

**EDUCATIONAL FUTURES: CREATING A FEMALE EDUCATION SPACE IN  
COLONIAL INDIA, 1854-1934<sup>1</sup>**

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One of the hallmarks of the late colonial period was a belated but significant increase in girl schooling as the state moved to ‘decentralise’ and ‘Indianize’ the administration of education proper after 1919. Between 1921 and 1931 female education institutions increased dramatically from 23,500 to 33,900 and their enrolment from 1.4 million to 3.1 million; although nearly all of this expansion was due to private sources funding mostly urban schools.<sup>2</sup> At first glance this was impressive. It seemed to link seamlessly with what was to follow under Nehru in the 1950s when aspirations for women’s education were based on full social equality with men and with new high school and tertiary opportunities for them. It was a reflection, at first glance, of the West where social and economic domestic transformations during both world wars, and the influence of feminist thought, saw the gradual emergence of girl education as a primary objective of reformist governments.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented to the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Melbourne 1-3 July 2008. It has been peer reviewed via a double blind referee process and appears on the Conference Proceedings Website by the permission of the author who retains copyright. This paper may be downloaded for fair use under the Copyright Act (1954), its later amendments and other relevant legislation.

<sup>2</sup> Karuna Chanana ‘Social Change or Social Reform’ in Carol Mukhopadhyay and Susan Seymour (eds.) *Women, Education and Family Structure in India* (San Francisco, Westview Press, 1994), pp. 37-58 cited by Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ‘Introduction’ in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Joseph Bara, Chinna R. Yagati and B. M. Sankhdher (eds.) *The Development of Women’s Education in India: A Collection of Documents, 1850-1920* (New Dehli, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2001), p. x.

However, the colonial legacy was more complex. This paper examines raj constructions of its 'female education' ethic, based on race and class, that offered a form of elite Western female professionalism that was to be rejected by the national movement as it recast the polemic in terms of social service mostly based on the household instead. Contrary to the influences of the West, the nationalist agenda offered a differentiated plan of political action for females compared to males, espoused in different ways by M. K. Gandhi as well as leading women's groups such as the Seva Sadan in the first decades of the twentieth century.

### Connecting with Indigenous Female Learning, 1808-1850

One of the reasons why the raj was unable to establish a lasting legacy of female education in India was its defective appropriation of the deeply rooted and communally sensitive traditions of indigenous education. Early missionaries assumed a *tabula rasa* when surveying the indigenous landscape, however the early raj had always been aware of traditional female education, whether this education was gleaned by sitting at the foot of Brahmin tutors, or by the learning of epic poems in indigenous village schools or learning accounts at the hands of the local *zamindars* (landlords) to manage the complex finances of their communities to fend off starvation and colonial interlopers.<sup>3</sup> Pre-British India had, in fact, possessed vibrant, diverse and sometimes fractured and exclusive female learning spaces for women that had evolved in culturally sympathetic ways over many centuries. The early story remains obscure because local commentators, playwrights and artists conveyed an unusually diverse range of perspectives that were easily distorted by the Western educational orthodoxy of 'progress' and the 'schooling' of females.

Earlier, too, there had been two competing state-led traditions: Bombay versus Bengal. In Bombay, the Native Education Societies, formed and encouraged by government in the orientalist period, had entrenched Marathi, Gujarati and Parsee local language schools for girls. The genuine interest in nurturing indigenous learning by Governor Montstuart Elphinstone and Judicial Commissioner Erskine Perry gave them unrestricted access to these schools (not granted to their successors), and the husbands of the teaching staff were even employed as government gardeners and the like to provide family financial stability.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> William W. Hunter, Report of the Indian Education Commission (1882), doc. 46 in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Joseph Bara, Chinna R. Yagati and B. M. Sankhdher (eds.) *The Development of Women's Education in India: A Collection of Documents, 1850-1920, op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> 'Extract from an Address Delivered on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1854 by the Hon'ble Mr Warden' in James A. Richey, *Selections from the Education Records* (Calcutta, Govt. Printing, 1922), p. 51.

Alternatively, developments in Bengal built a powerful pretext for later viewing female indigenous education through the prism of Victorian moral norms of family, 'character' and respectability and to use Western educational models to educate them. This was even before the intervention of Macaulay's famous Minute of 1835, which saw English imposed in all government funded classrooms.<sup>5</sup> In the 1820s the Calcutta School Society and the British Foreign School Society began a tradition of educating 'heathen' daughters from elite indigenous families and those belonging to poorer families.<sup>6</sup>

### The New Female Education Ethic, 1854-1867

Mid way through the nineteenth century the state became troubled about finding ways to better locate its female education rationale within strong Western moral norms. Attempting to do this chimed best with the Bengal model. It also worked towards creating a new rationale for educating women; now as part of the 'civilising mission' mostly for Eurasian girls and as a sanctuary for the Hindu 'widow.' Working with this new superficiality the raj became adept at suddenly embracing and then abandoning various girl school incarnations. Its theoreticians for doing so seamlessly travelling across its own strong divides of race, class and even child/adult as it talked of 'female education' without reference to the obvious distinctions it made on the ground for the daughters of Europeans as opposed to those of Eurasians and again for Indians.

The Revolt of 1857, and the theoretical legitimacy Wood's Education Despatch of 1854, gave new focus to state support for female education. Official commentary always implied much stronger engagement with what was happening on the ground than was actually the case. Government educators worried about rising pressures in the household by women wishing to learn the Urdu taught to their brothers and fathers in government institutions.<sup>7</sup> But the intellectual legitimacy of girl schooling remained unrecognised and chronically under-funded. This neglect

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<sup>5</sup> Macaulay's Minute of 1835, already preconceived by government, was once thought to have marked the 'victory' of the 'Anglicists' who favoured teaching in English in government schools, over the 'Orientalists' who wanted more instruction in the local languages. The issue was more complex. For example, key Anglicists like Charles E. Trevelyan also favoured the classical languages of Persian, Arabic and Urdu, whilst much Orientalist thought continued to influence government decision making until the 1860s. Tim Allender, *Ruling Through Education: The Politics of Schooling in the Colonial Punjab*, intro, chs. 1-5, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Peary Chand Mitra, 'A Biographical Sketch of David Hare' n. d. cited in James A. Richey, *Selections from the Education Records*, *op. cit.*, p. 35-7.

<sup>7</sup> Gottlieb Leitner, 'History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab Since Annexation and in 1882' ch. 2 in Usha Sharma and B. M. Sharma (eds.) *Women's Education in British India* (New Delhi, Commonwealth Publishers, 1995), p. 2.

gave license to poorly conceived crusades against female infanticide and the sudden closure of whole classes of female educational institutions when syphilis outbreaks occurred.<sup>8</sup>

These stark and culturally unsympathetic interventions set girls' schooling apart from raj education for boys. However, another distraction, that of female teacher training, embodying emerging Western professional precepts, had a much longer-term role to play in discrediting colonial female education. It melded strongly with the emerging state imperative of finding a 'useful' role for Eurasian girls. This story is complex but essentially the 'problem' of the Eurasian gave the British female education project, and the Western professional ethic upon which it was to be built, new cogency whilst revealing at the same time that it would exclude nearly all indigenous girls from any form of high school and college education.

In the 1820s and 1830s the raj kept a careful tally of its Eurasian population and Calcutta did its best to offer stipends for the schooling of these girls and boys. But, by the late 1850s, with the arrival of a second generation and exploding numbers, this was no longer possible. In response to this, the Viceroy, Lord Canning, declared that the future for the Eurasian girls lay as teachers of 'good character and training,' badly needed '...[to] bring their talents to so uncertain and... so discouraging a field of labour.'<sup>9</sup> And teaching teachers how to educate a rising generation of Eurasians might at least offer a more subtle form of social control and social conditioning, whilst also offering Eurasian parents who had become wealthier under raj commerce, a respectable avenue for their otherwise isolated daughters.

The term 'Eurasian' itself was unstable and dependent on changing government regulations in the nineteenth century. For females it was the most worked and re-worked racial categorisation of the period largely because relevant state exigencies were so changeable. In the early days of the raj Eurasian could mean, like 'Anglo-Indian', Europeans who had lived in the raj for thirty years or more. As a phrase that guaranteed one's ethnic purity, it was then adopted by people of part-Indian descent as proof of their European ancestry until the 1850s when it denoted mixed race people who followed a European lifestyle. Schools also had their own hidden racially-based entrance rules, whilst school photographs of elite finishing schools demonstrate that some of these schools also chose to recruit students from wealthy Indian families using the term 'Eurasian' to credential them for advantageous marriages and social mobility. As such, enrolment

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Allender, *Ruling Through Education: The Politics of Schooling in the Colonial Punjab* (New Delhi, Sterling, 2006) pp. 68-74.

<sup>9</sup> 'Minute by the Governor General, 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1860,' no. 2, Government of India Proceedings, OIOC P/188/75.

in the Western classroom, by the wealthy of mostly Indian descent, also had a part to play in this racial transference.

These exclusionary female education strategies were accentuated when Mary Carpenter first visited India with much fanfare in 1866. She began setting up teacher training schools and her influence at Westminster meant much of the meagre government funding allocated for female education was diverted to her teacher training institutions. Moral codes earlier coming out of the Bengal girls' schooling experience were adopted and Eurasian girls were admitted even without an earlier basic education. Missions were also to participate in the 1870s and in the 1880s government adopted funding formulas that were highly favourable to private venture Eurasian teacher training schools as well as to those set up by Loreto orders and the Martiniere schools of Lucknow and Calcutta.<sup>10</sup>

The results of these exclusionary female education strategies that favoured Eurasians, and the emphasis on elite teacher training, were to become manifest by the mid 1880s. The bleak picture for Indian generally was better demonstrated when the earlier inflated departmental enrolment figures were rationalised in the 1870s to meet new administrative 'decentralisation' benchmarks.<sup>11</sup> As a result, William Hunter and his sweeping education commission of 1882 was able to estimate the number of girls in elementary English or vernacular schools at 84,995.<sup>12</sup> However, education of girls at higher levels of schooling revealed a more disturbing picture. In Bengal the number of female scholars in high schools outnumbered those in female normal (teacher training) schools 612 to 36, but in all other provinces the ratio was reversed: Madras 38 female high school scholars to 119 female normal school scholars, Bombay 25 to 66, NWP nil to 85, Punjab nil to 208 and Central Provinces nil to 20.<sup>13</sup> Teacher training sublimated even the very limited high school opportunities the raj had to offer females. These figures are relatively small

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<sup>10</sup> The Martiniere schools at Calcutta, Lucknow and Chandernagore were established as early as 1817 funded from an usually generous bequest of a Frenchman, Captain Martiniere, who collaborated with the British after the battle of Pondicherry made his fortune acting as Nawab of Oudh's factotum, including importing European furniture for his master, as well as coining his money, casting his cannon and grinding his indigo. The terms of Martiniere's will specified the establishment of three schools 'to educate a certain number of children of any sex to certain age and to have them put as apprentices to some profession when at the conclusion of their school.' These schools were for European and Eurasians but the Calcutta school, in particular, with a relatively secure funding base evolved in the next 70 years to cater for the daughters of raj civil servants and petty bureaucrats.

<sup>11</sup> Administrative 'decentralisation' in education was introduced by Calcutta in all provinces in 1871 to more closely link funding to the collection of local rates, placing more responsibility on each province to accurately tally, administer and fund the schools under that province's purview.

<sup>12</sup> 'Results of the Examinations in the Girls' Schools, 1881-2' in William Hunter, Report of the Indian Education Commission (1882) in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Joseph Bara, Chinna R. Yagati and B. M. Sankhdher (eds.) *The Development of Women's Education in India: A Collection of Documents, 1850-1920, op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>13</sup> 'A note on Female Education submitted by Dadabhai Naoroji to the Indian Education Commission, 1882' Document 46 in *ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

but the pattern was magnified by the many privately run normal schools throughout India at this time. And at the same time vague estimates of female literacy generally were put at just two per cent along a thin ribbon around the coast and something less than one per cent in the north where purdah was more prevalent.

### European Educators in India

Part of this story also concerns Europeans working in India. Recent Western theorisation about Western women and India best attaches itself to mid to late nineteenth century rather than the earlier period and it is important for the second part of this paper. Margaret Stroebel and others view them operating within the restricted framework of 'masculine' imperialism.<sup>14</sup> This limited the possibilities for more spontaneous contact. Literature has also concerned early feminist writers who wrote on India but mostly lived in England. They were mostly concerned with their own profiles at the metropolis, offering only a reworking of the imperial civilising mission and Barbara Ramusack, has argued their actions can be viewed variously as those of either 'cultural missionaries,' 'maternal imperialists' or 'feminist allies' of the Indian females they sought to help.<sup>15</sup>

Such modern-day critiques of these British-based reformers offer a pessimistic picture regarding the Western modus operandi. But what such theorisation probably forgets is the considerable array of European and Eurasian women teachers and teacher-trainers working in India, imperfectly connecting with the regional and cultural realities of the schools in which they taught, but operating in ways unconscious of broader state agendas.

Their dispersal across the vast subcontinent and the elevated work burdens that they laboured under precluded much chance for professional collaboration. But they were closely connected with the realities of their local and cultural communities. For example, Louise Ouwerkerk spent much of her time negotiating her curriculum with the ceremonials of the princely state of Travancore in the south,<sup>16</sup> whilst Sister R. S. Subbalakshmi navigated the tricky local politics of

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret Stroebel, *European Women and the Second British Empire*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. ix-xi, 46; Nupur Chauduri & Margaret Stroebel, 'Western Women and Imperialism,' *Women's Studies International Forum* xiii, no. 4 (1990), pp. 290-291.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Ramusack, 'Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies: British women activists in India, 1865-1945,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. xiii, no. 4 (1990), pp. 309-320. For fuller discussion of this literature see Ruth Watts, 'Mary Carpenter and India: Enlightened liberalism or condescending imperialism?' in G. Sherington and C. Campbell (eds.) *Education and Ethnicity, Paedagogica Historica*, Suppl. Series (2001) vol. vii, pp. 206-7.

<sup>16</sup> 'Ouwerkerk Collection' Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC) MSS Eur.F.232.

teaching young widows to become teachers at a widows' hostel in Madras.<sup>17</sup> Others worked in the ambit of the Bethune school in Bengal but were much more under the thumb of local committees that funded their single teacher schools, and uncertain, too, about how many of their enrolment would return after the long summer break.<sup>18</sup> Social class was also a factor as to what schools these teachers taught in with the lower class women often relegated to lowly positions such as army schoolmistresses with appalling pay rates. Being allowed to marry whilst teaching was also a sign of low status, in contrast to the whitecollar professionalism of elite superintendents and principals, always with the moniker of 'Miss.'

Mary Carpenter herself was imbued with the subtlety of very sophisticated orientalist thinking begun with her father's close friendship with Ram Mohan Roy, and her own friendship with the next generation of Indian educational luminaries, most notably Keshub Chunder Sen and Satyendranath Tagore.<sup>19</sup> For Carpenter, schools founded in her name were not meant to be, as they later became, racially predicated institutions.

There were also several eminent European women who spent their entire careers in India which began in the period before the rise of Eurasian female schooling. The most notable example was Mrs Elizabeth Brander, (a graduate of Queen's College, London). She was recruited in 1872 as part of the early Mary Carpenter lobby, and served with distinction in Madras until 1901. Her work included disseminating the kindergarten pedagogy of Froebel's Gifts to girls' schools in India as well as writing culturally sympathetic children's books that used Indian rather than European motifs. She withstood Lord Curzon's radical conservative hostility to her education approaches that had been adapted especially for indigenous girls. And these were so impressive that in 1901 she was seconded to the US to teach her methods there.

These women created education sites where subsequent informal knowledge transfer to the Indian population could occur. For example, Hindu women converts moved well beyond the missionary agenda and the classroom in the late nineteenth century, 'indigenizing Christianity' to pioneer relief work for widows and prostitutes as well as leading campaigns against plague and

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<sup>17</sup> Rabindranath Tagore Papers. OIOC MSS Eur.B.183. The hostel later became part of the Lady Willington Training College.

<sup>18</sup> Diaries of Annette Beveridge OIOC MSS Eur.C.176/48.

<sup>19</sup> Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884), Theist, later leader of the Brahma Samaj and social reformer, combined Christian doctrines and the devotional practices of Hindu Vaishnava cults in his writings. In touch with other leading reformers of the age in India, such as Dayananda Saraswati, founder of the Arya Samaj, he advocated education for women and railed against the status of 'untouchability'. Satyendranath Tagore (1842-1923), the elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, likewise belonged to this tradition, particularly that part that focussed on the rights of women. His wife gave up the veil at home and she was the first Indian woman to enter Government House at the invitation of the Viceroy.

famine, in ways not fully embraced by their missionary masters. The agency their work gave to other women was to gain national and international recognition. Educational institutions were set up by women like Pandita Ramabai and Soonderbai Powar. They used their positions to lobby government along with Josephine Butler and other European women social reformers.<sup>20</sup> The raj found these pursuits generally beyond its narrowly defined understandings of what the professional ‘accomplishments’ teacher of needlework, music and European language should be. A restricted professionalism was framed by the state for its female teachers. In contrast to this, nursing under the Lady Dufferin Medical fund saw very broad networks of philanthropic collaboration develop at the periphery instead between Indians and Europeans, where standards of Western cultural containment were permitted to lapse in favour of life-saving *dhai* midwifery under the aegis of thousands of indigenous women medicos.

### The Eurasian Female Teacher Market, 1884-1910

The Eurasian shibboleth produced its own brand of transplanted Western female teacher professionalism. Innovative teaching methods were begun in the Lawrence Military Asylums in the middle of the century. A generation later imported women professionals, teaching mostly a Western curriculum, became subtle agents for making the curriculum in their schools more like that for the boys in senior government schools and colleges. The strategy included adapting the Cambridge Senior Exam used for Anglo- Indian boys’ schools for the girls in their schools. As well, limited possibilities opened up for Eurasian girls to complete their education in England at places like Maria Gray College in London. And newly qualified Eurasian women teachers in India knew by the end of the century that building their CVs meant acquiring academic competency in teaching subjects usually taught to the boys. By 1918, professional female educators in India had become the chief organisers of the schooling agenda for girls and there were signs that they, rather than the state, were at last prepared to embrace the sea of indigenous girls that had dangerously fallen from state consciousness with the arrival of Mary Carpenter two generations earlier in 1866.

### Mother India

This paper has not dealt with private enterprises such as the Bethune School in Bengal, or other impressive institutions that more latterly catered for indigenous female learning such as the

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<sup>20</sup> Padma Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism*, (Hampshire, Ashgate, 2005), pp. 52-3.

SNDT Women's University in Bombay or what was happening in Kerala in the south where education always charted a more advanced course.

But a new female ethic had emerged by the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly within the Hindu polity, that was predicated on strong cultural traditions and which sought to renegotiate the nexus between responsible 'mother' in the household and public action/social service as a more efficient means of combating illiteracy, child marriage, imperialism and grinding economic deprivation.<sup>21</sup> It now supplanted Western notions of professionalism for women built so narrowly on the teaching profession and mostly for Eurasians. As early as 1882 Gottlieb Leitner, a leading linguist and educator, had partly anticipated this cultural divergence in response to what the British were doing:

When the state of Native society becomes such that men will require women *a l'Europeenne*, then our present system might be revived; in the meanwhile, domestic happiness and purity will be furthered by abolishing the present female schools...I cannot understand what business it is of the Government to determine what the future relation of the sexes shall be among its subjects, for this is really what every innovation of indigenous female education comes to.<sup>22</sup>

Leitner saw this as part of a broader decoupling of India from its longstanding indigenous education traditions because of the intervention of the British education project. But in 1904 Annie Besant was similarly unimpressed about the seeming disconnect between India's needs and British brands of female professionalism.

India needs nobly trained wives and mothers, wise and tender rulers of the household...skilled nurses of the sick, rather than girl-graduates, educated for the learned professions.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Gottlieb Leitner, 'Evidence of Dr G. W. Leitner before the Indian Education Commission, 1882' in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Joseph Bara, Chinna R. Yagati and B. M. Sankhdher (eds.) *The Development of Women's Education in India: A Collection of Documents, 1850-1920, op. cit.*, pp. 105.

<sup>23</sup> Annie Besant, 'Annie Besant on the type of education for Indian Girls, 1904' in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya et. al. (eds.) *The Development of Women's Education, op. cit.*, p. 316.

The controversy that erupted over the publication Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* in 1927, and ably portrayed in Mrinalini Sinha's most recent book, demonstrates just how potent the new symbolism of the household and social service had become by this time.<sup>24</sup>

The conscious role of the colonial state in female education was not cognizant this complexity. It had rendered a European embodiment of a professional female teacher in terms that were too simplistic and rigid. In contrast, Indian feminism was played out on a broader canvas of complex European, Eurasian and indigenous female aspirations that intersected in unanticipated ways, and also against a backdrop of rising communal and nationalist consciousness, where the treatment of women was always a common denominator in renovating Hinduism. For the Hindu polity, the unwillingness of the men to accept an equal role for women forced Hindu feminists, who for the most part did not reject Hinduism, to pursue a separate social agenda that restricted their capacity to lobby for broader political reform concerning women's rights.<sup>25</sup>

After WW1 the influential All India Women's Conference (AIWC), stressed the importance of physical and moral education: though the latter was now expressed in Indo-specific terms. And at its most radical the national movement threatened to push women back further into socio-religious and household spaces, separate from the pan national political agendas of their fathers, husbands and brothers. This was when Brahmin and Hindu revivalism looked to strong communal and class refuges, inaccessible to broad sections of the population, both male and female. Whilst Gandhi's Wardha scheme later moved the agenda to kitchen and village-based crafts as a financial means of extending education to all.

In Europe by this time governments were adjusting to post WW1 realities and adopting socio-political agendas that imperfectly acknowledged earlier feminist thought. But, in India, nationalists began publicising their different outlook. During his time in Yeravada Jail, and then at the 1931 Round Table Conference in London, M. K. Gandhi had politely quarrelled with Sir Phillip Hartog (arch defender of colonial education) about the literacy rates bequeathed by the British.<sup>26</sup> Hartog used carefully collected census data to prove his point but Gandhi, eschewing

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<sup>24</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Spectors of Modern India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (London, Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Padma Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850-1920, op. cit.*, pp. 22-55.

<sup>26</sup> See esp. Sir Philip Hartog and M. K. Gandhi October 21, 1931; Gandhi to Hartog October 23, 1931; Hartog to Gandhi October 27, 1931; Margaret E. Cleeve to Hartog November 5, 1931; Professor K. J. Shah to Hartog February 20, 1932 in 'Correspondence between Sir Philip Hartog and M. K. Gandhi, 1931-9', Oriental and India Office, British Library (OIOC) MSS Eur D.551, ff. 1, 4, 6, 10, 45. Hartog (former member of the Calcutta University Commission (1917) a Vice-Chancellor of Dacca University), had just presided over a committee, appointed in 1927

the Western female, professional, educational perspective, merely asked of primary girl education: would this make them better mothers?<sup>27</sup>

What was also noticeable was that after WW1 a significant blurring occurred in the earlier racial boundaries regarding enrolments in European/Eurasian schools compared to schools for Indians. This was mostly due to government school amalgamations and the removal of unpublicised racial regulations. For example, whilst enrolments of Europeans/Eurasians in so-called European schools increased by only 5.1% between 1921 and 1926, the number of Indians enrolled in European schools increased by 111.9% and the number of Europeans in Indian schools increased by 62.9% for the same period.<sup>28</sup> These changes at last saw greater Indian schoolgirl participation without the earlier direct colonial state interventions that had mostly restricted funding to elite forms of education and professional teacher training.

The hesitancy felt by informed Indians regarding Western feminism was inevitable as the arm of colonial governance retreated, cultural mores were allowed to intervene more strongly, and nationalist leaders, particularly Gandhi, initially restricted *satyagraha* for women to boycotts of British woven cloth and alcohol as part of a different plan of action for females. Key women's organizations such as the Seva Sadan (founded in Bombay 1908 with the aim of improving women's welfare by developing social service networks) even banned their members from participating in nationalist activities that it saw as a male domain. Whilst other Indian women activists were developing their own sense of *bhaginivarg* (sisterhood)<sup>29</sup>; cutting across caste and religion to improve their lives, and choosing new forms of restricted but expedient collaboration with a retreating colonial master by enlisting the raj to enact laws to protect them against the medieval interventions of child marriage, sati and widowhood: customs that violated vedic purity.

That this level of fragmentation could occur at all in the context of a rising India was testament to just how little colonial brands of feminism and female professionalism had taken hold in the national imagination of the early twentieth century. Ultimately it was to be Nehru in the 1950s, presiding over a more moderate nationalist agenda by this time, who would bring a new unity to the philosophy that governed the education for females. The state-this time fully independent from Britain- took on direct responsibility for higher education for women whilst also linking it

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as an offshoot of the Simon Commission, to report on British education. Much of its focus had been on literacy rates and the legacy of the British.

<sup>27</sup> 'Interview with Mr Gandhi' December 2, 1931 in 'Correspondence between Sir Philip Hartog and M. K. Gandhi, 1931-9', (OIOC) MSS Eur D.551, f. 30.

<sup>28</sup> 'Memorandum of the Progress of Education in British India Between 1916 and 1926' OIOC V/27/860/11, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Padma Anagol, *The Emergence of Feminism, 1850-1920*, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

for the first time to the initial steps of elementary and middle schooling as a necessary prerequisite. Though many women remained impoverished and dispossessed in the face of the government's heavy industry priorities, Nehru's educational approach offered greater access based on merit and with a professional ethic much more closely linked to the needs of the new nation.