

Tim Allender. *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932*. Studies in Imperialism Series. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. 352 pp. \$110.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7190-8579-6.

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Tim Allender's *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820-1932* is a carefully researched and constructed book about British gender, class, and race agendas related to the education of girls and women in India. In a departure from much of the writing on this topic, which focuses on the education of Indian girls and women, the author considers the changing influences and networks of state-sponsored education under the East India Company and British Raj. Allender examines the classroom, hospital, and dispensary, spaces where women of different races interacted and carried out their work under the colonial state, to understand how female education reflected the East India Company and the Raj's attitudes toward women.

Allender's exhaustive research, carried out in the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, Australia, and the United States, was informed by three theoretical fields: subaltern studies, empire studies, and knowledge transfer theory. He chose the title *Learning Femininity* to underscore the point that Western femininity and not Western feminism was at the center of state, mission, and personal directives regarding female education in India. With Indian women characterized as lacking the essential characteristics of the civilized woman, Western femininity provided the guidelines for education and discipline. Over the 112 years from

1820, the beginning of mission education for girls in India, to the 1930s, when the empire was no longer relevant, Western femininity played a major role in determining who could and would be educated, who would teach, and what the curriculum and funding would be. Although feminism was relevant to many of the British women who espoused concern about Indian women and became their teachers, in India they taught femininity not feminism.

Tracking state initiatives in female education, Allender keeps returning to three key topics: Eurasians, the accomplishments curriculum, and changing governance in British India. Avoiding conventional chronology, which the author recognizes as inadequate to discuss the vast area, topics covered, or the nature of the state, chapters overlap in loosely defined periods. For example, the first chapter considers the period 1820-65, while chapter 2 covers much of the same period, 1840-67. In tracing this history, Allender introduces key players, notably Mary Ann Cooke Wilson, Mary Carpenter, Priscilla Winter, Edith Brown, Isabel Brander, and others who were subject to the whims of government. In presenting their dreams and constraints, Allender underscores the ways they were exploited even though their conditions and pay were much better than

those offered Eurasian women and Indian women when they became teachers.

During the long period considered in this book, “accomplishment subjects” dominated the curriculum (p. 31). This curriculum included, at its best, arithmetic, geography, history, and some natural science with subjects for refinement: music, elocution, modern languages, drawing, and needlework. The main concern was producing a moral subject who knew her place in society, although there were occasionally efforts to offer more academic subjects.

Following a detailed introduction in which he discusses his perspective, theoretical influences, and key topics, Allender assesses the first efforts to import British learning for Indian girls. Expressing his admiration for Orientalist sensitivity to Indian culture and languages, he praises the North Western Provinces Halkabandi (locality-based) model of village schools for successfully providing female education approved by local communities. The author sees it as unfortunate that this ideology did not prevail; instead of a “strategy of accommodation and conciliation” with Indian methods, spaces, and sensibilities, Indian women were defined as deficient in education, morality, and emotional authenticity (p. 56). What they needed, it was decided, was to be removed from their languages, families, and culture. As a result, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed not the expansion of female education but the shutting down of networks that would have made possible Indian-Western collaboration in new ventures.

In chapter 2, Allender considers the Eurasian girls who became the objects of educational initiatives. To keep the Eurasian daughters of soldiers from lives that might damage the image of Europeans, orphanages and military asylums began to provide some training and education. It was only after 1857, with the Eurasian population growing twice as fast as the Indian population, that teacher-training programs were set up for these girls.

Employment would keep them from going astray at the same time that it would demonstrate the civilizing influence of the British. In chapter 3, Allender discusses the astounding development of teacher-training programs displacing school education. Improved transportation and communication after 1857 brought more British women to India and introduced new women’s networks. However, the presence of European women did not change the world for Indian women who continued to be defined as dull, undisciplined, and handicapped by custom and genetics. The influential Carpenter insisted that given the deficits of Indian females, teacher training based on a version of the accomplishments curriculum had to come first.

After 1874 the state tasked the missions with training Eurasian and European girls to be teachers. With demand for girls’ schools growing, the missions responded with preparatory schools that taught the accomplishments curriculum. While conforming to the Raj’s racial and gender agendas within the compound, some of these missionaries went beyond the compound to tutor Indian girls in their homes and set up schools for poor girls.

The focus of chapters 5 and 6 is colonial medicine and medical training for women, which Allender sees as a space where female medical professionals within missions challenged race and class barriers. What David Arnold called the “gender-before-race argument” has been characterized by Allender as female medical training “less compliant” with the Raj’s racial agendas (p. 159). [1] Arguing that something revolutionary was happening, he portrays the missions as transcending the “raj race and class constituencies” by using new networks and extending medical care to Indians (p. 198). The training of female medical professionals was feminized but not touched by feminism.

In the last three chapters, Allender returns to the subject of schooling from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the 1930s. While the

missions had expanded medical education and medical care for Indian women, schools became more rigid. The new Education Code of 1883 restricted secondary education, teacher training, and funding to Europeans and Eurasians. Nevertheless, changes were taking place. The professionalism of European teachers led to the introduction of new methodologies, greater emphasis on academic subjects within the accomplishments curriculum, and a pulling away from racial policies. Nationalism led to new networks that brought Indian, Eurasian, and European women together to support a non-gendered education. In the final chapter, Allender discusses Loreto schools in Calcutta when colonial power was in retreat. Clearly a Western enterprise, Loreto subverted colonial agendas by providing a more academic education, educating Indian girls, and providing schools for the poor.

Allender finally puts to rest the myth that the Raj wanted to educate Indian females. He proves that statements contained in official documents and reports about the importance of female education, support for schools for girls, and fighting native reluctance to educate females had no substance in policy or funding. The author convincingly argues that Indians were not opposed to female education but resisted programs that had no relationship to their languages, lives, or culture.

Allender's discussion of race is especially illuminating. Detailing the East India Company's shift from Orientalism to Anglicism, and the characterization of Indian women as lacking intelligence and motivation, Allender explains how Eurasians became the target of educational initiatives. Moving through different periods, he makes it clear that race and definitions of racial characteristics determined not only who would be educated and become educators but also what their pay and treatment as professionals would be.

In his two chapters on medical care and medical education, Allender successfully contrasts the medical field with schooling for girls. At the same

time, he misses some of the similarities between the two arenas. Western female doctors argued that women could only be treated by women, but records of female patients in government hospitals and accounts of women who were treated by Western and traditional male doctors tell a different story. When families and communities were comfortable with a male doctor, he treated female patients. And while the medical field might have been less influenced by official racism, racism permeated the system.

Although it may seem like a minor point, Allender is unclear about the history of Calcutta/Bengal Medical College and its first women graduates. Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi did not study in Calcutta but graduated from Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1886 (p. 185). The same year, Kadambini Ganguli received the GBMC (Graduate of Bengal Medical College), an invented "degree" awarded because she had failed one of her exams. The first two women graduates of Bengal Medical College graduated in 1889; by 1895 there were thirty-four women graduates.

In the conclusion Allender reiterates the point that despite its rhetoric about a civilizing agenda, the Raj did not promote female education. The education it provided for girls in India was determined by its class and race agendas. Networks changed and crossed, sometimes providing new opportunities, but more often incapable of creating anything new. Throughout the period discussed, the deficits concept overwhelmed efforts to educate Indian females. Instead, the Raj turned its attention to training Eurasians to be teachers even when there were no schools for girls. And when these schools developed they were largely restricted to Eurasian and European girls. While the tone of this book is disappointment, Allender praises the efforts of European medical women for providing medical care and training for Indian women and the Calcutta Loreto sisters for going beyond the race and class agendas of the Raj.

Allender's attention to the interactions between the colonial state and British women who saw themselves as good citizens of the empire working on behalf of Indian women is a noteworthy contribution to our understanding of this period. While I would have liked to read more about the Eurasians and Indians who "learned femininity" with these British women, this was not the author's goal. Other books on women's education in India, Shefali Chandra's *The Sexual Life of English: Languages of Caste and Desire in Colonial India* (2012), Sita Anantha Raman's *Getting Girls to School: Social Reform in the Tamil Districts, 1870-1930* (1996), and Gail Minault's *Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India* (1998), as well as other studies, present the subjects of Allender's educators. *Learning Femininity* is a must-read for historians of empire and imperialism, Indian history, women's/gender history, gender studies, and the history of education.

Note

[1]. David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 265.

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