

ESTHER SIBONGILE SANGWENI

INANDA SEMINARY: 150 YEARS OF A LIFE OF STRUGGLE AND RESILIENCE

INTRODUCTION

Inanda Seminary has had to struggle for existence and survival all her life. While I think it is important to know these struggles, I believe we should not dwell on them, but on what it is that has made Inanda survive for 150 years in spite of the different threats to its existence.

1. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY.

Inanda Seminary has come a long way from the general attitude towards women held in the 19th century. At that time the general attitude was that women belonged to the domestic sphere. Their main duty was to provide their husbands with a clean home, food on the table, and to raise children. Their rights were limited. They could not vote, sue, or own property. Once they married, everything they owned legally belonged to their husbands.

2. THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE

As a result of such attitudes, even Missionary wives of the American Board Mission in Natal 'did not attend business meetings of the Mission, and certainly did not have the right to vote' (Wood: 5). However, this exclusion turned out to be a blessing in disguise since while the men were busy discussing Missionary work, their wives formed their own organisation, The Maternal Association in which the problems of their families and those of the African women around them were thoroughly discussed.

It was from these discussions that the idea of establishing a school for further education of African girls was first proposed. With Mrs Lucy Lindley as one of the main agitators, these wives pushed for the establishment of a school for further education of African girls –'to teach them how to make Christian and civilised homes' and 'to be teachers as well as to be good wives for the young men teachers and preachers already being trained at Amanzimtoti' (Wood: 5).

In her book *Shine Where You Are* Miss Wood tells us that 'It was the custom of Mrs Lindley to set aside a definite time every day when she went by herself and prayed that the money for the building and a suitable teacher would be found' (Wood: 5) In June 1863 preparations for the erection of a school for girls were in progress.

It was a group of strong, determined and committed women of prayer that ensured that Inanda Seminary was established. Nothing beats the power of a praying woman!!!!

2. THE STRUGGLE OF CHANGING SOCIETAL ATTITUDES ABOUT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY: 1869-1885

From the beginning, Mrs Mary Kelly Edwards had to struggle against patriarchy and racism. When she was appointed in 1868, she was the first missionary to be adopted by the newly organised Woman's Board of Missions of the Congregational Churches in the United States. When she wanted to train as a teacher, her father, an owner of a small cotton factory, who was by no means poor, had little sympathy for her ambitions, He gave her only \$5 out of \$44 needed for the first term of her teacher training course. But because she was determined and focussed on her goal she raised the rest of the money and graduated in 1851. **Even at that young age of 22, we see her strength, her independence of thought and determination. These were to be characteristics that, in later years, would set Inanda girls apart.**

Although in those days a few African men were anxious to see their daughters educated, for most girls, the only career open for them was marriage to any man who would pay lobolo for them. Their fathers needed the cattle for the marriage of their sons or for another wife for themselves. Because by law every girl or woman was under the authority of either her father, her brother or her husband, a woman was only destined for marriage and a life of serving her husband and family.

Even in Mission stations, most African men did not see value in higher education for girls. They thought it was enough for the Seminary to teach only Christian nurture and home-making skills. They felt that Primary education was enough for girls to

learn to read and write. They wanted them only to learn to help their mothers, to learn the crafts practiced by women, and to prepare for marriage.

From its inception, Inanda Seminary had to struggle to change such attitudes regarding the role of women in society.

Mrs Edwards had advanced ideas for her girls. She wanted the best education and the best teachers for them. She also wanted improved living conditions and a new way of life for them. However, the 'Mission Fathers' had different views. They controlled the funds, and Mrs Edwards had no vote and had little influence in Mission meetings. The Mission Fathers were not convinced of the value of Higher education for African girls. They thought Inanda Seminary was a doubtful project. Their vision was that an African girl only needed a little basic education to learn to be 'an active Christian and to know how to keep a Christian home and bring up children in the way missionary wives were trying to bring up theirs. They did not want a boarding school, and they felt it was not right for girls to sleep away from home.

But with her faith, determination and commitment to her course, Mah Edwards continued to pray and strive. In the end, when she was praised for 'her school', she said 'I cannot call it my school. In all my supplications I can only say 'Lord, it is Thy school. I am here to do Thy will' (Wood: 19).

3. THE STRUGGLE OF CHANGING SOCIETAL ATTITUDES ABOUT RELATIONS BETWEEN RACES: 1869-1927

Through the early years of Missionary life, a negative code and standard of behaviour towards African people had developed. Influenced by accepted segregation between white and black races in both the United States and Natal, missionaries of the time thought they must keep a 'distinct separateness' from the 'primitive' African. Mrs Edwards had a different opinion regarding her relationship with the girls and the women around her. She thought that the time had come for change, and that closer contact with the people she had come to serve, would make for greater knowledge and friendliness'. She was able to see the potential in the people around her. In a letter of 14 June 1869, she wrote:

As it appears to me, these people are preparing for a great and rapid advance. Their wisest and best men have said the missionaries do not know them, that they keep at too great a distance....

In the same letter she also says

There was a great deal said to dissuade me from taking my meals with the girls. After all my reasons were swept away, I finally said that I came here to do these people all the good possible; If I can do these girls more good by sacrificing the comfort and pleasure of eating with you at your table, I must do it.(Wood :20)

Thus a tradition and a culture of positive inter-racial relations at Inanda Seminary was established by a wise Christian woman who, even in those early years, recognised and acknowledged the humanity and equality of all before God.

Even though Mrs Edwards did not always agree with the 'Mission Fathers' on some issues, including whipping the girls and on her relations with them, in a letter to the American Board in June 1869, Rev. Lindley wrote that Mrs Edwards 'was the right man in the right place...with continued health, she will be found equal to her position. Out of this school we expect much good to come for this life, and for the life hereafter'(Wood: 21). Mrs Edwards died in 1927.

4. STRUGGLES DURING TIMES OF GROWTH OF POLITICAL AWARENESS AND THE RISE OF AFRICAN NATIONALISM

Between 1930 and 1939, Inanda Seminary had to deal with a wave of restlessness in African society and the school. African women and students were experiencing new freedoms and there was greater development of leadership among Africans. Political discussion, debate, political and literary activity characterised this period.

As a result, more white people became interested in what the 'Bantu' were doing. African pride and nationalism grew. Criticism of missionaries and resentment against the Colour Bar in the church grew; tensions between the races hardened and intensified. White people toughened their attitude against liberal views.

From its inception Inanda had struggled for funding, but in the period 1930 -1939 the school's funding situation was dire. Unemployment and poverty among all races spread. More Africans and Afrikaners moved to the cities, and there was competition

for work. This led to the government hardening its stance against Africans, Indians and coloured people, Segregationist and prohibitionist laws led to formation of more black unions and more political organisation by African people.

For the school, on the socio-political side, this period was hard. As a result of African women and students experiencing new freedoms, their thinking changed. There was tension, restlessness, resentment and dissatisfaction with forms of life inherited from the old days. Both staff and students had to grow in awareness and make changes and adjustments in attitudes and the way things were done.

As a school that prided itself on its Christian values, Inanda had to change. Everyone had to realise that the school was bigger than any individual; that administrators had to implement the required changes in the life of the school

5. STRUGGLES AGAINST THE THREAT OF CLOSURE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Also in this period was the Great Depression. As a result of the depression and a severe drought, poverty increased and the enrolment dropped. The school's income dropped by 50% and each year ended with a deficit. Raising funds and finding staff became more difficult. There was no money for missionary teachers and for maintenance. In its 65th anniversary in 1934, there were serious debates and discussions on whether Inanda was needed enough to sacrifice some other part of missionary work for it; whether it was not better to simply close the school.

However, the view that Inanda was indispensable as a school for training young women in leadership, prevailed. In May 1934 at a Special Mission Meeting, a decision was taken to keep Inanda open in spite of cuts in grants for it and for McCord's Hospital.

Once again, men and women who believed in the work being done at Inanda were determined to make sacrifices for its continued existence.

6. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE THREAT OF BANTU EDUCATION

When the Nationalist Party was returned to power in 1948, it was on a ticket of Apartheid. The aim of the government was permanent physical, mental and spiritual separation of racial groups in order to preserve the purity of each and strengthen tribalism.

The aim of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was to ensure that pupils were not trained on a European model; but were trained and taught ...'according to the sphere in which the Bantu live because 'there was no place for them in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour...' In administration, the control of African Education was taken away from the missionaries and the provinces and put under the central Department of Native Affairs. For Inanda Seminary this Act was a threat to:

- a) The inter-racial character of the school;
- b) The content of the education offered at the school;
- c) The existence of the school as a Mission school;
- d) Freedom in the choice of staff;
- e) Training in Christian service and leadership;
- f) The freedom of both teachers and students to think and act independently;
- g) The government subsidy the school had received

In 1955 the Mission decided that because of these threats, there was a need for the Seminary to remain a Mission school for girls who would become teachers and nurses and Christian homemakers. Therefore, the Mission submitted an application for the school to be an unaided private school offering academic training, practical training and character-development in a Christian atmosphere. Although the application was approved (with some restrictions), the threat of closure continued for many years.

7. THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE AND SURVIVAL IN THE 1970S AND 1980s

In the early 1970s the last missionaries were withdrawn from the school and funding from the mother church, the United Church Board for World Ministries (UCBWM)

declined. In the early 1980s the mother Church gave over all its SA church institutions to the local United Congregational church of Southern Africa (UCCSA).

This marked the beginning of perhaps, the most serious financial, academic and moral instability for the Seminary. The school experienced acute lack of funds for salaries and maintenance of infrastructure. Because of lack of funds, the school could no longer be selective in its selection of staff. This led to academic and moral decay. By 1997, all that had been achieved in 128 years was threatened. Eventually, in November that year the UCCSA closed the school.

However, a group of alumnae, the Inanda Seminary Old Girls Association (ISOGA) motivated for the hand-over of the school to the Association to run. After much persuasion, an agreement between ISOGA and the UCCSA was made with several conditions. All these conditions were met and the school was officially administered by ISOGA.

When ISOGA took over the School in 1998, it encountered several serious challenges including: dilapidated buildings; lack of funds; legal battles on the status of the school, land claims, land invasion; resistant and unionised staff; lack of discipline among both staff and students; low academic standards; and lack of policies and a constitution.

The Association succeeded to resolve all the problems encountered, and in addition, facilitated the building of a clinic to serve both students and the community on school grounds.

Lastly the Association appealed to the then President Mandela for funding to renovate the school infrastructure. President Mandela roped in the paper company, SAPPI, which ultimately donated over R3 Million to renovate the infrastructure of the school, to put in place financial systems, train staff, pay the Principal's salary for three years and establish a Trust with three accounts for the school.

ISOGA then appealed to Global Ministries to provide a chaplain for the school. This was granted. From then on the school thrived and regained its status as one of the best schools for girls in South Africa.

WHAT MADE INANDA SURVIVE FOR 150 YEARS IN THE FACE OF THESE NUMEROUS CHALLENGES?

- Inanda Seminary has survived because of hundreds of men and especially women that have supported it in various ways - through prayer, teaching and sacrifice;
- Inanda Seminary has always bounced back and survived because it is an institution grounded on prayer, faith and commitment to the service of mankind;
- Because it is an institution determined to awaken all its members to the truth of the equality, capability, sanctity and value of all mankind irrespective of their gender race, religion or social standing;
- Because it is an institution committed to developing all its students to the best of their ability in order for them to serve their communities and greater humanity;

It is these values that have produced some of the best women leaders in the country – strong, confident, independent, and powerful and yet caring, generous and God-fearing women in all sectors and spheres of our country and beyond.

It is these types of women who have prayed, persuaded and fought for the survival of Inanda Seminary for 150 years. They fought because:

- They valued Inanda's contribution to African development;
- Because the history and legacy of Inanda cannot be allowed to die;
- Because of the need to preserve this African heritage for future generations;
- Because of Inanda's place in developing and nurturing strong independent-thinking African women;
- Because of Inanda's values and ethos;
- Because Inanda is one of the few schools of excellence with an emphasis on positive African values and African pride;
- Because Inanda has given all who have gone through it a head-start in a hostile world.

These women wanted all this for future generations.

These women came from every part of the United States and South Africa. They included Missionary wives, Principals, teachers, nurses, ministers, matrons, former students, donors and General workers - o mah Mbili, mah Cele, mah Nduna, mah Mqwebu, mah Zondi, mah Edwards, Lucy Lindley , Martha Lindley and many others. Some have passed on, and others are still with us...

To the current members:

It is the hope and plea of all of us who are still alive that you will take the baton that we give you – THAT:

- You will never let the Seminary and its values die;
- You will always commit yourselves to the school and the nation;
- You will, when your time comes, be of service to the African community;
- You will keep the legacy of Inanda Seminary alive;
- You will defend what Inanda stands for;
- You will fight for its existence and defend it against all that threatens to destroy it.

Be the best you can be;

Bring honour and glory to the school, your nation and your families;

Strive against all odds;

Strive for excellence;

Be a beacon of hope for the nation;

Be an example to the next generation

Prove those who don't believe in you, wrong.

In spite of the hurdles put in your way, CONTINUE TO SHINE WHERE YOU ARE!!!!!!

References

Healy-Clancy, M. 2013. A world of their Own: A History of South African Women's Education. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Pelzer, A.N. 1966. Verwoerd Speaks: Speeches 1948- 1966. APB Publishers.

South African History Online: Towards a People's History: State Policies and Social Protest 1924- 1939. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/state-policies-and-social-protest-1924-1939>

Wood, A.A. 1972. Shine where you are: a History of Inanda Seminary 1869-1969. The Lovedale Press.