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Indian and American Women in the International Kindergarten Movement, 1880s-1930s[1]

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The purpose of the International Kindergarten Union, founded in Saratoga Springs, NY in 1892, was to 'gather and disseminate knowledge of the kindergarten throughout the world, to bring into active cooperation all kindergarten interests, to promote the establishment of kindergartens, and to elevate the standard of professional training' of teachers (Constitution 1918: 194f.). The kindergarten ("garden of children"), first named by the German educator Friedrich Fröbel around 1840, put into practice an innovative pedagogy designed for young children between about four and six years of age. The international dispersion of this method began in the first years of its existence. In the mid-nineteenth century, the kindergarten's proponents introduced it to many European countries and to North America, and by the 1880s it had spread to Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Although many male educators, including Fröbel himself and his admirers throughout the world, helped to build the kindergarten, kindergarten teaching was defined from the beginning as a distinctively female profession that offered women a rare opportunity for useful and dignified work. Women therefore took the lead in founding

institutions, developing pedagogy, and winning political support for this form of education (Allen 2017: 10-32; Beatty 1995: 38-51).

Our story centers on the Indian and American kindergarten educators who worked in India during the years from about 1880 until the 1930s. The efforts of these educators to set up kindergartens in various Indian environments, their educational aims, their relationships to their colleagues, pupils and trainees, and the evolution of their method in response to social and political change will be some of the themes covered here. This East-West encounter took place against the background of British colonial rule, which during these years reached its highest level of organisation and began its decline.

The kindergarten was part of this process of colonialisation, and its American proponents, many of whom were Protestant missionaries, often acted (in the words of Barbara Ramusack) as 'maternal imperialists,' who used the soft power of benevolence to advance a Western and Christian religious and cultural agenda (Ramusack 1992: 119f.). Their empire was not political or economic. It was the 'moral empire' of American Protestant religious culture—an empire that women's organisations, both secular and religious, spread throughout the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Tyrrell 2010: 43-66). The kindergarten, though based on Western educational theories, was never simply an instrument of Western hegemony, however. It was promoted by international networks that included educators of many nations, including such Asian nations as India and Japan. Indian educators were active participants in these networks and played a major role in the development of the kindergarten in India.

The international kindergarten movement

Much more than most of the era's pedagogical methods, the kindergarten was well adapted to international transmission. The first reason was its method. Fröbel rejected the conventional pedagogy of his era, which even for the youngest pupils prescribed book learning and rote memorisation. He developed a classroom routine based chiefly on manual activities using educational playthings (or 'gifts,' as Fröbel called them). Unlike most nineteenth-century toys, these were abstract rather than representational and designed to teach concepts such as color, measurement, and geometrical relationships. Children engaged in activities (or 'occupations'): building with blocks, laying sticks and tiles, folding paper, drawing and painting, and putting together puzzles. Teachers introduced the 'occupations' in a fixed sequence designed to develop manual dexterity, cognitive skills, and intuitive philosophical insights into the structure of the natural and moral universe. For instance, the ball

symbolised perfection and the blocks the relationship of the whole to its parts (Allen 1986: 433-50).

Because this curriculum was based on manual activities rather than reading and writing, it was adaptable to diverse linguistic and cultural environments. The classroom routine also included active pursuits, such as outdoor play, gardening, and animal care. Songs and games could be adapted to local settings. Important at the time was Fröbel's insistence on a benevolent and maternal discipline and his rejection of the harsh practices, including corporal punishment and shaming, that were common in conventional schools, including the 'infant schools' that small children attended. A kindergarten could be free-standing or part of a school, but its curriculum, which was based on play and did not teach reading and writing, was usually distinct from that of the grades. Teachers always required special training (Beatty 1995: 52-64; Allen 1991: 58-78).

The second reason for the kindergarten's international appeal was its ecumenical approach to religion. Unlike most schools of the era, Fröbel's original kindergarten was not associated with any sect or confession. Kindergarten philosophy combined a pantheistic view of God as benevolent creator with basic ethical precepts shared by many faiths. Later generations of kindergartners did not always follow Fröbel's example. In every nation where kindergartens existed, some were sponsored by churches or other religious organisations and included religious observances in the daily routine. Kindergarten education, however, often provided an alternative to state-mandated religious instruction and thus became popular among religious minorities—Jews in Britain, Germany, and the United States, Protestants and Jews in France and Italy, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Christians in Asia (Albisetti 2009: 159-69; Fortna 2000: 251-73; Wollons 2000: 113-36).

The third factor in the kindergarten's international popularity—its gender ideology—was the most important. Fröbel insisted that the teachers (or 'kindergartners,' as they, and not the pupils, were called) must be women, to whom he attributed an innate gift for educating small children—a gift that he and his disciples called 'spiritual motherhood.' In Frobel's view, not only biological mothers but also the unmarried and childless women who entered teaching careers were endowed with this gift (Allen 1991: 58-78). To qualify as teachers these women were required to pass a training course that was by the standards of this time quite demanding. This was one of the first professions open to women, to whom it provided dignified and satisfying (though usually poorly paid) work (Beatty 1995: 101-31).

Largely because of the momentum created by its female advocates, the kindergarten spread quickly across national borders. Because German educators were often liberals or socialists and supported the revolutionary movements of 1848, the reactionary regimes that took over in some German states after the failure of the revolutions forbade the kindergarten and forced many of its proponents into exile. These exiles found a generally sympathetic reception among progressive people, especially women, in other European countries and in North America. The first kindergartens were founded in Britain, the United States, and many parts of the European continent in the 1850s, and the method was soon adapted to these new environments (Allen 2017: 33-58).

By the standards of this era, the kindergartner was an emancipated woman, and she often joined movements that supported social reform along with women's rights. In the United States, the growth of large cities and the influx of immigrants provided such movements with an expanded field of activity. Kindergartens in the United States as elsewhere began as privately-financed institutions. Starting in the 1880s, organisations known as Free Kindergarten Associations, staffed and largely funded by women volunteers as well as professional teachers, offered tuition-free kindergarten classes in urban neighborhoods, particularly those populated by immigrants. These influential activists convinced many school boards to incorporate kindergarten classes into public school systems, and thus to make early childhood education, at least in the form of a four-hour morning program, available to a large number of children (Beatty 1995: 101-31). Largely because of this success the United States rivaled and eventually superseded Germany and Britain as a center of kindergarten education. By 1900, American training colleges attracted students from around the world (Allen 2017: 59-86; Wollons 2000: 1-15).

When American kindergartners founded the International Kindergarten Union in 1892, they declared themselves the leaders of a world-wide movement. The IKU, which was introduced at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, was distinctly American and Western, but also genuinely international (IKU Remembrances; Allen 2017: 80-6). All the officers were US-American or Canadian and all annual meetings were held in these countries. The IKU was part of the trend toward women's transnational organising that during this same era also produced the International Council of Women, the World Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Young Women's Christian Association, and Christian Endeavor—all groups that mobilised girls and women across national borders. Members of the IKU could be affiliated kindergarten associations (called branches) or individual kindergartners. By 1896 the IKU included branches in the United States, England, Canada, China, and Japan, and by 1918 a New Zealand branch had been added (International

Kindergarten Union Announcement 1896; 'The International Kindergarten Union' 1910-11: 270). Although no Indian branch existed, many individual kindergartners (including Indian and American women) were affiliated with the IKU itself or with British organisations such as the London Fröbel Society, which was connected with the IKU (Powell 2017: 276-97).

The outreach of the IKU was not limited to its members and branch societies but extended to kindergartens throughout the world. Under the conditions of the time, few educators from overseas could attend annual conventions, but they stayed in touch by correspondence. Letters from many countries—for example, from Germany, Britain, Japan, Santo Domingo, India, British East Africa, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Japan, New Zealand, and Canada—were read aloud at annual IKU conventions and published in professional journals. In addition to this network of contacts, the IKU provided advice on setting up and maintaining kindergartens and information on the latest materials and methods. Missionary kindergartners had their own networks provided by the mission boards of their churches and their home congregations, but many were also very much part of the IKU. Some attended annual meetings, and many sent letters to be read aloud at these meetings and published in the professional periodicals that afforded kindergartners throughout the world a place to publicise their work, to make contacts, and to raise funds (Allen 2017: 82-5; Constitution 1918: 159).

The kindergarten comes to India

These international networks provided important resources to educators in India, one of the few non-Western nations represented among the organisation’s earliest supporters. Among the speakers who were scheduled to introduce the IKU in 1893 was an Indian former student of Sarah Stewart, the organisation’s founder. Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati was unable to make the long trip to Chicago but sent her endorsement by mail (Field Notes 1893: 251). She was born in 1858 as Rama Dongre into an exceptional Brahmin household where she acquired the Sanskrit learning that later earned her the title of 'Pandita' (scholar) and the name 'Sarasvati' (a Hindu goddess of wisdom). Ramabai rebelled against Hindu orthodoxy by marrying a man from another caste, and after his early death by refusing to submit to most of the harsh restrictions that religious law imposed on Brahmin widows. During the 1880s, Maharashtrian women, collaborating with British and international allies, built a feminist movement that worked to improve women’s status in the family and to provide educational and professional opportunities, particularly in the fields of medicine and teaching. Within this movement, Ramabai

formed a women's society, the Arya Mahila Samaj, that worked to improve the lives of widows (Anagol 2005: 21-38). In 1883, with the assistance of a British Anglican religious community, Ramabai traveled to England with her daughter to study medicine (Dyer 1900: 13-37; Kosambi 1998: WS38-WS49).

There she converted to Christianity, partly in order to escape the many restrictions that Hinduism imposed on women in general and widows in particular. Because of her conversion, some Indian nationalists of her own and later times have failed to recognise her as a pioneering feminist and accused her of collaborating with her country's oppressors. In fact, however, Ramabai was able to adopt some Western ideas without abandoning her Indian identity. She refused to join a denomination (the 'Church of England,' she said, reminded her too much of the Raj), continued to study Hindu along with Christian scriptures, and maintained her diet and costume—the white sari prescribed by the Brahmo Samaj, a Bengali Hindu reform movement, for widows (Kosambi 2002: 154). In 1886 she left England for Philadelphia to attend an Indian relative's graduation from the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. Partly as a protest against the class and racial prejudice that she had experienced in Britain, she did not return there but remained for three years in the United States, which she considered a more democratic society (ibid.).

Though at first she attended the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania with a view to qualifying as a physician, Ramabai was forced by increasing deafness to change her career plans. She made kindergarten teaching her new profession. In Philadelphia she enrolled in training courses led by Anna Hallowell, who had opened the city's first free kindergarten in 1879, and Sarah Stewart, later the first president of the IKU ('Anna Hallowell', 1971: 122f.). Ramabai was much less interested in the pedagogy than in the gender ideology of the kindergarten, for she was convinced this and other kinds of professional training held 'wondrous possibilities,' for the Hindu widows who needed education and paid work to escape from their outcast status. She also emphasised broader ethical and feminist concerns. She admired Fröbel 'the famous teacher and inventor of the kindergarten,' for the high status he assigned to caring work performed by women, both teachers and mothers. Along with reformers in other countries who worked to improve women's status in the family as well as the workplace, she hoped that the ideology of 'spiritual motherhood' could encourage dignity and self-reliance in both spheres (Ramabai 1888: 144-6).

During her three-year American odyssey, Ramabai became a prominent figure in several women's organisations, including the International Council of Women (ICW)

and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) as well as kindergarten associations, and gained the support of many nationally-known female reformers ('Fighting for Homes' 1887; 'The Women's Congress' 1888). They included Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, the founder of the American kindergarten movement; Pauline Agassiz Shaw, the philanthropic sponsor of free kindergartens in Boston; and Frances Willard, the head of the WCTU—a group that in addition to working directly for temperance also supported many educational initiatives, including kindergartens (Allen 2017: 50-5; Beatty 1995: 52-71; Tyrell 1986: 27-36).

Along with these American colleagues, Ramabai called on women to use their nurturing gifts to aid their suffering sisters, and none suffered more than the women of India. She introduced English-speaking readers to her own group in her book, *The high-Caste Hindu woman*, published in Philadelphia in 1888 (Ramabai 1888). In Ramabai's cosmopolitan view, both American and Indian women needed to be emancipated. Her American supporters, however, imagined her more crudely as an apostle of enlightened Christian civilisation to a heathen land of darkness and superstition. American religious prejudices were very good for Ramabai's fund-raising campaign. 'Child Wives are Cruelly Treated, Queer Laws in India Which Sanction Strange Brutality,' read the headline of a newspaper article on a local branch of the American Ramabai Association, founded in 1888 ('Child Wives' 1898). By 1903, the sixty-five local branches of this organisation (or 'Ramabai Circles') had raised $10,000 for Ramabai's work in India (American Ramabai Association 1903: 7).

Ramabai did not found India's first kindergarten. British missionaries had introduced 'infant schools' (schools for young children that did not use kindergarten methods) in the 1830s, and had adopted Froebelian methods in the mid-nineteenth century. Isabel Brander, a British graduate of Queens College in London, introduced kindergarten training into the Madras Normal School—a school that enrolled local young women of all religious groups—when she became its head in the 1870s (Brander 1878: 357-63; Powell 2017: 276-87). The Indian Education Commission of 1882 (also known as the Hunter Commission) recommended the inclusion of kindergarten classes in government schools and the training of female teachers. These British government schools, however, were not anywhere near adequate to fill the demand (Allender 2016: 218-29; Kaur 2009: 144-67).

When she returned to India in 1889, Ramabai brought something different—a kindergarten linked to the emancipation of women, the welfare of a new generation, and democratic values such as religious tolerance and social equality. She used the funds provided by the American Ramabai Association to buy land for the

Sharada Sadan (House of Learning), an educational institution intended for high-caste widows, in Bombay (it later moved to Poona). The historian Jana Tschurenev describes this as 'Brahminical feminism' (Tschurenev 2018: 259). Perhaps, but the combination of charitable assistance with education and professional training for women was an important innovation.

The institution's offerings included a kindergarten, where many widows trained as teachers. During the institution's first years, its curriculum and admissions process were 'non-religious' (meaning that conversion to Christianity was not openly encouraged) and it gained substantial support from the Hindu social reformers who at this time worked to raise the status of women. American funding became particularly important when Ramabai's Hindu backers reacted to the conversion of some of her students by withdrawing their support (Anagol 2005: 21-38). Ramabai's approach changed when she founded the explicitly Christian Mukti Mission, and shifted her emphasis from high-caste widows to female famine victims, the poorest of the poor. For them too she set up training courses and kindergartens.

Though marginalised in Hindu society because of Christian missionary work, Ramabai remained an important and prestigious figure in international feminist movements, in which she was one of the first leaders to expand the concept of gender solidarity to regions outside Europe and North America. Her institutions brought many American women to India, where they worked with her and followed her example, for example by sponsoring homes for widows in their missions (Kosambi 1998: 147-9). Ramabai's Philadelphia mentor Sarah Stewart rejoiced that her Indian student had made her teacher famous throughout the world (Jerome 1918: 137).

A friend and supporter of Ramabai who also relied on American support was Susie Sorabji (1868-1931), a Christian of Parsi ancestry (her family called themselves Christian-Parsis) whose relatives were in the vanguard of a new female professional elite (Ramabai Association 1895: 266). Susie was one of the nine children and five daughters of the Christian pastor, Sorabji Karsedji, and the educator Francina Sorabji, who had grown up in a British adoptive family. Francina invented what she called a 'kindergarten system' for her own children and in 1876 opened a kindergarten for her friends' children in Poona. Her objective was to promote friendship among India's several communities, and among her first pupils were Parsis, Europeans, Hindus, and Muslims. This kindergarten became the nucleus of the Victoria High School, a famous co-educational school that included all grades, from kindergarten to university (C. Sorabji 1923: 14-9). Susie Sorabji took

over the leadership of two schools founded by her mother and also started one of her own. It developed into the St. Helena School, which admitted a cosmopolitan student body that included students of all religions. She developed her own pedagogical methods in a model kindergarten ('Miss Sorabji of India and her Schools' 1905: 185f.).

Like Ramabai, Susie Sorabji advocated gender solidarity across national borders. She often traveled to the United States to lecture on her work, and received a sympathetic and respectful reception from American audiences. For example, a newspaper article of 1902 reported that 'Miss Sorabji has become very popular with American audiences,' and praised her as a 'graceful, magnetic speaker' who gave an entertaining account of Indian customs ('Miss Sorabji' 1902: 6). Along with Ramabai, Susie Sorabji became an international advocate not just of kindergartens, but also of women's education and empowerment (Sorabji 1905: 186). Her American contacts extended beyond church and missionary circles—she was also a foreign delegate to the National American Woman Suffrage Association in the same year ('Foreign Delegates Coming' 1902).

Missionary kindergartens

Ramabai and the Sorabjis owed some of their success to their Christian faith, which linked them to several networks of Western colleagues and organisations. Kindergartens became a favourite project of American Protestant missionaries, largely because by the turn of the century many of them were women. During most of the nineteenth century women in the mission field had been chiefly the wives of male missionaries, but starting in the 1870s missionary societies in the United States and Britain recruited single women, often those with professional qualifications. In addition to religious belief, some of these women had other, more worldly aspirations. For young women from conservative Protestant families, a religious mission justified some unconventional choices: to practice a profession, to travel independently, to live as a single woman or, if married, to combine career with domesticity in a way that would have been difficult at home (Hill 1985: 123-92; Hunter 2010: 19-42).

Missionary work was divided by gender. Women were not ordained and therefore could not preach or found churches. Therefore, they devoted themselves to social services and to education. Particularly in the area of women's education—an area neglected both by the British government and many Indian male social reformers—their contribution was important: as of 1930, missionaries ran 12 of 20 liberal arts

colleges for women and five of seven teacher-training institutes in India (Basu 1993: 197).

'The kindergarten will appeal to the Oriental thought, we fully believe,' wrote a missionary stationed in Aligarh to the American periodical *Kindergarten Magazine*. '[….] If every foreign missionary could be armed with a sound, rational kindergarten training it would add more power to his or her work than any other preparation can do.' ('Field Notes' 1893: 174). Kindergarten work enabled missionary women to make contact with children, and through them with women and households, in ways that most Indian cultures did not permit to men who were not family members. 'The final citadel of heathenism is in the home,' declared a member of the Baptist Woman's Missionary Society in 1900, 'and that fortress can be taken by women only.' ('Survey of the World' 1900: 1090)

Statistics for a movement that involved many denominational organisations dispersed over a wide geographical area are not available, but it is certain that Protestant missionaries often founded kindergartens. To name only a few of many examples: the Free Baptist Women's Missionary Society sent its first 'Kindergarten Missionary' to Bengal in 1896, and by 1905 Baptist missions sponsored five such schools ('Foreign Mission' 1922: 45). One of these, the Balasor Kindergarten in Balasor (in the territory that is now the state of Odisha), enrolled 140 children in 1911 ('International Kindergarten Union' 1911-12: 653).

The interdenominational American Marathi Mission, which operated what is now the state of Maharashtra, reported in 1908 that it ran 185 schools that enrolled 7,035 pupils 'in all grades from the kindergarten up.' (‘Marathi Mission 1908: 79) One of the best-known schools of the Marathi Mission was the Josephine Kindergarten in Solapur. The teacher was Mary Ballantine Harding, an American who was born in Solapur to missionary parents and was sent at the age of nine to be educated in the United States, where she attended the Oberlin Kindergarten Training School in Ohio. She opened the kindergarten when she re-joined the mission in 1897. In 1917 Harding reported that the kindergarten enrolled 53 boys and 36 girls (United Church Board of World Ministries 1917: 135).

The Presbyterian Western India missions were also active in kindergarten work. For example, the station in Nipani (near Kolhapur) sponsored six schools, two of which offered kindergartens. 'We are trying our best to train up the children from their early youth,' wrote the missionary, Melanie Updegraff (Updegraff 1926: 8f.). Clara Seiler, born in 1883 as the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries, was trained at the Oberlin Kindergarten Training School, returned to work in the Presbyterian

Western India mission and founded a kindergarten as part of the Esther Patton School in Kolhapur (Seiler 1923: 10f.).

If the kindergarten were to flourish in India, it needed teachers, and these must be recruited from native populations. Missionaries founded schools and colleges for women, many of which offered kindergarten training among a range of programs that taught work skills (Hocking 1932: 124). To name only a few examples: Isabella Thoburn, who was the first woman missionary whom the Methodist Episcopal Church sent to India, founded a school for girls shortly after she arrived in Lucknow in 1870. It became Lucknow Women's College in 1886 and added a kindergarten training class in 1893 ('Isabella Thoburn' 1971: 443f.; Dimmit 1961: 23, 72). In 1911, the head of the Lucknow training program reported that the two-year course enrolled 'students […] from all over India […] Indian and Eurasian.' These trainees did their practice teaching in a kindergarten enrolling 'about forty-five children, mostly from heathen homes' ('International Kindergarten Union' 1911-12: 653).

In 1901, Harding opened a training program, which soon became the Mary B. Harding Training School (it is now the Mary B. Harding Junior College of Education) in Solapur. In the next year she reported that she had nine students, some drawn from mission's home for widows ('The Josephine Kindergarten' 1903: 34). By 1920 the school attracted students from all over Western India ('Mary Ballantine Harding' 1919: 26f.). In 1899, the Chicago-trained kindergartner and Methodist missionary Flora Widdifield became the principal of Calcutta Girls' High School, where she headed what the American *Kindergarten Magazine* called 'a well-equipped training department' for aspiring kindergartners ('The Latest Developments' 1899-1900: 124). An American visitor to Susie Sorabji's training class in Poona reported on the large class of students who were 'learning the kindergarten methods from Miss Sorabji and will, in their turn, teach the same principles to hundreds of […] children in other parts of India' (Fowles 1905: 314).

The Indian graduates of these schools, most but not all of whom were native Christians, gained valuable opportunities. Graduates got jobs not only in missionary schools but also in those sponsored by the British government, which after 1900 required schools in some parts of India to offer kindergarten classes (Kaur 2009: 141f.). Susie Sorabji remarked to an American supporter in 1905 that although she at first had to fight against 'the prejudice of the government inspector,' the kindergarten had now been 'made compulsory by the Government schools' (Fowles 1905: 314). The principal of the Esther Patton School in Kolhapur, Clara Seiler, stated in 1921 that she had only four kindergarten trainees, whom she had

difficulty retaining, 'for no sooner have the girls a little experience than they are in demand as primary teachers' ('The Esther Patton School' 1921: 129f.). From Balasor, Sadie Gowen reported boastfully that her kindergarten training school was 'the largest in the province and every teacher is in great demand' ('International Kindergarten Union' 1911-1912: 653).

A few of these trainees studied in the United States. In 1909, the first Indian delegate attended the annual convention of the International Kindergarten Union. She was Sulochanabai Chowey of Bombay, who at that time was a student at a training college, Folts Mission Institute in Herkimer, New York, which belonged to the New York Conference of the Methodist Church. Chowey said that her training as a kindergarten teacher had changed her personal behaviour as well as her professional aspirations. Like other Indian girls, she said, she had originally been of 'a retiring disposition' and at first had difficulty participating in kindergarten songs and games, which she considered immodest. Now a trained teacher, she wished to return to India and work among 'the poorer class of children, who are all over the street […] who are yearning for love and kindness.' The need was very great, she concluded, and she hoped more Western kindergartners could come to India and educate a new generation of teachers. (Report of Committee on Foreign Relations 1908-1909: 639)

Although by 1900 the British government provided several training colleges for kindergarten teachers, missionary institutions continued to play an important role. According to Parna Sengupta, missionary schools were more successful than those established by the government because the latter enrolled chiefly young Hindu women, who were bound by religious and caste prescriptions. Likewise, most Muslim educational reformers of this era considered female education a preparation for domestic life rather than teaching careers, which few Muslim women adopted (Minault 1998: 158-214). The young native Christian women (who in missionary training schools made up a large part, though not all, of the student body) were subject to fewer religious restraints than their Muslim and Hindu age-mates and thus in a better position to pursue a career in teaching (Sengupta 2005: 31-55). The British government eventually attempted to recruit more teachers by giving grants-in-aid to missionary schools, and many American training institutes received such subsidies ('International Kindergarten Union' 1911-12: 691).

The Kindergarten Classroom

What went on in these Indian kindergartens? Most admitted children from India’s diverse religious communities. The kindergartner Sadie B. Gowen reported to the

IKU from Balasor that every morning she welcomed 'Christian, Hindu, and Mohammedan' children who conversed in three different languages; Susie Sorabji's class admitted 'European, Parsi, Mohammedan and Hindu' pupils; and the kindergarten at Lucknow Women's College in 1914 included 'Hindu, Mohammedan, and Christian children.' (International Kindergarten Union 1911-12: 653)

Whatever their religion, however, all these children sang Christian hymns and heard daily readings from the Bible. Some missionary kindergartners did not disguise their intent to proselytise: education was 'really but a continuation of our evangelistic work' wrote Melanie and David Updegraff, the Nipani missionaries (Updegraff 1926: 8). The teachers in the kindergarten at Vadala reported that once a week their class became a Sunday school: 'it certainly does the heart good to see these little tots […] singing lustily the Christian songs for children.' (The Vadala Kindergarten: 1920: 40) Other educators implied that conversion was an infrequent and accidental result of their teaching. Susie Sorabji, who despite her Christian religion was a much-admired member of the Parsi community, remarked proudly that she had to enlarge her school because so many local Parsis wanted to enroll their children. These parents were 'so anxious for their little ones to be educated that, although we have Bible lessons every day […] they are willing to run the risk of having their children converted.' When a child did convert, 'the school thins out for a little while, but soon we are as crowded as before.' (A Group of Brilliant Women 1905: 17)

Some Indians deeply resented this indoctrination of children and in the 1930s demanded 'conscience clauses' that exempted non-Christian children from religious teachings—a policy that an interdenominational committee of Protestant missionaries endorsed in 1932 (Hocking 1932: 172). As Sorabji remarked, however, even schools that continued Christian religious observances remained popular among many non-Christian families (Cf. Bellenoit 2007: 197-205). Missionary schools educated many non-Christians, but produced few converts (Cf. Naik 2001: xvii-xx).

In the absence of overall information on the class backgrounds of kindergarten pupils, we can only refer to missionary reports that the children came from a wide social spectrum. Though some mission schools attempted to break down caste barriers, others (particularly those attended by 'untouchables') were segregated by caste. The Nipani mission ran at least one school for the children of tanners, an 'untouchable' group (Updegraff 1926: 10). Some missionaries described their pupils as the poorest of the poor: one compared the 'wretched waifs of humanity' in the streets of Calcutta to the 'clean, bright, happy, wholesome children' of the kindergarten (Fenner 1913: 391f.). In 1897, the American Marathi Mission in Solapur

made assistance to famine victims a major part of its work. The Solapur kindergarten was attached to an orphanage, and Mary B. Harding reported in 1902 that the children had come in a 'most pitiful condition' but were now 'plump and well.' ('American Mission, Solapur, India' 1901-02: 68) Harding also reported from Solapur that her school also interested 'high-caste non-Christians,' including one Brahmin widow who planned to establish a kindergarten in the school she headed in Bombay (American Board of Commissioners 1917: 391f.).

Most missionary kindergartners, both Western and Indian, approached their work with a smug sense of cultural superiority, confident that a method developed in Europe was superior to any native Indian tradition. Missionaries' reports, which were designed to win the support of their home churches, emphasised their success in impressing the locals. The 'natives,' wrote Mary B. Harding of Solapur, often followed kindergarten pupils and teachers on their walks, commenting 'how much the children know; how do you suppose they teach them? How happy they are!' (American Mission Solapur 1901-02: 68). Those who were not impressed were sometimes dismissed as ignorant or superstitious. Because the racial science of the era designated Indians along with Europeans as 'Aryans,' white people's racial prejudice against Indians was perhaps less virulent than against other colonised populations, but American missionaries sometimes referred to their 'little black babies' or 'little brownies.' (American Mission Solapur 1901-02: 68; 'International Kindergarten Union,' 1911-12: 653)

In addition to prejudice and condescension, however, there was also pride and affection. Elizabeth Hoge, who worked in Lucknow, called her pupils 'graceful little beings' who were discovering 'their power to move and be free and happy' (Field Notes' 1902: 83). As members of a generation which itself had struggled for professional opportunities, missionaries were proud of the career women whom they produced. Clara Seiler recalled sending off a graduate of the Esther Patton School in Kolhapur for further education: 'Arvadi, you are now to go to Solapur to the Kindergarten Training School to be our first trained teacher […] Learn well the lessons taught you there, so you can be a blessing here to the many little children who will flock to the kindergarten in coming years.' (Seiler 1923: 11; David 2001: 115-50)

Whatever their confidence in themselves and their pedagogical methods, however, American kindergartners in India could not replicate the classroom environments that they had created in the United States (Sorabji 1905: 185). A proper Froebelian kindergarten required lots of equipment: blocks for building, balls for rolling and spinning, tiles and sticks for making patterns, beads for threading,

picture books, song books, child-sized tables and chairs, cupboards, a piano, a playground. These things were difficult to obtain in India, and importing them from the United States or Europe was expensive and time-consuming. Some kindergartners were lucky enough to have generous American sponsors. Clara Seiler, the kindergartner and sometime principal of the Esther Patton School in Kolhapur, longed for 'a kindergarten building […] cupboards, blocks, and a sand-table—room enough to play! A verandah to run on, trees and garden chairs and tables and even a piano too! Too much to hope for?' Seiler got her wish when a friend of the mission, Mrs. Joy of Detroit, endowed Joy Kindergarten in memory of her husband (Seiler 1923: 11). American donors funded magnificent buildings for Susie Sorabji's school in Poona, for Mary B. Harding's training school in Solapur, and for the Baptist mission school in Balasor (Sorabji 1932: 51f.; 'Foreign Mission; Bengal-Orissa, India,' 1922, 54f.).

Others, however, were not so fortunate. Pandita Ramabai pleaded with her American friends to send supplies ('India' 1891: 424). Elizabeth Hoge, the kindergarten teacher at the Lucknow Girls' School, complained that the school could not afford to buy tables and chairs so her children worked on their knees in front of benches. 'We are so far away and it is difficult to get material.' ('Field Notes' 1892: 83). The Marathi Mission reported in 1907 that its school in Rahuri had started a kindergarten, but it was held 'in a room without furniture, save a number of little stools put together by a country carpenter and a table for the teacher.' ('Educational Work' 1907: 102). There were also some cultural conflicts: for example, the teachers at Isabella Thoburn College met with resistance to certain games, as 'singing and skipping' was 'associated with the idea of immorality, as illustrated by the dancing girls.' ('International Kindergarten Union' 1911-12: 653).

American kindergartners and their Indian colleagues were thus forced to adapt their teaching to local conditions. In the absence of imported equipment, they improvised: the pupils in Lucknow worked with paper, apparently the only available material. 'Our room is decorated with chains and rosettes made by the children,' wrote the teacher, 'and today they sent a newly-made chain to one of the native schools' ('Field Notes' 1893: 83). A teacher named Miss Enright described a class in Sangli that met in a 'dusty old dining room' and used homemade equipment, but still kept the children happy ('Educational' 1919: 221). An Indian kindergarten society founded in Calcutta in 1909 and affiliated with the London Froebel Society continued the task, initiated by Ramabai, of producing textbooks and teaching materials in local languages, but according to the historian Avril A. Powell they produced few results.

In this situation, some teachers saw the need for materials and equipment that fit into the Indian environment. As early as 1878 the British educator Isabel Brander, some of whose articles were published in American periodicals, complained that 'education in India is […] far too much a foisting of European thoughts and ideas upon the people' and called for toys made of locally-available materials and curricula based on local cultures (Brander 1878: 360). Powell asserts that Brander was 'naïve and condescending' to expect Indians to manufacture equipment for this alien form of education (Powell 2017: 285).

Brander was not the only educator to advocate the adaptation of kindergarten methods to Indian conditions. At least one prominent Indian teacher cared a lot about providing culturally appropriate materials. Susie Sorabji wrote in 1905 that she was 'deeply interested in localising the work, for the songs and some of the games are not appropriate for our children.' Hindu and Muslim pupils, she complained, were sometimes offended by story books from England that portrayed beef in butcher shops and happy pigs in clover. She and her colleagues developed books that illustrated numerical relationships by such examples as 'the depth of Indian wells […] or the distance of an Indian pilgrim's journey' (C. Sorabji 1923: 30). Sorabji introduced Indian geography by means of a relief map of India, located outdoors, upon which 'the little pupils […] sail their toy boats down the rivers in which real water runs, and stopping at the different ports to take on cargo.' ('Miss Sorabji' 1905: 185) By 1910, kindergarten educators everywhere, including the United States, had largely abandoned Fröbel's specially-designed gifts and occupations and had substituted activities based on the practical tasks of everyday life, so this must have made it easier to adapt curricula to a wide range of cultural environments (Allen 2017: 95-106).

Indian and British educators introduced another form of early childhood education, the Montessori system, into India in the 1920s. Maria Montessori, the Italian inventor of this method, had very little use for kindergarten pedagogy, which she considered sentimental and unscientific. The IKU followed the advice of the prominent American pedagogue William Heard Kilpatrick, a professor at Columbia Teachers College, who complained that Montessori's classroom routine was 'too rigid and artificial' and by focusing on the individual child failed to cultivate social skills, and rejected the Montessori method. Most American kindergarten educators, in India as at home, probably also rejected Montessori's pedagogy, which was not widely accepted in the United States until the 1960s (ibid.: 106f.).

The end of empire

In the wake of the First World War, the little world of the kindergarten felt the effects of events in the larger arena of international relations, economic crises, and decolonisation. The International Kindergarten Union, influenced by the post-war climate of isolationism, changed its name to the Association for Childhood Education and greatly reduced its contacts with the rest of the world. Particularly during Depression era, support for missionaries steadily diminished. In India, missionaries confronted a new and more militant nationalism. The independence movement led by Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi called on Indians to throw off cultural as well as political bondage to the West and to regain confidence in their native traditions. An anonymous article that stated Gandhi's views urged Christian missionaries to continue to provide services, but to renounce 'pride of race, pride of sect, and pride of personal superiority' and to discontinue proselytising activities ('A Hindu to Missionaries' 1920: 1).

Elite groups of Indian women, many of whom were university graduates, founded women's associations (such as the National Council of Women in India, founded in 1925). Although some were willing to cooperate with missionaries, these women called for an end to cultural imperialism and insisted that Indians must now set the agenda for India (Forbes 1996: 92-156). In 1932, an interdenominational committee of American Protestant missionaries responded to these new challenges by urging their colleagues to refrain from denigrating non-Christian religions, to separate assistance from proselytising, and to work with native social reformers across religious boundaries (Hocking 1932: 29-49). Whether or not they favoured independence (and many did), missionaries who realised that they would eventually have to leave their churches, schools, and hospitals to Indian colleagues modified their stereotypical views of the downtrodden and helpless Indian woman. They were increasingly ready to work with educated women of all religions as partners (Klein 2010: 141-66; David 2001: 373-90).

An event that indicated the effect of these changes on the kindergarten movement is described in a report, published in 1926 by Presbyterian missionaries in the Kolhapur area, on the gala opening of a new kindergarten in the nearby princely state of Sangli. Among those present was 'all the elite of the local feminine world,' including many elegantly dressed Brahmin women. The director of the kindergarten was the Kolhapur missionary kindergartner, Clara Seiler, but she did not preside (Reid 1926: 7-9). Instead, the mistress of ceremonies was a distinguished Indian physician, Gurubai Karmarkar, a Christian who had studied

medicine at the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia and practiced in Bombay (Hume 1911: 112-5).

The great moment was the arrival of three children (each accompanied by a footman) of the Chief (later Raja) of Sangli, Chintamanrao II, probably the sponsor of the kindergarten. The youngest boy gave an accomplished little speech in English welcoming all the children and declaring the kindergarten open. The mother of these children, who could not attend but sent a rich selection of sweets, was the former Kamlabai Joshi, the daughter of the progressive lawyer Sir Moropant Joshi (a well-known advocate of women's causes) and the memoirist and feminist reformer Yashodabai Joshi (Mc Leod, n.d.: n.p.; Kosambi 2007: 34-6, 107-40). Seiler made a short speech introducing kindergarten methods but then yielded the podium to Indian women educators (Reid 1926: 9). This occasion showcased the cooperative relationship between missionaries and members of the progressive Indian female elite, both Hindu and Christian, whom the article praised as enlightened parents and educators, outstanding career women, and generous patronesses.

At the same time Seiler, who along with many other missionaries expected to leave when India gained independence, trained her Indian students to take over kindergartens at the Esther Patton School and elsewhere in the area. In 1923 she described her classroom at Joy Kindergarten in Kolhapur: 'Three charming teachers at work. But no missionary? Where is she? She is not needed now. Avad, Grace, and Giraya can carry on this kindergarten alone' (Seiler 1923: 13). Seiler commented in a letter of 1945 to her home congregation that 'Indian leaders in our mission are increasing while we are decreasing, which seems to be part of the plan of God.'

The Presbyterian missionaries of Kolhapur had always had a very friendly relationship with the princely family. In the same letter of 1945 Seiler reported that, at the request of the British Resident in Kolhapur State, she had set up a kindergarten in the royal palace for the five-year-old child who now held the title of Maharaja Shivaji VII. This little prince faced the challenging prospect of losing some of the privileges that his ancestors had enjoyed. 'He [the Resident] desired that he [the child Maharaja] should play with other children, as children, with no bowing courtiers about.' Seiler accepted the assignment, though she had her doubts, 'for had we come out to serve the poor only?' (Seiler-Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, August 9, 1946). She left India in 1948 (Clara Seiler: Foreign Missionary Vertical Files).

Conclusion: the kindergarten and Indian feminism

The historian Aparna Basu remarks that missionaries intended to 'dominate the Indian mind' but that they did not succeed, and our story suggests some of the reasons why (Basu 1993: 206). In the schools they founded, Americans could not simply transplant their classroom methods to India, but had to adapt them to the situations in which they found themselves—a village, an orphanage, a widows' home, a classroom with no furniture, a palace. Moreover, 'the mind of India' was not monolithic, for like all cultures those of India encompassed many local variants and was divided by conflicts. During the period under discussion, one of the most important of these conflicts arose from the rise of women's movements in Maharashtra and other parts of India—movements in which kindergarten founders such as Ramabai and the Sorabjis became well-known figures. The historian Karen Offen uses volcanic eruptions as a metaphor for the history of feminism: like volcanic magma, feminism seeks any fissure through which to come to the surface (Offen 2000: 25f.). Amid the 'eruption' of local feminist movements, the missionaries' impact may have arisen less from any specific teaching than simply from their disruptive presence. By criticising Indian religious and cultural traditions and offering alternatives, the missionaries opened up a space where women could express ancient grievances and imagine new possibilities.

Missionary institutions that provided such women with education, training, and employment played an important role in the rise of feminism in India. The international network of the kindergarten movement also gave many professionally trained women access to credentials, financial resources, and colleagues around the world. Such women knew how to use, borrow and adapt Western knowledge without being dominated by it. For a few Indian women, conversion to Christianity was a productive strategy that not only offered an escape from patriarchal family and religious law but also facilitated contacts with Western colleagues and access to funding. However, this was a minority—missionaries made few converts, and Christians are still a small group in India (Anagol 2005: 523-46).

By the 1920s, moreover, missionaries knew that Indian independence in some form was inevitable and began the process of handing over their kindergartens, schools, and colleges to Indian colleagues. These Indian educators, organised by such groups as the National Council of Women in India, worked in early childhood education in the 1930s and have continued to develop it in many forms until the present. The International Kindergarten Union and the missionary networks provided an early basis for a network of early childhood educators that now extends to many parts of the world.

Endnotes

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