

Proceeding no. B-33, September, 1897

Correspondence regarding the admission of lady students into the Presidency College, Calcutta.

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Will the office of the Director of Public Instruction please state under what orders the admission of female pupils into the Presidency College was sanctioned? This information is urgently required.

E.L.M - 13.8.97

Mr. Rowe, Officiating Principal of the Presidency College wrote to me unofficially, informing me that he had applications from the parents of the two young ladies requesting that they might be permitted to join the Presidency College. In reply, I stated that if he had no objection, I had none. I also had conversations with the fathers of the two girls on the subject stating that their desire was to give them the very best education that was possible, and that this could not be obtained in the Bethune College. One of these gentlemen is Dr. P.K. Ray (Civil List, No.4, page 209), himself a Professor of the Presidency College. The other is I believe styled Controller of India Treasuries.

I never contemplated that any opposition would come from the fathers of the male students of the College, and from what I learn from Mr. Rowe, everything is going on in the most satisfactory manner. The ladies are properly escorted to College each day, and when they go from one class to another, they do so with one of the junior Professors in attendance.

C.A. Martin - 17.8.97

Notes and Orders

Please see the Secretary's queries at page 681 of the Report on Native Papers for the week ending 24th July 1897. The admission of female students into the Presidency College has not been sanctioned by Government, but I understand the Director of Public Instruction has done it without any reference to Government.

Yes, Dr. Martin told me so.

E.M.K. - 16.8.87

Some correspondence appeared in the columns of the Indian Mirror and the Englishman protesting against the innovation. If Secretary likes, they may be put up.

Put up the papers. Is there any previous correspondence on the subject?

M.F. - 16.8.97

Shall we ask for a report from the Director of Public Instruction? (The Government maintains the Bethune College wholly for the education of women. A copy of the note giving the previous history of the Institution is put up.)

The second question cannot be answered by the office. We may make a reference to the Director of Public Instruction.

For orders,

A.Sen-16.8.97

E.L.M - 16.8.97

Secretary

E.M.K.- 16.8.97

Please see the Secretary's queries above. Copies of the Englishman and the Indian Mirror are put up. There are no previous papers in the Department but the Medical Department have got papers regarding the admission of ladies into the Medical College; but they are not exactly to the point.

A. Sen - 18.8.97

E.L.M - 18.8.97

Secretary.

E.M.K.-18-8-97

Ask Medical Department for their papers.

Papers are put up. In a letter dated the 4th June 1883, Mr. G. Bellet, who was then officiating as Director of Public Instruction, submitted a proposal for the admission of females to the classes of the Medical College in Calcutta. In 1882 the Director of Public Instruction urged on the Medical College authorities the advisability of the admission of females to the College, on the ground of the great alleviation of suffering which, it was thought, would result if there were a body of qualified practitioners to whose admission the zenanas there would be no objection, as well as on the ground that if the Medical College classes were thrown open to females, a career of usefulness would be provided for these ladies.

The above proposal was laid before the Council of the Medical College, and at the meeting of the Council at which five members were present resolutions were passed by four of the members adverse to the proposition, only one being in favour of it. Some of the members opposed to the measure thought "the idea of mixed classes in Indian medical schools is much more repulsive than in a European one." The proposal for the admission of females to the Medical College, however, found favour with the Principal of the College, Dr. Coates. In quoting Dr. Coates's opinion, the Director said - "He (Dr. Coates) passes on to state the unanimous opinion of those connected with medical schools in Switzerland, whom he had consulted, which were to the effect that the presence of ladies in class rooms had a refining effect on all present."

The question came up for the consideration before Sir Rivers Thompson. The then Under-Secretary (now Hon'ble Mr. Bolton) recorded a note on the subject. He said that mixed classes of males and females were found at medical institutions in America and Europe and even in Madras, and "Dr. Coates adduces evidence that the presence of ladies in these classes has a refining rather than demoralizing effect on the students of the other sex. Dr. Harvey further testifies from personal experience that any awkward feeling which may at first be experienced by lecturers in addressing such classes soon disappears. Any unpleasantness arising from their associating with male students in those classes is, in fact, more likely to be felt by the ladies themselves; and if they are willing to brave it all for the sake of qualifying themselves as doctors, it would hardly be fair to refuse them admission into the College."

Mr. Rivers Thompson accepted the above views, and directed the admission of females into the Medical College, and orders on the subject were communicated to the Director of Public Instruction under order No. 418T.G., dated 29th June 1883. In paragraph 6 of this letter, it was directed that all arrangements in regard to separate seats, screens and waiting-rooms for female students, might be entrusted to the discretion of the Principal, Dr. Coates. With reference to these separate arrangements, Dr. Coates, in a subsequent letter No. 898, dated February 1886, to the Director of Public Instruction, said: - "No screens are used on the continent, in Ireland or in America. I specially asked this question from the Principal of the Madras Medical College, and his reply was that these girls sit apart from the male students unscreened in all the lecture rooms." Dr. Coates further said, :- "During the past three years in this College they have occupied seats in front of the male students, that is, between them and the lecturers. I have asked the lady students here, and they distinctly desire they should not be screened in any way."

The necessity for admitting female students into the Medical College arose from the fact that there was no separate college for imparting medical instruction to the females. But it is for consideration whether

the ladies who will take up the general course of studies, viz., F.A., B.A., and M.A., as the two ladies admitted to the Presidency College have taken, cannot attain their object by studying in the Bethune College in Calcutta, where such classes exist, and which is intended for the exclusive use of ladies. A correspondence, which appeared in the Englishman of the 1st August 1897, remarked" - "The Bethune College is the Institution set apart for the education of female students. If the teaching staff of that institution was found bad, the authorities in charge of that institution should have been appealed to for a better one." The "Cosmopolitan and Liberal", which is a Brahmo paper, and to which sect the young ladies who have been admitted to the Presidency College belong, remarks: - "Considering that there is already in Calcutta such a well-managed institution for the education of females as the Bethune College, we cannot understand what cogent reasons urged their guardians to put them in an institution conducted exclusively for the education of young men. It is decidedly a retrograde measure. While the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge have shown themselves popularly orthodox in matters of female education, it is to be deeply regretted that some unwitting advocates of radical reform in India have rushed in where angels do not tread."

It may also be mentioned here that a native lady, Miss Sarabala Biswas, has, under the Director's orders, been admitted into the Ravenshaw College in Cuttack.

Of the two ladies who have been admitted into the Presidency College, one is the daughter of Dr. P.K. Ray, a Professor of the Presidency College, and another of Mr. R.N. Ray, Deputy Controller-General. With reference to their admission, Dr. Martin says, - "I never contemplated that any opposition would come from the fathers of the male students of the College, and from what I learn from Mr. Rowe, everything is going on in the most satisfactory manner. The ladies are properly escorted to College each day, and when they go from one class to another, they do so with one of the junior Professors in attendance."

In European schools intended for boys in Calcutta, no female students has ever read. This has not perhaps been found necessary owing to the fact that there is plenty of schools for girls, where they may be properly educated.

It may be further mentioned that the establishment of the Zanana Hospitals, which was then under consideration, required that the Zanana Hospitals should be officered chiefly by lady doctors, the admission of ladies into the Medical College to qualify themselves for such office by grounds of allowing them to study in it. Recently one Miss Cohen applied to the High Court for enrolment as an Attorney, but her application was refused by the Court. So whatever high University degrees the native ladies may possess, they have no chance of becoming pleaders or holding responsible judicial and executive offices under this Government, for which they can still qualify themselves with the education they may receive in the Bethune College.

In these circumstances, it is for orders whether Government Colleges in Bengal, which have hitherto been open to boys only, can be thrown open to ladies also. The private Colleges in Calcutta have not yet been thrown open to the latter.

(Reports on Native Papers for the week ending 17th and 24th July 1897, containing some further opinions of the Vernacular Press are also put up.)

E.L.M - 21.8. 97

Secretary -

Secretary asked for Medical Department's papers about the admission of women to the Medical College. They are at the bottom of the file. The important orders are those of 29th June 1883. Please see also a note by Dr. Martin.

E.M.K. - 21.8.97

His Honour -

There has been a good deal said in the newspapers about the admission by Dr. Martin to the Presidency College of two lady students. Dr. Martin explains his action in the note above. We need not interfere, I think.

M.F. - 22.8.97

Taken up. Write demi-officially to Dr. Martin, and say that the Lieutenant-Governor thinks that an important change of the kind should not have been made without obtaining the orders of Government. Now that it has been made and that it is reported to be working satisfactorily, the Lieutenant-Governor will not interfere in all events at the present.

M.F. - 23.8.97

[No. 33.] [File 4-C/2C 1.]

Demi-official No. 263, dated Calcutta, the 25th August 1897.

From - M. Finucane, Esq., Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal, General Dept.,

To - The Director of Public Instruction, Bengal.

The Lieutenant-Governor's attention has lately been drawn to the discussions in the newspapers about the admission to the Presidency College under your orders of two lady students, and I have laid before His Honour the note which you wrote in reply to our unofficial reference, in support of your action in the matter. His Honour thinks that an important change of this kind should not have been introduced without obtaining the previous orders of Government on the subject.

Now that the change has been made, and it is reported to be working satisfactorily, the Lieutenant-Governor will not interfere at all events for the present, but I am desired to request that such questions may in future be submitted to Government for decision.