

# Social and Educational Structure in Bengal during Colonial Period



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## Abstract

Colonial rule in British India was more significant regarding the discussion of various issues in Indian history like political changes, social mobility, economic structure, educational scenario etc. Bengal was a core zone for reflecting British rule in India; it may say that colonial administration had been established in Bengal under the primary stage of British rule in India. British colonial period was not only important for changing political perspectives but also the period was more relevant for constructing a modern society in India. Education was another aspect in British India which had been emerged in new forms and developed during this significant period. Social reformations, reconstruction of society, change of social structure and changing nature of social status, social dynamic etc. were major characteristics during Colonial period in Bengal regarding the social issue. Nature of education, method of education, field of study, educational institutions etc. were huge changed during British period in Bengal.

In this paper the author would like to analyze the social structure and educational conditions in Bengal during British period and how education performed a magnificent role for constructing a new approach of society in Bengal. This study will also be conducted the interrelationship between social status and educational conditions of the people in Bengal during Colonial period.

**Keywords:** Social Structure, Educational Conditions, Colonial Period, Social Change.

## Introduction

British Colonial Rule in India had started in the last phase of eighteenth century although in this time East India Company established his rule in different part of India such as Bengal, Madras, and Mysore and so on. The first hundred years of Colonial period British Government had not interfered in Company's rule in India. Bengal was most important and valuable to British East India Company. In 1765 English East India Company had gained the right of revenue collection from Bengal, Bihar and Odisha and Company entered in Bengal politics and indirectly they established Company's administration in Bengal. British East India Company not only entered into Bengal politics but also interfered in social, cultural, religious and educational issues. From the beginning of British Colonial rule in Bengal society was very much difficult and directed by many dogmatic rituals and there was no social mobility. Higher class controlled the society and may be existed their social phenomenon. Therefore education was somehow controlled by higher class and various religious approaches. There was no scientific, modern education, just study the religious text only. In this situation of the society and education in Bengal, British Colonial rule had been established in Bengal and gradually started to reform society and Education under the British ruler and Bengali reformers. In this paper the author intends to analyze the social and educational conditions in Bengal during British Colonial period.

## Review of Literature

Several books, Literature studies were either written or organized by many authors, scholar & historians in the different issues Colonial period in Bengal such as British Rule in Bengal by Mithi Mukherjee (1991), Masks of Conquest: Literacy study and British rule in India by Gauri Viswanathan (2014) expressed her idea about the introduction of English studies in India under British rule and how it was an effective form of political control abetting voluntary cultural assimilation. She also transferred her idea on curricular study of English, contexts of imperialism, translationism and globalization in which the discipline first articulated its mission. Nemai Sadhan Boses (1976) Indian awakening and Bengal, R.C. Majumdar (1960) Glimpses of Bengal in the nineteenth Century, Aly Fouad Ahmeds

(1965) Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal 1818-1835 discussed on some aspects of social change which took place in Bengal during early part of the nineteenth century and also reform movements in Hinduism and Indian Islam, the press, the growth of education, the rise of the nationalist movement, the growth of Muslim separatism and evolution of British Indian Administration and policy. Rajat Kanta Rays (1975) Rammohan Roy and the process of modernization in India, Bimanbehari Majumdar's (1934) History of political thought from Rammohan to Dayanda (1821-84), Sushil Kumar Des (1962) Bengali Literature in nineteenth Century, 1757-1857, Joan G. Ronald's (2018) The Jewish Communities of India.

#### **Objectives of Study**

1. To study the social structure of the people of Bengal during colonial period.
2. To examine the social conditions of the people during British period in Bengal.
3. To study the educational conditions of people in Bengal during colonial period.
4. To analyze the interrelationship between social status and educational conditions of the people in Bengal during colonial period.

#### **Social Structure in Bengal during Colonial Period**

Since the beginning of Colonial period in India, Bengal was included under British administration then the social structure of Bengal was too much complex and society was influenced by many dogmatic concepts and rituals. In concerned period two cultures such Hindu and Muslim were existed and these two different thoughts moving around the society in India and Bengal also. Various issues were presented in Bengal society under Hinduism like caste system, somehow untouchability, polygamy, inequality, harassment of women which were the basic components of society in eighteenth-nineteenth century Bengal. After the establishment of British rule in Bengal, the nature of society had been changed gradually for the progressing attitude of some British rulers and so many Bengali reformers also. The social base of this quest which has generally, but not altogether appropriately been called the renaissance, was the newly emerging middle class and the traditional as well as westerns educated intellectuals. The socio-cultural regeneration in nineteenth century India was occasioned by the colonial presence, but not created by it (*Bipan Chandra, 1989, chapter-06*). Social reformation was another important issue regarding the discussion on social structure and social conditions in Bengal during Colonial period.

Raja Rammohan Roy was a Bengali social reformer who was prepared to concede the possible existence of the other world mainly due to its utilitarian value. Akshay Kumar Dutta and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar were agnostics who refused to be drawn into any discussion on supernatural questions. Asked about the about the existence of God, Vidyasagar quipped that he had no time to think about God, since there was much to be done on earth (*Bipan Chandra, 1989, chapter-06*). Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Swami Vivekanda traced on the Secularism and Spirituality to take cognizance of material conditions

of human existence which were reflected on the contemporary society of Bengal. Bipan Chandra (1989) in his book *Indias Struggle for Independence* mentioned that Indian Society in nineteenth century was caught in vicious web created by religious superstitions and social obscurantism.

Social conditions was very much tough in this period, the vital issue was the position of women. The birth of girl child was hopeless and unwelcome to parent and other family members. Her marriage was a burden to Parent and her widowhood was inauspicious. Martial life did not turn out to be a pleasant experience to a girl child. In Bengal an eighty year old Brahmin had as many as 200 wives. Another important factor of society in Bengal was Caste which sought to maintain a system of segregation, hierarchically ordained on the basis of ritual status. The rules and regulations of caste system in society hampered from social mobility, fostered social divisions and sapped individual initiative. The reform movements sought to create a social climate for modernization; it was realized that no society could ever make significant progress in civilization whose females were sunk to ignorance. According to Bipan Chandra (1989) if the reform movements had totally rejected the tradition, Indian society would have easily undergone a process of westernization. But the reformers were aiming a modernization rather than westernization. A blind initiation of western cultural norms was never an integral part of reform.

#### **Educational Conditions in Bengal during Colonial Period**

Education is a powerful instrument for developing every society. Early educational history of India, also Bengal was a diversity of different fields of knowledge. Education was influenced by various religious texts and customs. From early times to pre British period such issues were integrated with education like Vedic education, Buddhist education, education of epic, Smritisashtra, Dharmasashtra, Dharmasutra, in medieval period different Islamic religious text and other religious texts also. After the establishment of British rule in India the nature of education had been changed gradually in India and also Bengal. Major characteristics of education system of Bengal in Colonial period were western education; establishment of new educational institutions, study of modern subjects, certain number of people achieved it.

Many factors were responsible for establishing and developing western education in Bengal. Such factors were role of Christian Missionaries for establishing and enhancing logical and modern education, contribution of Bengali reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, somehow initiative British Governor General like Lord William Bentinck and Lord Hardinge and so on, necessary of Bengali Educator for enhancing British administration in India and Bengal also.

At first Christian Missionaries of Bengal were remarkable for origin and developing western education in Bengal. They established various English School in Calcutta such as in 1720 A.D. established

an English School in Calcutta by Revarend Belami, 1731 A.D. established a school by the society for the promotion of Indians and an another school was established by Kayenarander in 1758. In 1800 A.D. William Carry, Marshman, and Ward established Sreerampur Mission for establishing Western education. In 1810 Marshman established Calcutta Benevolent Institution for learning of indigenious Christian child and also set up a residential school in Sreerampur. For the developing of education in Bengal there was no ample example of cooperation between Christian Missionaries and English East India Company. Governor General Warren Hastings established Calcutta Madrasa in 1781 and also in 1791 Jonathan Dankan established Sanskrit College in Benaras.

Another important issue regarding education system in British Colonial period was Charter act 1813. Article 43 of Charter act 1813 mentioned that a sum of not less than one lac of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of sciences among the inhabitants of British territories in India".

An important personality regarding the development of western education in Bengal and India also was Raja Rammohan Roy who understands the relevance of western education and how it was important for development of a country and to construct a developed Nation. In 1817 Hindu college was established by the contribution of David Hare and Raja Rammohan Roy in Calcutta. In 1831 report of General Committee of Public Instruction for assessment of Hindu College assured that "A command of English language and familiarity with English literature and science had been acquired to an excellence rarely equaled by any school in Europe".

Women education was another important issue regarding educational structure in Bengal during Colonial Period. In 1820 Female Juvenile Society was established by the British Women for establishment and support of Bengali Female Schools. Others important society regarding women education in Bengal were The Calcutta Baptist Female School Society in 1832, Ladies Society for Native Female Education in Calcutta and its vicinity in 1824, Ladies Society for Native Female Education in 1824 etc. Another important Personality regarding women education was Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the first Secretary of Calcutta Female School. After the contribution of Bethune Calcutta Female School transferred into Bethune School which was also transferred into Bethune College in 1877.

In 1829 William Bentinck assured to General Committee of Public Instruction that "It is the wish and admitted policy of the British Govt. to render its own language gradually and eventually the language of public business throughout the country, and that it will omit no opportunity of giving of every reasonable and practical degree of encouragement to the execution of this project" (As quoted in Trevelyan). Court of Directors had agreed the education policy of Bentinck.

According to Syed Nurulla and J.P. Naik (1951) the age from charter act 1813 to Woods despatch was a period of controversies rather than of achievements. In Colonial period Despatch of Charles Wood (1854) was remarkable recommendations for origin and developing modern education in India and Bengal also. Woods Despatch (1854) mentioned " It is one of our sacred duties to be the means, as far as in us lies of conferring upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge and which India may, under providence, derive from her connection with England". Stanely Depatch, 1857 another important despatch for developing western education in Bengal. In 1882 first Indian Education Commission was set up by W.W. Hunter for assessment of Woods despatch. Commission had recommended regarding various issues like primary education, secondary education, and also higher education in India. Another important education commissions during Colonial period in India were Indian University Commission (1902), Sadler Commission (1917), Hartog committee (1928), Central Advisory Board of Education (1921), Sopru Committee (1934), Waddha Planning (1937), sergeant Planning (1944) etc. which were also significant for developing Educational Structure in Bengal during British Colonial Period.

#### **Conclusion**

British rule in India nearly 200 years and during this colonial phase several upheavals in the arena of social and educational system. In the history of India the colonial period thus considered as the turning point during British rule. Although there had been found several demerits of British rule in India but in socio-educational sphere some significant development had been found during the period.

At the beginning of colonial period Indian society was bounded by several conservative forces such as untouchability, caste system, religious customs, polygamy, and torture of women and economically misbalanced people. Similarly rate of literacy was very low and only a section of people had the scope to receive education during colonial period British rulers were able to remove a number of pseudo-cultural system from Indian society. Due to the spread of education Indian people started the work of social reformation and reorganization of social system. Development of education enlightened them about the serious draw backs of social conservativeness. Thus we can find the enhancement rate of literacy and social development end of British period. Therefore the analysis leads to conclude that since colonial period and during colonial period, Bengal received Renessau in different areas of socio-educational conditions.

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