"Breaking Barriers: The Role of Women in Advancing Female Education in Princely Tripura".

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Abstract: During his reign, Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya attempted to strengthen the state's much needed educational infrastructure. In order to increase the number of elementary schools for the people of princely Tripura, he built several ones in metropolitan regions and several in rural areas. All of these efforts were in vain since the standards of the educational system remained unchanged. Once again, the schools established to improve education were limited to teaching males exclusively. The only children who had significant access to formal education were the male offspring of wealthy, aristocratic, and royal households. Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya's queen was Maharani Tulasibati. Maharani Tulasibati was the first to recognise the value of women's education. She was committed to advancing education for women's betterment. Consequently, in 1894, she opened a school inside the castle that was exclusively for females. She was a pioneer in the establishment of women's education in the state as a result. However, this progress was limited to the ladies of wealthy and regal households. The royals never imposed any development programmes on people from the highlands who had no link to the lowlands. Some young people realised in 1945 how important it was to educate the indigenous groups living in the highlands who relied entirely on jhuming and the woods for their subsistence. As a result, they established the Jana Siksha Movement and began freely educating the less fortunate ethnic groupings. Many women with formal educations stepped out to support their efforts to promote education, particularly among women. This study will shed some light on the Tripuran ladies who dedicated their lives to advancing women's education throughout the state's royal period.

Keywords: Education, Women, Royal, Princely, Tripura, Movement.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Education is a basic right to every female, every girl beyond her economic status, marital status and age has the right to access the education. About 63% of the world’s illiterate youngsters are female and the literacy rate of any underprivileged country can be improvised by imparting education to women. United Nations also depicted that uneducated and poor women are mostly targeted for the human trafficking and this illegal multinational business would be curbed if women get opportunities to learn different skills and provided with basic knowledge. Again, if there is no discrimination in sending a girl child in school than it also teach males about the educational rights of the females and they also less likely to build a superiority complex. Thus it promotes the idea of democracy and equality in to both males and females. Education also provides chance to women to engage in economic activities and that leads towards the better earning and living standard in a family. It also imparts economic empowerment to women. More economic activities are also quite beneficial for the fiscal of the country. Hence, it is a clear phenomenon that women education is overall convenient.

According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) women empowerment is to gain knowledge and awareness about the gender relations. It is also about gaining idea of self worth and to understand the direction of one’s life. Women empowerment is also about having abilities of making decision and negotiation. It organizes the social changes and also makes someone enough powerful to bring the social just and changing the economic scenario on a worldwide scale. Women empowerment starts with the education and education imparts values in women which ultimately help them to face the difficulties in socio-economic and political sphere and also gives courage to raise voice to change those systems.
There are uncountable benefits of women education for instance, improved mental health, improve in child mortality rate, decrease in the rate of maternal death during child birth, lesser chances of getting HIV etc. Thus education is a crying need and important for not only for a woman but for the whole so called civilized society.

According to the 2011 census rate of India the literacy rate of women in the country is 65.46% where as male literacy rate is 82.14%. So, raising awareness about women education now become a vital need in the contemporary situation.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA:

India had gone through drastic changes in every aspect during different periods of time in the history. Hence, it is clear that the female education system in India also faced several ups and downs and variations in the history of this sub-continent and it is still facing.

Starting from the Vedic period, ceremonial initiation to the Vedic studies which was also known as Upanayana was common for both boy and girl child. The Atharvaveda also gave evidence of women studies in Vedic era by mentioning that a maiden could be successful in her married life if she had trained with discipline during her studenstship. The Sarvanukramanika also depicted there were all about twenty women authors or ‘seers’ who had contributed in writing the Rigveda namely Lopamudra, Visuvavara, Sikata Nivavari and Ghosha. During Vedic period female students were divided in to two classes which were known as Brahmavadinis and Sadyodvahas. Brahmavadinis used to carry on their study in theology and philosophy for whole lifetime whereas Sadyodvahas continued their studies until they were married i.e. till the age of 15 or 16. From the 4th century there was a sway in to the philosophical and theological studies and that attracted the main attention of the society. Consequently Brahmavadinis cultivated these subjects with great enthusiasm and also aimed at the excellence in the scholarship. Philosophers like Maitreyi had actively taken part in the movement against the Vedic sacrificial tradition. Gargi had the privilege to be the spokesperson in the philosophical tournament arranged by the king Janaka of Videha. In to that tournament Gargi proved that she was a dialectician and philosopher of high order by aptly attacking and cross-examining Yajnavalka, a reputed philosopher of Vedic age. Atreyi was another excellent student of Vedanta who was trained by Valmiki and Agastyra. Also in this Vedic era women used to take teaching as a career option and they were used to recognize as Upadhayas. From the 3rd century BCE women education confined in to rich families of Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. During the age of Dharmashastras, the law giver Manu asserted that women did not deserve freedom at any stage of life and she must be controlled by father, brother, husband and son in different stages of life. As women became second class citizens they were deprived of formal education and were also prevented from reading writing or studying Veda.

However in Buddhism women were still celebrated and allowed to enjoy the right to education. In Buddhism women who believed to attain salvation were known as Theris and in their verses were preserved as Therigatha. Subha, Anopama, Sumedha were some name who contributed as authoress of Therighata.

Medieval period in India was the period of the emergence of Islamic administration system. Hence it was quite obvious that Vedic and Buddhist system of studies lost their place to Islamic education system. There was the absence of separate schools for girls; girls may send to co-ed schools when they were children but during their young age they had to take training under any elderly lady about the domestic accomplishments. There were so many scholarly women during medieval time and basically they were form ruling families. Iltutmish’s daughter Raziyya Sultana was excellent in education and warfare training. Not only that Ghiyasuddin Khalji from Khalji Dynasty had established some Madrasas during his reign to teach women cultural activities and weaving, military science, household works etc. Mughals were also great patron of education and there were many women scholar in to that dynasty. Starting from the “Literary Gem” of Mughal era, Gulbadan Begum, was the writer of Humayunnama in Persian language which was really informative about socio-political structure of the Humayn’s time. She was a great poet and had written many verses. Humayun’s wife Hamida Banu Begum was also an educated woman along with Salima Sultana, niece of Humayun, who was a master in Persian language. Emperor Akbar’s wet nurse Maham Anga established college in Delhi for girls and school at Fatehpur Sikri for the daughters of the Mughal nobles. Shahjahan’s wife Mumtaz Mahal along with her accompany Saati-un-Nisa were also very scholarly women and they had keen interest about literature, culture and politics. Eldest daughter of Emperor Shahjahan, Jahanara Begum was also highly learned also used to encourage other in to the same thing. Emperor Aurangzeb’s eldest daughter Zebunnisa Begum used to excel in both Persian and Arabic languages. Not only that, she was also skilled in different branches of sciences, mathematics, astronomy etc. Even his younger daughter Zinat-un-Nisa was seasoned in to literature.
History of the modern India had witnessed many accomplished women of India. Savitri Bai Phule, India’s first feminist who attempted the revolutionary step to establish the first Girls’ school in India. She was also highly educated and challenged the unrealistic taboos of society. Tarabai Shinde in her first published verses Stri Purusha Tualana depicted the persistent gender discrimination in the society. Fatima Sheikh built a school named ‘Indigenous Library’ in her own house with help of Savitri Bai Phule. In this school they started to teach Dalit women. Pandita Ramabai setup a Mission in Pune to literate poor and widowed women. Rokeya Sakhatwat Hossain started a school for girls in Kolkata. Swarla Kumari Devi was one of the first women contributors in Bengal literature. Kadambini Ganguly became first female doctor in Asia after fighting against social stigmas; Chandramukhi Basu was the first female principal in the undergraduate academy in South Asia, Kamini Roy was the first female who graduated with honors in her subject and had taken teaching as her profession. Rashshundari Devi, Rukhma Bai, Ramabai Ranade, Anne Besant, Sister Nivedita, Ashapurna Devi etc. were the pioneering women in female education during the modern period of the country. They fought against all odds and became inspiration for many at that period and even in the contemporary period.

### III. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PRINCELY REALM OF TRIPURA:

The Bengal Administration Report of 1874-75 projected that very little attention was paid in the princely Tripura regarding the prosperity and development of education in the region. The report presented that only 103 boys were taking education in existing two schools at that point of time and funds for these two schools were really very low and were supplied by the Rajas. It was also stated that except Agartala all the educational institutions were mere Elementary Vernacular Pathsalas. During 1879 there were 25 schools in Tripura. In those schools among 700 students most of them were the sons of Bengali Hindus and Muslims followed by the Manipuris, Tipperahs and Thakurs. 57 Girls also attended school at that time and among them 54 girls were Manipuris and three were Tipperahs. Hence it was clear that Manipuris and Bengali Hindu and Muslims were very interested about educating their children. Yet students were decreased in the tenure of 1879-80. Hence though the schools were increased at that point of time due to lack of students, teachers were not regularly paid with their monthly salary which was Rs. 20 per month.

From the State Proceedings of 1892 it was clear that the common people of Tripura were only accessible to the primary education in to Pathsalas and also in vernacular language. To train the teacher of Pathsalas in vernacular language, there was a school at Agartala. After being successful in the final examination of training, one was eligible to initiate a Pathshala into their respective villages. That candidate was chosen by the villagers and understanding Badhodaya (a Bengali Primer for the primary schools) was the minimum qualification of a teacher. Only eight trainees were accepted at a time and it was fixed as two each from Bengali, Manipuris and Tripuri groups and two from Kuki and Halam communities.

However, Maharaja Radhakishore Manikya (1896-1909) tried to rejuvenate the education system of the state by building a new high school, some primary schools, tol etc. A free boarding school also established for the Royal family and Thakur family boys. But all these attempts also could not develop the condition of the educational status of the state at that period of time.

In the year of 1914-15 new 154 schools were built in Tripura among them only 12 nos. were for female education. Thus the infrastructure and desire for female education was highly deplorable at that time and attendance of female students at those 12 schools were also very poor. However, many schools were built up in the state during 1920s and primary education was become mandatory during 1930s but Tripura did not have any access to college education until the merger of the sate with the Indian Union.

### IV. WOMEN AS CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE:

From the theoretical evidences mentioned before we can easily understand that though there were many initiatives to improve the education system in Tripura, a little emphasis was put on the full fledged development or increase in the female education in the state even in Agartala. Anyways, things were begun to change when Maharani Tulasibati came into the scenario. In 1860 she was born at Nalgaria in Ranirbazar, Tripura in a Manipuri family as Angus Laime. She was the queen of Radhakishore Manikya. Some of her composed verses on Radha and Shyam were the documentations of her literary accomplishments. However, she was the first woman in Tripura who understood the importance of female education and wished to establish an only girls’ school inside the palace premises. Hence the ‘Agartala Balika Vidyalaya’ set off in 1894 on 9th of April. Basically this school was for the girls from Royal or noble families. Queen devoted her own personal treasury for the fund of the school which she had established for the betterment of women education. Gradually female students of the affluent families from
other places of the state started to join the school. To enhance the interest of study among the people she denied the idea of taking any tuition fee from the students. She was a woman with great anticipation so she started giving rewards like plate, bowl and other showpieces instead of trophies to attract the female students to study minutely. Thus, she as a true pioneer of female education in the princely era sown the seed of girls’ education by setting up an educational institution and also had adopted innovative ideas to spread it in to the general mass especially women.

Queen Kanchan Prava Devi was married to Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya who became the Maharaja of Tripura in 1923. She was the sole regent of the state of Tripura during 1948 on behalf of minor Kirit Bikram Kishore Manikya. Since 1937 the plan for the foundation of a college which would be affiliated to the University of Calcutta had been going on. Under the ‘Vidyapattan’ scheme 254 Acres of land was also marked in the eastern part of Agartala. But sudden broke out of Second World War changed everything as the newly constructed ground floor was stated to be used as army hospital for the British Army. Eventually Queen Kanchan Prava Devi had taken the responsibility to build a college in the Capital of Tripura. In 1947 the Maharaja Bir Bikram College was established. She also obtained the affiliation of Calcutta University almost overnight by responding the needs of the students of the state. Thus, Tripura got its first College under the tactful leadership of Kanchan Prava Devi. This venture reflected her educational contribution towards the population of Tripura.

In Tripura education was confined to the people of well off families and nobilities outside of the royal premises. Again, settled cultivators from the different villages of Tripura had the opportunity to enjoy the benefit of the education system even in the case of women too. With the influx of Bengali people at the Hill Tripura since 1901, invited by the Royals to help them in the administration, literacy rate was increased in Tripura. Unfortunately, Tribal communities especially jhumias who used to live at the hill areas, did not have the awareness of benefit of education and were deprived. Therefore, in 1945 leaders of Jana Siksha Movement started to provide education to the underprivileged tribal communities who basically used to live in the hill areas. During their movement many tribal women leader, who had the training in formal education dedicated their life in imparting education to the poor tribal women of the villages and also provided them vocational trainings so that they could be economically strong. Kiranprabha Debbarma devoted her life for the education of the deprived mass and she was determined to do that since her student life as she was inspired from the sacrifice of women from different period of time and that too lead her towards the fighting for the rights of the disadvantaged people.

Mangaleshwari Debbarma was one of the female teachers in the Jana Siksha movement. She was inspired from her father Sukhram Debbarma who also founded a school in Raighat, Tripura for spreading education in to the backward tribal people in the hills of Tripura. Mangaleshwari Debbarma mostly taught female students form her village without any wages. She had dedicated her whole life in the socio-political and educational betterment of the deprived communities in Tripura.

V. CONCLUSION:

In the year 1946 only 1026 girls were enrolled in the school and they were from priviliged families. After all the measures taken by the rulers of Tripura to engage women in to studies and even the step that had taken by Maharani Tulasibati, the number of female students was not up to the mark during princely era. Also the reform movement which was undertaken by the social leaders for educating tribal women from rural Tripura did not bore expected result and women were lagging behind in the education. Main reason behind it was the patriarchal system of the society where women were not encouraged to study but to engage in the jhum fields and in to household works. However, the condition of the literacy of women, especially tribal women was improved after Tripura became a part of Indian Union on 15th October 1949. Lastly, in 1972 Tripura gained the status of full-fledged state and it was then when the education system of this state including female education found its full acceleration. Presently after 2011 census Tripura is one of the most literate states in the country with 87.22% literacy rate.

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