

Chapter VIII

GROWTH OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN DARJEELING HILLS : PROBLEMS AND PROSPECT

The Constitutional Provision of India give both men and women equal opportunity in all areas. Educated modern women from urban and rural areas of India slowly developed their inner strength to stand on their own feet, to respond to new challenges in life. In Darjeeling hill areas also we observe that women are now trying to fight against suffocating factors such as poverty, ignorance and a sense of inequality. The experience of life of the modern hill women is different from that of previous generations. However, though there are constitutional provision in favour of women, the wide gap is still visible between men and women in every field. So now modern women "... have had to use their brains as well as their hands, they have discovered experience, new emotions they have developed new ambitions. Few want to be merely but happy wives and mothers, but the recipe for happiness is changing. Ingredients of educated happiness include self-realization through the development of the individual potential.”(1)

Womens Education from the Historical Perspective :

Ancient India gave a very important place to women. In the ancient period that is in Vedic and Buddhist India we come to know many names of scholarly women who made significant contributions to the field of education.

During the early Vedic period women were allowed to the study of the Vedas and the performance of sacrifices. Girls were initiated through the Upanayana ceremony, wore the sacred thread and lived a life of celibacy. Marriage according to choice was preferred. There were women scholars devoting themselves to higher studies who remained unmarried through their whole life. Many Vedic hymns were written by women scholars. Learned women even challenged men of learning in open discussion. Many women took teaching as a career even they received military

training and took part in war. During Buddhist period also it has been observed that many girls took vow as Bhiksuni or nuns in monastery. Though Buddhism and Jainism were at first showed indifference to admit women into their faith but in the course of time women were admitted to both Buddhism and Jainism and nunneries were established. The reason behind the attractions of becoming a nun was that a woman had the opportunity to study, teach and preach.

Female education got a great setback during the period 200 B.C. to 1200 A.D. due to Manusmriti or laws of Manu. Women in the later Vedic period were deprived of all privileges and at the end of the Buddhist period women's education got a greater setback mostly because of Muslim invasion and internal strife and corruption in the monastery and among different Buddhist sects.

During Muslim rule that is the period 1200 A.D. to 1800 A.D., the percentage of literacy went down very rapidly. Though in the Muslim Royal household we get the name of many Muslim educated ladies but on the whole the education of girls presented a very gloomy picture throughout medieval India. Male supremacy became strong and men both Muslim and Hindi were very prejudiced against female education. The Pardah system was first introduced by the Muslims and later on Hindus also accepted the system.(3)

The early British period that is from 1800-1854, shows that missionaries and philanthropists from different European countries and from England did some important works to improve the condition of women's education in India. They tried to break the popular resistance to women's education by opening schools for girls - Raja Rammohan Roy with the help of the British Government ultimately banned the widow burning system and gave all his support to the education of women folk.

Then later came Dayanand Saraswati from the Arya Samaj, who did his best to improve and liberalise the condition of women. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in

Bengal worked hard to remove the Pardah system, to provide widow remarriage and women's education. The Indian women's plight was then miserable : ignorance and superstitions were suffocating them. Very few received education and enjoyed freedom. --"Raja Rammohon Roy and other reformers recognised the plight, and particularly in the early part of the 20th century there was a conscious move back to the spirit of Veda."(4)

The British Government realising the enlightened Indians' support for womens education emphasised the introduction of women's education. The despatch of 1854 for the first time prescribed for India an educational policy. The despatch of 1854 reminded the British Government of its responsibility of educating the common masses of India also encouraging girls' education. The Indian education commission of 1882 recommended liberal grants in aid, freeships and scholarship for girls' education. Somehow the Government sector did not do much work in this field, though private agencies really worked hard to spread the education of girls.(5)

Female education in the hill region of Darjeeling

The then Government also realised that hill people should come within the perview of development so in the hill region of Darjeeling one state school of official enterprise was established. This school was meant for the children of the native inhabitants, mainly, boys.

In Darjeeling also missionary enterprise worked more for girls education than official effort, Loreto convent was the first European girls' school established by the Loreto Nuns of Irish Roman Catholic in 1846. At first boys were allowed till primary stage.

Around 1850, Rev. W. Start, a Missionary, opened a school for Lepcha boys and girls. Mention should be made of Niebel, another missionary who prepared some Lepcha primers and did propaganda for the school and this ultimately brought many children both boys and girls to the school. In 1886 Darjeeling Girls' School was established by Bishop Milman which was again handed over to the order of "St. John the Baptist and from then it was known as St. Michael's school.

Mount Harmon school was established by the Missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America in 1895. It was a co-educational institution.

In 1890 the Government opened in the town of Darjeeling a primary school for the Nepali Bhutia and Lepcha girls. The school was originally called the Girls' Boarding school later it was renamed as the Nepali Girls' High School as the Nepali Girls had taken more interest in Education. The school was later upgraded to secondary level.

In Kurseong St. Helen's convent for European children was founded in 1890 by the Roman Catholic daughters of the cross of leige.

A Government school for girls known as Dow Hill school, started functioning from 1898, like Loreto convent it allowed boys till primary stage at the beginning.

In Kalimpong Rev. William Mac-farlane founded a training school for both boys and girls and observing that the local language is akin to Hindi, he introduced Hindi as the medium of instruction. He also produced a text-book in that language. "In a few years Mr. Macfarlane's system had so taken hold of the district that in 1873 there were 25 primary schools with 615 boys and girls receiving instruction."(6) It is needless to mention that Church of Scotland Missions hard work was the most important factor in the spread of education among the local people.

From 1902 there was considerable progress in the education of women. The period 1919-1921 is known as the period of Diarchy or a period of Transition.

During this period there was greater progress in the education of women. Throughout India there was one hindrance in the field of female education, was child marriage. Though in Bengal Raja Rammohon Roy and Iswarchandra Bidyasagar, in U.P., Dayanand Saraswati and other social reformers of different states did much work to stop prevailing Sati and child marriage system. Many Hindu girls were married before the age of 12 years and in this regard the condition of Muslim girls was no better. However, the awareness of the need for education resulted in the gradual rise in the age of marriage. By 1921-22 there were 19 colleges for women, 675 secondary schools for girls' and 21,956 primary schools for girls.(7)

Another very important development was the establishment of S.N.D.T. Indian women's University by Maharshi D.K. Karve in Bombay. "It was founded in 1917 at time when Indian nationality had burst forth under the leadership of Tilak, in order to correct the erroneous tendencies in modern education, and put female education on a new footing in keeping with the ancient traditions of India."(8)

The S.N.D.T. women's University got recognition after independence in 1949. During the British period it did not get recognition as the medium of instruction was the vernacular. "In 1921-22 there were 197 women in medical colleges and 334 in medical schools, 67 in colleges for teaching and 3,903 in schools for teaching. A large number of women took up a commercial and technical career."(9)

Development of Women's education in hill areas of Darjeeling

During the period 1902 to 1921, one important coeducational institutions, Dr. Grahams Homes, was founded in 1900 by the late Rev. J.A. Graham, originally this institution was known as St. Andrews colonial Home.

St. Joseph's convent was founded in 1922 by the missionaries of the Roman Catholic - sisters of St. Joseph De Cluny.

By the Church of Scotland mission, a school for girls was founded by Mrs. Grahams the wife of Rev. J.A. Graham, who since 1897 was also running a teaching cum vocational training centre for girls. The Scottish Mission girls' school also provided vocational education side by side with academic education. At first only one vocational course given to girls so the school was known as Kalimpong lace school. Later on from 1907 other vocational courses were also implemented such as wool-dying, wool weaving, tailoring, embroidery, carpet-making, leather-work, fabric printing etc.

In 1924, the general department of the school was separated from the original body and converted into the Kalimpong Girls school. "It was perhaps one of the earliest institutions in the district to introduce Nepali as the medium of instruction upto middle English school.(10)

In 1908 Bengali Medium Maharani Girls' School was established by some well-known Bengali Ladies having connection with the Brahma Samaj. St. Teresa a sister school for Loreto convent for Nepali Girls established in 1923 to impart education through vernacular language to the local girls of this area.

The period 1922-47 shows development in the field of women's education. There was further rise in the age of marriage. In 1929 the prohibition of child marriage act was passed, which raised the minimum age for marriage of girls to fourteen. "In fact girls grew into young ladies of seventeen and eighteen before marriage proposals started coming in and all that the parents could do, in the meantime, was to let their daughters continue their studies till marriage."(11)

This attitude, however, helped the girls to use all the educational opportunities given to them. It also helped them to get respectable jobs as teachers, clerks, nurses, doctors typist etc. So the lower and middle classes realised the

economic incentive connected with education. Liberal-minded women's career began to take part in public life.

Gradually the Pardah system fell into disuse thereby making female education possible and it came to be appreciated by the middle classes. More and more girls school and Colleges have begun to come up. In this period also struggle for Indian independence had its affect on the emancipation of women. Indian women joined in terrorist movement, non-violent movement and also in Indian national army introduced by Subhas Chandra Bose in Burma.

It should be mentioned of course that under Gandhiji's able leadership the political struggle turned into national mass-movement. People, both Hindu and Muslim were awakened from their drowsyness. Though before non-violent movement there were many isolated movement occurred in different parts of the country, the political struggle remained a movement for the upper middle class. Another important thing is to be mentioned that Gandhiji's non-violent movement did not confine to men only "Gandhiji passionately pleaded for the participation of women in active politics. And it is tribute to the extra-ordinary power of the man that not only those who had the benefit of English education, but even the most orthodox of the Hindus sent their women from their age long seclusion in the home, out into the open to wrest political power from the British."(12)

There was strong enthusiasms and the women came out from the village, towns and cities to fight for the cuntry. They joined in the processions, did picketting, broke laws and courted arrest. Some women spun yarn on the charkha to paralyse the textile industry of Great Britain. When male leaders were imprisoned, women led the agitation, "and the ability, energy and skill of many of these women leaders were an eye-opener not only to the British but to their own countrymen too."(13)

Another point to be mentioned that there was fear throughout the world that if enfranchisement of women were granted it would have lessened the importance of men, and women would take over positions of power. However in England adult franchise for women was granted in 1928. In India even after many appeals the Montague chemsford scheme and later the south borough Franchise committee did not grant permission for female suffrage.

Travancore where matriarchal traditions existed first granted the vote to women; Madras enfranchised its women soon after in 1921. This step of women's suffrage was followed by Bombay, Bengal in 1925, Punjab in 1926; the central provinces in 1927 and Bihar in 1929 introduced women's suffrage. Later on all Indian states had enfranchised their women.(14)

"In 1946-47 there were 59 arts and science colleges for women, 2,370 secondary schools for girls 21,479 Primary schools - for girls and 4,288 institutions for professional technical and special education for women, owing to the greater initiative shown by the state government and local bodies, the burden on private effort was considerably reduced as it accounted for 16,979 women institutions out of a total of 28,196 women institution. The period also showed an increase in the trend towards co-education."(15)

In Darjeeling hill areas during this time many schools were established. In Kalimpong St. Philomena Girls's school was established in 1932 by the sisters of Saint Joseph De-cluny.

St. Joseph's Girls' school was established in 1938 and was upgraded into high school in 1944. A female teachers training course also being run in St. Joseph's but it did not continue.

In Kurseong Pusparani Roy memorial school was founded by private ladies. Later it developed into a high school.

The Saraswati Girls' school at Mungpo was established in 1946.

In Dajeeling the Himachal Hindi Bhavan founded in 1931 had started a Hindi middle co-educational institution in 1934 which was up-graded into Hindi High School in 1939.

Ramkrishna Vedanta Ashram which was founded in 1924 opened in 1981 the Nepali Medium Sardeswari Girls' school for local girls. After 1947 all the commissions such as the University Education Commission (1948-49) the Mudaliar Commission (1952-59) and the Kothari Education commission 1964-66 made important recommendations regarding women's education and co-education.

In 1957 a national committee was established by the Government of India in the Ministry of education for women's education under the chairmanship of Smt. Durgabhai Deshmukh. This committee examined the problem of women's education and on its advice a national council for the education of women was set up under the chairmanship of Durgabhai Deshmukh. A state council for women was also set up in different states and union territories.

The national council for women's education appointed two committees such as Smt. Hanna Mahta Committee in 1961 and Shri M.Bhaktavatsalam Committee in 1963. (Sri M.Bhaktavatsalam was the then Chief Minister of Madras). These two committees such as Hans Mehta committee in 1961 were given the responsibility of examining the problem of curriculum for girls and to examine the causes of lack of public support for girls education specially in the rural area - and also the removal of obstacles inhibiting their progress.(16)

It is to be mentioned here that the united nations designated 1975 as international women's year in order to pay more attention on the advancement of women all over the world. The special themes for the year were equality, development and peace.

The resolution taken by the General assembly of the united nations on the 18th December, 1972 proclaiming 1975 as International women's year envisaged the following action :

- (1) to promote equality between men and women
- (2) to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort especially by emphasising women's responsibility and important role in economic, social and cultural development of all level
- (3) to recognise the importance of women's increasing contribution to the development of friendly relations and cooperation among nations and to the strengthening of world peace."(17)

About higher education it has been observed that the five colleges were established in the hill subdivisions. Darjeeling Government College for both boys and girls was established in 1948 only to run intermediate classes in Arts and science. In 1950 it was raised to the status of a degree college.

Loreto College was the only girls College, founded by the Government of West Bengal in the year 1961. This is a degree College for Arts with a girls' hostel.

Kalimpong Degree College was established in 1962. It was a co-educational institution.

Kurseong College is also a co-educational College established in the year 1967.

The North Bengal University under the North Bengal University Act (West Bengal) of 1961 was established in 1962 at RajaRammohonpur, Siliguri.

In the hills, girls' education upto Class VIII and upto the age of 14 was made free long before.

As an incentive to girls' education book grants were also given to them. In so far as hills of Darjeeling are concerned separate girls schools were not opened in the rural areas; the schools were mostly co-educational. Only in the urban areas,

there are separate school for the gentler sex, but College education had been co-educational. The only exception being Loreto College. All other Medical, Engineering, Politechnical schools and colleges are co-educational.(18)

In the Table 3.7 percentage of female literates in the rural and urban areas of the Hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling District presented.

Table 3.7

Percentage of Female Literates

1961-81

		<i>Percentage</i>	
		<i>1961</i>	<i>1981</i>
1. Sadar Sub-division	Total	14.5	33.9
	Rural	8.6	28.0
	Urban	41.0	59.9
2. Kalimpong Sub-division	Total	13.0	33.8
	Rural	8.6	27.9
	Urban	30.7	56.7
3. Kurseong Sub-division	Total	17.0	33.8
	Rural	12.2	24.8
	Urban	42.2	59.7
Three Hill Sub-divisions	Total	14.8	33.9
	Rural	9.8	27.4
	Urban	38.0	58.6

Source : Roy B. - 1961, Literacy and Education, pp.52-53 - Statement 113. Education in the Darjeeling Hills, - an historical survey - 1935-1985 by Dewan, D.B., p.299. Incorporated from 1981. Census Provincial figures

The female literacy percentage in the three hill sub-divisions is higher than that of the state as a whole as it is clear from the table 1981. "State records only 30.33(Total), 22.01(Rural) and 55.26(Urban) for female."(19)

It is to be pointed out that in Darjeeling the European and American missionaries opened schools only for the European and Anglo-Indian children. The British Government also opened schools for similar students. Very few missionaries really gave their effort for local students. "Growth of national consciousness from the third decade of the present century compelled on increasing no. of these white schools to admit Indian children. At first only Indian Christians were admitted in small numbers, but since the forties, the wards of rich Indians irrespective of their religion, were accorded ready admittance."(20) Till mid fifties these schools kept 40% of their seats for the Indian children. Till 1961 Cambridge Junior School Certificate and the Cambridge Senior School Certificate examination of the Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate was existed but from 1940 some schools started in preparing their students for matriculation examinations also. Gradually from 1961 a newly constituted body from New Delhi took over the functions of the Cambridge Local Examinations and introduced a standardized curriculum for all English medium schools and Anglo-Indian schools also school-leaving certificate examinations conducted corresponding in standard to the Higher Secondary Examination. Many of them teach up to the School Final or Higher Secondary standard of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education through English as the medium of instruction.(21)

From 1850 Rdv. W. Start, a private missionary made an attempt to teach through secular education. So from 1850 secular education had started in Darjeeling hill areas and side by side girls' education also progressed. Hill girls are now trying to adopt a career of her own. A large per cent of women shares equally with men the responsibility of social and cultural development.

The people of Darjeeling especially the womenfolk are now conscious of the fact that for full development and improvements of homes and for developing and

moulding the character of children, the education of women is of even greater importance than that of men.

Problems and Prospects

Today both men and women are supposed to have equal opportunities in all areas. But unfortunately there is wide gap in between the status and condition of men and those of women. The condition of girls' education is still far from satisfactory. There are many problems in the field of women's education such as problems of poor enrolment and poor retention at the primary stage. And there are various reasons behind that such as poverty and illiteracy of the parents. In rural and economically backward areas the number of girls' school is also inadequate in relation to the total number of girls in the specific age groups.(22)

In the school the dropout rates of girls are higher than those of the boys. The main reason behind this, is that if education has to be given to the children, the preference is given to the boys. The young girls in the lower strata of the society are supposed to do the household duties. Sometimes they finish the school stage but hardly continue their higher education. Again, girls generally cannot go for scientific and technical education the reason is parents think Arts and Humanities are best education for girls. These are common problems in women's education throughout India and Darjeeling is also no exception.

However, condition in Darjeeling are little different inspite of the problems in different field. It is observed that in Darjeeling women get priority in every field though the society is patriarchal the majority of men and women believe that women are equal to men. Women's right to education and work is not objected to, on the contrary, it is believed that the wishes of women are often the decisive factor.

Women are more practical at present, they feel they must be educated and must work.

According to Dick B Dewan, "Today, in the hill regions, no girl or women can be said to have been denied the opportunity of general education of any level. They compete with boys in any field except in Technical education, in which field, they have not come forward. In teaching profession they seem to go side by side with male counterparts.(23)

In Darjeeling hill area Nepali tribal people such as kiratis, Tamang, Gurungs, Magars, Newar etc. constitute more than 90% of the population. These people including Lepcha do not impose any restriction on women folk and high caste Hindus such as Brahmins and Chettris are less in number. Hence the transition of the upper caste Hindus are not found in the Darjeeling hill area. Many traditional restrictions are also imposed on girls in the high class Hindu family in Nepal of course westernised families in urban areas do not suffer from the impositions.(24)

In Darjeeling the young boys and girls are given full opportunity to make their own choice. Love marriage followed by elopment is one form of marriage. But this marriage is supposed to be recognised and formalised later on by both the parents. Among some tribes of Darjeeling and Nepal cross-cousin marriage is preferred. If we take for example marriage system among Gurung, then it is observed that "all cross cousins, that is both father's sister's daughters and mother's brother's daughters are possible marriage partners for a boy, but the father's sister's daughter is much preferred"...."Marriages of parallel-cousins are however strictly prohibited. This means that a boy cannot marry his father's brother's daughter nor(25) can be marry his mother's sister's daughter."

At present inter ethnic marriage is also quite frequently practised. The reason may be that in the rural and urban areas many ethnic groups live together. So in the natural course of things intermixing and inter caste marriages take place.

In Darjeeling very few arranged marriages take place, many Nepalis take marriages lightly that means marriages not always regarded as a sacred and unbreakable relation "So Divorce is not subject to much criticism."(26)

Here widows and Divorcees are not regarded as inauspicious. So, widow marriage or marrying a divorcee is not much of a problem. The reason is that men do not think about whether they are marrying virgin or non-virgin. In this regard we can mention here that orthodox people in India believed that widows and divorcees are inauspicious. Once they were considered as outcasts but slowly, because of the change in social outlook and the spread of literacy, this idea has changed. But in spite of the change in outlook widow marriage or the marriage of a divorcee is not frequently takes place.

One very good point found is that the dowry system does not exist in the hill areas. But dowry is very common in almost all parts of India. There the dowry is regarded as a status symbol by many families. The dowry in the form of money, jewel, clothes, cattle etc. is given to a girl as a share of the family's wealth and for this reason they are not given land. It is a safeguard for the land based position of the family". In theory a girl's dowry is her share of her parental family's wealth (today it is often used for her higher - education or for travel) security, for it sometime treated as an insurance policy to be returned to her if the marriage does not work, to be made available to her if her husband dies but in practice the dowry tends to commercialize marriage, material wealth is put above other considerations. It places a market value on a girl, a price her father has to pay to get rid of her, a value for which the husband's family can bargain. The agreed prices relate not only to the girl's desirability but also to the groom's status increasingly determined by his education."(27)

This dowry evil is not found in hill society of Darjeeling because the family remains outside the arranged marriage system; so marriage is not influenced by money.

Suicide among the girls as a means to get rid of their problems is also not a common phenomenon as the hill girls enjoy much more freedom than that of the plains.

However the hill areas suffering from some other social problems such as early marriage, illegal divorce etc. Because of early marriage divorce is always a common phenomena in the hill society. Divorce is now legal in India though in rural or isolated tribal areas legal divorce is not a common phenomenon. The Hill society has been very permissive in this field. For divorce, legal permission is not taken. Usually girls do not lodge a complaint in court against their husband even if the husband leaves her or does not take the responsibility of the family maintenance.

In urban and specially in rural areas another problem is common. Girls often run away from their husband and marry another person. There may be many reasons behind this, such as poverty, the drunkenness of the husband etc. Though society does not approve of such conduct, it does nothing to prevent it. In tribal areas all marital or social problems are settled by their tribal leaders or the Gram Panchayat or their own association. Legislation and social reform has its effect only on educated people the lower strata of society are not much affected by it, because it hardly touches them. In Darjeeling different ethnic groups such as Tibetans, Tamangs, Lepchas and Sherpas, all have their own association for any social and marital problem these associations take a decision for them.

Polygamy is often practiced i.e. a person often has two or three wives. There are also rare cases of polyandry. Though with the spread of education this tendency is gradually decreasing.

Another problem is the age factor. There are many cases where a girl is marrying a boy much younger than herself which may be the cause of divorce in later years.

Co-education may be regarded as another problem. Co-education is not objected to at the primary stage but is not much preferred at the secondary stage.

Early marriage of boys and girls also creates problem for many families and this brings natural obstruction to education. The Mitra Commission realised that the vocational and professional education for womenfolk is more necessary than traditional education. The interests and abilities of the girl students are also to be given importance.

It is also important that local material and local crafts should be introduced in the adult education centre and scope should be given for self-employment and co-operative system of work. "In order to make girls education both formal and non-formal, more effective, the Government should try to attach Balwadis or creches to such centres of education and formal schools so that working mothers can avail of their facilities."(28)

The Commission emphasised the importance of opening training institutions and polytechnics mainly for women. In the non-formal teaching centres more emphasis should be placed on Home Science, nutrition, health education, nursing, cooking, midwifery, sewing, needlework and other handicrafts such as leather work, metal work, cane-work, mat-making. The role of women is important both in urban and rural areas, certain other things also should be considered such as hostels for women at all levels. Toilet facilities also should be given in all academic institutions.

The universal literacy campaign has revealed the need for intensifying efforts among Muslims and Tribals and the Panchayat body should take a Major role in raising the level of women's education. There should be overall social and economic

development which will ultimately develop women's consciousness.(29) It is to be mentioned that the Government also time to time taken many measures to improve the condition of women through many acts and bills. These are the Hindu marriage act of 1955; the Hindu succession act of 1956; the Hindu adoption and maintenance Bill of 1956; special marriage act of 1954; the Dowry Prohibition act of 1961 and family planning scheme. Undoubtedly these measures have profoundly influenced and brought changes in the life of Indian women.(30)

In spite of many problems in the hill society - it is observed that a hard and struggling life prevented many social crimes and vices such as the dowry system, bride-killing, forced early marriage, despising widows and divorcees etc. At present, girls from urban areas specially play the role of mother, wife, teacher, housekeeper, at the sametime pursuing a career.

Margaret Cormack made a very apt statement about women's role, which is also applicable to this hilly part of the country. The modern Indian women are doing their role with grace no doubt.

"The modern Indian women is joining her western sisters in an exhausting and and frustrating quest even as she knows fully well the dangers and possible damage. The hunger for new knowledge, formed experiences for new self-hood is too great...." "They command but do not offend, they accept but do not feel defeated, they work very hard but do not feel injured, and among their friends they laugh but do not mock. They give more of themselves than their older sisters, for they have developed selves with richer gifts."(31)

SUMMARY

The Indian Constitution recognised equality between men and women in society and before law also women's education in all the field is given recognition by the constitution of free India.

Ancient India gave a very important place to women. In Vedic and Buddhist India many scholarly women made significant contributions to the field of education. But female education got a great set-back during the period 200 B.C. to 1200 A.D. because in this period women's education, got a much greater setback because in this later Vedic period women were deprived of all privileges and at the end of the Buddhist period got much greater setback mostly because of Muslim invasion and internal strife and corruption in the Monastery and other Buddhist sects.

During Muslim rule, from 1200 A.D. to 1800 A.D. the percentage of literacy went down very rapidly though in the royal household many Muslim ladies got education but the number was small. During Medieval period male supremacy became strong and both Hindu and Muslim were very prejudiced against female education. The Pardah system was first introduced by the Muslims and later on Hindu also accepted the system.

The early British period that is from 1800-1854 shows that missioneries and philanthropists from different European countries and from England did some important work to improve the condition of women's education in India. Raja Rammohan Roy with the help of British Government ultimately banned widow-burning. Dayanand Saraswati from the Arya Samaj did his best to improve and liberalise the condition of women. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal worked hard to remove the Purdah system, to provide widow-re-marriage and women's education.

The British Government realising the enlightened Indians support for women's education emphasised the introduction of women's education. The despatch of 1854 for the first time prescribed for India an educational policy. The Indian Education Commission of 1882 recommended liberal grants in aid, freeships and scholarship for girls education. However, private enterprise really worked sincerely to spread the education of girls.

The then Government also realised that hill people should come within the perview of development. But before any official effort European missionary enterprise worked for girls' education but it was mainly for European and Anglo-Indian girls. Loreto Convent (1846) Mount Hermon School (co-ed) in 1895. St. Michael School in 1886. In 1890, the Government opened in the town of Darjeeling a primary school for Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha girls and later on the school was renamed as the Nepali Girls' High School. St. Helen's Convent was founded in 1890. A Government school for girls known as Dow Hill School established in 1898. Dr. Graham's Homes was founded in 1922, St. Joseph's Convent was founded in 1922. The Church of Scotland Mission worked hard for women's education, it also ran a teaching cum vocational training centre for girls. Kalimpong Girls' School was established in 1924. In 1908 Bengali Medium Maharani Girls' School was established.

However, it is to be mentioned that in 1917 Indian Women's University was established by Maharishi D.K. Karve in Bombay. There was positive development in the field of women's education from 1922-47. In 1929 the prohibition of child marriage act was passed, which raised the minimum age for marriage of girls to fourteen. Gradually, Pardah system fell into disuse and thereby made female education possible. The struggle for Indian independence had its effect on the emancipation of women. Indian women joined in terrorist movement, non-violent movement and also in Indian National Army. Adult Franchise was introduced in

different states from 1920. In Darjeeling hill areas during this time many schools were established. Such as St. Philomena of Kalimpong (1932) St. Joseph Girls' School in 1938, Pushparani Roy Memorial School, Saraswati Girls' School in Mungpoo. Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashram opened a Nepali Medium girls' primary school in 1981. Himachal Hindi Bhavan started a Hindi Middle co-educational school in 1939.

Durgabhai Deshmukh Committee, Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee in 1961, Shri M. Bhaktabatsalam Committee in 1963 were given responsibility of examining the problem of women's education. These Committees however, recommended for the development of women's education.

Five Colleges were established in Darjeeling Districts hills areas namely Darjeeling Government College (Co-education) in 1948, Kalimpong Degree College (co-ed) 1962, Kurseong College (co-ed) 1967, Sonada College (co-ed) in 1989 and Loreto Girls' College in 1961. North Bengal University was established in 1962 to give opportunity to the boys and girls of hills and plains for higher studies.

However, women's problems are still prevalent. There are distinct differences between male and female members in regard to educational status. Socio-cultural distinction among men and women are observed basically in the traditionalism and in the modernity. In rural sector and backward areas though women education is lagging behind, still conservative attitudes are found among many women. Many women were not given chance to join in higher education. Restrictions were also there in job opportunities for women. Besides transport and other problems are also posing problems for women's education for they have to cover long distances to attend to educational institutions.

In all other places as well as in Darjeeling District drop out rate of girls are higher than boys. Girls after finishing their school stage hardly continue for higher education; some social problems were also found. Early marriage of boys and girls

and elopment most often are posing problem for education in the area; illegal divorce brings problem in the family. However, dowry demand and dowry death were not observed. On the other hand, hard and struggling life and the innocence of people prevented them from many social crimes.

The womenfolk of Darjeeling Hill areas are now conscious of the fact that for overall development and improvements of their domestic environment and for developing and moulding the character of children, education of women is essential. One good point to be remembered is that the average female literacy percentage in the three hill sub-divisions is higher than that of the state as a whole which is 30.53 per cent, whereas the same is in Darjeeling District, 22.01 (rural) and 27.4% in Darjeeling District and 38.26 (urban) and 58.6 in Darjeeling District.

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