

VIEWS OF PANDIT TARA DATT GAIROLA (THE FOREMOST LEGISLATOR OF BRITISH KUMAON DIVISION) ON FEMALE EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Received: 07-04-2013

Revised: 14-06-2013

Accepted: 19-09-2013

ABSTRACT

The 19th and early 20th century saw a great upsurge in the recognition of the need for education of females in India. A three pronged effort for the education of females was made by the Christian missionaries, the British Government and progressive sections of the Indian Society. The discourse on female education in India encompassed the thinking of the intelligentsia at the national, regional and local level. Pandit Tara Datt Gairola was a leading intellectual of British Kumaon Division in the first four decades of the 20th century and his opinion was sought by Government on all important matters relating to it. He was actively involved in the different issues of regional and national discourse and expressed his views regularly from the 'pulpit' and through the press. The present paper discusses his views on the issue of female education in India. An attempt has also been made to summarise the personality and achievement of Pandit Tara Dutt Gairola.

KEY WORDS- Pandit Tara Datt Gairola, British Kumaon Division, Female education, Swami Ram Tirth, Denominational institutions, National life, Arya Samaj.

About Pandit Tara Datt Gairola

In the British Kumaon Division, Pandit Tara Datt Gairola (1875-1940), born in the princely State of Tehri Garhwal, was one of its foremost leading intellectuals during the 20th century. A versatile personality, he was the first post graduate (1899), first law graduate (1900) and first High Court Vakil from Garhwal; the first to found the first organisation of Garhwal, the 'Garhwal Union' or the 'Garhwal Hit Pracharni Sabha' (1901), for the social , political and educational uplift of Garhwal; One of the founders, legal advisor, member of the Editorial Board and for some years the editor of the second and most prominent paper of Garhwal, the 'Garhwali' (1905); conceiver of the

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scheme and second secretary of the Kuli Agency started by Thakur Jodh Singh Negi in Garhwal district for the mitigation of the hardships faced by the rural populace because of the inhuman system of 'kuli-begar'; first and only member from British Kumaon Division in the Legislative Council of the United Provinces of Agra And Oudh (1915-1920) constituted under the Minto-Morley reforms of 1909; member of the 'Kumaon Parishad', founded in 1916 for the common problems of the three districts of the Kumaon Division and also its president at the historic Haldwani session (1918); member of almost all important committees of British Kumaon Division constituted by the Government; legal advisor to the Princely State of Tehri; recognised by Government as an expert on the management and development of forests of Kumaon and the moving force behind the official establishment of communal forests (van panchayats) system in British Kumaon Division and the architect of its rules; pioneer of horticulture in Garhwal and first secretary of Garhwal Fruit Growers Association (1935); an authority on the history and affairs of Badrinath temple; the conceiver and organiser of the Chandra Ballabh Educational Trust, founded by Pandit Ghanand Khanduri (1921) and its first secretary for 12 years and which played an important role in education in Garhwal; Chairman of Garhwal District Rural Development Association (1938) set up by the Congress Government under the premiership of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant; first Chairman of the Srinagar (Garhwal) Town Area Committee (1929-1934); Honoured with the title of 'Rai Bahadur' by the Government in 1917 for his assistance as Secretary of District War Assistance Committee and as

in famine relief work as chairman of Garhwal Central Famine Relief Committee. A deeply religious and spiritual person, he was a follower of 'sanatana dharma' and was strongly influenced by the world renowned 'sanyasin' Swami Ram Tirth in whose contact he came in 1901; addressed as 'The Modern Rishi of Garhwal' 'Maha Rishi' and 'A shining spiritual gem of Garhwal' by the first D.Litt. in Hindi and a renowned authority on medieval saint literature of India, Dr. Pitambar Datt Barthwal. An acknowledged eminent regional historian and Garhwali poet, his scholarly works included such diverse fields as law, Himalayan folklore, Himalayan magic, 'saint literature' of medieval India with some of them being blessed by eminent personalities such as Rabindranath Tagore and Annie Besant. He also delivered lectures on some of these subjects at the universities of Allahabad and Benares Hindu University. In politics he shared the liberal ideology of the Moderates and of the National Liberal Federation which believed in the attainment of 'Swaraj' for India by constitutional means. Before the era of elections, till 1920, when the system of 'expertise' and 'nomination' prevailed he was not only the front leader of Garhwal but of the whole of Kumaon Division. James Meston, the Lieutenant Governor of the United Provinces, on his own retirement had said of Pandit Tara Datt that he had kept Kumaon in the forefront of politics. Pandit Tara Datt was recognised for his sincerity and as one who expressed his views on all matters of national importance and those relating to Kumaon without fear or favour and was widely respected by the public and Government alike and known for his learning, moderation and fairness.²

INTRODUCTION

In pre- British India, barring a few exceptions, the mass of women were not given education. The medieval conception assigned to women only domestic duties. There were village and town schools for boys but women were not provided with education. After the British conquest of India, there was destruction of the old society and a growth of a new outlook among the people. During their rule efforts were made by the progressive sections of the Indian people to realize the democratic principle in politics, religion, education and the social sphere. Equal right of women to education and culture was recognized almost universally and the conservative recoil from education of girls began to disappear. The gradual change in the attitude of the people was encapsulated by the Rani of Sangli when at the All-India Women's Conference of 1927 she stated, "There was a time when the education of girls had not only no supporters, but open enemies in India. Female education has by now gone through all the stages-total apathy, ridicule, criticism, and acceptance. It may now be safely stated that anywhere in India, the need for the education of girls as much as of boys is recognized as a cardinal need, the sine qua non of national progress."³

Despite the recognition of the pressing need for women's education, the question in the 20th century continued to bristle with difficulties of various kinds. A great impediment in the path of the general education of women was the extreme diversity of races, religions and social conditions in India. Also, the social customs of the people, such as early marriage of girls, 'parda' system, caste prejudices etc. were some other drawbacks against the universal diffusion of knowledge among women of India. This made the general application of one system of education for females well nigh impossible. Then there was the function of women in Indian society which had also been somewhat different from that in the west. In India her sphere was the home. She was not allowed to enter into economic or political competition with men. Social and domestic services were the special fields for her activity. This made it impossible to formulate any system of female education in India without a thorough examination of all these difficulties. These impediments were enumerated by Pandit Tara Datt and they were also the same which the Government recognized. Therefore when it invited public opinion on the subject Pandit Tara Datt responded by setting forth his views. They reflect the depth of his involvement on the burning national issue of female education in India.⁴

Pandit Tara Datt's views

Pandit Tara Datt advocated that there should be as little Government interference, in female education in India, as possible since he held the view that "the education of women should be entirely in the hands of the community to which they belong."⁵ The then prevailing system of public school education, according to him, was therefore "unsuitable for Indian females."⁶ While supporting female education he believed that its growth should be spontaneous among the people. He was against the Government control of education but he did not visualize an absence of its role vis. -a-

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vis. education of females. Rather, he saw the Government as duty bound to stimulate this spontaneous growth.

In India at that time there were three classes of institutions which were imparting education to females, viz. (1) Government model schools, and training classes where education was given more or less on the lines of the public schools, (2) Christian Girls Schools, with or without Government aid, where Christian religion was taught over and above the curricula in Government schools; and (3) denominational institutions such as the Arya Samaj girl's schools, the Hindu widows homes and Indian Women's University founded in Poona by Prof. Karve.⁷ Out of these, in Pandit Tara Datt's view, the "first two classes of institutions cannot be said to impart education on national lines, or such education as will make Indian women true house-wives from their national stand-point... The effect of such education is that educated females are becoming mere copies of the educated males. They have began (sic) to care more for public life and public offices, than for the silent, but, perhaps more useful social work, which ought to be their special province."⁸ He was also opposed to the imparting of education by the Christian girls school because he felt that "they bring up the non-Christian girls in an alien faith" and therefore went so far as to state that, "Government should not countenance or give any grant-in-aid to such institutitutions."⁹ It is noteworthy that he held this view despite his early education in a Christian Mission school¹⁰ and also having been a resident of a Christian hostel while he was in college.¹¹

Denominational institutions, in the view of Pandit Tara Datt, were the "the best fitted for female education"¹². The need for denominational institutions in education had been recognized by Indian nationalists for imparting education along national lines as opposed to the British policy which had the spreading of western culture as one of its aims. Numerous organisations such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Ramkrishna Mission, the Aligarh Movement, and individuals like Deshmukh, Chiplunkar, Agarkar, Maganbhai Karamchand, Karve, Tilak, Gokhale, Malviya, Gandhi and others worked towards the establishment of educational institutions, both for men and women, imparting modern education throughout the country.¹³

Though pandit Tara Datt was against Government control of education, he believed that so long as purely private institutions did not grow in sufficient numbers, the state schools could not be dispensed with but the policy of the Government should be to leave all matters of curricula and other details as much in the hands of school committees as possible. For less ambitious denominational educational institutions for women, he was pragmatic in suggesting that they should accept and avail themselves of the help of the Government but on condition. He wanted that denominational institutions should avail of such help from the Government only "so far as is consistent with their system of teaching."¹⁴ What was therefore wanted according to him was a national awakening in this matter and the Government's chief function was to stimulate this awakening in various ways, (1) by making

liberal contributions;(2) by offering advice and other assistance as wanted;(3) by organizing a propaganda for female education somewhat on the lines of the cooperative movement and village panchayats and (4) by granting liberal scholarships. Although the spread of education on these lines would be slower, in his opinion, than compared to Government spreading the system of public education for girls throughout the country, he believed that such “kind of education will do more harm than good, and will lead to an undesirable economic and political competition between men and women of the country ... [and therefore]... it is far better that progress in female education be slow than it be on wrong lines”.¹⁵

From Pandit Tara Datt’s views it follows that his conception of India’s national life was that it was one which was deeply rooted in its traditions and according to which to be a true house wife was the role of the woman. It included a society in which the women were not to be brought up in an alien faith and also there was to be no undesirable competition between men and women. It also meant a life that was counterpoised to a life that was anglicized. In this he shared his views with many other national leaders who were in the forefront of the national movement. For example his views were similar to those of Mahatma Gandhi on many points. Gandhiji believed in good education for women, but at the same time by this he did not mean that they should compete with men in all vocations; woman’s proper place, according to him, was the “home” and home life is entirely the sphere of the woman; therefore in domestic affairs and in the upbringing and education of children, Gandhiji believed, women ought to have more knowledge.¹⁶

In consonance with his conception of India’s national life, Pandit Tara Datt’s suggestion of the curricula for the education of Indian women was that, “the three R’s, rules of hygiene, domestic science, rearing of children, and last but not least, religious and moral training should form the indispensable curricula for the education of Indian women.”¹⁷ But despite of his espousal of a traditional view of women’s role in society, Pandit Tara Datt was not against women from receiving higher education or venturing out of not only their homes but even going to foreign lands for education. To the contrary he was supportive in this by suggesting that “For more ambitious girls, colleges on the lines of the new Indian Women’s University of Poona should be opened. Facilities should be given to those few girls who wish to go to foreign countries for post graduate or higher training in special subjects.”¹⁸ His views may said to be progressive for the society in which he lived for in his times the societal norms of the Kumaon Province were not favourable to even men going to foreign lands for education. Those that did go found it very difficult, after their return, to be admitted back into their society or ‘biradari’. By 1910 only one Brahmin from the Kumaon Province, Pandit Bhola Datt Pande of Almora, had returned to India after obtaining his B.Sc. degree from America. On his return a debate had ensued in his society whether he should be accepted back into their fold with the opinion being divided on the issue. However, it is noteworthy that the ‘Garhwali’, with which Pandit

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Tara Datt was closely associated, had professed its policy of support for foreign travel in general on the ground that in the then condition of the country it was essential for its progress.¹⁹

Pandit Tara Datt also believed generally that “education of Indian women should be through the medium of their own vernaculars throughout.”²⁰ But, just as he was not against the Indian women going to foreign countries, he was also not against their being educated in English or any other foreign language but on practical grounds stressed that, “Bearing in mind the shortness of time at the disposal of our girls owing to their early marriages, I think the teaching of English or any other foreign language should be out the question for the present.”²¹ Therefore within the ambit of the then state of Indian society, his views show a blend of tradition and modernity.

Recognizing the social reality of the existence of the ‘parda’ system in Indian society, Pandit Tara Datt advocated that “every effort should be made by Government to organize a system of itinerant instructors and teachers to visit private families for the purpose of teaching the women in the ‘parda’. At that time this work was entirely in the hands of Christian missionary ladies and Pandit Tara Datt was not in favour of it being done by them. Regarding their role, he opined that “their main object being religious propaganda, their usefulness from a purely educational point of view is greatly minimised.”²² As an alternative he suggested that, “Government should take up this work in its own hands and appoint thoroughly competent mistresses for the purpose.”²³ In this regard he saw the great role that could be played by widows as they, according to him, could be “centres of great influence in their own homes and neighbourhoods ... [and further stressed that] ... “It is through the education and reform of the Indian widows, that real progress in female education can be made.”²⁴ Towards this end he suggested that, “Widow’s homes should be opened in large numbers, where they should be trained for social service and specially (sic) for the profession of teaching and of medicine.”²⁵

Pandit Tara Datt did not view the problem of female education only in the national perspective but also in the local context. Therefore he drew the attention of the public towards the condition of female education in his own district of Garhwal which had very few towns. He drew the attention of the public towards the condition of female education in the district by stating that “I regret to say it has not made any appreciable progress so far... The population being almost wholly agricultural, girls cannot be spared from agricultural work and, hence, their education becomes well-nigh impossible. The little education which some of the girls in the towns and in the better families receive, serves no useful purpose when they are married in villages where they seem to forget what they have learnt.”²⁶ Even though he felt that the problem of education of females was much more difficult in the hills of Garhwal than in the plains and a wait would be required for more favourable time, this realization rather than dampening his public spirit only encouraged him to impress on the Government that “the need for female education is none the less pressing in these hills. Their

ignorance of the simple rules of sanitation and of the management of children, their superstitions make the education of the hill women a matter of public concern. Without the education of our mothers and daughters our children cannot grow up to be healthy and moral."²⁷

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In this paper, before India's independence in 1947, the three districts of Nainital, Almora and Garhwal within the United Provinces of India (Agra and Oudh) and also known as Kumaon Province in old Government records, have been referred to as British Kumaon Division to distinguish it from the Kumaon Division created after independence as one of the administrative units of the state of Uttar Pradesh (renamed from the United Provinces of India, Agra and Oudh). The three districts were further divided after independence over a period of time and some new districts added and created to be part of the 27th state of the Indian Union. The new state, created in 2000 after bifurcation from Uttar Pradesh, was named Uttranchal and later renamed Uttrakhand. At present the major portion of the area of Uttrakhand is comprised of the erstwhile British Kumaon Division. (these notes are based on (i) History Of Kumaon by Badri Datt Pande, 1993 (ii) The Uttrakhand Movement, Construction of a Regional Identity by Pradeep Kumar, 2000 (iii) Garhwal Himalaya, A Study in Historical Perspective by Ajay S. Rawat, 2002 and (iv) Uttranchal, Historical and Cultural Perspectives, by Uma Prasad Thapliyal, 2005.
2. This section is based on (i) His Imperial Majesty King George V And The Princes Of India And The Indian Empire, 1937. (ii) Hindustan Times, June 1, 1940. (iii) The Leader, Allahbad, June 2, 1940. (iv) Karma Bhoomi, Kotdwara (Garhwal), June 10, 1940. (v) 'Garhwali', Dehra Dun, June 1- 15; August 15, 1940; September 1, 1940 and (vi) Garhwal Ki Diwangat Vibhutiyan by Bhakt Darshan, 1982 Ed. (vi) personal sources.
3. Desai, A.R.; Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular Prakashashan, Bombay, 1976 Ed. P.P.277.
4. Gairola, Tara Datt; Female Education In India, The Leader, August 9, 1917.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.s
7. D.K. Karve was Professor of Mathematics in the Fergusson College and became a force in the Deccan education society. (see Narain, V.A.; Social History of Modern India, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut/ Delhi, 1972, p.81). The Indian Women's University was founded by Professor Karve and came into existence on 3 June, 1916.
8. Ibid

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9. Ibid
- 10 Chopra Mission School at Pauri (Garhwal)
11. Muir Central College, Allahabad.
12. Gairola, Tara Datt; op.cit.
13. Desai, A.R; op.cit. P.P.142
14. Gairola, Tara Datt, op.cit.
15. Ibid.
16. Unnithan, T.K.N ; Gandhi and social Change, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 1979,P.P. 65.
17. Gairola, Tara Datt; op. cit.
- 18.Ibid.
19. 'Garhwali', Dehra Dun, November, 1910.
20. Gairola, Tara Datt; op.cit
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
- 25.Ibid.
- 26.Ibid.
27. ibid.