

# CO-EDUCATION

## ITS BENEFITS & DANGERS.

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‘Woman’, says the scripture, ‘was created out of a rib of man’ But I would like to modify the definition a little : I would like to replace ‘out of a rib of man’ by ‘out of a dream of man’. Woman was created by God. But Dr Tagore tells us—this is not all, man has made her what she is with a touch of his own mind :—

“শুধু বিধাতার-সৃষ্টি নহে তুমি নারী ;  
পুরুষ গড়েছে তোরে সৌন্দর্য্য সঞ্চারি  
আপন অন্তর হ’তে ।”

The woman created by the Lord is not what she is to us men. The burning desire of men’s heart has perfected women. A woman is more than the earth’s, and Tagore has well described her in—

“পড়েছে তোমার পরে প্রদীপ্ত বাসনা,  
অর্ধেক মানবী তুমি অর্ধেক কল্পনা ।”

When George Eliot speaks of Eppie’s reading at the ‘dame school’ we come to ascertain that in her time, during the latter part of the 19th century, co-education was not in practice in England, at least in the rural districts of England. Even in our times there are separate institutions for the education of boys and girls in England. But the number of these institutions, exclusively meant for one sex or the other, is gradually on the decline. Co-education has become the most prominent feature of western education of the day.

To-day we live in a materialistic world. The end, which

the world seeks to-day, is material gain. We can have a real picture of this materialism in the poem, "The Cry of the Children," of E. B. Browning. The poetess describes in this piece how the children 'are weeping, in the play-time of others, in the country of the free', and asks a question,— "how long, O cruel nation, will you stand to move the world, on a child's heart, -stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation, and trade onward to your throne amid the mart"? But she does not expect any melting of the hearts of the gold-hoarding nation, and therefore, warns them against 'the child's sob in silence', which, she says, 'curses deeper than the strong man in his wrath'.

This material end demands that women should come and work with men in the everyday business of life. Civilization, they cry aloud, has received little contribution from half the human race. Let women come forward and take their due share in the onward march of humanity. They want us to forget any distinction that we might make between the sexes as regards the old method of division of work among the sexes in society.

To realise this end women must be brought in close touch with men, and how can the sexes work together if they are kept apart from each other in the early days of their life? Therefore we might hear a cry for co-education even in the firmament. The west has materialised the point by introducing a system of co-education from A. B. C. D. to the final examinations of the universities. A wave of the movement has reached the shores of the East through English education and has raised a great deal of noise and clamour amongst the peaceful people.

Co-education has been introduced in India, and we are anxiously awaiting the results thereof. The Scottish Church College and the City College of Calcutta have taken the initiative. Other Colleges of Calcutta are making arrangements for women's classes in the morning, and we can safely predict

that the two periods will coincide in near future, and we shall see co-education firmly established in the Indian soil. A section of the people who have been opposing the movement from its very inception will in course of a few years be utterly unnoticed and little cared for. They should beware!

The fun of the whole thing is that a large section of the learners themselves oppose the movement. When we analyse the reasons thereof we come to the conclusion that there is a great defect in the system. This is a very plain one: Indian boys and girls are sometimes taught the alphabet under the same institution. But as soon as they are a bit grown up they are placed under separate institutions. An artificial rampart is set up between them and they grow unfamiliar to each other. This accounts for their coyness when in the University they are recommended to be placed side by side with each other.

Materially, we admit, we shall be gainers by educating our youths and maid ns on the same lines and under the same institutions. During the last decade women have shown adequate aptitude for being placed side by side with men even in this country. The Civil Disobedience movement of the Indian National Congress has shown how well the women have fought side by side with men in the cause of the mother land. Even we have seen women participating in the Revolutionary movement, and as a result a lot of them gaoled under the Bengal Ordinance. In their University career women students have shown equal brilliancy with men, and we have seen some of them head the lists of the final examinations of the university. Even as typists, clerks, teachers and other professionals they have challenged the supremacy of men. We have amidst us a great female leader like S. Sarojini Naidu of the A. I. C. C., whereof she had been the President and Dictator at times. Besides, co-education is not quite an innovation of this age, especially in the case of India, our

motherland. We have seen how Devajani, daughter of Sukracharya, received instructions together with the men disciples of her father, in the golden days of India, in ages gone by.

Those who are in touch with the Bengali novels are aware how great difficulties arise when necessity brings unrelated men and women together. Even under the threat of death a Bengali lady can not speak freely to an unfamiliar, unrelated gentleman from whom perhaps a considerable amount of assistance and relief could be expected. Necessity, therefore, demands the removal of this feeling of delicacy and foreignness from the minds of the sexes, and co-education is perhaps the greatest means to the end. The advocates of co-education amply illustrate this point with practical examples and pictures of society that are nothing short of real. Herein consist the benefits of co-education.

The problem of co-education has become a practical one, and we see the newspapers pouring out diverse opinions on the subject. Indeed, the columns of the newspapers have become a great and advantageous field of action for the advocates of co-education as well as the reactionaries. Even in debating societies debates are held on the subject, and sometimes competitions are held in some localities or an essay on co-education is invited the object whereof is seeking public opinion.

Indeed, we are receiving showers of arguments and opinions on the subject every day, and still so much remains to be known. The reason is that the subject is of vital importance to the society at large, and no amount of debates and considerations is too large. It is not yet ripe time for the nation to give its decided opinion on the subject. The two reactionary elements must be fighting till one of them is wiped out of existence, that is, one is merged into the other, and all discussions will only then stop.

Gandhi and Rabindranath are the two heads of the East, and the people constantly refer to them in all matters. I do

not remember Mahatma Gandhi to have ever made any statement upon the subject of co-education. But as regards education, and rights and duties of women, in course of his lectures in the second conference of the R. T. C., he declared that he would like to see them as mothers of the nation and therefore educated and enlightened, but the type of education, said he, that produces typists and clerks of women is nothing short of deserving contempt and disapproval from Society. Gandhi denies us the very benefits that the advocates of co-education promise by the introduction of the system. As regards Rabindranath, the advocates will refer to the practice of Dr. Tagore at Santiniketan, and the reactionaries will refer to his article 'Kavyer-apekshita.' In this article Rabindranath admits the apprehension of the reactionaries to its entire extent, and says that it is but too natural that young men and maidens will fall in love with each other and unite. Tagore denies the possibility of friendly relationship of men with women of any form, other than as man and wife when he speaks of the friendship, between 'Patralkha' and the prince 'Chandrapir' as most unnatural and one which has only insulted the woman in Patralkha, utterly and without mercy. A great force of attraction has been in existence from eternity between youths and maidens, and the poet will say, it cannot but destroy all barriers that might be set up amongst them, and have its way.

Thus the reactionaries point out that co-education will slacken the code of morality and vitiate society at large.

This assertion is only confirmed by facts when we see, almost every year, several young men in love committing suicide, some inside the college premises and others outside it, for the sake of a female friend of theirs whom they greed to love in course of their study in the college. We have seen the newspapers' remark that all these love-sick young men were brilliant, promising students and could have rendered valuable services to the mother country, if not cut up prema-

turely. Society has suffered a great loss by their deaths and the enemies of co-education have been shocked, and we with them. Should not co-education be opposed on this ground at least?

The liberals will argue that free-love is no slackening of the code of morality. 95 p. c. of the married couples of India lead an unhappy matrimonial life, only because they were ill-matched through the choice of their parents and guardians. Morality does not consist in compromising with the untrue but in keeping to 'truth' at any cost whatsoever. Therefore, those who abide by their consorts at all costs, after much bitterness has been created, are not moralists at all. They should assert their right. True it is that some self-chosen couples are found as unhappy as others, and to this they will reply that the present age is democratic, and the 'people' prefer suffering for their own follies to suffering for the faults of others, which they consider as nothing short of a great mockery of fate. 'Let us have our own choice'-cries oppressed humanity and, who can deny it?

But still there is one great point of objection. It is one that the advocates of co-education often count upon as their gain. But indeed! it is no gain at all! Nay! it is an irretrievable loss to humanity! You might argue that by introducing co-education you will remove the barrier of delicacy from amongst men and women and thus facilitate their everyday activities. But have you counted upon the loss that will be suffered hereby? I suppose, 'Certainly not!' To-day a woman is to a man 'half a human being and half a dream and imagination'—in the language of Rabindranath. 'She is a mystery to us now.' But this is due to the distance that lies between her and man. So says the poet.

Distance lends enchantment to the view,

And covers the 'mountain in its azure hue.'

But when the distance is removed, the veil of charm is withdrawn and rough stones and thornshrubs appear! Who

is there then ready to sacrifice this distance and thereby disenchant our life? If there be any one he is either insane or indifferent. Let him alone, for we are worldly men and the very dusts of this earth are so many gems to us. Still will you force it upon us, O Cruel Civilization? Well can you do that and we are aware! But we will oppose you with all the dash and go that we can command, for this is the last drop of joy that has not yet been removed from our cup by a drop of tear, and we will not allow you to deprive us of it. No, by no means; our soul demands!

Countless are our miseries, but few our joys. If a drop of tear you can not wipe away—what right have you to empty the cup of my joys? Pray, for Heaven's sake do it not! Oppressed humanity cries—do it not! Who is there so hard then as to do it again?

We, simple, poor men, earn our daily bread in the sweat of our brows. We come out of the factory, or the office, or the mill at sunset, 'upset and unmanned' and can only suffer living because we find amends,—an adequate compensation for our miseries by leaning upon a charming heart for rest and comfort. This is the only bond that binds us to life in spite of the cruelties of fortune and the world.

Do you know why an ill paid Bengali clerk can live even after so much hardship and ill-treatment in the office by the John Bulls? I will tell you—

"Because of the presence of a ministering cherub, a kind and loving wife at home."

Now if you make her a typist or another clerk, wherefrom will she get her store of wholesome love and affection? What will the subsistence of the poor then be?

Despise not our prayer!—do not disenchant our life and drown us in the utmost misery. With the words and entreaties of every loving heart—of every loving husband and wife in the realm, nay in the world, I pronounce a word against co-education. Will not the force of human will give

it a force far greater than you can overcome?—Surely, it will!

Let me stop then. Although necessity—necessity for swelling the gold reserves of powerful states like America, England, France, etc, and of the sons of fortune like Henry Ford and others, calls for the working of women side by side with men, co-education,—love and humanity forbids. We should think a thousand times ere we decide upon a definite plan. The need for co-education cannot balance the need for opposing it—its evils. The dangers of co-education are many,—the benefits but few. Who would like to win a penny at the risk of losing a pound. If any, let him advocate co-education. We shrink back.

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### **A Servant of Humanity.**

In its ordinary use the term “servant” carries with it the idea of some reproach or indignity. But for man there is hardly any other title more glorious than that of “A servant of Humanity.” To serve humanity is to serve God Himself, and therefore it is that “A Servant of God” and “A Servant of Humanity” are terms almost synonymous. To serve Humanity is really to serve God or some noble Ideal of Perfection. Servants, as they are vulgarly understood, are in personal services to personal and temporal authorities; but a Servant of Humanity offers service not to this man or that, neither to this body of men or that. His service is strictly impersonal, universal in its operation, and eternal in its duration. It is offered not with a view to demand any return, no, not even in the form of reputation or influence; for generally it is seen that a Servant of Humanity is seldom appreciated in his own life-time, and is persecuted and condemned like Jesus Christ even by those for whom he works or like Mahatma Gandhi who has not been properly appreciated even by a large section of his own countrymen.