisha) education was controlled by the private bodies. The schools (Pathasala) ran in temples, Sanskrit Tols , Bhagavat Tungis and in the house of some rich families like Rajas, Zamindars, , Karans and Khandayats to teach three R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) to womenfolk <sup>2</sup>( Utkal-1881). The Avadhanas (teachers) put emphasis on reading, writing and working out simple mathematics or knowing the theological knowledge. Odia literature was taught to the pupils in addition to the Bhagavata of Jagannatha Das and puranas etc. There was no Odia school managed by the Kings of Odisha by that time. Thus, education in the Pre-British period was in a mess in Odisha.<sup>3</sup> (Panda-1997) The writings on women's education of nineteenth and twentieth-century Odisha reveal that women were not only under placed in the educational system but it was there that they learnt to subordinate themselves and to accept dominant ideologies of masculinity. Education was formulated to develop in women only those qualities that were seen essential to make her a good housewife, reticent in speech and subservient in manners.

When Odisha came in contact with the British, there had been a sharp deterioration in the position of women. Psychologically she was considered an inferior species and socially she was kept in a state of subjection. The strong influence of taboos made the people believe that education of women was a sin and literate women would quicken their widowhood. Education was imparted to boys for jobs. Since girls' education had no economic value it did not train them for their 'domestic roles' as mother and wife, it was not encouraged at all.

Though the development of women's education in Orissa can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century, yet by the end of the nineteenth century vast masses of women were illiterate.

Women education in Odisha, after the British conquest (1803), was initiated by the missionaries stationed at Calcutta. The main aim of these missionaries was to preach the natives the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The missionaries integrated and coined Odia letters and printed the first Odia Bible in 1804. The New Testament was translated in 1809 by Pandit Mrutyunjay Viyalankar.<sup>4</sup>(Nayak-2019)

In 1813, the Charter Act contained a clause enacting that a sum of not less than a lakh of rupees in each year be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of learned natives of India and the introduction and promotion of

knowledge of science among the inhabitants of the British territory in India. Because of this Act the first systematic step by the east India Company was taken in 1822-23 to spread education in the Madras Presidency. However, the natives' education was not properly progressed due to non availability of teachers.

Therefore, in 1834, the number of schools was only three with the strength of 154, 258 and 276 respectively.<sup>3</sup> (Ibid) Therefore, education in Odisha was more degraded than any other province of India of equal importance by 1866.<sup>5</sup> (Samal- 1989) Above all, female education was in very slow progress.

In this context, the missionaries played a prominent role in preparing the ground for social changes in India in general and Odisha in particular. The female education made a beginning in Odisha under the initiative of missionaries. During the famine of 1865-66, the missionaries established orphanages for the converted Odia girls especially for the tribal girls. Thereafter, they started imparting education to them because in accessible mountainous areas the tribal girls were great victim to age old superstitions and ignorance. Subsequently hill schools were established for their education.

The Purdah system among the women of higher classes also proved to be an obstacle in the spread of education among women. So, the missionaries decided to provide some kind of education for those married women and for this purpose the first Zenana\* association was started by Mrs. Smith in Balasore in 1869. (\* **Zenana**- the apartments of a house in which the women of the family are scheduled.). During the year 1870-71, there were 28 vernacular schools in Balasore. The same year, Cuttack had 50 schools with 2755 students and the first girls' school at Cuttack had come up. Women education was taken up with the establishment of the Ravenshaw Hindu Girls' School in 1873. The Maharaja of Keonjhar and the Rani of Talcher also took initiatives to provide education to the women and started schools. Later on, Reba Ray and Sailabala Das became instrumental to furthering the cause of women's education in Odisha. 6 ( Op.Cit.Nayak)

Regarding female education in Odisha the joint Inspector wrote in 1874-

“if by female education we mean a little reading and writing, there are more educated women in Odisha than perhaps in any parts of Bengal but if it means good and sound learning then it must be confessed very little has yet been done, and for some years to come little more is likely to be done in this respect. The people do not object to give education of some kind to

their daughters, but the idea of sending them to public schools to which the public have access and where they may be subjected to the gaze of the public and will have to mix with girls of all classes is revealing to their feelings and prejudices. Hence it is that while in the pathsalas carried on in the indigenous method, we often have a few girls writing the alphabet on little pieces of palm leaf or with small pieces of chalk upon the ground we do not find a single Odia, Hindu or Mohammedan girl of the respectable family in any of our middle or higher class schools...”<sup>7</sup>

In Mayurbhanj district there was no separate institution for the girls till 1861. In 1862 one lower primary school was started at Baripada and it upgraded to an Upper Primary School in 1919. It became Middle English school in 1932 and in 1947 it raised to the status of high school.<sup>8</sup> Senapati & Sahu-1967)

In 1875 there were nine girl’s schools and one Zenana association for the education of girls. Of these five one was in Cuttack, one in Puri and the rest in Balasore. One of the schools was unaided and others were aided. The aided schools were under missionary management.

In the rest frequented Pathsalas and Mission normal school at Santipur, most the girls were Bengalis. The number of the Odia was few.

In 1881, there were 25 girls out of whom 4 were Odias. Later girls’ schools were established at Jaleswar, Puri, Balasore and other important towns. By 1881, the condition of female education was comfortable.<sup>9</sup> (Ibid)

The total number of girls under instruction was 2416 in 1882. Of these, 823 were from special girls’ school and the rest were from boys’ schools. The special girls’ schools were 33 in number i.e. 25 in Balasore, 6 in Cuttack and 2 in Puri. Out of them 20 were under missionary management and the rest were Hindu girls’ schools. The best Hindu girls schools were those situated at Balasore, Cuttack and Bhadrak.

An important step towards the progress of education in Odisha was taken when a Medical school and a Survey school was established at Cuttack. The school was opened on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb., 1876. It is fully and fairly started with 38 students. In 1886 a female class of the institution was also opened.<sup>10</sup> (Review -1886)

The other recommendation provided for aiding girls schools on easier terms, for an increase to the female inspecting agency and the gradual replacement of male teachers by

mistresses. The entire proposals were approved by the government of Bengal. Action was taken on these proposals from time to time. A Sub Inspector was appointed in 1887 for Odisha to inspect girls' schools lying within the limits of the municipalities.

The progress of female education as represented by the number of girls students in various schools and colleges of Mayurbhanj was encouraging though till a very long period there was only one girl's school. Co-education continued in almost all the schools. There was only two girls' primary school in 1902. It rose to seventh standard in 1920.

In Puri district there were only 17 primary girls' schools in the year 1896-97, but it raised to 52 in 1906-07. It included two model primary girls' schools at Puri and Bhubaneswar and all were dependent on public funds. At that time number of girls studying at primary girls school was 1168 out of which were 1131 Hindus, 32 Christians and five Muslims.<sup>11</sup> (Senapati & Kumar- 1977) but altogether 3241 girls received education in different institutions and about 2073 or 63 percent of the total number of girls were in the boys school. This ratio indicates that co-education was preferred by the local people.

Cuttack Medical School was placed under the management of Surgeon Lieutenant Colonel J.M. Zorab in 1891. He was succeeded by Dr. Steward. Under his able guidance and management it registered 112 students and 6 girls' students in 1894. Under the management of Dr. Steward and Dr. Zorab by 1905 the Cuttack Medical School not only supplied doctors to the several hospitals and dispensaries in Odisha but also trained efficient nurses.<sup>12</sup> (Op.Cit.Samal)

**The table below shows the progress of female education till 1905-**

Year	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Remarks
1884-95	107	5,638	
1899-1900	111	6,062	Girls in boys Schools
1904-1905	214	14,118	are included.

After all by 1905, the progress of female education was not satisfactory. The highest standard achieved by the girls in Odisha was middle vernacular scholarship standard. The slow progress of female education was mainly due to the following reasons.

**i. Conservative mindset of People –**

Most of the people of Odisha were conservative. They did not like that the girls should go out and come in contact with boys, teachers or any other residents. Similarly the education of

girl children was a matter of great indifference to of parents and guardians. They usually did not take any care and interest in the education of their female wards which they did in case of boys.

### **ii. Prevalent of Early Marriage:**

The early marriage system was prevalent everywhere in the province. It presented insurmountable barrier to education beyond the primary stage.

### **iii. Paucity of female teacher:**

Scarcity of female teachers and want of adequate state aid and aid from other public funds hindered the smooth progress of female education.

As a whole, it can be said that, the state of education in Odisha in 1905 was not satisfactory both from the qualitative and quantitative points of view. This was mainly because of the fact that government fully indifferent to educating the people of Odisha after 1866.

The female education was in very poor condition in the **Koraput district** before the coming of Breklum Mission in 1882. It was a “Dark Age” for the women of this locality. They were illiterate and had no voice in the society. None of them had come out of their homes to work. It was observed by the missionaries that unless the women were qualified, the society would not develop. Therefore, the first step taken by the missionaries was to educate Christian women. Perhaps understandably the wives of the missionaries were fully engaged in this work.

Thereafter this mission took keen interest in providing education to r the girls children and introduced female education in this inaccessible region. They ran 4 types of schools

- a) The Boys School.
- b) The orphanages and boarding schools.
- c) Girls school- these began as orphanages or as school for the daughters of the converts as well as for the daughters of low caste people. Most of their female education was restricted to primary level and the rudimentary domestic science.
- d) The missionaries had mixed schools. In boys’ school of the missionaries, education was also imparted to girls. But they were very few.

Special interest was paid by the missionaries to start a girls school because there were no scope for the girls to get education during that time.

A primary school for the girls was established at Kotpad and further the girl's Upper School in Kotpad was made into a Middle English School. They started building orphanages, boarding homes and hostels to accommodate the meriah victim children, orphans and poor . Now ninety five percent of the Christian women who were in service in and outside the Church today had an opportunity to study in mission schools

Apart from school education, regular Bible teaching was given and great efforts were made to educate these women at least up to the standard of reading and writing. The wife of Johanness Timm for example was teaching Bible stories to women as early as 1893A.D. It was observed that women were very much interested to learn from the missionaries. The Non-Christian women also participated in the training. The wives of Rev. Timm and Rev. Gloyer were teaching to some girls and women who were gladly willing to become Christians. Those who were qualified to read and write were given special training in the seminary for the future ministry of the church. In fact Rev. Gloyer searched for some women who could be trained and who could help in preaching the Gospel.

The missionaries advised the authorities of the Breklum Mission regarding their special ministry among the women of the Jeypore Estate. It was decided to do more work for the spiritual development of the women. The authorities first sent two deaconesses in 1905 A.D. and other two in 1909 A.D. to Koraput District. So the work had been carried out more efficiently.

One of the deaconesses was in charge of the hospital, another was in the charge of girls boarding school and training of Bible women. The third looked after the work of the women in the villages. The three were stationed at Kotpad. The fourth took up zenana work in the town of Jeypore.

It was found that the missionaries had less opportunity to talk directly with the women during their preaching ministry. For example, the non-Christian women were always inside their homes. Special training was given to dedicated Christian women to approach the non-Christian women. The wives of the seminary students were also trained theologically. Mrs. Speck was young and experienced in Odia language to teach the women of the seminary students; Mrs. Gloyer was in charge of instructing the women.

Wives of the missionaries were also joining their husbands in preaching at camps. The missionaries were preaching to men and while their wives were preaching to women. This

kind of combined preaching was fruitful for the spread of the Gospel. Mrs. Leuckfeld was always with her husband during his camp and was teaching to the women.

In the town area women's work was done through the wives of the missionaries and also by a deaconess. They used to visit non-Christian women and preaching the Gospel. The sister of W.Ahrens had opportunity to keep relationship with the Muslim women and had dialogue with them about their Lord Jesus Christ. Many non-Christian families were converted through this kind of personal witness.

Certain steps were taken by the Church Council and the Synod of Jeypore Church to prepare women for the future ministry of the church. They were the only sources to approach for the non-Christian women. The following decisions were taken in the Synod in 1942 A.D.

- a) More girls should be sent to the boarding home.
- b) During confirmation class, good biblical instructions should be given to young girls.
- c) The wives of the workers should specially be trained.
- d) Before marriage the daughters of the workers should be given proper instructions in the main pastor stations.
- e) The newly married couple be presented with Bible and hymn books.
- f) In each Deanery and Parish centre, women association be formed (SIC).

There was no high school before 1947 in Koraput district. The Vikram Deo College established in 1947 at Jeypore is the only college of this district to impart co-education.

Thereafter government took some steps for development of education from lower strata and established a number of schools for the development of women education as -

### **I. Introduction of primary education:**

The educational policy of Indian government of 1905 laid more emphasis on primary education. So, to improve the female education, government took a number of steps to set up primary and teacher training schools in Odisha.<sup>13</sup> (Samal-82

### **II. Establishment of Secondary Education:**

For the expansion of secondary education the government continued to rely mainly on private enterprise assisted by grants in aid and subject to certain control. But the British administration neglected scientific and technical education.

### **III. Provision of Training for Female Teachers:**

In the work of the spread of female education the employment of female teachers was badly necessary. So the system of training girls as village mistresses was adopted in some states from the year 1910. Accordingly the girls who had passed lower primary examination were given some training to enable them to be the teachers of the lower primary school.<sup>14</sup> (General Review-1910)

As a consequence, the grants for primary education were increased greatly. As the grants did not prove enough, the government of India adopted another resolution for the widest possible extension of primary education on a voluntary basis in 1913.

The female education was slowly spreading and the number of girls attending schools gradually rose. The growing popularity of female education was evident from the fact that between the years 1911 and 1916, the number of girls at schools had increased by nearly 34 percent. This was mainly due to open of special schools for the girls and the employment of female teachers in that schools.

In the districts of Sundargarh very few women were able to read and write in the pre-independent period. Most of its population constituted by the poor illiterate adivasis and they were not interested to send their girls to schools. The ex states administration also did nothing remarkable for the spread of education among women. In pre-independent period the women education in Keonjhar district did not make much progress. Majority of its population were mostly adivasis.

They were not interested in education. No separate schools were there for the education of girls. Some girls were known to have attended the village Pathsalas, along with the boys. The British government adopted some encouraging steps for the spread of female education. Separate girls' schools were started. According to Cobden Ramsay there were four girls schools with a number of 162 girls student in total in the ex state in the year 1907-08.

But gradually female education started to gain popularity and during the year 1914-15 the number of girls students rose to 756.<sup>15</sup> (Senapati -341-42) The same year, the ex state ranked third among the eighteenth feudatory states of Odisha in the field of women education. In 1943-44 about 1148 girls were studying in different schools of the ex state.

At the time of Darbar administration the girls were imparted not only general education but also education in gardening, nursing and music.

The number of girls at schools continued to increase. The Patna and Kalahandi districts were considered pioneer in the field of female education.

As the efforts were concentrated on the development of primary education, the female education received less attention from 1921. Even then some more schools for girls were opened and efforts were made to provide them with properly qualified and appointed teachers. The beginning of another development showed after 1925 i.e. the admission of increasing number of girls in the boys' schools. It was remarked "the conception is quite clearly coming into the range of practice.

During 1929, 102 girls' schools were there in the Puri district from which one was middle vernacular schools and the rest were primary schools with 2500 pupils.

There were only two Middle English schools for the girls established in the year 1930. The girls Middle English school at Baripada was established in 1932 and named after Maharani Prem Kumari, the queen of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Bhanja. In 1938 the status of the upper primary school at Balangir was raised to the Middle English Standard. There were no high schools for girls in any of the twenty four districts of Odisha.

For the promotion of female education co - education was encouraged as far as practicable. The girls' schools were established in case of necessity. The special inspectional agency for the female education was created. Attention was paid to provide the girls schools with trained teachers. Even then female education presented a disappointing picture.

The progress of female education was different from district to district and also the number of girls' students differed from each other. In Sambalpur, during the year 1900-01 only 471 girls were attending schools. But gradually its number rose to 1332 in the year 1906 of whom 899 were enrolled in boys' schools and 433 in girls' schools. There were only six upper primary girls school situated at Sambalpur, Rampella, Attabira, Barpali, Bargarh and Padampur. All were managed by government. <sup>16</sup>(Senapati & Mohanty-1971) These schools were formerly District Council School but were kept under the control of government in 1903. Thus at that time opportunities of education available to women were only up to primary standard.

In next twenty years there was a steady advance in all classes of schools. Three of the schools had become middle vernacular schools situated at Sambalpur, Bargarh, Rampella and all were managed by government. Besides, there were five upper primary girls' schools and

fifteen lower primary girls' schools. Regarding the female education in Sambalpur district Nilamani Senapati, the Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur and the president of the managing committee of the Zilla School had given a highly informative remark in 1931 which run as -

“A proposal came for admission of girls in the high school classes. I was in favour. All the non-official members were against. They apprehended, if the girls were admitted, boys would be withdrawn. I ordered admission of girls and waited to see the result. No boys withdrew. Virtually the door to high school education for girls remained closed until a decade later when Lady Lewis Girls School was started.”

In 1944 Lady Lewis Girls School was established which was an important step towards the progress of female education in Sambalpur. Gangadhar Meher College now the premier educational institution of western Odisha was established in 1944. It was the first and foremost college of the district. 1944-45 the number of girls' students increased to 607.

In the ex state of Nayagarh, Daspalla, Khandapara and Rampur, female education did not make much progress during 1930's.

In the Balangir district the situation was also same. The ratio of progress was slow and steady. In 1934-35 at Patna of Balangir there was only one primary school and 28 Lower Primary School for girls. In 1930-40 there were 98 Primary Schools including twenty primary schools for girls. Sonepur of Balangir district there were one upper primary and four lower primary schools for girls in the year 1941-42 and the number was same with 567 girls reading in them in 1943-44.

1944 the Rajendra College, the first college of district was started. In 1945-46 there were 115 primary schools with 10,311 girls' students.<sup>17</sup> (Senapati, & Sahoo -1968) In 1947 there were nearly 70 lower primary schools for girls and only Girls' Upper Primary Schools in this region.

In 1936, the percentage of literacy among the women was only 2.4. Of course the opening of Cuttack girls' high school and intermediate classes in Ravenshaw girls' school in 1916 was concrete steps towards the promotion of higher education among the women of Odisha. But no Muslims girls passed the matriculate examination by 1936.

In 1945-47 in Gangpur ex state there were only seven primary girls' schools with 1350 girls and in Bonai ex state the number of girls' students was 480 by 1945-46.<sup>18</sup>(Senapati & Kumar-1975) The female education was ignored till 1947.

**Conclusion:** Women education in Odisha during the British period was slowly and steadily growing in the state. In the post independent period government paid more attention towards the advancement of female education in different districts. Because of the administration blessing as well the encouragement of the leading personalities of Odisha Madhusudan Das and his daughter Sailabala Das, Abinash Chandra, Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati and the T.E. Ravenshaw, the Commissioner of Odisha, women education became much popular in Odisha and after the end of the Raj the government put much stress on female education. Several measures were taken by the government in the direction. Some of them were the appointment of school mothers to look after the girl students in the school. Introduction of attendance scholarship, free supply of dress to encourage regular attendance in schools, appointment of women teachers' and exemption of tuition fees for the girl students in educational institutions. In the college female students whose parents do not pay income tax or agricultural tax, are required to pay half tuition fees. These measures have been greatly beneficial in promoting female education in the state. Education for women is very indispensable because it is hoped that educated women make happy homes and this contributes greatly to form a better nation. Most of the ills in society can be removed by providing proper education to a girl child.

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