



Impact Factor:4.081

Education System of Murshidabad District in the Colonial Era: A Historical Investigation

Rakibul Islam

Assistant Professor in History, Email- rakib90history@gmail.com, Govt. General Degree College at Kaliganj, Debagram, Nadia, West Bengal.

Abstract: Murshidabad is an important historical place in the history of India. In middle age, Murshidabad was the capital of Bengal. Karnasubarna of Murshidabad was also important from industrial and cultural perspective during the ancient period. It's political and cultural importance centred on the independent Nawabs of Bengal during the last periods of Mughals. The British rule in India also started from Murshidabad after the battle of Plassey and the battle of Baxa. As a result of this, the education system, along with the economic and political system, faced a huge change and there started the English education in Murshidabad. Both the Christian missionaries and the zamindars and kings helped in the spreading of modern education in Murshidabad and in India.

Key words: Bengal province; Karnasubarna; rule of Nawabs; Christian missionary; zamindar, modern education

Murshidabad is a very important name in the history of modern India. The end of medieval age, the beginning of modern age in the history of India and rising of Indian freedom movement started from the soil of Murshidabad. Murshidabad has got its present shape sketched in 1879¹. The present shape of the district is decided not on a geographical basis, but on an administrative basis. Murshidabad is situated in between the north and the south Bengal in the latitude of 23⁰43^{II}- 24⁰52^{II}, and in the longitude of 87⁰49^{II}- 88⁰44^{II}. According to 2011 census, the area of Murshidabad is 5324 km². The total number of population is 7103407. The literacy rate is 66.59%. The growth rate of population is 21.9%. The river Bhagirathi flows through the district. The western side of the river is known as Rarh, and the eastern side is known as Bagri. There are differences between the two sides. They differ in geographical nature, weather, economy, religion, culture, and manner of living. This means that although Murshidabad is an administrative area, geographically and culturally it is divided into two different regions. The western part is an indispensable part of 'Rarh' region, while the eastern part or the 'Bagdi' is part Nadia and Bangladesh plain land².

From the ancient times, Murshidabad has been known as the centre of education and culture. Karnasubarna, presently situated near Berhampore, is regarded as one of the distinguished educational centres of India³. The international Buddhist religious and education centre "RoktoMrittikaMahabihar" was also situated here in ancient time⁴. The famous Chinese tourist Hiouen- Thsang has mentioned this Mahabihar in his writings⁴. He, along with other Buddhist scholars, came here, stayed and studied here⁶. In 1960s, archeological department of Calcutta University excavated at Karnasubarna and proved that there were enough evidences of student hostel and study centres. During the reign of Pals, in the north-western side of the district (present Jangipur subdivision), there were few Buddha Bihar and study centres. Even during the reign of Sen Dynasty, Murshidabad was known as the centre of education. There was the study of Prakrit, Pali, Sanskrit languages⁵.

In the middle age, during the reigns of Sultans and Mughals, Arabic and Persian languages flourished in Murshidabad as the languages of the rulers. The Muslim rulers replaced those Buddha bihar and tols with madrasahs and maktobs and spread the study of Islam and Persian language. With the passing of time, both Hindu and Muslim came closer to each other both politically and culturally. This helps in the development of education. As a result of this, the study of languages like Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit got a huge flourish in Murshidabad during the middle age.

The battle of Plassey marked the end of middle age in the history of India and the beginning of the modern period. This also marked the establishment of British rule in India. The industrial revolution, western education, liberal thinking and the development of printing press helped in this change. The East India Company helped in the spreading of modern education for their colonial purposes. In 1813, the British government, by passing the Charter act, decided to sponsor the education system and its development in India. In 1835, Lord Bentinck ordered William Adam to survey the education system of Bengal and make a detailed report. He made a detailed report accordingly. In that report, the picture of education system of Murshidabad came before us for the first time. William Adam presented his report in three phases in between 1835 to 1838. He made the 1838 report on the basis of the field survey. Adam travelled at various places of Murshidabad and Daulatabad. He mentioned in his report, “there is total 67 schools in 20 thanas of Murshidabad. Among them, 62 is Bengali medium and the rest 5 is Hindi medium. The Hindi medium schools were made for those who came from the western province.”⁷

It was also said in the report that “11 villages, Mahallas or Bajar have 2 schools in each of them. They have 22 schools among them. 20 is Bengali medium, 2 is Hindi. The rest of the villages have 45 schools in them.”⁸ People from all castes were engaged in the profession of teaching. But among them, the Hindu Kayasthas were greater in numbers. There were 39 teachers from Hindu kayashta in Murshidabad at that time who thought that teaching is noble profession and they had got it from their ancestors. Brahmins, Baidyas, Sadgops and Chhetris were also involved in teaching profession. There were also Muslim teachers. If people from lower caste took the profession of teaching, their honour in the society got increased. Even the guardians did not hesitate to send their children to those schools where the lower caste teacher used to teach. It is further known from his report that like the other district of Bengal, schools in Murshidabad did not have buildings of their own. The buildings were built from the donations of rich families, or from fund collection, and sometimes by teacher’s expenses. Schools were run in different places. These places include teacher’s house, village temple, village mosque, one of the guardians’ house, or under a tree. In the 67 schools of the district, total numbers of teachers were 1080. Pupils from every caste and religions used to come to schools and spend 10 years in learning and acquiring qualifications. The remarkable lawyer and the founder as president of national congress in Murshidabad district, Brajabhushan Gupta has described one incident of a school where students were sitting on the ground and learning from books made of palm leaves. This description matched with the description of William Adam. Although the English education started at the beginning of the 19th century, it could not totally remove the Indian education system. In primary education, the Indian system was the only source of education⁹.

William Adam said in his first report of 1835 that there was an English school in Murshidabad run by ‘Bengali Auxiliary missionary Society’. But, due to the lack of good and qualified teachers and the disinterest of the local people, the school could not succeed. In his third report of 1838, Adam mentioned about Nijamat College. He also mentioned the English learning along with Arabic and Persian learning. There was only one English school which was run by Reverend Peterson of the London

Missionary Society. It was a free school. Peterson used to teach students in his own house for two to three hours, three days a week. Total numbers of students were 13. Moore's grammar, the English Reader, and Goldsmith's History of England were taught there. Adam also in his report mentioned that there was an effort to establish a school by collecting funds from both Indians and Europeans.¹⁰

After investigating from various sources, it has been known that before 1835, the British government took no step in the development of education in Bengal. The government took steps after the publication of Adam's report. Sir Charles Wood cancelled the 'Flirtation theory' of Meckley, and opined for 'Mass education'. He also decided to expand it with the help of the government. This resulted in the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857. The government also started funding the primary education. But that was not sufficient. One of the government reports also mentioned that in 1881-82, the total population of the district was 120100. But the annual education budget was only 10000 rupees. At that time, the total number of students in Murshidabad district was 12000.¹¹

For the purpose of spreading education in Murshidabad, new schools were founded at Saidabad and Jangipur in 1846 and at Kandi in 1848. According to Harding's plan, the government paid the salaries of teachers from the government treasury. In between 1856-1864, three indigenous schools were opened in Berhampore Gorabajar, Jiaganj, and Azimganj. Teachers used to teach students both in Bengali and Hindi. In 1856, local Zamindars and other influential persons helped in the establishment of six new schools at various places. These places include Cossimebajar, Shaktipur, Khagra, Panchthupi, and Rajarampur. In 1866, the government established eight Indian schools at Berhampore, Tenya, Dahapara, Bhagwangola, Suti, Jaipur, Malihati Erowali areas. In these schools, Barnaporichay, mathematics, history, geography, and morality were taught. From the description of Swami Akhananda Memories, it is known that during 1897-1898, there was no school from Plassey to Sargachi. Sargachi Ramkrishna Mission Kindergarten School was established in 1898. This school gave primary education to children from that area. According to a government report of 1874-1875, there were 251 government aided schools, 250 Pathshala in Murshidabad. The total numbers of students were 1600¹².

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a group of missionary, sent by the London Missionary Society took important role in the spreading of English education in Berhampore. The Group includes Missionaries like Dr Stephen Suttan, Miss Peterson, Miss Meckaiya and others. They established English schools in areas like Berhampore, Kalikapur, Pharasdanga, Daulatabad, and Lalbagh during the period of 1809-1824. Nijamat College was established in 1815 for the children of Nawab families. In this school, Arabic, Persian, and English were taught. Later it was opened for the Hindus too. In 1837-1838, an English school was established at Saidabad. But it could not last long. Another school was established at Jangipur in 1838. In 1845, Miss Mickaiya established a school at Khagra. This school is now known as Khagra Gurudas Tarasundari Institute. Berhampore Krishnath Collegiate School was established in 1853.¹³ The present building of the school was built in 1991 with the financial help of Maharaja Manindra Chanra Nandi. This school is now regarded as one of the best schools of Murshidabad.

The young Raja Krishnath Roy of Cossimebajar took a very important role in the spreading and development of the western education in Murshidabad in the first half of the nineteenth century. He was the supporter of young Bengal movement. He believed that only the western education could free the people of this country. He dreamt of building a university in Murshidabad. He made a will for this purpose. His dream came true when his widowed wife Maharani Swarnamoyi took initiation in the establishment of then Berhampore College (now Krishnath College) on 1st November

1853. This college has been spreading knowledge in Murshidabad and in Bengal for the last 150 years. Commere College was established in 1963. It used the building of Krishnath College for its classes at night. Later it was taken to another place which is now known as Berhampore College. From 1853 to 1946 there was the pressure of increasing numbers of students in the only college of Murshidabad. To tackle this problem, the wife of the then District collector of Murshidabad, Mrs. Amiya Rao took initiative for the establishment of Berhampore Girls' College in 1946 with only 26 students. The Christian Missionaries established the first Teacher training college in Murshidabad in 1938 in the name of Union Christian Training College. This training college is famous both within and outside the district.

From the above discussion, one can easily get the knowledge of the education system of Murshidabad. One can also see the condition of women education in Murshidabad. In 1950-1951, the literacy rate of the district was merely 12.68%. The literacy rate of women was only 06.80%. There was a huge difference between the literacy rate of villages and towns. This was because of the differences of facilities available to the people of villages and towns. Another main reason for the lower female literacy rate was the backwardness of Muslim community. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, there were accommodations for women education. Both aristocratic Hindu and Muslim women got their education at their home. It was the Christian missionaries who paved the way for the women education in Murshidabad. . they established New Castle School for women in the 1930s, but that could not run longer. After few years of its establishment, Mahakali Pathshala got the Government approval in 1949. Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi and few others established Berhampore Girls' School with 7 students in 1927. This school used to take place first in Krishnath Collegiate School, and then in Central correctional Home. After getting the Government approval in 1934, this school was renamed in the name of the wife of Maharaja as Maharani Kashiswari Girls' High School. In the same year, Mrs Sushama Singha managed to establish Shilpamondir Girls School at Gorabajar. After 1947, this school was upgraded to higher secondary level. This school showed path to the women education in Murshidabad¹⁴. After the establishment of Berhampore Girls' college in 1946, women got the chance of higher education in mass numbers. Although girls' schools have increased in numbers after the independence in Murshidabad, the worn-out condition of women education in the nineteenth century is still visible. In the above discussion, the colonial education system of Murshidabd, and the development of education after the battle of Plassey is portrayed.

Conclusion:- It can be concluded from the above discussion that indigenious noble families and educated people played an important role in the spread of education in Murshidabad during Nawabi era and the pre-colonial period. It is not that there was no government initiative at all. The Nawabs had taken an initiative in the spreading of some education policies in government form, but it was only limited family or people of Nawab and noble family and not for general people. In the colonial era, the British government took some initiative to spread of education. But it was very small to requirement.

Reference

1. Bandapadhyaya, Bijoykumar, 'Pracheen Murshidabad Karnasubarn o Mohipal' Radical, Kolkata, Page No-09.
2. Ibid. Page No-09.
3. Choudhuree, Susheel, 'Nawabi Amle Murshidabad' Ananda , Kolkata, 2004, Page No-04.

4. Riyaj-Us-Salatin,- Page No-04.
5. Choudhuree, Susheel, 'Nawabi Amle Murshidabad' Ananda , Kolkata, 2004, Page No-14.
6. Gupta, Bisan Kumar, ' Murshidabad Jelay Shiksa Byabasthar Kramabikasher Prekhapte Shahar Berhampore: 1704 – 1954', 'Itihaser Alope Berhampore Poursava (1876 - 2007)', Berhampore , Murshidabad, 2008, .
7. Choudhuree, Susheel, 'Nawabi Amle Murshidabad' Ananda , Kolkata, 2004, Page No-55.
8. Bandopadhyaya, Sengupta And Biswas, 'MurshidabadJela Gazetteer', West Bengal Gazetteers, Department of Higher Education, Govt. of West Bengal, 2003, Page No-409.
9. Ibid, Page No-409.
10. Ibid, 'Itihaser Alope Berhampore Poursava (1876 - 2007)', Page No-61.
11. Ibid, Page No-61.
12. Ibid, Page No-62.
13. Ibid, 'MurshidabadJela Gazetteer', Page No-411.
14. Ibid, 'Itihaser Alope Berhampore Poursava (1876 - 2007)', Page No-67.

.....