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THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN CEYLON DURING THE
FIRST HALF OF THE BRITISH PERIOD (1796-1867).

by

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Education)

University of Ceylon - 1965.

ABSTRACT

This investigation seeks to trace the development of the education of girls in the first half of the British Period which was marked by the early efforts of agencies like the government and the missionaries.

The position of the female in society in pre-Western Ceylon (before 1505) and the opportunities available for the education of girls in the broadest sense of the term, the changes brought about by the Portuguese (1505 - 1658) in the field of religion and the consequent alterations in the pattern of education, the coming of the Dutch (1658 - 1796) and the enforcement of Protestantism, compulsory education, and the systematic organisation of education for all (including girls) are considered in Chapter I. This section serves as a background study, for it deals with the conditions that were prevalent in pre-British times.

The British period commenced when the Dutch surrendered their territories in 1796. During the early years the British East India Company was responsible for the administration but it was only concerned with commerce, profit, and power. However this situation did not last long and in 1802 Ceylon became a Crown Colony. Educational provision during the British period is investigated under two heads - Government and Missionary.

Chapter II gives an account of the Government enterprise before 1831 which consisted greatly of the contributions of individual governors rather than the Government itself, for the Government was not interested in this subject. The development of Government schools was therefore haphazard. Governor North revived the Dutch parish schools but introduced the joy-tax which operated against the education of girls. Maitland was more concerned with good administration. He however repealed the oppressive joy tax. Brownrigg was an active supporter of education and contributed much to the education of girls. Missionary activities also commenced during his term of office. Barnes was the road-maker who was least interested in the intellectual advancement of the Colony.

Chapter III covers the pioneering activities of the four missionary bodies - Baptist, Wesleyan, American and Church Mission - in the field of girls' education before 1831. They arrived during Brownrigg's Governorship and were encouraged by him. Being motivated by the desire to convert the natives to Christianity, all of them established village vernacular free schools which became centres for the diffusion of Christianity. Very often the girls went to the same schools as the boys. The American Ceylon Mission however began a new type of institution - a boarding school for girls called the Codrville Female Boarding School. The prejudice against the formal education of girls was great and the missionaries provided many inducements in order to get them to attend their schools.

Chapter IV deals with the inauguration of the School Commission, which resulted in the better organisation of education by the Government. Vernacular schools were closed down and English was made the only medium of instruction. But the importance of the mother tongue was realised later and the system of schools was soon made up of vernacular, mixed, elementary, superior girls, and central schools. At the apex of the system was the Academy. Girls attended all schools except the central schools and the Academy. Government enterprise, however proved a failure for many reasons, the chief of which was the inefficiency of the school commission.

Chapter V is concerned with the expansion of the missionary system of schools. Unlike in the early British period, there were after 1831, eight associations actively engaged in founding schools for girls. The Feminist Movements of the West also had their branches in the island working for the emancipation of the women through the schools. Most of the Missionary societies had vernacular, mixed, elementary, and boarding schools. They also had an institution each, like the Academy of the government to which girls did not go. The grandest contribution of these missionary bodies to the education of girls was their girls' boarding schools. Their influence was felt in the educational, social, cultural and vocational spheres of the life of the women of the country.

In Chapter VI an assessment is made of the activities of the various agents involved in the pioneering efforts for educating girls. The failure of the Government system of schools resulted in the appointment of the Morgan sub-Committee which was the first body to make recommendations for the improvement of the education of girls. The discussion is wound up with an appraisal of the lasting influence education had on the progress of women in society.
