



# International Journal of Innovations in Liberal Arts



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7986872>

## Indraprastha School: A Rendezvous of Colonial Modernity in Delhi City

**Ajay Kumar Sharma**

Amity School of Liberal Arts  
Amity University Haryana, India

Received: FEB. 15, 2023

Accepted: APR. 23, 2023

Published: May. 31, 2023

### Abstract

The Colonial period in India bring transformation in Caste and Women's position in society through constant criticism of social evils besiege within Indian society and set forth the way for Modernity and subsequent modernization of the society. Caste system and anti-women social structure become target of the colonial narrative. The colonial government intervene in social issues of the Hindu community through legislation and help in insinuating the social reforms, paves the way for women emancipation and foraging the caste identities and consciousness among depressed classes of the Hindus. The colonialism in India presuppose to bring the modernity in society and it was quite convincing in case of women, the colonial rule worked liked a transforming agency which exposed patriarchal dominance of Hindu society through critical analysis of its strange and misogynists' practices. The paper will analyze the social reforms movement in Delhi during early 20<sup>th</sup> century and its effect on women particularly and analyzed how Indraprastha School become an inspiring institution to cater the modernity among the women through a unique educational experiment in Delhi City.

**Keywords:** Indraprastha school, Punjab, Theosophical Society, Arya Samaj, Zenana Mission

### Introduction

The idea of opening a school for Girls in early 20<sup>th</sup> century in India was very radical and difficult, the social reform movement century had great impact on progress of women education in Punjab, as Delhi being part of Punjab province after unsuccessful revolt of 1857, did not enjoyed much attention from the colonial government and education cliques, the efflorescence of social reform movement in Punjab especially focusing on girls education was

one of the important plank of the social reformers , Lahore had become a major center of reformists activity in mid-1890's the bulwark of reformists associations of Punjabi communities had their agenda of reforms , Arya Samaj, Sanatan Dharm Sabha, Theosophists among Hindu community ,Anjuman-I- Islamia and Ahmadiyya among Muslims and Singh Sabha among Sikhs had common focal point about the attention on girls education for their respective communities and these denominational societies were successful in opening the schools at Lahore and its suburbs for their respective community Girls<sup>1</sup>.

### **Defining Colonial Modernity**

The term colonial modernity usually been a sociological term applied in context of Imperialism and Colonialism throughout globe and explains that British conquest in India pose a challenge to fragmented political and social landscape and traditional society of India and under colonialism there was churning in different social groups of society. Through critically analyzing the customs and traditions it divulges discussion on various aspects of Indian society, like gender issues, caste question so on and forth it led to modernity of Indians.

In response Indians had counter challenge the narrative against their customary practices and responded in varying ways and adopt the meta narratives of the modernity such as liberalism, free speech and Renaissance spirit to reform the social evils within Indian society particularly Hindus were more responsive and in this endeavors sought cooperation of colonial agency, it reciprocated and thus heralded the modernization of Hindu society in 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>.

The western education became the prime mover in bringing out the modernization of traditional Indian society thus sparked the "Bengal Renaissance" in early nineteenth century which transcends, an important offshoots of this" Renaissance" was witnessed in Delhi City, in early nineteenth century, it centered around the a pre- Modern Mughal Institution viz, Delhi College, which in turn bring integration of traditional education with modern or western, it was a successful educational experiment proven to be an abrasive blueprint of the colonial modernity in conventional society. This hybrid educational experiment in historiography termed as" Delhi Renaissance "it affected the political and social discourse from (1803- Reign of last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar till 1857 revolt). Delhi College comparatively succeeded in adopting the idea of colonial modernity like other colonial cities or Presidency towns Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. The elites of the Delhi city were able to comprehend distinctive kind of social ferment and confidently compromised the new intellectual forbearing emerging from colonial modernity with their orthodox Mughal identity and past. The entire enthusiasm and sagacity around the "Delhi Renaissance" vanished away with

outburst of 1857 revolt and violent events related to it totally shattered the efflorescence of colonial modernity in pre- modern Delhi<sup>3</sup>.

### **Delhi and Social Reforms in 20<sup>th</sup> century**

The Social reforms movement in early 20<sup>th</sup> century were spreading to different parts of India, Punjab being the thrust center and Delhi as one of the provinces had been affected by these movements. The British Colonialism provided platform for the dissemination of reformists ideas. Delhi, of post-revolt- period geographically alludes to Punjab having 85% area as rural belt while Urban region caters only to 15%, the educated and elite classes reside in core region of ex- Mughal Delhi popularly called as Shahjanabad, Delhi was fortunate to have a Municipality in 1861<sup>4</sup>. The limited political representation provided by the Municipality helped in resolving the various problems related to school education, sanitation, and hygiene, during 1880's Municipality successfully counter the plague epidemics and formulate the plan for recognition of community sponsored schools in Delhi <sup>5</sup>.

By early 1901 the Arya Samaj, a reformist sect became very popular, it started its educational work through opening five Branches in different parts of Delhi city, one of the biggest was at Katra Neel, in walled city. The aggressive campaign launched by Arya Samaj for donations to establish schools was favored enthusiastically by the people, within four years, ten DAV schools started in Shahjanabad and its adjoining region. Arya Samajas's insistence on girls' education found many supporters the Philanthropists of Punjab finance the education of girls one newspaper of period reported" The enthusiasm for girls' education in Punjab was so massive whenever appeal was made for donations in any public meeting people throw out bundles of notes for the cause, it was a common practice in all communities".<sup>6</sup>.

### **Missionary Work**

In Delhi province three missionary societies SPG (Society for Propagation of Gospel) Cambridge mission and Baptist Mission were on the forefront of educational work, they had used multipronged strategy to engage and profess their work, Firstly; focused on Zenana Missions, which meant educating women at their homes and women teachers specially trained for the purpose visited the houses of prospective pupils, Secondly they work among depressed classes(Schedule Castes) of Hindu society, Thirdly, Missions undertook proselytization work in those areas which were out of bound for the Caste Hindus. The proselyting activities of missionary in and around Delhi suburbs among the depressed classes was a cause of major friction between reformist sects of Hindus and Missionaries in the City<sup>7</sup>.

The Arya Samajists launches counter campaign to contain the proselytizing activities of the missionaries, they opened two schools for depressed class children in vicinity of walled city and start their own Zenana Mission for high Caste Purdah women in city,<sup>8</sup> some other organizations like

Sanatan Dharm Sabha, Prem Sabha and Sat Sabha etc. also played a prominent role in counter campaign against Missionaries<sup>9</sup>.

### **The Beginning**

So, in the scenario another Reformist Sect "Theosophical society"<sup>10</sup> started its educational work, at Delhi, the society had a branch at Chhipiwara, near Jama Masjid, those were the traditional times when patriarchal dominance didn't allow girls to move out from the houses and it was nearly impossible to persuade the parents of the girls to attend the school because marriage of young girls was more preferable than educating them. A group of young enthusiastic philanthropists and likeminded members of Theosophical Society led by Rai Balkishan Dass a banker entrepreneur of Delhi had appeal to the public and sought their support for the education of girls, the group members were inspired by the speeches and writing of founder of the "Theosophical Society" Annie Beasant, it was stated that School actually established in response to a very motivating and thought provoking speech of Annie Beasant called "The Education for Indian Girls"<sup>11</sup>.

The Theosophists at Delhi receive the call positively, it accelerated the progress of Girls education in and came forward to start a Girl school, Rai Balkishan Das was assisted by other important dignitaries of Delhi society, individuals like Lala Jugal Kishore, Rais Piyare Lal, Rai Bahadur Sultan Singh supported the cause and it led to foundation of "Indraprastha Hindu Kanya Shikshalya" or "Indraprastha Hindu Girl School" was opened at ,Mohalla Chhipiwara in 1904 ,the school building a beautiful Haveli was donated by the family of Rais Balkishan Das located near Jama Masjid, Delhi<sup>12</sup>.

So, it was the first, Hindu community sponsored Girl School in Delhi, which was founded by the efforts of a Zealous Group of social reformers, who despite facing social ostracism continued to carry out their struggle for Girl's education. However, taboo related to an exclusive women's education outside their home persisted, continued to be one of the obstacle for expansion and enrolments of new girls in school, it was an successful experiment relatively imbedded by modernity as curriculum of school had been modeled on western education system approved by the Punjab Education Department, colonial government was accommodative and supportive of such individual or joint effort launched by Indians because women's education was the indispensable plank of "Civilizing Mission"<sup>13</sup> as an effective propaganda of Colonialism in India<sup>14</sup>.

### **Formative Years**

The inception of the Indraprastha School for Girls in 1904 was an attempt to modernize the intellect of the people and had to construct a space for women's liberation in patriarchal boundaries which usually was contemptuous to allow

such freedom, so it wasn't an easy task, education of girls considered useless and dangerous. It needed revolutionary courage for the founders to move against these prejudices and social conservatism. The honorary secretary, Lala Jugal Kishore persisted in making a house- to- house approach to persuade parents to send their daughters to school. On many occasions he was threatened with physical violence. The finding out women teachers for the purpose was another problematic area for the founders<sup>15</sup>.The closed buggies(palanquins) were arranged for the pupils escorted by the women guards. The fee charge was very nominal, to dispel parents doubt about the utility of educating girls many additional subjects such as bookkeeping (General Accounts), hygiene, needle work, housekeeping and home science were introduced in Curriculum besides the popular subjects approved by the Punjab Board of education<sup>16</sup>.

In 1911, when Delhi acquired the status of Capital there was mushrooming growth of Girls School in City, Arya Samaj, Khalsa Diwan and Anjuman -I – Hidayat- ul -Islam start girl schools for their respective communities, so venture of Indraprastha School succeeded in popularizing and acknowledging the women's education, after First World years the school admit the girls from other communities, so it became a secular institution. In 1924, School became a separate institution and College shifted to another donated house, the strength of girl students in school was more than hundred and fifty, later College become one of the Constituent colleges of newly established University of Delhi and in 1938 College finally acquired its present building on Alipur Road, previously known as resident cum office of the Commander in Chief of British Indian Army requisitioned by University for the College Building<sup>17</sup>.

### **Colonial Modernity and Indraprastha School**

Delhi in its pre-1857 period never developed as classical colonial city as comparatively, Presidencies towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, in post-1857 years it was considered as dusty town of the one of the provinces of Punjab. It gains prominence as a Colonial city after transfer of Capital in 1911, when ruling British administration having vibrant Bureaucracy, and ruling elites shifted to the Capital city, slowly and gradually a middle class, comprised of teachers, merchants, clerks and other professionals related to different vocations emerged within the City, the building of New Capital by 1930's bring many more migrants into Delhi belonging to industrial workers and lower strata of the society, became the part of the cosmopolitan microcosm of the city. All of them served and catered to the need of colonial state's economic and political establishment.<sup>18</sup>

The Urban institutions represent this modernity in every colonial city, same was the case with schools, in Delhi city particularly community sponsored institutions were more progressive as compared to the Government Institutions. Indraprastha School of course was a unique institution actually

founded on principles of neo-Hinduism preached by Theosophists which pose challenge to notion of western or Christian superiority over the popular Hinduism, the founding principle of Indraprastha School in initial stages had vociferously stem and contain the Christian Missionaries Propaganda and condemnation of backwardness of Hindu Society and miserable condition of Hindu women, Indraprastha School provides a counter narrative and proved that Hindu society can ameliorate the condition of their women and can compromised the modernity with liberal reformist approach of Hinduism.<sup>19</sup>

The Colonial cities and their institutions became the patron of colonialism throughout the colonial world, the cities with their economic and administrative capabilities functions as the agent of colonial empire and earned huge profits through trading networks and generate profitable revenue for the empire. In later phase these cities become centers of protest and anti-colonial movements. The Indraprastha school as an Institution also became part of the anti-colonial movement in the pre- Gandhian era. During First World years, when home rule started by Tilak and Annie Beasant the founder of Theosophical movement, the school came under scrutiny of Delhi Administration because of its affiliation with Theosophists, its first Principal an Austrian nationalist, Leonara Gmeiner had to face the wrath of the authorities as of her Home Rule activities and school face threat of closure, however matter was resolved amicably through settlement between the Delhi Government and Governing body of the school<sup>20</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

The Indraprastha School has served its purpose in fruitful way, its legacy in formulating and heralding the women empowerment in pre- Independence Delhi through education is immensely acknowledged by the society itself. The ideology of Colonial Modernity and its impact over the Institution been analyzed thoroughly it can be said Indraprastha school acts as bridge between the Modernity and tradition and systematically maintained a balancing act by promoting the neo-Hinduism in early years of its inception later it adhered to secular values and promote communal harmony by inclusive admission policy just after few years of its existence, in post-independence era numbers of school's Alumni contributed in social and economic lives of the Indian Nation. The model of education adopted by school was one of the unique in those times, later this model was followed by the all schools of area and subsequently school since independence adhered to curriculum prescribed from time to time by education department, school became one of the sought-after schools and undoubtedly it fulfilled the promise for providence of women empowerment and become a significant symbol of progressivism unleashed by colonial modernity in Delhi City.

**End Notes:**

1. Punjab District Gazetteer, Vol, V, Delhi District, pp.69-70, Lahore, 1895.
2. Singh, Yogendra: Modernization of Indian Tradition, pp.134-35, OUP,1973.
3. Gupta, Narayani: Delhi Between Two Empire, 1803-1931, Society, Government and Urban Growth, pp.34-36, OUP,1981.
4. Prasad, Madho (Rai Sahib): The History of Delhi Municipality 1863-1921, pp.124-125, Pioneer Press, Chicago,1921 (Digitalized, April,2014).
5. *ibid*: op cit, pp-214-215.
6. Ferrell (Donald Wayne): Delhi 1911-1922, Society and Politics in the Imperial Capital of India, pp.30-32, Unpublished Thesis, University of California ,1974.
7. *ibid*: op cit, pp. 34-35.
8. *ibid*: op cit, pp.37- 38.
9. *ibid*: op cit, pp. 41-42.
10. The society was founded in USA in 1875 by Russian mystic Helena Blastvsky and Henry Olocot, later its branch was established at Adyar, Madras in 1889, the major objective of the society was study of comparative religion and infusion spirit of humanism in World. In India, Annie Beasant was the mentor of the movement she started the process of reforms her main stress was on women education and ideology of neo- Hinduism prevailed in its teachings under her influence branches were established and spread to other parts of India. In Delhi, branch was opened near Jama Masjid, Delhi, the members of society were from elite classes of the Delhi city, who supported the cause of women education in Delhi City.
11. Prasad Narayan: "A century of Change, Social and Educational" in Indraprastha School: A History, pp.3-5 a souvenir pamphlet published by school to commemorate the century celebration, 2005.
12. *ibid*: op cit, pp.6-7
13. Hutchins G. Francis: The illusion of permanence: British Imperialism in India, pp.129-30, Princeton University Press,1912
- 14.: *ibid*: op cit, pp. 134-35.
15. Prasad Narayan: "A century of Change, Social and Educational" in Indraprastha School: A History, pp. 6-7, a souvenir pamphlet published by school to commemorate the century celebration, 2005.
16. *ibid*: op cit, pp.8.
17. Shahpedia .org: Internet resource: A discussion "The History and Archives of Indraprastha College for Women, in interview, published on 30<sup>th</sup>, January 2018. seen on 26<sup>th</sup> May,2023.
18. Gupta, Narayani: Delhi Between Two Empire,1803-1931, Society, Government and Urban Growth, pp.86-87, OUP,1981.

19. www.KAU.SE: Internet Resource: online Book, Fajallsby Per- Olof, idealizing India: A Transforming perspective on Theosophists Contributions to education and politics (1879-1930), pp.57-58. Seen on 26<sup>th</sup> May,2023.

20. Wilson J. Wiltch: "Report on enquiry in Delhi Municipality Education and Home Rule Movement in Delhi", pp.104- 116, published by Chief Commissioner, Delhi, Government of India Press, 1941.

### **References:**

1. Mohanty. S. P: Colonial Modernity and Literature view from India, Orient Black swan, Delhi 2018.
2. Singh, Manish: Colonialism and Social Transformation in India, Pearson, Delhi,2014.
3. Basu, Pardeep (edit): Colonial Modernity, Indian Perspectives Prakashni Setu, Calcutta,2011.
4. Liddle Swapna: The Broken Script, Delhi Under the East India Company and The Fall of Mughal Dynasty 1803-1857, OUP, Delhi,2002.
5. Gupta, Narayani: Delhi Between Two Empire,1803-1931, Society, Government and Urban Growth, OUP, New Edition,2005.
6. A Guide to Record of Delhi Archives, Delhi Archives, Government of Delhi,2005.
7. Singh, Yogendra: Modernization of Indian Tradition, OUP, Delhi, New Edition,1992.
8. Indraprastha School: A History, a souvenir pamphlet published by school to commemorate the century celebration, 2005.
9. Frykenberg R.E: Delhi Through the Ages, Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society, OUP, Delhi, New Edition,2006
10. Ferrell (Donald Wayne): Delhi 1911-1922, Society and Politics in the Imperial Capital of India, Unpublished Thesis, University of California ,1974.
11. Bhargava Meena, Dutta Kalyani: Women, Education and Politics: The Women's movement and Delhi's Indraprastha College, OUP, Delhi, 2022.