



## Education system in Bengal with special reference to Birbhum District during colonial period: A study

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### Abstract

Bengal had well development system of indigenous and vernacular system of education during ancient times. During medieval India the Bharmanical system of education flourished with over form education system. Before the arrival of the British the popular education was based on idea and principles of Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century a number of Tols, Chatuspaties, Maktabas and Madrasahs were established to carter the need of indigenous education. All indigenous institutions were patronized by the rulers, zaminders and local elites. Nawadip, Krishnagar, Memari, Pandhua, Sathgachiya were the important centres for learning in Bengal during medieval period. District Birbhum was also developed in the context of indigenous education and it accepted the modern form of education during the period of study. Krishachandra College, Birbhum Zilla School, Rampurhat High School, Margram High School and Bolpur High School were the important centres of learning during the period of study.

**Key Words:** Bengal, Birbhum, System, Education, Development. Tole, Chatuspathy, Maktab Madrasah, Wood Despatch, School, College.

Bengal had well development system of education from ancient times. As far as the progress of indigenous and elementary education in Bengal was concerned a large number of Pathsalas<sup>1</sup>, Tols<sup>2</sup> and Chatuspathis<sup>3</sup> were established during colonial period. The reports of various local Governments, Buchanon's report and Adams reports reveals the fact that an extensive system of education was prevalent during 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in India.

According to Nurullah and Naik, ‘ The nineteen century Indian society was essentially a feudal society in its decaying form consisted of several classes and very large number of castes and tribes.’<sup>4</sup> During the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the decaying princely governments, the Zamindars did not accept any responsibility for the people and all their educational efforts were limited to the problems of some financial support to learned persons, an institutions of higher learning, mainly on religious consideration. The Buchanon’s report, report of William Adam, specially the third report provides an information regarding the state of the education in early quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Macaulay Minute of 1835 provides information about the changed medium of instruction which brought English as the medium of instruction during the period of study and also remained a controversy between Anglicist and orientalist. The controversy regarding the medium of instruction started in Bombay from 1845-1848. The Wood’s Despatch of 1854 provided platform for the establishment of Universities in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Similarly the other Universities were established in different parts of India and the Medical Colleges were also established subsequently in India.

A lot of Missionary Schools were also established with the initiative taken by number of private individuals and the Christian Missionary of Europe. It is evident from the writing of Nurullah and Naik in their famous book ‘*student’s history of education in India*’ that a lot of Missionary societies of England came and actively engaged in the propagation of education. The General Baptist Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society, and Scottish Missionary society were established for the promotion of educational activities in Bengal and the parts surrounding it.<sup>5</sup> The other societies from different Countries of Europe which were established for imparting education these were protestant Lutheran Missionary Society, Basel Missionary Society etc.

The period experienced the development of educational system in the area. The students of University of Calcutta were required to be taught in English in order to pass the matriculation examinations. After matriculation examination the students were required to study, two years intermediate courses and another two years to pass Bachelor of Arts degree.<sup>6</sup> In the year 1882 a commission was appointed to review the system of education during the period of study. It was revealed from the report of education commission that elementary form of education was neglected because of the importance given to higher education. The commission also recommended that Primary education should in future have an exclusive claim on the local educational fund and should have large claim on provincial revenues. School boards were brought in to being to control an administer of new resources.<sup>7</sup>

Lord Curzon was among the pioneers who took some steps for the improvement of Colleges and High Schools in Bengal and other places.<sup>8</sup> This initiative was taken in Calcutta University and were implemented in other places. In the year 1919, Sadler Commission was appointed to study the whole questions of University Commission.<sup>9</sup>

Two separate Universities in Banaras and Aligarh were established in the year 1919 and in the course the other Universities were also established in several parts of India. The Montague Chelmsford reforms were designed to develop self-government.

In Bengal lot of development took place in the field of higher education where Lord Dalhousie founded Presidency College in 1855 in which Hindu College was also incorporated.<sup>10</sup> From 1855 to 1882 a few more colleges were founded with private donations but under definite government management. Saint Xavier's College and Metropolitan College were started in 1862 and 1869 respectively.<sup>11</sup> The most important development taken place in the context of education during this period was that the colleges were not only located in the capital city, but were widely spread in the mufassil towns.<sup>12</sup> A lot of development must have taken place in the field of education from 1882 to 1902 as Ripon College (1884), Bangabasi College (1887), Central College (1896) and the St. Paul's Cathedral Missions College (1899) were established.<sup>13</sup> A lot of Colleges were established under the patronage of private management in both Calcutta and mufassil towns.

It is evident from the statistics that there were near about 3,000 University students in 1882 in Bengal out of which 2/3 of the students studied in different government colleges. The number of University students rose to 8,000 out of which not less than 2,000 were in different government colleges.<sup>14</sup> The number of students in arts colleges in Bengal were increase by over 6,000 from 1907 to 1912.<sup>15</sup> The number of students who studied over here were numbered 4626 from Bengal proper and the rest from the newly created province of east Bengal. It is very important to note that the Bengal had near about 1/2 of the total number of English schools to the rest of India.<sup>16</sup> In 1917 Bengal had near about 35.8% of all secondary schools in India and 35.9% of all secondary students and had a school for every 28.5 square miles.<sup>17</sup> In 1921 the total number of literates in Bengal proper were 3.5%.<sup>18</sup> The introduction of Bengal Primary Education Bill in 1928 by Nawab Musaraf Hossain, the then education minister of Bengal on August 9, 1928 was a solid step forward towards the spread of Primary education among the masses of Bengal.<sup>19</sup> Bengal Primary Education Bill of 1930 was passed on August 26, 1930.<sup>20</sup> The Report of the Public Instruction of 1938 suggest that total number of students in all types of schools were 3141856. The survey of education in Bengal during 1835-1947 reveals the fact that the primary education was progressive and was strikingly very high and modern and secular education was flourishing gradually in secondary level. With the foundation of Eden College and Lady Brabourne College in 1939 institutional education among Bengali women shown steady progress.

District Birbhum also had a long tradition of the system of indigenous education and it had great amount of people who patronized the system of indigenous and vernacular education during 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Zamindars of Hetampur and Kundala patronized different kinds of institutions who in the course greatly contributed the progress of education. Several Tols and Chatuspathis were established by these local

Land Lords and several Maktabas and Madrasahs were also established by the Nawabs of Rajnagar and it is quite evident from the report of Adam specially Adam's third report of 1838.

Rameshchandra Mitra has written that Adam came across 56 Tols in Birbhum District. The onerous Character of Tols study is borne out of the fact that students entered the school between the ages of 9-15 and stayed on till 30-35.<sup>22</sup> District Birbhum had well development system of indigenou education. According to Adam's Third Report on Vernacular education of 1838 that District Birbhum had 544 schools out of which near about 407 schools imparted education in Bengali, 5 imparted education in Hindi, 56 in Sanskrit, 71 in Persian, 2 in English and one was specially designed for girls.<sup>23</sup> The teachers received very meagre amount of salary and according to William Adam, "It thus appears that 401 teachers received in all Rs-1297-4-9 averaging to each Rs – 3-3-9 per month".<sup>24</sup> On several occasions the courtyards of the house, the Baithakhanas of the house, the Shops, the Verandas, the Temple premises were used as a place for imparting education.<sup>25</sup>

The total numbers of students in these vernacular schools were 6,383 out of which 232 were Muslims.<sup>26</sup> Similarly during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was huge existence of Perso-Arabic system of education. There were around 71 Persian schools and 2 Arabic schools in the District. In each of the schools, one teacher was engaged to impart education in the District out of which 66 were Muslims and 5 were Hindus. In 2 Arabic schools, the teachers were Muslims. Most of the schools were established in the houses of the riches, in the Baithakhanas, in the Cuchery houses and many of them were attached with the Mosques. There were 485 students who received education in these Persian schools out of which 245 were Hindus and 240 were Muslims.<sup>27</sup>

The report imparted by William Adam suggest the fact that District Birbhum had well developed system of vernacular education and also the Perso-Arabic system of education .With the decline of the political power of the independent Bengal Nawabates and with the change of political condition of the Muslims of the district on the lines of the Bengal, the established system of education de-generated to the lowest end. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century specially during 1871, the Muslims of the district started showing interest towards education.

A large number of schools were established in Birbhum where Hindu and Muslims both received education. During the period of George Campbell primary education received great impetus from the inhabitants of the district. In the year 1872 there were near about 129 government and government aided schools where 445 students received education.<sup>28</sup> From 1850-1900 11schools were established where the students from Hindu and Muslim community received education.<sup>7</sup> Birbhum Zila School was established in 1851 and received its affiliation from Calcutta University as High School in 1857. Barhra High School was established in 1858 and received the

affiliation from Calcutta University as High School in 1931. Similarly Hetampur Raj H.E School, Hetampur and Bolpur H.E School, Bolpur were established in the year 1869 and 1878 respectively and received affiliation from the Calcutta University as high school in 1872 and 1878 respectively.<sup>29</sup> Rivers Thomson Girls High School, Suri was established in 1884 and received affiliation from the Calcutta University as high school in 1941. Similarly Rai Bahadur Sedmal Dalmia High School, Dubrajpur was established in 1885 and received affiliation from the Calcutta University as high school in 1929. Rampurhut and Chandpara High Schools were established in 1886 and 1890 respectively. Shivchandra High School of Kirnahar was established in 1895 and received affiliation from Calcutta University as High School in 1898. Rampurhut Girls High School and Paikar High School were established in the year 1900 and both of the institutions received affiliation from Calcutta University as High School in the year 1928 and 1929 respectively.<sup>30</sup>

Among all the institutions of the district, Birbhum Zila School played an important role in imparting education to all students of the district. It is evident from the report prepared by Banwari Lal Roy in the book, "History of Birbhum Zila School" that 135 students are admitted in the school in 1856 and they had to pay tuition fees for receiving instruction in the school. Mr M.Gregory, the English man was appointed as Headmaster in 1854 with a minimum salary of RS-150 per month.<sup>31</sup> Babu Ummeschandra Ghosh was appointed as second Master in 1851 with the salary of RS 60 per month.<sup>32</sup> Similarly Babu Gurudas Chatterjee was appointed as the third Master with the salary of RS 30 per month.<sup>33</sup> In the year 1882 Babu Ambikacharan Mukherjee was appointed as the Principal of the school and he continued his position up to 1898. As far as the available records Babu Haridas Mukherjee was the Principal of the School and stayed in the same position and was instrumental for the reconstruction of the school. He was also instrumental in the reconstruction of the Muslim hostel. During this period the total numbers of students in the school were 295 out of which 250 were Hindus and 44 were Muslims.<sup>34</sup> It does provide with an idea that the school had some substantial contribution in the development of modern education in the District.

#### References:

1. *Pathsalas*- Elementary schools of learning in Indian languages.
2. *Tols*- Schools of higher learning for instruction in logic, Rhetoric and Vedic literature.
3. *Chatuspatis*- Elementary schools of learning through domestic instructions.
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5. *Ibid.*, p.116
6. A.K. Keay., *A History of Education in India*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Oxford University Press, 1964, p.205
7. *Ibid.*, p.206

8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Dr.Md. Shamim Firdous., *Education in India during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century: A Study*, Conscientia, Vol.I, Academic Journal, Krishnagar Government College, Krishnagar, Nadia, June, 2011, p.93
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*p.94
13. *Ibid.*
14. 6<sup>th</sup> *Quinquennial Report, Review of Education in India, 1907-1912*, Vol. III, p.224
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. 7<sup>th</sup> *Quinquennial Report, Review of Education in India, 1912-1917*, Vol. I, p.85
18. *Census of India 1921, Bengal, Vol. V, Part-I*, p.306
19. *Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol. XLI. No-II*,PP.241-242, Date-17.03.1933
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Mitra, Rameshchandra., *The History Of Bengal (1757-1905)*,editor N.K. Sinha, University of Calcutta,p.432
23. Adams, William., 3<sup>rd</sup> *Report, Report on Vernacular Education*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. O, Mally, L.S.S., *Bengal District Gazetteer, Birbhum*, printed by Government of West Bengal, 1996,p.112
29. Majumder, Durgadas., *Bengal District Gazetteer, Birbhum, 1975*,p.449
30. *Ibid.*
31. Roy, Banwary Lal., *History of Birbhum Zila School, 1929*, Suri, Birbhum,p.48
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*