

# Status of Women in Medieval and Early Modern Society in Mysore State

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**Abstract – Women occupied a very low status in medieval and early modern society in the State of Mysore. Child marriage, prohibition of widow remarriages, prevalence of Devadasi system were some of the social factors responsible for the low status and misery of women who were reduced to the position of glorified slaves. The women of weaker section and lower strata of society enjoyed comparatively more freedom since both husband and wife had to work to earn their livelihood, but their general condition was intolerable. Therefore, the crusade for the emancipation of women became the first objective of the social reform movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.**

**Key Words – Society, Medieval, Modern, Widow, Marriages**

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

In the early nineteenth century in India, women were almost totally excluded from the formal system of education. There were strong and deep rooted prejudices against women's education. It was believed that female education would not only produce widows but also facilitate romantic intrigue. It was said that no man would marry an educated girl. Objections to female education seemed to have been based on the apprehensions of the unknown power education could give to women. Further it was held that education would undermine the feminine qualities in women and bring disgrace to their families.

The wide prevalence of child marriage among all castes also prevented girls access to education. It was rare to find a girl above the age of 10 or 11 unmarried. Once married, a girl was wholly cut off from reading and writing, because it was considered a shame for a young woman or girl to hold a paper or book in her hand, or to read in the presence of others in her husband's house.

Whereas education of males was directly related to employment, female education hardly had any economic importance. The domestic role of women fostered a belief that education for girls was unproductive because it could not be put to any financial use. The cost of education in terms of fees, books and so on, as well as the temporary loss of a helper in the household and the lack of visible monetary return were strong economic deterrents reinforcing the existing taboos. Lack of separate schools for girls, male oriented curriculum and

general ignorance of women were other factors which contributed to the exclusion of women from formal system of education during the early part of the nineteenth century.

No beginning was made in the field of women's education until 1840's when the London Mission established the first school for girls in Bangalore city. In the year 1842 Mrs. Jene Rice, wife of Rev. Benjamin Rice founded the London Mission Girls' Boarding School to carry forward the work of God's kingdom in Bangalore. She found that Canarese people took less readily to the idea of a girls' boarding school than the Tamilians. In the year 1854 some progressive individuals of the city established another school for girls. In the succeeding years, the missionaries established more schools for girls in other parts of the state.

## II. STATUS OF FEMALE EDUCATION IN MYSORE:

The Jayalakshmi Vilasa Arya Balika Pathashala at Mysore was started in the year 1904. The school was started as the report says, "the great desideratum regarding the female education now-a-days, felt by the thinking people, is a system of education in which, along with the secular education, a sound moral and religious education is combined. The religious education should be quite un-sectarian, based on the fundamental truths of *Sanathana Dharma*, and the moral education consistent with our Hindu ideals as far as practicable and suited to our modern conditions".

When the school was established it received generous support from the public. Sardar M. Kanthraj Urs who was then Deputy Commissioner of Mysore gave moral and material support to this school. There were 98 girls on the roll distributed in seven classes. The curriculum of the school consisted of reading, writing, letter writing, manuscript reading, poetry, grammar, arithmetic, history, geography, hygiene, sewing, cookery, singing and religious and moral instruction. The unique feature of this school was the importance given to moral and religious instruction. Besides this, a strict watch was kept on the conduct of the girls in the class room. The girls were exhorted to conduct themselves as the model women of future India. The school teachers, in addition to their regular duties were also going around the town collecting contribution for the school.

In a representation presented by Halkur Marulasiddappa, a philanthropist of Arasikere taluk in Hassan district records that, "among the progressive Indian states, Mysore leads especially in female education. In this Arasikere taluk, a girls' school was established in the year 1903 for the upliftment of female education. The school has served the educational needs of the girls of the taluk. Now there are three classes with a strength of 110 pupil. Still there was no building for this school. The school is housed in a rented building.

The Director of the department of public instruction in his report for the year 1907-08 observed that securing qualified female teachers to teach in girls' schools was a serious problem. During the year, the government made a special provision of Rs.1500 to replace male teachers by that of female teachers in these schools. The government also sanctioned 37 scholarships to encourage widows to pursue their education in government and aided schools. The report refers that the progress of girls' education was satisfactory. The number of schools and number of girls under instruction registered an increase over the years. But the increase in the number of girls pursuing higher education did not show an appreciable increase. This is evident from the fact that out of a total 21438 girls under instruction, only 2 were studying in colleges and 42 girls were attending high school classes.

The situation did not improve even during the year 1909-10 as it was evident from the fact that only 73 girls passed lower secondary examinations. The report for 1912-13 refers that the number of girls studying in higher classes was very small as seen from the following table.

**TABLE-1: Percentage of Girl Students at Primary, Middle and High Schools**

School	Percentage
High School	0.19
Middle School	4.69

Primary School	95.12
Total	100

Speaking at the Vani Vilas Girls' School on April 11th, 1913 the Maharaja said, "It is a trite that no community can expect to advance when half of its members are illiterate and ignorant and I fear that this is a charge which is at present can well be brought against our community as a whole. You cannot, with impunity, afford to neglect the education of future mothers of your children, and it is, therefore, none too soon that you have awakened to the true needs of the situation and started this school".

For the improvement of female education government initiated a number of steps during the year 1914. It passed an Order effecting the following changes :

The Government Girls' School, Bangalore and The Government Empress School, Tumkur were raised to the status of Kannada high schools.

- English lower secondary classes were also opened in these schools and in the Arya Balika Pathashala and the Chamarajpet Girls' School, Bangalore.
- A similar provision was also made in the Malleswaram Girls' school and in the district headquarters girls' schools at Kolar, Chitradurga, Chikmagalore and Shimoga.
- Arrangements were made for the teaching of the elements of industrial and domestic arts in these schools.
- The Maharani's College, Mysore was reorganized. A hostel was opened for the students of maharani's college.

In spite of the special efforts made to promote education of girls in all grades the pace of progress was very slow. The results achieved even in the direction of primary education for girls were disappointing as number of girls proceeding beyond the lower secondary stage was negligible. Taking cognizance of these challenges in the year 1917-18, the government took a few measures. A training institution for Hindustani school mistresses was opened in Mysore. An attractive scale of pay was fixed for lady graduates who have completed B.A and M.A degrees. Compulsory education was introduced in cities of Mysore and Bangalore in respect of girls in the age group of 7-10 years. The number and rate of scholarships were revised on a more liberal scale. Steps were taken to appoint district inspectresses of girls' schools and the revision of the curriculum for girls schools was

speeded up. A separate hostel was also opened for women at Bangalore.

### **III. EDUCATION MEMORANDUM OF C.R. REDDY:**

A proposal was moved by C.R. Reddy in the economic conference at its session in the year 1918 in which he suggested the following measures for the improvement of female education in the State.

1. Vernacular should be made the medium of instruction
2. Revision of curriculum to suit the needs of Indian women
3. English should be made second language compulsorily

The education memorandum authored by C. R. Reddy was considered by the government and suitable orders were passed in the year 1921. The memorandum discussed at length the problems confronting women's education. To overcome these defects, the following steps were taken:

1. Primary education for girls – since the number of girls primary schools was very small when compared with the number of boys schools, the government proposed to establish 500 new primary schools for girls at the rate of 100 schools per year. These schools were to be established in places where a sufficiently large number of students were available. In places where a sufficiently large number of students are not available to establish a separate girls' school, co-education schools should be established.
2. Middle schools for girls – for the middle school education of girls, there were 108 vernacular middle schools and only 13 anglo-vernacular schools. It was directed that all the vernacular middle schools should also be converted middle schools of the bilingual type as those for boys. All the new schools that were to be established should be staffed entirely by women teachers. There should be special industrial classes to teach girls needle work, embroidery and lace making etc.
3. Training of teachers – to improve the efficiency of existing schools and to provide trained teachers to the new schools to be opened, government considered it necessary to develop the normal section of the maharani's high school, Mysore. And to establish a separate normal school at Bangalore to provide for the training of 100 teachers for primary schools.

4. Building and equipment – the government should give preferential treatment in meeting the requirements of girls' school buildings. An allotment of Rs.30000 should be set apart for this purpose
5. Curriculum – the subject of revision of curricula of all grades of girls' schools was referred to the Board of Education with instructions that the curricula for girls' school should be made more elastic and a little different from that of boys. Special attention should be made to introduce subjects who are of some use to women.

The education memorandum was discussed at length in public as well as in the Mysore Representative Assembly. Many of the recommendations could not be implemented for want of funds and also for want of sufficient number of qualified women teachers to teach in girls' schools especially in rural areas. As such there was no dramatic improvement in the progress of women education in subsequent years.

The University of Mysore introduced intermediate college scheme during the year 1927-28. As a result Vani Vilas Institute, Bangalore was raised to the status of college. This raised the number of colleges for women in the state to two. The college was shifted to a new spacious building in Sheshadri road. In the year 1936-37 a hostel was established to serve the needs of the students of this college. Later this college came to be known as Maharani's college.

### **IV. CONCLUSION:**

It is evident that during this period primary schools for girls and middle schools for girls were established to meet the requirements of girls. The education memorandum by C. R. Reddy was considered by the government and accordingly suitable orders were passed in the year 1921. The education memorandum was open for discussion at length in public as well as in the Mysore Representative Assembly. Many of the recommendations were not implemented for want of funds and also for want of sufficient number of qualified women teachers for teaching in girls' schools especially in rural areas.

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