

A TOUR OF ENQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN INDIA, 1912-1913

IN consequence of a movement among English women engaged in teaching, expressing itself in a widespread and growing interest in the condition of women in the East and culminating in a conference held at Oxford in September 1912, Miss Roberts and I started in October of that year on a journey in India of which a report is given in the following pages. A very short outline of our journey will indicate the extent of our enquiry and the sources of our information.

We landed in Bombay on November 1, 1912, and proceeded to Madras, where we spent about a month, staying at various high schools and visiting Madura, Palamcotta, Bangalore and Mysore. On Dr. Mott's kind invitation we attended the South India Conference held in Madras, as also the Bengal Conference held in Calcutta in the following month. On our way to Calcutta we paid a short visit to Guntur in the Telugu country. We spent the month of December in Bengal, making Calcutta our centre and visiting Darjeeling, Barisal and Dacca, where we enquired into the proposed women's college to be established by Government as part of the new university. On January 3 we started on a journey through the north of India, staying at Benares, Allahabad, Lucknow, Agra, Palwal, Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore, Jullundur, Ludhiana, and Dehra Dun where we attended a conference of women teachers of the United Provinces. We then travelled south, calling again at Delhi and Agra, paid a short visit to her Highness the Begum of Bhopal, spent a day or two at Hoshungabad, Jubbulpore and Katni, and returned to Bombay on March 1. From Bombay visits

were paid to Ahmednagar, Poona and Hyderabad, and finally to her Highness the Maharani of Baroda. We also visited a number of village stations such as Tiruvallur and Batala, as opportunity offered in the various provinces.

In most of the places we had the pleasure of being the guests of missionaries of various societies and cannot speak too gratefully of the readiness of their co-operation in our enquiry or of their unfailing personal kindness to ourselves. We also had interviews with the Minister of Education and several of the Directors of Public Instruction, and received invaluable help from the government inspectresses who exerted themselves to give us every opportunity of seeing all that is done by the State for the education of girls. Indian men and women, too, engaged in the various indigenous schools set up in the interest of reformed Hinduism, were most kind in inviting us to see their work and in talking freely of their hopes and aims.

The situation as it became known to us by conversations with experienced workers revealed itself as full of promise and of danger. Until lately it has been taken for granted that illiteracy was the normal condition of womanhood, and the government estimate in 1907 of 7 per 1000 as the proportion of women able to read would have caused little remark if made some twenty years ago. But many causes have contributed to a gradual change in the public attitude towards the education of women : the patient, unrecorded toil on the part of women missionaries, the growing sensitiveness of India to western opinion which discredits a nation whose women are illiterate, the desire of educated men for educated wives, the obvious convenience in household affairs of the ability to read, write and keep simple accounts, the general spread of Christian ideals of human relations, and the strange spirit of unrest now abroad amongst women all over the world which seems to leave no nation untouched. So that in most parts of India we found a growing willingness to send girls to school and it is no longer necessary to pay them for attendance ; in some places a small fee

may be safely demanded. It is true that the education is cut short at far too early an age by marriage and the little girl leaves school very imperfectly prepared for life, but merely to establish the custom of schoolgoing is a great thing and will bear fruit in the next generation. India can no longer keep its women ignorant even if it wished to do so.

To meet and foster this growing demand three agencies are at work, the Government through its educational service, the Christian missions, and committees of Indians who found and manage schools in the interests of religious propaganda, with the object of counteracting what is perhaps correctly considered the Anglicizing tendency of the education given by the other two agencies. We saw not a few schools of this last class, especially in the Panjab, and felt great sympathy with the desire of their founders to establish a truly Indian education. But they present few original features, and largely imitative though they are of government and missionary schools, they are far below these in efficiency through lack of experienced management and capable teachers.

The government educational authorities are as a rule willing to set up a school for girls wherever there is a reasonable expectation that pupils will be forthcoming and where no school already exists. We visited many of these schools both in the large towns and the smaller municipalities and saw much good work done in them. But they suffer from several serious disadvantages. The code, originally designed for boys and very imperfectly adapted for girls, is in itself mechanical, and is, as a rule, too rigidly followed in detail. The system is English and if administered by Englishwomen, accustomed to adapt and supplement the syllabuses and to carry out the regulations in a spirit of loyal independence, it might work well. But the supply of English teachers is entirely inadequate. No motive other than the missionary one will bring out to India women of high qualifications to whom a thousand interests and a useful and varied career in the forefront of a

great movement lie open at home, to teach for a small salary, among almost incessant physical uneasiness, in an alien land and language, children who will be removed from their influence long before they can sympathize with the intellectual life of their teachers or become in any sense their companions.

It is rather by traditional interpretation than by original intention that the 'declaration' of 1854 has banished not only religious teaching but also religious influence from government schools, but in practice, as we were repeatedly told, government neutrality, when applied to education, is often in effect anti-religious. This proves injurious in many ways, of which two are especially important for our purpose: it deters many of the best women from entering government service, and, far from conciliating the Indian parent, it causes him to regard government schools with distrust. As we travelled through India, the curious fact became increasingly clear to us that Indians of all creeds and classes preferred in fact, though not always avowedly, mission schools to government schools for their daughters, partly because of the excellence of the English teachers, to whom, as Sir Valentine Chirol says, 'teaching is rather a vocation than a profession,' partly because of the moral tone and the adequate provision made for the safety of the girls, and partly on account of the spiritual teaching which, however frankly Christian, is greatly appreciated. The Indian parent has no wish that his daughter should become a Christian, but still less does he wish her to be irreligious.

In most places we found no eagerness on the part of Government to deal with the very difficult problems of the education of girls. It is generally recognized that the secular education which is alone possible in government and municipal schools is not suitable, and the English officials of the Educational Service are the first to admit their inevitable ignorance of the lives and natures of Indian women. It is hardly possible for any Englishman to gain

any personal knowledge of either pupils or teachers, and the government inspectresses, admirable as their work often is, are few and fully occupied. Many of the educational officials with whom we talked would probably value very highly the advice and co-operation of the teachers in mission schools, whose knowledge and experience in this field are far beyond their own. As the greater part of the work of educating Indian girls is still in the hands of missionaries their opinion should be more influential than it is, and we felt in each province that a much closer association between those responsible for government education and the missionary teachers was both possible and highly advisable. In the matter, for instance, of vernacular text-books, the lack of which is one of the most serious obstacles in the progress of education, the missionaries might supply the knowledge, and Government the money, necessary for bringing out more and better books. Details of curricula might be thought out in friendly conference, and experienced missionary teachers might do great service by helping the Government to bring the syllabuses for the classes in girls' schools into closer relation with the ordinary life of Indian women.

Regarded from every point of view, the mission schools seem to us to have at this date an extraordinarily great opportunity, the reward of years of self-sacrificing effort and of toil which must often have seemed wasted in the face of indifference, suspicion and even hostility. They can count now in most parts of India on a supply of little girls to fill any school which they open, on the general concurrence of parents, and on the goodwill of Government. Their work has proved most fruitful in result and seems capable of almost infinite expansion.

But the situation is also beset with difficulties and fraught with danger. The whole social system of India tells against any education of women which goes beyond the mere rudiments. The intellect of a woman has hardly been recognized as having any rights or claims, and the domestic

ideal which is all-prevalent in India has been held to exclude the development of any part of her nature other than the emotional and the practical. The custom of early marriage removes the child from school just at the age when an independent intellectual life is awaking. The great difficulty of many of the Indian scripts causes a very large part of the scanty school-time to be absorbed in merely learning to read and write, and in places where two or even three languages are current little more can be taught. It not infrequently happens that in a few years even these hardly won arts are lost for want of practice. But even so, the few years of attendance at school have conferred much that is very valuable. The whole mental outlook is widened by the mere contact with books, the lessons of concentration, perseverance and order are never lost, the door of knowledge, if not entered, is at least opened, and the acquaintance with a cultivated and friendly Christian woman leaves an unfading memory.

The mission schools have this advantage over government schools that daily use may be made of the Bible, which, apart from its religious importance, has great educative value as a storehouse of lessons of literary, historical and ethical significance. The numerous little primary schools, maintained by missions and staffed as a rule by Indian Christian women teachers under the supervision, as yet indispensable, of a missionary who may have a large number of such schools under her care, are among the most valuable of educative and religious efforts. Those who have attended them welcome the 'zenana lady' when she visits them in their homes and are far more open to her influence than others; they are familiar with a higher, clearer code of ethical duty, and they will certainly send their daughters to school and supply that home interest in the children's lessons which is so valuable an auxiliary to the work of the teacher.

Missionaries engaged in this kind of work may well feel that they are effecting something, and we could only wish

that such schools were in reach of every Indian girl. Of course the good results would be greatly increased if the children could have a longer school life. It is not necessary to set down here all that we heard of the evils of early marriage and the wrongs inflicted by the curtailment of childhood and the premature infliction of the burden of motherhood. But this evil cannot be cured from without, and any attempt at a forcible change would probably do more harm than good. Only Christianity with its exaltation of the spiritual over the physical, its safe outlet for emotion, its wealth of new interests and its doctrines of self-control and unselfishness, can diminish the terrible absorption in matters of sex, and make possible higher ideals of marriage and other human relations.

The custom of early marriage is the greatest obstacle to the progress of the education of girls, in this especially, that it cuts off at the root the supply of teachers. Almost all the girls leave school far too young for any possibility of their training as teachers, the married women, if they care to take up teaching at all, are preoccupied with domestic cares, and though in some parts of India increasing use is made of widows, there are many prejudices and difficulties in the way of their general employment. The main fact of a widow's life is disappointment, and her position is often one of great moral danger. Many missionaries told us of the extreme difficulty of finding a safe and honourable dwelling for an isolated woman teacher, whether unmarried or widowed.

Such teachers as there are derive almost entirely from three sources : the Hindu Reform sects whose contribution is as yet small in numbers, the Indian Christians, and the Eurasian community. Among these the age of marriage though still very early is considerably later than in the Hindu and Moslem world, and though very nearly all become wives the position of the unmarried woman is better understood. These young women seemed to us the great hope of education in India and the ultimate reliance must

be on them. Yet we did not find that they are as yet capable of any sustained effort or heavy responsibility, and it would be a cruelty to themselves and an injury to their charges to set them to tasks which they are unable to perform. The English teacher is still indispensable both for the actual work and as an inspiring example. The Indian Christian women have as yet shown little desire to pass on to other women what they have learnt, and the Indian teachers seem strangely lacking in the sense of vocation. Yet they show great skill and tact in dealing with very young children and would succeed perhaps better in kindergarten work than in other kinds of teaching.

Eurasian women might render great services as teachers in Indian schools. Their mixed origin, on the one hand, makes the climate congenial to them and gives them a command of the vernacular and a knowledge of the country very difficult for foreign missionaries to acquire, and, on the other, gives them a greater degree of social freedom than Indian women have, and at least a nominal Christianity. Though we heard much in some places of the limitations and weaknesses of this community, which has had indeed little encouragement to energy and independence, yet we found that the missionaries and teachers who knew Eurasian girls best are the most hopeful about their capacities and possibilities. We were impressed by the need of further provision for the education of these girls and of those belonging to the so-called 'domiciled community.' They form an important class as so many of the government inspectors and teachers are drawn from amongst them. At present fifty per cent of those under instruction are in Roman Catholic convent schools, where in many cases the teachers are French nuns and the influence is not British.

We gathered, however, from much evidence that there is still an imperative demand for more English women in Indian schools. The system of education is English in origin and both the Government and the missions unconsciously count on English people to carry it out. It is

generally recognized that there are too few Englishmen in the Educational Service of Government and it must be confessed that there are far too few Englishwomen in the mission schools. We found that one of the greatest attractions of these schools is the presence of English ladies, and it appears to be true all over India that both parents and children prefer them to Indian women teachers. The high schools owe much of their popularity and efficiency to these missionary teachers.

But they are nearly always overworked, and few sights in India struck us as more pathetic than the life of such a teacher, bearing up against homesickness, loneliness and physical discomfort or even suffering, burdened with financial and domestic responsibilities in addition to her own proper load, in itself almost overwhelming, struggling to adapt herself to natures so unlike her own and enduring the endless disappointments incident to the work of the pioneer. But besides this distressing sense of over-pressure, the quality of the teacher's work is seriously affected by her want of leisure. Many young missionaries told us, with keen regret, that plunged as they are almost at once into class-work in English, they have not time to learn the vernacular to a degree at all satisfactory to their trained sense of scholarship; that, lacking this, they can never thoroughly understand their pupils or be understood by them; that Indian life beyond the walls of the mission compound must remain a sealed book to them; that in consequence they cannot rightly prepare their pupils for their future life, and, worst of all, that they cannot give their girls the individual attention which is so deeply needed. The most valuable part of the life in a boarding-school should be the training given by personal contact with ladies of the kind sent out by the missions, whose influence on manners, morals, ideals of conduct and intellectual habit would be wholly good. But this side of the teacher's work is apt to be the first to diminish under the stress of overwork, partly because it is the most congenial and partly because no time can be

definitely assigned to it. The girl must come when she feels inclined, confidence cannot be forced, and to find the teacher very busy and able to give a mere shred of time before some pressing engagement is enough to discourage a timid and sensitive pupil. The affection of the schoolgirl would give the teacher an easy entrance into homes where she might be of infinite service if she ever had time for such visits. Moreover, many complex problems of Indian education would probably prove capable of solution if experienced missionary teachers had leisure to think them out, either individually or in informal conference with each other.

It is partly a question of money. The financial burden lies very heavily on some missionary teachers, and if it could be removed there would be more energy and leisure for the proper work of the school. More convenient buildings and better equipment would often enable the teaching to be done under less trying circumstances. Teaching is a fine art and is best done under generous conditions.

Still more is it a question of workers. The supply of English teachers is wholly inadequate to the demand for them. We visited hardly one mission school which was not understaffed.

But even if the number of English teachers were greatly enlarged, the problem cannot be solved wholly by means of them. The education of a nation cannot ultimately depend on another nation and the task must be performed mainly by Indian hands. In this connexion we studied with the deepest interest the proposals for establishing Christian colleges for women in relation to the universities of Bombay and Madras. India at present needs as it never needed before a supply of native women trained to habits of independent thought and serious study. It is most important that the university women of India, whose influence will probably be out of all proportion to their numbers, should be trained by Christians and we are strongly of the opinion that a residential college will be far more effective than a hostel or a non-residential college.

But for a long time to come the great majority of Indian teachers will not be university women, but girls whose education has not gone beyond a middle, or at best, a high school certificate. The training of these is a matter of most vital importance and should be the task of the very best teachers that the missions can provide. We came to the conclusion that it is better done in central resident training colleges than in training departments attached to schools, where it not infrequently happens that the girl is successively pupil, student in training, and teacher in the same institution. At the same time senior girls are a very important element in mission schools, and it is a great advantage to them to be still under the influence of those who have brought them up. They should probably not go to the training college till they are sixteen years of age. They might then spend two years on their training and give five or six years of service before they marry.

Criticisms of the curricula at present in use in girls' schools referred chiefly to a lack of adaptation to the needs and natures of Indian women. It was generally felt that arithmetic claimed too much attention and that the whole education was too literary. It seemed to us almost everywhere that the nature study, children's games, songs, physical exercises, handwork and drawing taught in schools needed more careful adaptation to Indian conditions. In some schools there were distinct signs of over-pressure, and of too little exercise, sleep and food.

The problem of the teaching of manual work beyond the stage of the kindergarten seems as yet to have found no satisfactory solution. It is difficult to see to what useful ends the arts of sewing, knitting, or crocheting are to be turned when the girl goes home. To teach girls to make blouses, skirts and stockings is to train them in arts which the social life of their country does not need. It not unnaturally induces the girl to exchange her own graceful and suitable dress for a generally unsuccessful imitation of English clothing, and this manner of dressing, besides being

expensive and inconvenient, tends to increase the deplorable separation which now exists between the educated and non-educated Indian woman. In the same way, the usual occupation of women converts sheltered by missions, the making of lace and drawn thread work, is open to criticism. The market is entirely European and the sale is promoted by considerations other than economic; the charitable pay more than they wish for the sake of supporting the mission. Yet the cheapness of the material and implements, the ease of the manufacture and the fact that hitherto there has been a sale, if not a demand, for such things, naturally attract missionaries to this resource when seeking a livelihood for the women thrown on their hands.

We found much variety of practice among missionaries as to the use of English in high schools. Here there seems to be a want of clearness as to the aim of the education given. If the girls are being prepared for a university career a high degree of proficiency in English is of course indispensable, as English is at present the sole medium of instruction at all the Indian universities. And no one would wish to underestimate the value of a knowledge of English sufficient for reading English books and conversing with English people. Yet it seemed to us that too much is sacrificed to acquiring a perhaps unnecessary fluency in English, and the results as they affect both pupils and teachers must give rise to grave anxiety. A thorough knowledge of English seems in practice seldom combined with a love of the vernacular and enthusiasm for race and country, at any rate amongst girls. The missionary teachers, also, finding it possible to teach their classes in English, and being directed always to talk to the girls in English, gradually lose their zeal for learning the vernacular; and indeed it is very difficult at the end or beginning of a very strenuous day, to summon the fortitude necessary for severe study of a language which they have little opportunity at first of speaking except to the servants. Every missionary will admit that the two language examinations which all recruits take by no means

involve a thorough grasp of the vernacular, and nearly every one would continue her studies if she had time and a sufficient motive.

The most unfortunate result is that in consequence of the missionary's want of proficiency in the vernacular Scripture comes to be taught in English and in some schools the whole or a great part of the religious life is conducted in a language alien to the pupils. Educationally there is great value in familiarity with the beautiful language of the Authorized Version of the English Bible, but this seemed to us a small gain compared with the immense disadvantage of the alienation of the religious from the national life. If the missionary with every advantage of intellect, training and a strong motive finds it difficult to clothe her religious teaching in a vernacular dress, how impossible must it be for immature girls, with no particular motive for making a great effort, to understand religious conceptions presented to them in a language which they are only beginning to grasp. There is reason to fear that the docility and politeness of the girls and their ready acquiescence in whatever is said to them deceived the missionary as to the reality of their understanding. In one school we heard the questions put in English and answered in Panjabi, an excellent method for assuring an intelligent grasp of the subject, but it seemed to us that a still better method would be to allow the missionaries time and opportunity to learn the vernacular so thoroughly that they could convey religious teaching with ease and precision in the mother tongue of their pupils. It is not easy for a girl accustomed to carry on her religious life in English to explain her experience to a fellow countrywoman who can speak only her native language, and lack of knowledge of the vernacular Bible makes quotation difficult. Almost all the missionaries who spoke to us on this subject agreed in theory on the superiority of religious teaching in the vernacular, but many had found it practically too difficult.

Though the teaching given by women missionaries is

the best of its kind in India, yet many of the teachers told us that they felt the training which they received at home to have been inadequate or unsuitable as preparation for their difficult and complex task. If missionary societies could decide at an earlier stage to what work and country a candidate will be assigned, the training might have a closer relation to the work which she will be required to do. Experience in a good high school at home would form perhaps the most valuable part of the training and access to such schools might be arranged also for missionary teachers on furlough. We believe that many English head mistresses would willingly co-operate with missionary societies in this matter if they were invited to do so. Many missionaries also strongly expressed the need which they feel for centres of special training in India, where the language, religions and characteristics of the Indian races might be scientifically studied and taught.

In conclusion, we were greatly impressed with the importance of occupying the field at present open for Christian schools, both primary and secondary, before the popular demand for education increases and schools are established from which Christian influence is excluded.

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