

Allan Octavian Hume's Role In The Development of Elementary Education in Etawah

Abstract

Allan Octavian Hume, the father figure of Indian National Congress, an amateur ornithologist, passionate horticulturist and a socio-political reformer was born at St. Mary Cray Kent in 1829 and came to India in 1849 as a young Civil servant and joined the Bengal Civil Service at Etawah in the North Western Provinces. During his long tenure of around ten years in the district Hume took various significant reformative measures like improving health and sanitation facilities, developing infrastructure, initiating self rule in the modern democratic fashion, out of these many, I have humbly tried to take up one of his major concerns as a topic of my research paper i.e. development of elementary education in this comparatively backward area of the North Western Provinces.

Keywords: Etawah, Halkabandi School, Tehsil, Public Library.

Introduction

From Hume's perspective a sound elementary education system would lay the foundation for India's material development and be the instrument of its moral regeneration by ultimately eradicating the social evils such as infanticide, the inferior status of women, child marriages.⁽²⁾ In his definitive educational statement of September 1859 defining his ideals of education for Indians he stated: "the object of the education with which we have to deal is to prepare youth first for the discharge of their duties as citizens and second for the exercise of their functions as producers and enjoyers of wealth"⁽³⁾.

Aim of the Study

1. To highlight role of A.O Hume in the development of primary education in etawah in 1856.
2. The type of elementary education system proposed by Hume is discussed like Halkabandi school and also to highlight the vision of Hume in setting up public library at Etawah in order to spread elementary education in this city.

A brief observation of the situation made him realize that elementary education was one of the most neglected issues in the recent years. With an estimated population of over 5,50,000 the district had seven government supported tahsili schools and 77 traditional indigenous schools with twice the number of students. The experiment in funding village primary schools was failing, as the voluntary funding principle was ignored and Zamindars were forced to pay contributions.⁽⁴⁾ According to his March 30, 1859 report there was an urgent need to adopt a liberal attitude towards education. But he believed indigenous schools would not be able to serve this purpose. His goal was to supersede these institutions "by more numerous and better schools of our own" or as he described it "establish new and comparatively good village schools and the majority of the old ones will disappear quietly as mists when the sun rises"⁽⁵⁾

His first effort in this regard was to promote the *Halkabandi school system* in Etawah in 1856. His efforts were the results of Colonial policy to educate the natives, this story started with Charles Grant who was an officer of British East India Company.⁽⁶⁾ His ideas impressed a number of Britishers, out of them Wilber Force was one, who advocated his ideas due to which, article 43 of 1813 act was passed in House of Commons to promote the educational system in India.⁽⁷⁾ A. O. Hume's experiments in vernacular education were preceded by the pioneering initiatives taken by James Thompson when the latter was the governor of NWP (1843-53.)⁽⁸⁾ In a detailed report dated 21st January 1857, Mr. Hume describes, the circumstances under which he initiated his system of free schools in



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Etawah: in February last I received semi-official permission to attempt the establishment of Elementary Free Schools, to be supported by a voluntary cess, contributed by the landed proprietors. After no little opposition had been overcome by patient argument and perseverance, a large majority of the Zemindars of Pergunnah Etawah consented to the levy of the cess, and they having formally declared the same at a great public meeting held for the purpose, and paid up the first installment of their subscription, 32 schools were opened on the first of April, in the more important villages of the Pergunnah." These proceedings were approved by the Lieutenant-Governor, and subsequently by the Court of Directors. Encouraged by this auspicious beginning, this system (known as the "Hulqabundee" system) was gradually extended to the whole of the District, and by the first of January 1857, 181 schools had been established, with 5186 scholars (including 2 girls).⁽⁹⁾ This system was being run on the voluntary rate paid by the landowners and this constituted an extra tax in the area amounting to one percent of the government's land revenue assessment demand.⁽¹⁰⁾ This system was inspired by the ideas expressed in the 1854 Wood's dispatch Act in which new educational policy was introduced in Colonial India. According to this a new voluntary paid cess system was suggested for the promotion of schooling in India. Hume knew that it was not enough to fund district education because the funds raised by the voluntary cess were inadequate. So the beginning was made in a humble but effective way: "Only three buildings and these 'cutcha' ones were erected for the schools. At present these are chiefly located in some commodious apartment of the Zemindar (if he is popular) or in some till-lately ruined house, repaired after a fashion by the villagers. 181 schools teachers were found (8 on Rs. 6 per month, 39 on Rs. 5, and 134 on Rs. 4), many of them "for the pay they receive very able men " and detailed rules were printed in Hindee and Oordoo, prescribing the course of study, the duties of teachers, and the arrangements to secure a strict and consistent supervision.⁽¹¹⁾ In response to this call he prepared a school management system in which practical control of all the district schools was to be vested primarily with the district officer, The Education department being responsible for regular inspections designed to test the progress of the schools and see that the rules in force were observed. His planning establishes him as a visionary officer who was genuinely concerned about the development of education in the area under his control. He himself bestowed much care and attention on the central Anglo- vernacular schools.

On the 1st of August, 1856 Mr. Hume opened at Etawah a Central English and vernacular school which was also locally funded and had some 100 scholars by the end of the year.⁽¹²⁾ His efforts suffered a brief set-back during the 1857 revolt but after the end of the revolt Hume resumed his educational policy and programme. (Resuming these efforts was also probably the result of the support of his loyal Indian friends to save his life during the mutiny.) He writes when I returned to the district in

January 1858, I only found 31 schools, whose teachers had remained at their posts throughout the disturbances.⁽¹³⁾ To start a new, in 1858 Hume made a local committee with the motive to increase the number of pupils attending schools, under this arrangement the tehsildar, the deputy collector and the deputy inspector of education were made the ex officio members and Hume himself was the honorary chairman. In September 1859 Hume noted with satisfaction that the number of students had increased from 70 to 250 during the first six months of its operation. Hopeful with the progress he drew up a design for a very fine new building for the central school which later on came to be known by his name Hume High school. This building had one centrally located hall, one dome shaped arch and six doors.⁽¹⁴⁾ This central hall was built representing the first alphabet of his name 'H'. Hume also organized a scholarship scheme to enable 12 scholars, eight from halkabandi, tahsili and indigenous schools in the mufassal and four from Etawah town to complete their education at the central school.⁽¹⁵⁾

His another idea to promote the cause of education was the establishment of a basic public library system for the district. He wrote a letter to Comr. Agra regarding 'public library system proposed for Etawah district on 28 June, 1856. The letter is well recorded in SWOAH (Selected Writing's of A.O. Hume) vol-1 this letter stated that "*I have the honor to inform you that ever since I took charge of this district, I have been endeavoring to establish public libraries in all the principal towns of the district. Public libraries could not I found be maintained and I therefore consider that their amalgamation with Patwari Book Clubs, such as were suggested by the Board and approved by the His Honor the Lieutenant governor, would probably give to both the institutions a stability that singly neither could ever have gained.....*" (pg. no.63)

Hume had also started a printing press for books for the Halkabandi schools with the name Etawah educational press that published the occasional journal People's Friend sent to all the schools in the district and also Zamindars and patwaris.⁽¹⁹⁾

It was the result of the sincere and honest efforts made by Hume that elementary education on modern grounds reached a good height during his tenure. By the time he left Etawah the number of schools had reached from 32 in 1856 to 142 in 1863-64 with a large number of students attending the schools.⁽²⁰⁾ The greatness of his efforts does not lie in the increment in the number of schools established or increasing number of students during his time, but in the circumstances in which he made it happen. As per A history of secondary education in Uttar Pradesh by Brahandeo Mishra "The educational activities in the NW Provinces were greatly hampered rather paralysed by the upheaval of 1857. In consequences of the prohibitory rules of the home government imposed after the upheaval, the education expenditure had come to a stand-still till 1861." (page 208-209)

Conclusion

Despite these conditions it is pleasing to observe that his efforts for the development of free elementary education in his area were in no way less than the present democratic independent governments of the country. His idea of amalgamating public and private support for the promotion of education is yet sound and effective.

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