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Women Literacy Rate in the Princely State Tripura: A Historical Study

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Abstract

Tripura was a princely state and ruled by the rulers of Manikya dynasty for a long period. She merged with the Indian Union on 15th Oct 1949. The rulers of Tripura wanted to modernise their state and educational modernisation was only a part of it. However, that process of modernisation was started only from the last quarter of 19th century. Many schools, both primary and secondary were established during that short span of time. Nevertheless, due to its primitive and patriarchal character the ratio between the male and female literacy growth rate was not uniform. In this article the researcher tried to find out the female literacy growth rate in Tripura before her amalgamation and historically analyse the real cause behind the negligence of women education in the Princely state Tripura on the basis of various statistical records.

Education is one of the pillars of modernisation and literacy growth rate is an indicator through which the educational growth can be measured partially. Tripura was a princely state before her amalgamation with the Indian Union. It was a tribal inhabited state based on its primitive culture and tradition. Hence, the state was far away from modern educational system. The process of

modernisation was started from the last quarter of 19th century. However, due to the lack of proper educational infrastructure the literacy rate was very negligible in the state. During the last three quarters of Manikya rule, it is evident that the literacy growth rate of the state increased handsomely. However, the conditions of women literacy rate in Tripura were very insignificant.

A country or a state cannot make her progress only with her male or female citizens. Both have their equal roles behind the development. Nevertheless, in the patriarchal society the domination of male citizens and in the matriarchal society the domination of female citizens is evident and thus, those countries or states offer us a halfway developmental story. In 19th century, in a primitive state like Tripura with her patriarchal outlook give us an idea about the social condition of women in Tripura.

In 19th century Tripura, tribal people were majority in the state under the Manikya rulers. Table No. 1 depicts that during the period there were very few numbers of schools in the princely state Tripura and the total numbers of pupils were very poor but unfortunately, there were no trace of any female students during the period. Hence, it is clear from the report that the female education was never appreciated by the rulers of Tripura.

Table No. 1. Educational account of the state Tripura (1894-95)

Division	Number of Schools			Students			Race of Students								Average daily attendance of	
	For boys	For girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Thakurs	Manipuris	Tripuris	Kukis	Bengali Hindus	Bengali Muslims	Christians	Others	Boys	Girls
Sadar	10	0	10	448	0	448	56	64	33	0	184	85	11	15	342.89	0
Sonamura	8	0	8	189	0	189	2	0	31	0	61	82	0	13	132.41	0
Bilonia	5	0	5	137	0	137	0	0	0	0	54	83	0	0	95.36	0
Kailashar	12	0	12	306	0	306	0	174	0	15	65	50	0	2	234	0

Total	35	0	35	1080	0	1080	58	238	64	15	364	300	11	30	804.66	0
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Source: *The Administration Report of Tripura State For the Years (1894-95, 1914-15, 1918-19)*, Tribal Research & Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 2004

The aborigines were primitive, lived in deep forests and were satisfied with their age old culture and traditions and the people those who lived in urban area i.e. only the town Agartala and divisional headquarters were also very few in numbers. Accordingly, the Census Report of

1901 reveals that the educated tribal people in Tripura were very few in number. Until the thirties of 20th century, the 'Thakur' families represented the educated section of the tribals (Bareh, 2007). Table No. 2 shows the educated aborigines of Tripura in the year 1901.

Table 2. Number of Educated Tribal people (Census 1901)

Total Population	1, 73,325	
Name of the Tribes	Tribal Population	Educated Tribes
Chakma	4,510	10
Tripura	75,781	107
Kuki	7,547	04
Halam	2,215	Nil
Lushai	135	Nil
Mog	1,491	137
Total	91,679	258

Source: Atish Chandra Choudhury *Census Report 1310 T.E. (1901 A.D.)*, Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, Re-printing 1995.

Hence, from the above table it becomes clear that only 0.28% of the tribal population were educated. The person those who were educated other than the tribal peoples were especially the

Bengalis. The reasons behind it was that, the progressive rulers of the state wanted to make their state modern and in this process of modernisation they invited educated intellectuals of colonial

Bengal. Thus, a large numbers of educated intellectuals begin to immigrate into the State especially from Bengal. While, the total number of Bengali people living in Tripura in the year 1901 was 59,689 (Choudhury, Re-print 1995), it was enumerated that 43,894 people migrated to Tripura (Choudhury, Re-print 1995), though in the Imperial Gazetteers of India Vol. XIII the number of immigrants were 40,000 (Imperial Gazetteers of India, Vol, XIII (New Edition), 1908).

As the educated Bengali immigrants began to immigrate into Tripura, the number of literacy increased but the census report 1901 reveals that though the number of male literacy increased significantly, the female literacy growth rate was quite insignificant (Table No. 3). One of the reasons behind this insignificant growth rate of female literacy was that, during the period those who migrated from Bengal to Tripura were moved by the easy earning in Tripura. The officials, government employees, farmers and the working class came to Tripura for employment only, not with the intention of settling in the State permanently and therefore, they left their family members at home. The new comers do not at once entirely leave their residence in British territory, they keep their families and friends there, and make in Hill Tipperah only

Khamar Baris or farmhouses in which they live for the purposes of carrying on their cultivation (Annual Report on the General Administration of the Political Agency of Hill Tippera for the year 1886, No-407, dated , 7th July, 1887, para-34).

For the first time one girls' school was opened within the campus of Imperial palace by the Queen Maharani Tulshibati. In 9th April, 1894 the school with the name 'Agartala Balika Vidyalaya started her journey. The school was completely aided by the Queen's personal treasury. At first, only the girls from royal families got their education from the school but later, girls from various places took admission. However, if we see table no. 3 than it depicts that initially the school was unable to increase the number of female literacy in the state, though it was an outstanding effort on the way of women education in Tripura. According to the Imperial Gazetteers of India, in 1901, only 2.3 percent of the population could read and write (The Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XIII, 1908) and among them 4.1% were males and 0.2% was females. In the year 1903-04 the numbers of educational institutions were 103 in Tripura and the number of pupils increased to 3125 (3008 boys and 117 girls) in the year 1903-04

(The Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XIII, 1908). That number of

schools and their pupils increased in the later years.

Table: No. 3 **Number of peoples (according to their religion) those who were educated in different languages in Tripura in the year 1901**

Total Population			Number of peoples those who were educated in different languages.														
			English			Bengali			Hindi			Oriya			Others		
Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
173325	92495	80030	324	316	5	3511	3378	133	111	110	1	15	15	0	313	304	9
<u>Hindu</u> 119192	63147	56045	291	286	5	2503	2403	100	73	72	1	15	15	0	64	62	2
<u>Muslims</u> 45323	24734	20589	31	31	0	990	961	29	38	38	0	0	0	0	108	108	0
<u>Buddhist</u> 5999	3200	2799	0	0	0	10	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	134	129	5
<u>Christian</u> 137	76	61	2	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0
<u>Animist</u> 2673	1337	1336	0	0	0	6	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	2

Source: Atish Chandra Choudhury Census Report 1310 T.E. (1901 A.D.), Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, Re-printing 1995.

In the year 1914-15, the numbers of schools increased to 154 and among them only 12 nos. of schools were made for the girls. Hence, though the number of male literacy increased in Tripura during the period the female literacy did not increase in the same proportion (Table No. 4). In addition, if we compare both the table no. 4 and 5, then we find that

in 1918-19 the total literacy growth decreased though the numbers of administrative divisions in the state were increased. In both the tables, though we find that the number of schools for the girls remained same but the number of female students and their attendance were downwards in the later year.

Table 4 Educational account of the state Tripura (1914-15)

Divisions	Number of Schools			No. of Students			Average daily attendance of	
	For boys	For girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
Sadar	50	2	52	2095	174	2269	1511.63	82.73
Kailashahar	18	4	22	901	55	956	690.97	46.20
Sonamura	20	1	21	1029	39	1068	802.3	34.99
Belonia	13	1	14	699	23	722	569.85	14.89
Khowai	8	1	9	215	12	227	160.46	8.42
Dharmanagar	16	1	17	555	48	603	419.06	32.01
Udaipur	11	2	13	241	35	276	167.42	21.11
Sabroom	6	0	6	189	11	200	157.10	7.80
Total	142	12	154	5924	397	6321	4478.62	249.15

Source: *The Administration Report of Tripura State For the Years (1894-95, 1914-15, 1918-19)*, Tribal Research & Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 2004

Table 5 Educational account of the state Tripura (1918-19)

Sub-division	Number of Schools			No. of Students			Average daily attendance of	
	For boys	For girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
Sadar	51	2	53	1643	105	1748	1191.31	64.06
Kailashahar	11	4	15	743	100	843	504.83	63.29
Sonamura	19	1	20	689	29	718	514.43	22.18
Belonia	10	1	11	517	23	540	351.5	14.07
Khowai	5	1	6	137	14	151	104.96	8.89
Dharmanagar	14	1	15	619	26	645	403.54	14.99
Udaipur	3	2	5	181	33	214	117.48	20.39
Sabroom	8	0	8	92	8	100	69.79	5.8
Amarpur	6	0	6	53	0	53	52.68	0
Kalyanpur	1	0	1	42	0	42	18.86	0
Total	128	12	140	4716	338	5054	3329.38	213.67

Source: *The Administration Report of Tripura State For the Years (1894-95, 1914-15, 1918-19)*, Tribal Research & Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 2004

However, the process of modernisation in Tripura continued and in that process of modernization, many schools including primary and secondary schools were established by the ruler of Tripura. In the year 1922(1332 T.E.) the number of schools were 168 and among them 152 schools were for the boys, while, the girls' schools remain the same. In the next ten years i.e. upto 1931-32, 56 nos. of new schools were established (Debvarma, 1997). A bold step had been taken by the royal

administration in 1931-32 when compulsory primary education was introduced in Agartala, under the State Act 2 of 1932 and later it was decided to expand its scope upto the valley of Howrah and to the linked areas of the Sub-divisional town (Menon, 1975). However, prior to her merger with the Indian union, Tripura had no facilities within her boundary for imparting collegiate education. The below table no. 6 depicts the number of primary schools from the year 1907 to 1946.

Table No. 6. Number of Primary schools in Tripura from 1907 to 1946

Year	Number of Schools	Number of pupils
1907-08	137	4,011
1916-17	125	4,842
1926-27	139	4,215
1936-37	111	5,110
1943-46	123	5,115

Source: *Tripura District Gazetteers*, Government of Tripura, Agartala, 1975, p. 316.

Therefore, as the number of schools was increased during the period, the literacy growth rate was also increased. However, table no. 7 shows that, the

educated people in Tripura, from the year 1901 to 1941 were quite few in number and the number of female growth rate was quite insignificant.

Table No. 7. Literacy in Tripura during 1901 – 1941.

Year	Total % of literates	Male	Female
1901	2.5	4.5	0.2
1911	4.0	6.9	0.8
1921	8.2	14.3	1.1
1931	2.8	4.9	0.4
1941	7.9	12.7	2.5

Source: 1. Atish Chandra Choudhury, *Census Report 1310 T.E. (1901 A.D.)*, Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, Re-print 1995, p. 16.

2. Thakur Sri Somendrachandra Debvarma, *1340 T.E. Census Biharani of Tripura (in Bengali)*, (Census Report of Tripura 1340 T.E.), Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Agartala, Re-print 1997, p. 60.

3. *Census of India 1961*, Vol. XXVI, Tripura, District Census Handbook, Section – I, C.R.Paul, Government of Tripura, Government Printing and Stationary Department, Agartala, 1964, p. 296.

The number of English educated people in Tripura was quite a few but the trends were always upward (Table No. 8). In addition, it was only due to the immigration of English educated peoples from Bengal to Tripura. It is also evident that the Bengali Hindu people were much more English educated than the Bengali Muslim people in Tripura in the year 1931. “In the state 0.8% of people were English educated and

among them 0.14% of male and 0.1 % of female were English educated. Among the Muslims 0.4% of people and among the Hindus 0.9% of people were English educated. Among the male, 0.17% were Hindu and 0.7% were Muslim English educated people.” (Debvarma, 1997). Thus, we can affirm that the Bengali Hindu educated people migrated more than the Bengali Muslim educated people.

Table No. 8 Number of English educated persons

Year	Number of English Educated persons
1901	324
1911	1208
1921	1707
1931	3087

Source: Thakhur Sri Somendrachandra Debvarma, *Census Bibarani of Tripura, 1340 T.E. (Bengali)*. Agartala: Tribal Research Institute, Government of Tripura, Re-print 1997, p.61.

In the year 1946, prior to the State's accession to the Indian Union (15th Oct, 1949) there were only 5 Lower Primary, 6 Middle and one High English school for girls in the state. Besides, 4 nos. of free primary schools were run on a co-educational basis at Agartala. The enrolment of girls' students in all the schools during the period was only 1026 (Menon, 1975).

Hence, though the rulers of Tripura instigated several steps to make their state modern but due to her primitive character, static social ethics and patriarchal outlook, female education was in a

setback. Female education among the tribes was never encouraged by the rulers except few steps taken by the female personalities of Royal House. Whatever developments we observe regarding female literacy growth rate from various sources were only due to Bengali female immigrants. Hence, from the female literacy growth rate in Tripura it become evident that in the first half of the 20th century the educational infrastructure still remain in a primitive stage.

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