

High-scoring Madras girls

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the report of the Everest mountaineering triumph by a Japanese woman climber, Junko Tabei, came the news that added to the cheer of the supporters of Woman's Lib—that a girl, G. Geetha of Chidambaram, had topped the list of 2.2 lakh students in the Tamil Nadu SSLC examination. Earlier, Kiran Batura, had obtained the first rank in the IAS examination.

Few men would be ungalant enough to suggest that the two results represented the examiners' way of celebrating International Women's Year. Is there any justification for the view, that girls do better than boys in schools and colleges? What are the reasons?

There is evidence that in colleges the girls secure more prizes and the percentage of passes is higher among them.

In Tamil Nadu, 33 lakhs in the total of 78 lakh pupils in schools are girls. In colleges, there are 62,000 girls among 2.2 lakh students.

"There is no question about it—the girls are certainly better."

said Miss E. Mathew, Principal of Ethiraj College for Women. "You have only to go through the list of prize winners at the University convocation to see that girls outnumber boys. And this, despite the fact that their total strength is smaller."

At last year's convocation, for instance, 41 of the 76 prize winners were girls, following a pattern prevailing for some years now.

The picture in a leading co-educational college in Madras is revealing. Nine of the 15 University prize winners from the college were girls and they secured 17 of 28 prizes. The dominance of girls is even more shining because they form less than a quarter of the total strength of the college. Also, among girls, the percentage of passes is higher than among boys.

Common reason

The most common reason given by teachers and parents for the better performance of girls is that they do not have as many distractions as boys. They are not very much interested in activities outside college, they keep off politics and do not take part in strikes and agitations.

This situation is gradually changing and more and more girls are becoming interested in films and extraneous activities, according to the principal of a women's college.

Sister Juliet Irene, Principal of Stella Maris College, attributed the good performance of girls to "hard work, diligence and discipline."

Talking to a group of girls, one gets a long list of qualities that, in their view, contribute to their success: concentration, regular attendance and study, hard work, paying close attention in class and so on.

A professor in a co-educational college gives a less flattering reason: the defective education system which favours the plodding type rather than the original thinker. Girls are certainly more hard working than boys and it is only natural that they should perform better in an examination that places a premium on memorising. His experience is that, while girls are familiar with detail, they lack the broad perspective and general knowledge of the boys.

Some boys who were interviewed would not concede that girls did any better in college. "Even if they fare better in examinations, it is not because they are more intelligent," said one.

A psychologist points out that only a few girls entering college

intend to take up employment. Some educated parents send their daughters to college as a matter of course because, for them stopping their education with school would be inconceivable.

Many girls, however, are sent to college to get a degree that will improve their marriage prospects. Considering the lack of a compelling motivation to do well, their performance seems to be remarkable.

The career motivation is strong for boys but some are cynical about the value of degrees and even of good grades.

Are the girls who do well in the examinations preferred for employment? A few reputed firms do choose the applicant with the highest marks and ability, whether it is a man or woman. But, except for jobs to which women are specially suited, many employers prefer men even with inferior qualifications. The most widespread reason for this discrimination seems to be the feeling that women may not take their jobs seriously and stick to them.

In the professions like law, medicine and engineering, not many women have risen to the top. Indeed, the ratio of highly successful women in these fields is not proportionate to their numbers.

Our Staff Reporter