

**Opinion Article****The Role of Women's Organizations towards  
the Development of the Idea of University\***Tamar SIRADZE<sup>1</sup>  Dali DOBORJGINIDZE<sup>2</sup> **Abstract**

Since the Russian Revolution of 1905, the great wave of formation of various types of women's organizations took a massive scale. At the beginning of 20th century, the first higher educational courses were opened for women in the Caucasus. Significant educational activities were conducted by the following organizations established by and for women: "Georgian Women's Charity Organization", "Commission of Tbilisi Women's Circle", "Georgian Women's Society", "School for Poor Girls", "Society of Education", "Society of Knowledge", "Georgian Unity of Equality for Women", etc. Hitherto existing charity and educational activities were enriched with the women rights' problems. Women's organizations appeared not only in the capital city but the provinces as well. The process strengthened with participation of not only Georgian but women of other nationalities too. The first formalized organizations were functioning as committees, unities, circles or commissions, mostly temporarily. However, they contributed much to the nation's further educational and cultural development, culminating in the opening of the first university in Georgia in 1918. The aim of the present paper is to trace the process of the formation of the idea of University in Georgia at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, beginning from Ilia Chavchavadze's invaluable contribution towards the national revival through women's significant role up to the final foundation of the Tbilisi State University in 1917 and opening it in 1918.

**Keywords:** Education, women's organizations, teachers, university

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The reform of the general education in the European countries and the Russian Empire as well as appearance of various written and printed literary platforms (books, periodicals, etc.) in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century put the world in front of the new cultural challenges. The oral tradition of memory, knowledge and thinking was replaced by literary, written form throughout the world. The same process started in Georgia in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and took enormous scale after the disintegration of the feudal order.

Development and maintenance of literacy and education had been one of the main functions of women in Georgia since medieval times, apart from other social-cultural functions. Preservation of the national identity strongly favored through women's painstaking endeavor to contribute to the welfare of the motherland and raising up new generations. The understanding of women's role in the society was based on the "Mother-Pillar" ethno-cultural paradigm – mothers (or women in general) as preservers of fundamental values on which the structure of a family and in broader sense – the whole culture – is constructed. Suffice it to say, women used to transfer the oral knowledge of the Bible and "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" from generation to generation – as the cultural memory of the language as well as the system of values and national identity. That was all performed through the oral tradition. However, what should be done in order to go hand in hand with modern development, when

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printed media appears, communication becomes easier and diverse and the old methods are not productive anymore?

It is here that the importance of women's role becomes relevant towards the development of public educational system that might be based on secondary as well as higher educational institutions. Foundation of the all-embracing universal educational values started as early as 19<sup>th</sup> century by outstanding public figures – mostly men – but continued with increasing participation of women.

The research was fulfilled with application of quantitative as well as qualitative methods: analysis of scholarly studies and fiction and sharing leading experience, data processing and critical analysis.

## 2. FINDINGS

In the 19th century, education left the boundaries of the families and moved into society. Women faced new challenges to maintain their historical role of educators outside their families as well and become active members of the society.

From the 1850s, several names appear in the Georgian reality, confirming that women's movements were in line with the worldwide processes of struggling for women's rights. Among them were Barbare Eristavi-Jorjadze, Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tsereteli, Ekaterine Melikishvili-Meskhi, Ekaterine Gabashvili, Elene Kipiani, Dominika Eristavi, Anastasia Eristavi-Khoshtaria and others. These brave women made great contribution to the introduction of European values to Georgia by taking active part in the work of the "Society for Spreading of Literacy among Georgians" as well as famous printed media of that period – "Iveria", "Droeba", "Kvali".

Frankly speaking, it was not an easy task to conduct activities and say a valuable word side by side with the great men of Georgian national-liberation movement of that time – Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Iakob Gogebashvili, Niko Nikoladze, Dimitri Kipiani, Giorgi Tsereteli, Sergei Meskhi, etc.

The first most influential and significant organization we are going to talk about is The Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians. The famous Georgian intellectuals founded this charity organization on May 15, 1879 in order to assist to the promotion of literacy among the peasantry of Georgia, which was the part of the Russian Empire at that time. The Society organized by the outstanding leaders of the national and cultural revival movement - Ilia Chavchavadze, Dimitri Kipiani, Iakob Gogebashvili, Akaki Tsereteli, Ivane Machabeli, Rapiel Eristavi – ran a network of schools (called gymnasium), bookshops and libraries throughout the country as well as conducted trainings for teachers and sponsored Georgian-language journals and magazines. Being the one and only educational foundation at that time, the organization made invaluable contribution to the formation of the Georgian pedagogical idea and development of the national system of education.

The richest library of the Society is now preserved at the Ilia Chavchavadze National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. The online search engine of the members of the Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians has recently been created via cooperation between National Archives of Georgia and The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. The web program contains the biographical data of more than 15 thousand members of the Society for Spreading Literacy, who became members of the society from the day of its foundation until its liquidation time during 1879-1927.

We can provide data on the ratio of men, women and unspecified members of the organization in order to make a clear picture of women participation in the society. Needless to say, women also participated in preparation of the background for establishing the Society together with men. These were mostly women who got educated at schools in Georgia established by the Russian Empire and were aware of the necessity to establish Georgian schools. However, their contribution is less estimated and acknowledged by the contemporaries. It was not easy to confront the Russification

policy of the Russian Empire officials but Georgian women showed incredible bravery and perseverance in this endeavor. The data: Period - 1879-1927 (total 15, 261 people):

6062 members – men - 80.47%, women - 14.76%, unspecified - 4.77%; 5673 real members – 83.04%, 16.27%, 0.69%; 341 permanent members – 82.11%, 13.78%, 4.11%; 355 founding members – 89.30%, 10.14%, 0.56%; 62 supporting members – 58.06%, 27.42%, 14.52%; 89 scholarship holders – 87.64%, 6.74%, 5.62%; 2010 teachers – 50.35%, 31.89%, 17.76%; 160 school directors – 56.25%, 10.63%, 33.13% ; 77 library managers – 50.65%, 22.08%, 27.27%

As we can see, most percentage of women falls on teachers, library managers and supporting members that illustrate the fact that women continued their historical role of educators outside their families as teachers and librarians. Very small portion of women participated in administrative issues but still there were some we can identify who served to the improvement of women's rights in terms of education and public life.

The members of the Society at different times were Anastasia Tumanishvili, Ekaterine Gabashvili, Ekaterine Melikishvili, Olga Guramishvili-Chavchavadze, Despina Gelovani, Marjory Wordrop, Mariam Orbeliani, Nino Nakashidze, Barbare Jorjadze and others. They joined men in opening regional departments and reading rooms, creating textbooks or training teachers and did their best to make education available for boys and girls equally. However, men-members of the society did not express any interest towards girls' admission to schools. That is the reason why Ekaterine Gabashvili reproached them by saying:

“I was astonished by the fact that during the debate from 12 pm to 5 pm on money consumption by the Society for raising literacy, it occurred to nobody to think about whether these benefits were for boys' schools and education only or women also had permission to enjoy the right. It is strange indeed that none of the Society members or board members thought about women at that time. Would not it be good while talking about schools in Batumi and Tbilisi to decide as well that schools should be for boys and girls equally?”

It's true, girls also study at our village schools but it is not regular, their admission depends of teacher's wish. Why should we not allow all girls go to school? Why should we not allow all girls get educated at teacher training courses? We have many women who would willingly become village teachers in case they are specially prepared for this. Don't you know that in Europe and mostly in America the best teachers are women? Why should we not try? Moreover, that you say that it is a problem to find a decent man-teacher nowadays. I can't believe that our Society finds women's education unnecessary for the welfare of Georgia. On my part, I think it obligatory for women to master the Georgian language inasmuch as a woman is the first teacher of children. If children do not love and respect their mother tongue and the process of studying, it will be difficult for them to study it later. And in near future, they might be ashamed of their mother tongue, regretfully.”

### 3. DISCUSSION

The issue of the Georgian language was indeed a topical one at that time. The language of instruction in all the schools was Russian. Ekaterine Gabashvili, who struggled to introduce Georgian-language education at schools as well as admission of women to teacher training courses, was herself fortunate to get educated at Madam Favne's famous boarding school in Tbilisi that was the only school to teach children the Georgian language, apart from other subjects, of course. She is well known in Georgia as a children's writer and translator but her feminist activities should be noted as well. She was one of the few women to become the member of the Board (Governing Body) of the Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians from 1882. In 1897-1922 she was the head of the women's vocational school and in 1872-1905 – the initiator of establishing Women's Circle and creating its regional branches.

Another prominent woman who got primary education at Madam Favne's boarding school was Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tsereteli. Today she is remembered as a famous writer and essayist. However, she also led distinguished social-political activities. After finishing Madam Favne's boarding school, she was enrolled in the Noble Women's Institute of Transcaucasia, which she graduated in 1865. In 1876 Anastasia went to Switzerland where she got acquainted with the issues of upbringing children based on Pestalozzi methods, as well as new pedagogical ideas, school works in Switzerland and France. She eagerly studied everything that was innovative, leading and useful for that time. She visited Paris, Zurich, met the Georgians living there and then returned to motherland.

On returning home, Anastasia Tumanishvili got involved in cultural-educational life of the country. Soon her literary translations were published – Alphonse Daudet's "Marshal's Heartache" and Walter Scott's "The Highland Widow" as well as her first original story "Father's Victim".

Anastasia was an active member of the Society for Spreading Literacy among Georgians, under whose patronage she managed to open a primary school in her native village. She was also a founder of the "Society for Mutual Support of Women Teachers and Educators". The aim of the organization was to support women teachers with ideas as well as material aid, make use of women's labor in pedagogical field, protect women's rights, etc. She made a significant contribution in the development of children's literature and publishing activities. She actively collaborated with the journals "Mnatobi" and "Kvali" and eventually founded a children's journal "Jejili" (wheat shoots).

With Anastasia Tumanishvili's initiative, a new women's primary school was opened in Tbilisi in 1902, while in 1908 she founded a women's organization "Education".

Since the Russian Revolution of 1905, the great wave of formation of various types of women's organizations took a massive scale. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first higher educational courses were opened for women in the Caucasus. Significant educational activities were conducted by the following organizations established by and for women: "Georgian Women's Charity Organization", "Commission of Tbilisi Women's Circle", "Georgian Women's Society", "School for Poor Girls", "Society of Education", "Society of Knowledge", "Georgian Unity of Equality for Women", etc. Hitherto existing charity and educational activities were enriched with the women rights problems.

It should specially be mentioned about the work and activities of the Georgian Women's Circle. It was founded in 1872 by the so called "disobedient women students" who left for Switzerland to get high education – Anastasia Tumanishvili-Tsereteli, Ekaterine (Keke) Melikishvili-Meskhi, Olga Guramishvili-Nikoladze – and their followers: Ekaterine Gabashvili, Elene Kipiani and others. The organization based the aims on literary activities of the daring women, providing the population with the collection of new translations of the world literature as the first independent product of Georgian women's literary and translational activities.

Women's organizations appeared not only in the capital city but in the provinces as well. The first formalized organizations were functioning as committees, unities, circles or commissions, mostly temporarily. However, they contributed much to the nation's further educational and cultural development, culminating in the opening of the first university in Georgia in 1918.

The first-ever national university in the Caucasus was opened in 1918 laying the foundation for a European-type higher school in Georgia, based on Georgian educational traditions. The idea of foundation of the university first emerged as far back as the early 19th century amid intensification of the struggle for liberation from Russian Empire. A new generation led by great Georgian public figure Ilia Chavchavadze, with whom a new stage of spiritual revival in the history of our country is connected, appeared on the scene in the 1860s.

The foundation and opening of the University in Tbilisi is associated with the male representatives of the cultural and political elite of that time. However, we can name at least one

woman – Mariam Orbeliani, who actively collaborated with Ivane Javakhishvili in 1917-1918 and became the member of the supporting committee established right after opening of the university.

Tbilisi State University was founded in 1918 owing to the leadership of Georgian historian Ivane Javakhishvili and the group of his followers. It was the first and the only educational body of this type in the Caucasus Region by that time.

Georgia has a tradition of education, as evidenced by the functioning of the School of Philosophy and Rhetoric of Phazisi in Colchis (4th century), centers in Palestine (5th century), Syria (6th century), Greece (10th–15th centuries) and Bulgaria (11th century). Gelati and Ikalto Academies in Georgia (11th–12th centuries); However, as a result of political-economic decrease and at last becoming the colony of Russia, there had been no national higher educational institutions in Georgia for the next few centuries.

This is how Elisabeth Bagrationi-Orbeliani addressed the audience on the opening ceremony:

“I am greatly excited welcoming you today as I understand the glory of the moment and appreciate the honor I am granted. We are opening our own Georgian university and with this, we are renewing the knot of the split thread of the ancient culture. The culture illuminated by the Eastern sun has been beautified by the approximation to the Western thought. Europe knew us and loved us. As early as in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Rome sent out missionaries to us. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century we were approaching France. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Sul Khan-Saba visited Ludovico XIV and later created his parables in Lafontaine’s style. The last hundred years somehow distanced us from Europe and its liberated thinking. And now it is urgent to win the lost time back. Now I consider myself lucky to be granted the obligation to teach you French in order to get acquainted with the writings of the prominent thinkers of the French revolution and enjoy their works. Please bear in mind that it is owing to the French Revolution of 1789 that we are having a free Georgian university today.”

All that was said before prepared the background and conditions for the women to get educated. So far, there is no talk about scientific and research activities of the Georgian women inasmuch as the first and foremost goal was to allow them get the basic education. With times, some specific interesting cases do appear in the history of women’s activities in the field of science as well. It is here that the name of the first Georgian woman-scholar appears. Barbare Kipiani – Psycho-Physiologist, public figure.

Barbare Kipiani, a granddaughter of Georgian public figure Dimitri Kipiani, was the first woman psycho-physiologist who worked in Europe. Her scientific papers on issues of children’s physiology and pathology were awarded golden prizes. In 1899, Barbare Kipiani graduated from St. Nino’s educational institution and in 1901 started studying at the medical faculty of the Brussels University. She delivered lectures on Georgian and Russian languages at the Brussels University. As a scientist, she studied the methods for determination of memory types, psychological basics of upbringing, ambidexterity among schoolchildren, tropism, etc. From 1908, she was a scientific secretary of the Brussels University’s magazine, *Revue Psychologique*.

Once Georgian publicist Revaz Gabashvili wrote in the newspaper “Tsnobis Furtsetli” (News-Sheet): “Professor Jotiko, a Polish lady who invited Barbare Kipiani to her laboratory, helped Barbare to become a scientist and paid her tuition fee when she was expelled from the university due to non-payment. Our society should know that the granddaughter of the founder of the Royal Bank, Dimitri Kipiani, is being supported by the foreigners while the representatives of local nobility even refused to give her the scholarship.”

Apart from her contribution to science, Barbare Kipiani was constantly searching for the pieces of Georgian art scattered throughout Europe, in order not to lose the national treasure. She founded the Georgian section of the history and ethnography at the International Museum of Brussels in 1910. In the Georgian National Center of Manuscripts is preserved the letter by Barbare Kipiani in

French and Georgian languages, in which she urges Georgian society to participate in the creation of museum exposition.

“This is the first time when Georgia has an opportunity to show Europe our achievements both in education and technology. We ask you to help us by denoting books, graphs, pictures and other items. We hope that our society will assist us in rebuilding this new institution.” – Barbare wrote in her letter.

Barbare Kipiani was actively engaged in public activities. Her contribution to the protection and promotion of exhibits of Georgian culture is exceptional. She was a guardian of family property and archive of Salome Dadiani and Achille Murat, which she handed over to a Georgian Catholic monk, Michael Tarkhnishvili, who worked in Italy. Barbare Kipiani’s return to homeland proved to be short. She taught French language in Georgian Noblemen Gymnasium. She worked as an assistant to Akaki Shanidze, prominent Georgian linguist, philologist and academician, but in 1921, when Russia reoccupied Georgia, she was forced to return to Brussels. She died in 1965 at the age of 85 and was buried in Brussels.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the above discussed can be summarized as follows: the educational issues had been transferred from the families into the public environment. Active women of the society found the realization of their potential in forming educational groups and societies, including libraries and primary schools, where they could have accomplished progressive ideas and plans for the further development of new generation. Dissemination of feminist ideas proved to contribute significantly to the activation of women in public life. Despite the widely spread educational movement among women in the central and regional parts of Georgia, women’s activities were less marked with scientific or scholarly achievements. However, the role of women was palpable in the foundation of the university as strong supporters of the idea, culminated in opening the first university in the Caucasus in 1918. The endeavor was a precursor of new discoveries in women’s educational potential in the time to come.

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*Ethics committee approval is not required for data used in this study.*

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