

## **Women's Education in the Valley Areas of Manipur (1891-1947) A Historical Study**

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**Abstract:** As Education is the only key to women empowerment, imparting modern education to all sections of womenfolk is the bounden duty of the Government as well as the governed. In spite of having the elements of feminism and the system of matriarchy in the early Manipuri Society, the tradition of the provision of literary education to the women was totally ignored. The trend of modern education also known as western education started in Manipur only during the British Colonial rule in the state. The basic feature of Such new education system is learning imparted to all irrespective of caste, creed and gender thereby resulting in the growth of female education in Manipur. But it could hardly achieve success and encouragement in the pre-independence period. It took a new shape only in the post independence period i.e., after 1947. The introduction of female education in Manipur eventually brought significant changes in Manipuri Society.

**Keywords:** education, matriarchy, caste, creed, significant.

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Date of Submission: 21-09-2017

Date of acceptance: 02-10-2017

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Women's education plays a vital role in bringing about Social change in the post colonial Manipuri society. During the Vedic period of Indian history women enjoyed equal status with men in all spheres of life and women of this period was the epitome of intellectual and spiritual attainments as they had accessed to education. In this hilly region of the easternmost corner of India also, unlike the other South East Asian societies, a women's role in different aspects such as culture, literature, economy and religion is very unique. There was undoubtedly elements of feminism in the traditional Manipuri society which had favored women to be economically self reliant and in building up social and political collective energy. Besides like the Indian women of the Vedic Period, the State has a long and historical tradition of female education since the earlier historical times.

The main objectives of the present study is to explore the nature and extent of female education system prevailed in Manipur during 1891-1947.

This present study is taken up through historical perspectives and is mainly based on primary as well as secondary sources like administration report of the British Political Agency, Puyas (Ancient Texts), Books, journal, Ph. D. thesis and seminar papers.

Discussion:

When India first came under the British rule, a section of female population was educated up to the modest requirements of a household wife. Among the women of the upper class the legends of the Puranas and epics supplied impressive lessons in morality. Among the lower orders the keeping of the daily accounts fell in some households to the mother or the eldest female in the family. Addition or subtraction being performed by means of flowers or the notches on the stick or any such counters which come to hand.(Nirmala : 1999) However such old practices were to be replaced to most fast changing lifestyle of its people. Female education was neglected for a long time even in the British period and before 1854 the attitude towards women's education had been that of utter non-involvement. The Company was not ready to initiate any program for female education. In this context, J.A. Richey observes, "Prior to the Dispatch of 1854 from the court of Directors, female education was not recognized as a branch of the State system of education in India. The attention of the authorities does not appear to have been directed to the subject until many years, after they had adopted definite measures for the education of boys. In none of the general dispatches, relating to the educational matters submitted to or received from the court of Directors during the first half of the nineteenth century, there was any reference to the education of India's girls and women. It would seem that the authorities both in England and in India were of the opinion that any attempt to introduce female education when there was no demand for it, might be regarded by the people as an interference with their social custom."(ibid) In this way,

it was only in 1854 that Government partially recognized women's education as a branch of state system of education in India.

Prior to the introduction of western education in Manipur, informal and non literacy education was imparted to the women section beginning from girlhood They were imparted professional education like weaving, embroidery, agriculture, spinning and other cottage industries by their mothers and local elders. Physical, moral and military education was also imparted to the women but physical and military education was provided particularly among the women of royal and aristocratic families in the early times. Besides cultural education, like music and dance was also provided compulsorily to the girls since very early times in Manipur. But such a traditional system of education alone could not meet the changing needs of the evolving modern society. Consequently to impart modern education to women was the need of the hour. In the beginning, imparting modern system of education to the girls was not encouraged in Manipuri society. The female education got its momentum only after the introduction of British administration in Manipur (Basanta : 1998). In 1894-95 efforts were made to open a school in Imphal. But due to non-availability of a suitable candidate for the post of mistress, the school could not be opened for a long time (Administration Report :1894-95).

Finally the first girls L.P. school was started in December, 1899 when a suitable mistress was found at last. In the opening day, 12 girls had enrolled in the attendance register. (Basanta : op.cit) But the school had to be closed for want of support in 1902-03. (Shakespeare : 1991) Thus in the initial stage, women education could hardly achieve success in the state and the situation remained unchanged for quite some time. Moreover want of female teachers, the Manipuri conception of womanhood, religious orthodoxy of the Manipuris and superstitious beliefs were some of the hindrances to the growth of female education in Manipur. (Lokendra: 1991) The failure was probably due to the rumor that as soon as the girls had been satisfactorily taught to read, write and speak English, they were to be shipped off to England where there was said to be a scarcity of marriageable women. In this regards, T.C. Hodson writes, "The sole basis for this untoward myth lay in the fact that at that time among all the officers of government, civil and military, then serving in Manipur not one was married Such rumors are constantly arising in Manipur and derive their wide circulation through the agency of bazaars, where time hangs so heavy that such gossip is eagerly retailed and receives too often ready acceptance." (Hodson : 1984)

In 1906-07, another school for girls was established in more modest lines.(Shakespeare :op.cit) Besides, studying all subjects in Lower Primary classes, weaving and embroidery were also instructed to the girls in this school. (Administration Report: 1906-07) Towards the end of the year 1913-14, a girls' school was opened for the education of girls of the Bengali community with the kind permission of Sir Archdale Earle, K.C.I.E., Chief Commissioner of Assam and so, the school has been named the "Lady Earle Girls' School". There were 19 girls on the roll on March 31st, 1914 and the average attendance was 14.8. (Administration Report : 1913-14)

Christian Missionaries also did commendable works in spreading female education in the hill areas of Manipur. Gradually, female education received further impetus after 1930 as there was a move to encourage female education in the state. Besides many girls' Schools were opened run by private enterprises, which were situated at Wahengbam Leikai, Kwakeithel, Heirangoithong and Chingakham Leikai in Imphal area, besides one recognized L.P. Girls School for which the expenditure was financed by the State Government. Above all, a grant-in-aid of Rs. 20/- per month was also paid by the State to the Girls' primary school at Sagolband. (Administration Report 1930-31) Besides, the need for the establishment of more High schools was keenly felt among the then elites of Manipur. Some pioneers of modern education like Dr. N. Leiren Singh, N.Gopal Singh, Chourajit Paul, Damodar Paul, Tolchou Singh and Chouyaima Singh worked for the growth and development of Secondary education in Manipur thereby resulting in the establishment of many High schools in the State in subsequent years. Thus one private High School viz. Manipur girls' Institution was founded in 1931 which was run by Shree Kojiam Amubi, a pioneer elite who advocated female education in Manipur. According to contemporary sources the best girls' school in Manipur in those days was "Manipur Girls' Institution" of Shri kojiam Amubi. (Jugeshwor : 1933) During the year 1931-32, the school was given provisional recognition by the Calcutta University but it had no building of its own. So, Maharaja Churachand Singh, the then King of Manipur, donated a permanent site near the Palace and consequently, the school was renamed after him as Churachand High School on 1st March, 1934.(Administration Report 1933-34) By 1935, another Girls' High School was opened at Pureiromba Khongnankhong, Imphal known as Tamphasana Girls High School by Maharaja Churachand Singh in the name of his daughter Tamphasana.(Mangoljao: 1967) It was shifted to the present building which was constructed at the personal expense of His Highness, the Maharaja of Manipur on the 1st April, 1936. In February, 1936 the Director of Public Instructions of Assam granted provisional recognition of this school. The State also allowed it a grant-in-aid of Rs. 100/- per month from June 1936. (ibid) The school was later on upgraded to higher secondary school. The outbreak of the Second World War became a hurdle to the growth of female education in Manipur. During 1943-44, only 97 girls attended two girls' schools. (Administration Report: 1943-44) But the number increased to 377 on the rolls of the 5 girls' L.P. Schools during 1945-46 and out of 44 candidates who took the State L.P. Examination 29 came out successful. (Administration Report : 1945-46) Thus female education became more progressive and developed after the Second World War as the people became more aware of the necessity of imparting education to women. The Tamphasana Girls High

School was given recognition by Calcutta University in 1947. In 1946, a College was established at Imphal. It was the first college in Manipur and was named after Maharani Dhanamanjuri Devi who donated Rs. 10,000 for the college. (Mangoljao:op.cit)

During the Maharaja's rule, Educational administration in the State was under the direct control of the Manipur State Durbar. In the Durbar there was a member in Charge of Education who was responsible for the Schools in the valley of Manipur. There was no separate department of education, however, by the year 1910 the Education Department came into existence with a deputy Inspector of school and two inspecting Pandits. (Shanti : 2001) With this new development in the field of education, all the schools in the hill areas were under the control of the Vice President of the Manipur State Durbar whereas the administrative machinery of education in Manipur valley was organized as a separate system. (ibid)

## II. CONCLUSION

From the above accounts, it can come to the conclusion that since the earliest historical times, Manipuri women took prominent roles in every sphere of the state like social, cultural, economic, political and other activities. Besides, traditional education in non-literary form was also imparted to them. However, with the introduction of British colonial rule in 1891, female education in the modern line was started under the patron and zealous efforts of the then rulers of Manipur, British political agents and Christian missionaries in the plain and hill areas of Manipur.

Female Education plays a very important role in the overall development of the State in the post Independence period. Education has revolutionized the life of women. As a result many changes are developed in their outlook, attitude, thought and belief etc. and concepts of women empowerment and feminism are started to emphasize in the State. Such developments in the educated women herself have profound impact on the family, marriage institutions, health, sanitation and other social norms and values of the State. Thus educated women brought overall development of the state and also assumed a prominent role in bringing the trends of modernization and westernization in Manipuri Society.

Despite the above facts, women enjoy a humble status in Manipuri society. Social evils still continue against women in this male dominated patrilineal society and they were usually suppressed by their male partners with the view that women are always inferior to men.

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IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Dr. Sh Shantibala Devi. "Women's Education in the Valley Areas of Manipur (1891-1947) A Historical Study." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) , vol. 22, no. 9, 2017, pp. 79-81.