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## **Problems faced by Female Members in the Indian Education Service in Colonial Period**

### **Abstract**

*This study was conducted to analyze the problems faced by female members serving as inspectress and as principals in government schools at that time. Indian government records provide details of most women appointed to the IES between 1905 and 1922 when recruitment ended. Over that time the average age of the 17 appointed was close to 30 years. Male appointments, by comparison, averaged closer to 26 years of age. The academic credentials of women varied; some had good quality honors degrees, others did not, but all had teacher training qualifications of one sort or another. When appointed, all were single, but many did not stay in the IES for very long. Little is known of what happened to them after they resigned but it is likely that many got married while others, finding Indian pay and conditions not to their liking, sought and found positions elsewhere. Previous or existing family links with India were also much in evidence amongst female IES recruits.*

**Key Words:** inspectress, recruits, colonial, degree, management, principal

### **Introduction**

In Muslim communities there was widespread parental unwillingness to send girls to school or to allow them to remain beyond marriageable age. Communal or sectarian feeling might stimulate girls' schooling in large centers of population for specific communities but most communities, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh etc, would not send their daughters to a common school. There were also more specific practical problems including a supply of competent teachers. Men were not welcome and there were really only three possible sources — widows, teachers' wives, and Indian Christians. It was also well-nigh impossible to get Indian women to serve as school inspectors. The job involved endless travelling and staying overnight in a variety of types of accommodation which was quite unacceptable to Muslims and Hindus alike. Despite the time and effort spent on

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responding to the London memorial, the Indian government saw little hope of any real progress until Indian women themselves started to demand change. In the circumstances the number of women required for the IES was small. Their main tasks were to inspect girls' schools in receipt of government grants-in-aid and to act as principals in the few government schools and teacher training colleges for young women. In 1913, there were 17 female IES officers, comprising 12 inspectresses, as they were then called, and five superintendents. A perusal of the backgrounds of some of the European women who served in India provides a rare insight into the education of middle class women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### **Objectives**

The aim of the present study was to analyze the hardships faced by the women serving as an educationist at that time.

### **Methodology**

The study was the documentary analysis of the previous record available. The record available for study comprises of 21 women from the past to be worth studied.

**Gladys Heuer** was 26 when appointed as a **mistress** of method at the Dow Hill Training College in Kurseong in 1906. Born in Liverpool, she had been a pupil teacher before winning a Queen's Scholarship to the Edge Hill Training College. She completed her Board of Education teaching certificate in 1902 and then spent a further year in France at a Normal School in Limoges, where she passed the *Brevet Elementaire de l'Academie de Poitiers*. At the time of her appointment to the IES she was teaching at the Ethelburga Street council school in Battersea. The chairman of the selection committee described her as a fresh-looking, healthy girl, who was very calm and self-possessed, with a touch of superiority in her manner. She was clearly a cut above the average elementary teacher in qualifications and probably in ability and the chairman said that her year's training in France had impressed the committee. She had no academic degree, and no male would have been appointed to the IES without one, but that was not considered essential as her work in India was to focus mainly on the training of infant teachers.

By contrast, **Mary Honey burne** was 32 years old and a first class honors graduate in classics from Victoria University, Liverpool, when she was appointed as a junior inspectress in Bengal in 1907. She also had a teaching certificate from the Cambridge Training College for Women. The daughter of an Anglican cleric, she was born and reared in Liverpool. She attended the prestigious Liverpool High School for girls before winning a scholarship to Victoria University. When she applied to join the IES she already had six years teaching experience, including two years spent in government schools in Cairo and another 21 months in India at the All Saints Diocesan High School in Naini Tal. She also had a knowledge of French, German, Latin and Greek, and Egyptian Arabic.

**Ethel West** was born in Calcutta — her father was a botanist and seed merchant — and educated at the esteemed La Martiniere College for girls. Her mother ran a training school and orphanage for Eurasian children and Miss West did honorary work there when she left school. As a result she became a fluent speaker of Urdu. Later she taught at La Martiniere College before going to England in 1902 to study at Girton College, Cambridge. In 1905 she achieved third class honors in the Mathematics Tripos but it was not until 1947 that Cambridge awarded degrees to women. Instead, she took advantage of a temporary *ad eundem* arrangement and took out a BA degree from Trinity College, Dublin. At the time people like her were called ‘mail boat graduates’ because they crossed to Dublin, often for the first time in their lives, by the mail boat to pay their fee and receive their degree. She then completed a teacher’s diploma at St Mary’s College, Paddington, and taught for two years at the girls’ high school in Dover. By then she was 30 years old and anxious to return to India. The comments of the selection committee chairman were more revealing of contemporary social attitudes to race than they were of Miss West’s qualities as a teacher. It was stated that she probably had *a slight trace of Indian blood*. In connection with this suspicion, together with her Indian upbringing, special enquiries were made

as to a *possible deficiency in energy and initiative* but the result confirmed the impression she conveyed when she was interviewed, that she was lacking in neither of the necessary qualities mentioned. Tragically, within a few months of her return to India she died, and the IES lost one of its most promising female recruits.

Miss West’s replacement was **Helen Stuart**, a 30-year-old Englishwoman, who had been educated at Cheltenham Ladies College, during the headship of the famous Miss Beale, St Hilda’s College, Oxford, and the Maria Grey Training College in London. Like Miss West, she too was a ‘mail boat graduate’ having taken out a BA degree in classics, from Trinity College, Dublin, under the *ad eundem* provision. A speaker of French, Latin and Greek, she had taught for five years, including nine months in Canada, before applying to join the IES. Her subsequent career is unknown.

**Mary Garrett**, appointed in 1908 as an inspectress of schools in Eastern Bengal and Assam, was born in Ceylon where her missionary father administered some 50 mission schools and 5000 pupils. She was educated privately until the age of 16. Then she went to England and completed a first class teaching certificate at the ladies’ training college in Cheltenham. The selection committee thought she was ‘pleasant looking and had an interesting and intelligent face. She spent the next 10 years touring Assam each year as a school inspector before resigning in 1920.

**Jessie Parsons** was 37 years old, with 17 years teaching experience to her credit, when she was appointed Principal of the training college for Indian girls at Bankipore in 1909. She too, had been born in India, in Madras, where her late father had been an officer in the government secretariat. She attended the Doveton Girls’ School and later the Doveton College in Madras before entering Presidency College in 1889. She graduated with a BA degree in history in 1891, and was one of the first women to do so. She then obtained a licentiate in teaching from the government training college at Saidapet in Madras. Thereafter, she held various

teaching posts in India and also ran a boarding school for European children in Penang from 1896 to 1904. She had two brothers; one, Dr. L. D. Parsons, was the Colonial Post Officer in Gibraltar, while, the other was a barrister in London. In 1908 she spent a year at the London Day Training College catching up on the latest ideas and techniques in the training of teachers. The selection committee thought she was eminently sensible, though not a brilliant person. In appearance she was described as plain but her voice was pleasant and despite being born in India she was of pure English descent. Her widespread knowledge of India was thought to make her far less of a risk than some younger girl who knew nothing of India. She was also thought to possess ‘that solidarity of purpose and equability of temperament which in pioneer work is invaluable’.

**Mary Somerville** was another former pupil teacher who subsequently obtained a university degree after combining a course at teachers’ college with part time university study. When she sailed for Calcutta in January 1911 to take up a post as an inspectress of schools in East Bengal and Assam, she was 25 years old. She hailed from Edinburgh where her father worked in the Inland Revenue department. She was educated initially at the Edinburgh Ladies’ College before becoming a pupil teacher at the North Merchiston public school for four years. She then completed a certificate of teaching specializing in secondary and higher education at the Established Church of Scotland Training College. While training as a teacher she also attended the University of Edinburgh and graduated MA with second class honors in English in 1908. Thereafter she taught at the Leith Academy and at the Edinburgh Ladies’ College. She was also assistant secretary of the historical society of the University of Edinburgh. Some two years before she applied to join the IES she had been engaged to be married to a young ICS man in Bengal but he was accidentally drowned. Thereafter she was determined to go to India. In 1908 she had unsuccessfully applied for the principalship of the training college at Patna. Her referees all spoke very highly of her teaching ability and the selection committee was clearly impressed by her determination to acquire a degree under difficult conditions. She was described as a ‘nice-looking Scotch girl. In manner she is very quiet and though she seems to be of a distinctly gentle disposition, she impresses one as having plenty of “grit” and determination. She speaks well’. She resigned in October 1914 and was replaced by Miss Garrett.

The file on **Miss Somerville’s** appointment also contains a poignant letter from F. R. Jamieson, of the Scottish Education Department, to the India Office on the subject of Indian and Colonial appointments. He claimed to know of a lady with a far better claim to the post that Miss Somerville was after — someone educated at Wycombe Abbey, Girton College, and both the Manchester and the Oxford training centers for teachers, ‘but she would not look at it. She was quite contemptuous of the place’ [India]. He mentioned this in order to warn the India Office that it would probably not be overrun with candidates of the first order: ‘Generally, I find that to be the trouble with the Indian and Colonial places; they are not good enough for the best kind of people; and second-best people don’t seem to be likely to hold up their end creditably — in India at least’.

One wonders whether Jamieson would have approved of **Gladys Broughton** 16 appointed as an inspectress in the Central Provinces in 1912. She was born in India and lived there until she was 11 years old. Her family had very strong links

with India. Her late father had been a captain in the British army. Her maternal grandfather, Sir Michael Filose, had been a lieutenant-colonel in the Indian army and Chief Secretary to the Maharaja of Gwalior. Lieutenant-Colonel Clement Filose, then Military Secretary in Gwalior, was her cousin. She also had two brothers serving in the Indian army and another seeking entry. After the death of her father, her mother went to London, trained as a nurse, and then served in the Indian Medical Service until her second marriage.

**Miss Broughton** was educated at Bedford High School and won a scholarship to University College, London, where she obtained a BA degree in 1907 with second class honors in philosophy. In 1912 she obtained a University of London teaching diploma as a student in the training department at Bedford College. She had no teaching experience when she sailed for India from Marseilles in December 1912 but she was described as a bright and extremely capable young woman — she was 29 at the time — and ‘intensely in sympathy with India’. She was later approached to accept the position of principal at Bethune College, the foremost women’s university college in Bengal, but she refused on the grounds that the pay was insufficient. Soon afterwards, in 1915, while on leave in the United Kingdom, she resigned from the IES but later rescinded her decision.

**Ethel Chamier** was another member of the IES who was born and spent her childhood in India. However, unlike many female appointees she remained in her post as a school inspectress in the Central Provinces until she retired in 1940, aged 55. The year before she retired she was awarded the OBE for her services to female education in India. She hailed originally from Madras where her father was a prison governor. She was educated at Bishop Cotton’s School in Bangalore and was a fluent speaker of Hindustani before she went to England in 1903. There she

attended Princess Helena College in London before going up to St Hilda’s Hall, Oxford, to study science. She majored in chemistry and gained her diploma with fourth class honors which the Principal of her College attributed, in part, to nervousness under examination pressure and a period of poor health. From there she returned to India where she worked as an educational inspector in the Bengal provincial education service. She clearly impressed the selection committee with her glowing references, her extensive knowledge of India, academic qualifications, previous teaching experience, and enthusiasm for science. Two of her most supportive referees were Misses Garrett and Somerville. Their faith in her ability was amply justified in her subsequent career.

One of the best qualified female candidates to join the IES was **Elsa Spencer**, whose father was an HMI. Born in Cambridge, she attended the St Felix School in Southwold before winning a scholarship in 1907 to Royal Holloway College ‘probably the best women’s college connected with the University of London’. There she completed a London degree with upper second class honours in classics. One of her referees claimed that she would have got a First but for illness at a critical time. From Holloway she went to the Clapham High School secondary training department to train as a teacher for two years. This was followed by a winter spent in further study at Gottingen University. Her teaching experience included a year at the *Lycee de jeunes filles* in Rheims, as well as posts as a language teacher first at the prestigious Croydon High School for girls, and later at

the equally famed North London Collegiate School for girls. She was described as dark, serious looking, pleasant and of good appearance, self-possessed, and intelligent. She was also keen to go to India. The selection committee was especially impressed by her knowledge of Latin and Greek and her capacity to speak French and German fluently. Unfortunately, her subsequent career in India is not recorded.

**Helen Brander** was an equally promising IES candidate but she lasted only a year before being forced to resign for health reasons. She suffered from appendicitis in the summer of 1916 and went to Darjeeling for an operation but suffered post-operative complications for some time afterwards. In her letter of resignation in March 1917, she said she felt unequal to the strain of school work and the climate. She was also annoyed at the lack of free living quarters as originally promised. She had gone to India as Principal of the government girls' high school in

Bankipore, Bihar. The daughter of a Scottish bank manager, she was born in San Francisco and lived in California for five years before the family returned to Edinburgh. There she was educated at George Watson's Ladies College, where she won a succession of scholarships, before enrolling at Edinburgh University. She graduated MA in 1908, having majored in Latin, French and German. She then spent a year in France at the University of Clermont — Ferrand where she completed a *Dip d'études francaises*. Then followed teaching posts at Blackburn High School for girls, Camborne County School for girls, and Bournemouth Collegiate School for girls before spending the 1914–1915 academic year at Bedford College acquiring a London University teacher's diploma. Described as a pleasant, sensible Scotch girl who was likely to do well in India, her career in India appeared doomed from the start but she subsequently recovered her health and eventually, at the age of 32, was reappointed to her original post which had remained unfilled on a permanent basis since her resignation. Prior to her reappointment she taught at the Loretto Convent School in Darjeeling and was briefly Headmistress of the Dow Hill School and Training College in Kurseong, Bengal.

The war years made it virtually impossible to recruit female staff from Britain because of a wartime ban on women travelling by sea through 'the dangerous zone' for fear of submarine attack. The same rule also prevented **Miss M. V. Irons**, an inspectress of schools in Bengal, from returning to England after her resignation from the IES. In the immediate post war years many more appointments were made from candidates already domiciled in India. In some cases, as with Eunice Dawson, the normal age limit was also waived.

**Miss Dawson** was 37 when she was appointed as an inspectress of schools in Bihar and Orissa in 1919. She was born in Burnley, Lancashire, but lived much of her childhood in the Punjab as her father was an Anglican missionary there before later returning to be a parish priest in Rugby. Miss Dawson was educated at the Clergy Daughters' School in Bristol and later at Durham University, where she graduated BA in classics in 1903. The following year she gained a Durham diploma in the theory and practice of teaching. She then held several teaching appointments at girls' grammar schools before going out to India in 1913 to be first assistant mistress and subsequently Headmistress of the European High

School for girls and the Lawrence School in the Punjab. In 1918 she was offered but declined the post of educational secretary to the YMCA, preferring instead, to take a temporary position in the IES as a school inspectress. This position was made permanent in 1919. She presumably resigned in 1921 as her name disappeared from the *India Office List* thereafter.

**Una Tilley** was an example of someone already serving in India who was appointed to the IES after the First World War. Initially, she joined the Burma provincial education service as Headmistress of the government normal school in Rangoon at the start of 1918. Three years later she obtained an IES post as assistant lecturer in education at the University of Rangoon. Born in London in December 1890, she was educated at Blackheath High School for girls (1900–1910). From there she won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford, where she gained a second class honors diploma in history in 1914. This was followed by a further year at the Clapham High School training department and the award of a Cambridge certificate of secondary teaching. Miss Tilley then taught at schools in Kennington and Bromley for two years, and spent another two years as a secretary in the War Trade Intelligence Department before eventually fulfilling a long cherished wish to go out to India. The selection committee thought her rather young for a senior Indian appointment but she impressed them with her marked capacity and strength of character. It was noted, for example, that while at Oxford she had played hockey for her College XI and also been president of the boating club. Her only drawback was her weak eyesight. It was considered acceptable for the initial two-year probationary term but would need to be tested again if her appointment was to be made permanent. Some three years later her eyesight must have been considered acceptable for her to be appointed to the IES as a university lecturer.

There appear to have been three female IES appointments in 1922 but thereafter recruitment ceased. Mention has already been made in some detail of Alice Lawrence. Others who joined included Miss I. H. Lowe and Gladys Harrison.

**Miss Lowe** was London born and the daughter of a senior examiner in the Patent Office. After private schooling she attended Westfield College where she obtained a University of London BSc degree in 1913 with honours in geology. In the period 1914–20, she was a demonstrator in geology at Bedford College. In 1920 she was awarded an MSc degree in geology and also began reading for a diploma in geography from the University of Oxford. When she applied in 1920 to join the IES as an inspectress of schools in Madras she was told that her appointment would be conditional on her first obtaining a teaching diploma. She met this requirement the following year at Bedford College by obtaining a Cambridge certificate of teaching and sailed for India, aged 32, in February 1922. The Principal of Bedford College referred to her as a woman of character and ability who had won the esteem of her teaching colleagues. She was trustworthy and in her last year at Westfield College she had been elected as senior student. The selection committee noted that she came from a cultured family and was a person of refinement and high character. Perhaps this was the female equivalent of being in all respects a true gentleman!

**Gladys Harrison** was probably the last female appointed to the IES. Born in Buckingham in 1888, she attended Oxford High School and Royal Holloway College, graduating BA in 1909, with second class honors in French and English. The next year she studied for the London teachers' diploma in pedagogy at St Mary's College, Paddington. From there she went out to Calcutta to teach at the Pratt Memorial High School for two years before returning to England to teach at St Mary's Abbots School in Bromley. From 1917 to 1919, like Miss Tilley, she too worked for the War Trade Intelligence Department. In 1920 she returned to India as Vice-Principal of Queen Mary's College in the Punjab. It was from there that she was appointed to the IES as Principal of a new intermediate college for girls in Lahore.

There are grounds for believing that the Indian government was never anxious to increase the number of women employed in the IES beyond the bare minimum. Many recruits did not stay in India for very long because they got married or found better teaching posts elsewhere. Some also found the job too demanding. The harsh Indian climate and the hazards of travel, especially in rural India, deterred many women from making a lifelong career in the IES. Traditionally, they were also paid less than men on the grounds that they did not have families to support. The response of the Indian government towards **Lilian Brock's** request for an increase in salary seemed indicative of its attitude in general towards females in the IES.

**Miss Brock**, an inspectress of schools in Bengal, applied for an increase in salary in 1905, a year after arriving in India. She claimed that her salary, which was pegged at Rs 600 per month, was inadequate 'to meet the expenses of an English lady living in Calcutta'. Unless her salary was increased she said that she would terminate her contract. The provincial government of Bengal strongly supported her claim. She had a first class honors degree in English from the University of London, a diploma in teaching from Cambridge University, and was very highly thought of in her work. The Indian government, mindful of the fact that it had not experienced any difficulty of late in procuring good female candidates for similar positions on existing pay,

expressed sorrow at her probable departure but declined to support her claim. Not deterred, she made a second attempt but that too was unsuccessful. Then, early in 1906, the female missionaries in Bengal petitioned Pedler, the DPI, to prevent her from resigning. At this point the Secretary of State got to hear about the matter and eventually terms were agreed and she stayed.

The difficulties faced by many female members of the IES were highlighted in the evidence they gave to the Public Services Commission in 1913. **Miss H. G. Stuart**, Chief Inspectress of schools in the United Provinces, criticized the poor salaries and especially the harsh pension conditions. She argued that few, if any women could complete 25 years' service. The work was very exacting, especially for inspectresses, who spent much of their time travelling and staying overnight in *dak* [post] bungalows, and most would be well over 50 before they qualified for a full pension if they stayed that long. In her opinion 20 years was an ample requirement for the pension. The problems associated with constant travelling had surfaced some years earlier when the Indian government had agreed to pay special



local travel allowances to inspectresses in the central provinces. At the time the point was made that men often travelled alone and covered many miles on horseback but this was not always possible for women. Moreover, as Miss Stuart remarked, 'A lady is seldom physically strong enough to do her work and inspections after long and fatiguing rides for any length of time together, and there is no [male] inspector in [the Central Provinces] who is called upon to cover so large an area as the inspectress'. When Miss Garrett resigned in 1920, after spending 10 years as an inspectress of schools in Assam, she commented, 'I feel that 10 years as a touring officer in this climate is as much as can be fairly expected of any woman ...'. **Miss Stuart** also pointed out how difficult it was to recruit Indian women as assistant inspectresses because of social custom. In the Central Provinces, for example, the isolation of women from the mainstream of life, a custom called *purdah*, was still rigidly enforced. Miss Stuart was also critical of the way in which women were recruited into the IES. She said that she got her job in India via someone on the Board of Education in London mentioning the post to a friend in the training department at Bedford College. The friend, in turn, mentioned Miss Stuart as a possible candidate. Miss Stuart claimed initially that she had known nothing of the post nor had she ever considered working in India. She was convinced that most female teachers were not aware of career opportunities in the IES and that more advertising and information were needed. She also spoke of the long period that elapsed before leave was due and the undermining effects of the climate on personal health and vitality.

These views were endorsed by those of **Miss J. Patterson** from Madras. When asked to comment on female education in India arising from a memorial presented to the Secretary of State by Philippa Fawcett *et al*, she suggested that the paucity of female school inspectresses was

a major reason for heavy workloads and frequent health break downs the life of an officer is a very hard one. She is cut off almost entirely from home life and society. She experiences all kinds of discomforts, is obliged to put up in travellers' bungalows, chatrams, chavadis, school rooms; and even in the open air under the shade of some friendly tree. She encounters innumerable hindrances and irritations small and big. Sometimes the latter are so constant that the strain results in a nervous breakdown. It is a life of pure self-sacrifice and only those who are really interested in their work continue in it and contrive ways and means of meeting expenses, overcoming difficulties and enduring with patience the trials of life. At the same time she readily admitted that the work was fascinating, and that there was no officer who could not relate a score of interesting anecdotes to show why they bore the burden bravely and unflinchingly.

**Miss C. M. Lynch**, another inspectress in Madras, made some interesting comparisons when she referred to the low salaries paid to women in the IES. She claimed that female inspectors in England were paid from £200 to £400 per year. A teacher at a top school like Cheltenham College could earn up to £1000 per year. A teacher at the North London Collegiate School earned up to £500 per year, while other teachers could earn £300 per year or £200 in small schools. By comparison, women in the IES started on the equivalent of about £320 per year rising in most instances to no more than about £600 at the very most.

## **Findings**

On the basis of the results the findings drawn are:

1. First of all the women travel all the way through sea and land only for the purpose of serving.
2. The climate of the subcontinent is so harsh for the English women to bear.
3. The salary provided them after there a lot of hard work is not enough to meet their demands in the subcontinent.
4. The inspectresses do not serve for a long time as they have to resign from the job due to marriages and some resign due to a lot of hard work and endless travelling and staying overnight in a variety of types of accommodation which was quite unacceptable for Hindus and Muslims.
5. The female members have to serve as the principals but there are not enough resources for them to carry out their duties effectively.

## **Conclusion**

On the basis of the study following conclusions are made:

- It was an understood fact that the travelling in discussed era is laborious and the study proved the fact.
- It was also the fact that climate in that era is back breaking and is like toothache with such an environment living is really tiresome.
- It was also concluded that the salary at that time is not enough to survive in such environment.
- From findings it is concluded that there exists a lot of problems not in terms of travelling but also for accommodation.
- It was also concluded the female members have to perform more than one duty which is challenging for the females in a totally unfamiliar environment.

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