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Intersectional Identities and Women's Education in British India

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Abstract

This topic delves into the intricate network of intersectional identities in British India during the establishment of educational institutions for women by both British and indigenous reformists. It aims to investigate how factors such as class, religion, and ethnicity intersected to shape the development of women's education. Shedding light on the challenges faced and milestones achieved in this historical context. The research employs the Intersectionality theory, pioneered by the Black African-American feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, which posits that gender, class, race, and other social identities intersect, overlap, and impact an individual's life. The study explores the intersectional identities of Indian girls through the lens of gender and social identities, examining their interaction with the religious and social structure of Indian society and how it deprived and discriminated against women in obtaining an education. The research also discusses educational institutions for women's education by both British and Indigenous people from the theoretical perspective of intersectionality. The methodology involves archival and

descriptive research methods, including historical and content analysis, to examine historical facts, past events, and people, leading to a comprehensive conclusion.

keywords: Intersectionality, intersectional identities, women's education, British India, intersecting factors, British government, indigenous educational system, native people.

Introduction

According to Durkheim 'Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity: education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands' (Durkhiem, quoted in Haralambos 2013).

This research lies in the need to comprehensively understand how the Intersection of religion, gender, and class influenced women's education in India under British rule and resulted in the establishment of educational institutions for women especially schools and colleges by the British and indigenous communities by introducing reforms and policies for women education.

This research explores the Intersectional complexities shaping women's education during British Rule in India. With a focus on decoding and unveiling the diverse factors influencing educational experiences, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into the nuanced realities faced by women in this historical context.

When examining women's education through an Intersectional lens, it is crucial to consider how factors like religion, gender, socioeconomic status, and some other identities intersect and influence one's life. This study addresses these complexities to promote inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for all women.

In India, only women who belonged to elite families were allowed to get an education but, the women of lower class were barred due to their ethnic and racial identities to get education. Intersectional identities were treated as oppressive structural social classes, as in history, it was clear how these Intersectional identities made women's life experiences different according to their identity and class.¹ However, after the colonization of the Subcontinent by the British, numerous changes were introduced in the socioeconomic structure of India. Within the advent of the 20th century education was raised as the main instrument to enhance the status and life of Indian women.

This research will also analyze the circumstances that led to the establishment of educational institutions representing Intersectional identities of women in the 20th century.

This study will use the theory of Intersectionality and Liberal Feminism to understand the phenomenon of intersectional identities of women and the establishment of educational institutions. Intersectionality explains how

¹Ann Phoenix, "Interrogating Intersectionality: Productive Ways of Theorising Multiple Positioning", *Kvinder, køn & forskning* (2006):2-3.

multifaced identities influenced the educational experience of women in India.

To shed light on the importance of women's education and the role of educational institutions theory of intersectionality is used to understand the nuanced reality of women's education in British India. This research will be conducted under the post-positivism paradigm.

Intersectional identities and women's education in British India

Indigenous educational system of India

In the work of Grova, it is found that in the indigenous system of the Subcontinent, education was given on religious bases existing in the subcontinent, represented by different ethnic intersectional identities. Scheduled castes and women were not allowed to get an education due to the reason of their racial and gender identities, the prevalent condition did not support the education of all people particularly lower class and women.²

In ancient India, Gurukuls were the educational institution for Hindus where students (shisha) used to live with teachers (gurus) in the same house for a long period to get an education. After Gurukuls Tols were made where education was given in the Sanskrit language to upper-class Hindu boys, for lower-class and primary education Patshalas were established.³ In the Hindu community due to

² Grova, D. R. *Development of Primary Education in Punjab 1937-1947*, Paper presented at the Punjab History Conference, 26th Session held on 18-20 March, 1994.

³ Government of India, *Report of the Indian Education Commission 1882*, William Hunter. Printed by the Superintendent of Printing India, 1882.

the caste system education was only for the elite class and women who belonged to the lower class were deprived of even basic education.

For the Muslim community, Maktab and Madrasa were made for primary and secondary education. In Maktab lower class could get primary education girls were also allowed to study with boys at the same school, and girls belonging to the upper class studied at home. While for higher education Madrasa were made only for boys. Sikhs got an education in the Gurdwara. In the Sikh community education of Adi Granth to Sikh girls was given in Gurdwaras by bhai.⁴

Intersectional Identities and Women Education by Missionaries

The American Missionary Society opened 1st school for boys in 1814 and girls in 1824. This shows that gender identities were the main factors behind the establishment of these schools. Representing the social and racial identities many institutions were established in the Sub-Continent, as in 1815 a school for poor girls was established by the Bombay Education Society. In the same way, the church Missionary Society opened 30 schools for Hindu poor girls in Calcutta, representing their ethnic identity. In 1840 Scottish Church Society opened six schools for Hindu girls. Missionaries also established schools for upper-class Hindu girls in 1841 and Poona in 1848. These represent social and gender identities. British Missionaries showed their interest in the education of women and the first school for girls was established in 1924 in Bombay.

⁴ Septimus Smet Thorburn, *The Punjab in Peace and War* (Harvard University: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904), 21-30.

Intersectional Identities and Women Education by the British Government

In 1881, the British government was also keenly interested in female education and emphasized women's education in the Hunter Commission. Thomas Munro's report presented in 1882, also showed that gender identities existed at that time as he mentioned that there were 157000 schools for boys and only 4000 for girls. It shows that women were still facing discrimination due to their gender in the field of education.⁵

When Governor General of Bengal, Warren Hasting came in 1781 he established Calcutta Madrasa for Islamic study, which represented the Muslim identity. In the same period, Jonathan Duncan established Sanskrit College in 1791, representing Hindu Identity. In 1793 Charles Grant presented a report and gave Downward Filtration theory. He offered education to the upper class only, to make them able to pass education to the remaining section of society. This shows that even at that time these ethnic and religious identities were considered by Europeans and Natives. By native people Sanskrit colleges were opened in 1821 and 1824, similarly in 1829, a Government college for Muslims, and in 1836 Hooghly Mohsin College was established by Muhammad Mohsin. It was found in the survey conducted by Mountstuart during 1823-1825 that there in Bombay existed no schools for girls only schools for boys were there. In the survey conducted by William Adam (1835-1838) in India, there was no formal education for women only home education was given to upper-class girls.⁶

⁵ Government of India. *Selections from his minutes and other official writings*. Thomas Munro. London, Kegan Paul, 1881

⁶ Nurullah, Syed, Naik. "A Students' History of Education in India (1800-1965)." (1964).

In 1835 Thomas Macauley gave his theory which is known as Macauley's Minutes or Downward Filtration Theory, in which he proposed education for the upper class and some section of the middle class whom he called Anglicized Indians to make them a connection between government and masses, his downward filtration theory represented the social identities of upper and lower class (Act, 1935). Erskinepeny also resented the downward filtration theory in 1842 and proposed education for the upper class but his theory was rejected by the government.⁷

British introduced policies to promote women's education as in Wood Dispatch Zanana schools were aided by the government and education was encouraged for women of every community by eliminating all kinds of identities, social, ethnic, and gender.⁸

In the year 1857, three universities were established, Bombay University, Calcutta University, and Madras University but these were only for boys' women were not given admission in the early years. Calcutta University .gave admission to women in 1877. Then in 1902 Raleigh Commissioned the university education and gave a University Act in 1904.1901 there were 186 colleges and 4 universities but all were only for males.

In (1917- 1919) the Saddler University Commission presented its report and encouraged higher education of women and also made recommendations for

⁷ Macauley's Minutes (1835)

⁸Filza Waseem, "Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Identity Formation of Indian Muslims through Education", *Review of History, and Political Science* 2, no. 2 (2014): 131-48.

female teachers training and technical education for girls without any discrimination of identities.⁹

Maharshi Dr.Dhondo Keshav Karve established SDNT, 1st university for women in 1916, it was not only the 1st university for women in India but also in South Asia. So, it is clear that gender and racial identities were the main problems for higher education of women as a university for boys was established in 1857 and for women in 1916, after 60 years.

Hindu, Muslim reformist, and women's education

In Lapidus's work, it is found that several Hindu and Muslim reformers came forward to address the depressed prevailing conditions of women in the sub-continent. Hindu and Muslim reformists represent Liberal, conservative, and moderate intersectional identities and their specific schools of thought.^{10, 11}

1st school for Hindu girls, the Kali Krishna Girk school was established by Peary Charn Sarkar. But formally Jotirao Phule with the coordination of his wife Savitribai Phule established 1st school for Hindu girls in 1848, especially for lower-class girls, Mahar and Mang. In 1870 a school for Muslim girls was

⁹ Saddler Commission, 1917.

¹⁰ Ira Lapidus, "A History of Islamic Societies", Cambridge University." Press, 1988.

¹¹ Valentine Moghadam, *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

opened by Hakim Syed Ahmad Hussain Sufi, representing the Muslim Identity.¹²

In Punjab 1st school for boys was established in Shimla in 1848, and the second in 1851 at Amritsar. For Muslim boys 1st school was opened at Masjid Khair Din by Anjuman -i-Islamia Amritsar in 1879¹³. According to Dr. Leitner before the annexation of Punjab, there were only six schools for Indian Girls in Delhi, which shows that gender identities were a matter of consideration.¹⁴ The girls from the lower class were allowed to get an education at elementary school with boys.¹⁵ In 1870 Ms. Isabella Thoburn opened a school for girls in Calcutta. For Muslim girls, Anjuman-i-Islamia opened a school in 1928. Technical school for girls was opened in 1944 in Punjab^{16,17}.

In 1908, Queen Mary College was established as Victory May Girls High School to educate the upper-class females or rulers of princely states and elites. Its management and educational system were similar to English Public schools. English ladies were appointed as teachers. Kinnard College (1918) was a Liberal college made for Punjabi Christian Women to give them professional training, Lahore College for Women (1922) was Moderate for Middle-class girls, Islamia

¹² Report on Popular Education in Punjab, (1864-65).

¹³ Punjab District Gazetteer Jalandhar, 1980.

¹⁴ Gottlieb Leitner, "History of Indigenous Education in the Panjab since Annexation and in 1882." (1882).

¹⁵ Punjab District Gazetteer Jalandhar, (1980)

¹⁶ Khan, and Dev Samaj. *The Punjab Past and Present*. Department of Punjab Historical Studies: Punjab University.1973.

¹⁷ Punjab Report by Popular Education in Punjab,1872-73.

College for Women Cooper Road Lahore (1939) was conservative and for Muslim girls.¹⁸

Theoretical framework

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the unified classification of social Identities such as gender, class, and race associated with some individuals and groups and creates interdependent and overlapping systems of deprivation and discrimination (Oxford Dictionary).

In the late 1980s intersectionality was introduced as an empirical term in the context of anti-racist and anti-discrimination. Intersectionality is defined as a feminist theory ingrained in class, race, and gender relationships, and was given by Black African-American feminist, Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. According to her gender, class, race, and other social inequalities intersect and overlap with one another and affect one's life and individuality¹⁹. Firstly, she presented her theory of "intersectionality" when she published her paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Sex and Race" at Chicago University in 1989. Its main idea is that although everybody is concurrently categorized in different social positions such as class, gender, race, and sexuality these cannot be understood

¹⁸Reports on the progress of education in Punjab, 1937-38;1941-42.

¹⁹ Linda Lindsey, *Gender roles: A sociological perspective* (New York: Routledge,2005), 1-21.

without each other as addressing one category, such as gender, draws us to how it is affected by race, social.^{20,21,22}

This study is relevant to the concept of Intersectionality as it is observed that education was only available for girls of the privileged class in India. This class did not include common Indian women, only women who belonged to the elite class had the right to get an education within some social limitations including learning at home. While talking about identities in the early years' colonial favored boys' education and established schools and colleges only for the elite and upper class they also created a hierarchal educational system in India that represented intersectional identities²³. In response to British policies and

²⁰ Ann Phoenix, "Interrogating Intersectionality: Productive Ways of Theorising Multiple Positioning", *Kvinder, køn & forskning* (2006):2-3.

²¹ Averil Y. Clarke and Leslie McCall. "Intersectionality and social explanation in social science research", *Du Bois review: social science research on race* 10, no. 2(2013): 349-363.

²² Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex, A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics", *The University of Chicago Legal Forum: Routledge* 140. (2013):139-167.

²³Gail Minault , "Delhi College and Urdu", *Annual of Urdu Studies* 14 (1999): 119-134.

educational institutions natives also established educational institutions for their women.²⁴

Conclusion

This research Unravel the Intersectional Identities in Women's Education during British Rule in India and comprehensively understands how the intersection of gender, class, and race influenced women's education in British India under British rule and resulted in the establishment of educational institutions for women especially schools and colleges by British and in the response of British reforms and policies by indigenous communities. Existing historical narratives often overlook the nuanced interplay of these intersectional identities, hindering a holistic understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and societal implications faced by women pursuing education during this period. This research addresses this gap, providing a deeper insight into the multifaceted dynamics that shaped women's educational experiences and the establishment of Educational institutions in India under British rule and contributing to a more nuanced historical narrative that reflects the intersectionality of women's identities in the Educational context.

This study analyzes the multifaceted Intersectional factors affecting women's education in British India, including caste, religion, socioeconomic status, and

²⁴ Zitha Ngulube , *"The influence of Traditional gender roles and Power relations on women and girls' education and health in Northern Ghana."* Unpublished BA Thesis; University of Iceland School of Education, 2018.

societal attitude. It also unravels the Policy Influence and historical background of colonial educational policies and their intersectional implications and analyzes how these policies shaped women's educational opportunities in British India.

This research made the historical analysis of the role of educational institutions, both formal and informal representing intersectional identities by British and indigenous people in shaping women's educational experiences and opportunities.

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