

Education: The Role of the District Board in Colonial Bankura: 1890-1945



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Abstract

British, the colonizers were the first to provide us with the tools of modern education. They implemented their policies in the colonial India on the upper level to be filtered downwards. This is called downward filtration theory which was responsible for neglect and poor development in any field i.e. education, health, sanitation etc. Actually the newly arisen middle class was become the instrument in the hands of the Britishers to get the understanding of India and to provide the Indians with the facilities. So happened in respect of education that the middle class Indians were given education for spreading this downwards. But they could not implement it for the lack of funds and cooperation from the Governments and they also failed to make the indigenous people out the utility of these developments. About 700 municipalities were constituted till 1900 and Bankura was one of them to be declared as municipality in 1869. District Boards, Local Boards were set up at the Sub-divisional Level and union committees for groups of villages under the Bengal Local Self-Govt. Act of 1885. Some elected members were given the responsibility to look after education and other public services in the District boards. The Bankura District Board took this responsibility on its shoulders and stepped ahead in the field of developing education at primary, middle and higher level. A micro study is being made in brief on the development of education and the role played by the district board of Bankura by using the primary sources unexplored yet.

Keywords: District Boards education, municipalities, British Government

Introduction

The area and subject matter of a local and regional history are of micro approach and clearly different from the macro one, though both have the same aim – examining the past in its true chronicle and logical sequence. This paper proposes to probe into the process of educational advancement of Bankura as a peripheral district of the south west Bengal during the colonial rule. The forces which worked behind this development were examined here. The District Boards were set up to bring out the development of education and left with the meager funds to run the education in poor manners. When the elites or bhadraloks spent their own money and donated their properties for the sake of education, the government were looking towards the taxation of the local bodies for making profits and paying less attention to the education. With the help of primary sources this problem is defined and a real picture of the time has been given here.

Objectives

To study the primary sources and presenting the real picture of progress of education in a district of Bengal. This study is different from the traditional studies done in this field. How the people reacted to the actions that were taken by the Government as well as the district boards. There was a clear conflict between the efforts of the Government and of the Board.

Review of Literature

A number of books have been written on the development of education in India and also in the different regions of India on macro level. But these works do not deal with the problems faced by the local people while meeting with the needs for the development of education in the district. I have used the primary sources to bring in the light the indigenous efforts. Why do the local people donate land, money and time for this purpose? and who made all these donations what were their social status and what were their attitude towards the British government? For answering these questions the diaries, letters and education proceedings are used.

Concepts

The concept is that if the indigenous efforts were not made for the development of education it could not reach the height where it reached in those days. The efforts made by the Government were not enough and properly.

Methodology

This paper is based on the archival documents, Government reports, Census reports, contemporary newspapers, periodicals, personal letters and diaries. The method is usual method used in historical research in the field of social relations, like evaluating the relevant data, cross examining them and constructing out of them a picture of gradual development of education by the joint efforts of the locals and the government.

Paper

In 1869 Bankura was declared as a municipal district and a headquarter of British Administration with the establishment of a cantonment, before that Bishnupur was the administrative headquarters of south west Bengal. Bankura was a little known place as Holwell stated in his accounts but after the reconstitution of Jungle Mahal in 1806, Bankura a small village that was full of thorns, forests and ponds caught the eyes of the British to set up British offices here. Before the introduction of English education in India as well as in Bengal and also in Bankura, education was imparted through Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian languages in Tols, Pathshalas, Makhtabs and Madrasas, the indigenous schools. The Pathshalas were teaching reading scriptures, writing Sanskrit and elementary mathematics to meet the purpose of day to day routines¹ By introducing a new education system which would serve the interest of the British, they either ignored or curbed these traditional education centres. In 18th century Charles Grant was the first person to introduce education through English language and this got impetus from Maculay's Minute and the resolution of William Bentinck on education.²

In the first few decades of 19th century the education which was being adopted by the people of Calcutta and the interest of the Government to spread the education in Calcutta, Krishnanagar and Burdwan and other parts of Hooghly was not noticed in colonial Bankura³ Bankura was a mile away from adopting new methods of education and accepting colonial modernity. In fact aboriginal tribes made the main part of Bankura's population who were ignorant of any modern movement regarding education in Bengal. In 1820 Walter Hamilton wrote about Bankura, "The name of this district implies a waste territory and backward stage of civilization". Actually, historical facts are not telling the story of the commencement and growth of English education in this peripheral town which cannot remain untouched by the tides of time. The question remains who was the introducer of colonial system of education in Bankura. Harchundra Ghosh who came as the Sadar Ameen of Bankura, was the member of Young Bengal Group in Calcutta, became the torch bearer of the development of this region. He surveyed and published his report a topographical and Statistical Sketch of Bankoorah' in

1838. He wrote that apart from Missionaries who were mainly establishing and organizing some schools of vernacular languages, the native people also planned to introduce western education by setting up an English school, but it was nipped in the bud in want of funds which came from local subscriptions⁴ In 1846 the introduction of Zilla School was a step forward towards the expansion of western education⁵ Samachar Darpan revealed that a person named Hiralal Dubey founded a girls' school in Bankura town⁶. But these efforts were not enough for the growth of modern education. Gastre report in 1863 says that "Education is very little attended to. Few indeed can do more than write their names even in the towns. In the villages education may be said to be entirely neglected⁷. In Bankura Bishnupur and Sonamukhi towns draws the students in the schools mainly from businessmen's families and had learnt only elementary mathematics and vernacular languages from their teachers or gurumahasayas to meet the business demands. These traditional teachers were paid poorly and were not acquainted to the modern concept of education⁸ English education got its momentum after 1870. Public Instruction Report gives us a real picture of the time that there were 7 Middle English Schools, 2 High Vernacular Schools, 7 Middle Vernacular Schools, 107 Primary Schools and 3 Girls' School in Bankura District. Apart from it contemporary police reports recorded the existence of other 427 schools in the district at the same time. Hunter mentioned that these schools might be non-aided institutions⁹

After 1870 the growth of English education accelerated positively, but number of students was decreasing and this became a serious concern for the organizers. The student strength was very low in many schools. This problem severely affected the Zilla School. The headmaster mentioned three causes which led to the decreasing enrolment in the schools, 1) Wesleyan Mission founded a new High English school in Bankura, 2) a fear of spreading epidemics such as cholera, chicken pox in the town and 3) a rumour that Bankura might be omitted from the list of districts of Bengal.¹⁰ The decreasing strength of students were found in surrounding towns: Sonamukhi, Kotulpur and Eastern part of Bankura. These towns were passed under the jurisdiction of Burdwan which led to the lessening roll strength in the schools. Manbhoom the newly merged district in western Bankura was not ready for accepting English education and treading on the traditional lines. In this part of Bankura education was imparted effectively in Chhatna. (in 1872-73 a student qualified an examination for Minor Scholarship)¹¹ The education was so costly in the Middle English Schools that people were not able to afford it. This cost was 19-5 rupees a year and the granted aid from the Government was only 7-5 rupees. The poor student could not join these schools.¹² Campbell, Policy, regarding Primary education was introduced during 1870-74, accelerate the primary education with the foundation of more colleges. The middle and lower middle class people of the society were benefitted by these schools but the elites were not getting

education there. They were very much fond of having education in the institution which was imparting education through downward filtration theory. Bhudev Mukherjee was the pioneer to conceptualize this type of education. Campbell's policy was rejected because of slowing down the speed of primary education¹³ the poor financial support of Government primarily hampered the progress of education. In 1873-74 Government provided with the assistance of Rs.11940¹⁴ only, which was one- third of the total requirement i.e.Rs.29,800 for running aided schools¹⁵. Thus the future of education in Bankura was depend on the indogenous efforts of the local people who were not aware for having education ,in absence of the adequate Government funds.

Progress of Education in Bankura from 1881 to 1947

The Jurisdiction of Bankura was expended by merging some towns from neighbouring districts, and it became a district finally in 1881¹⁶,the positive rise on the graph of education was seen. In the next twenty years the number of schools in Bankura increased from 1390 to 1520 and number of registered students rose up from 31,789 to 40,002¹⁷. 1891 onwards there was an unnoticeable rise in the number of schools as well as of students. This scene was common till 1912. 10 more Middle English Schools were founded but the number of Middle Vernacular Schools and the number of students of these schools showed a rapid fall, it was matter of grave concern. We find only 13 Vernacular Schools with 740 students in the district in 1920-21 but this number went down to 4 to 201.This was the sign of Governments negligence towards vernacular education, as it could not create people for their service and a few local people were showing their interest in this field . People were very much interested in taking education in vernacular schools as statistics found about Burdwan proved that the increase in the numbers of schools there were 81 to 90¹⁸ The condition of education at upper primary and lower primary level was of serious concern. At that time only 30 Upper Primary schools were in the District, there was an increase in the number of students but the infrastructure of the schools was not enough.The Lower Primary School increased slowly after 1912. The year 1901 showed a slight fall in the number of schools, but the number of students remained the same.This progress in education was not satisfactory as no major achievement attained in the sphere of education in the last 20 years, also the pace of the growth of education was very slow in comparison to Burdwan a neighbour district.

No attention was paid to spread the education among women and tribes in the district of Bankura .Education among the Hindu women got some impetus .only 200 female among 1000 females were acquiring elementary education in1901. Bishnupur subdivision was ahead of other parts in providing education to women. But Muslims were far behind to receive modern education. Illiteracy was pervaded in the inner domain of Muslim women of them 20 or less than it could be able to write their name only .Exceptionally in Indas 330 Hindu and 132

Muslim women of total female population acquired education .Only 10 women among 1000 women were got educated in 1921¹⁹ Tribal communities constituted only 10% of the total population, they were fully illiterate and ignorant of the modern education. Some social restrictions kept them away from education. At lower primary level only 390 students among 24765 were belong to tribes and not a single tribal female could write her name.

The missionaries took steps towards the growth of college education from1903 onwards and became popular among the elite people of other districts. Even in 1920s 50% of the college students were not of Bankura district. The college was feeded by the scholars from other districts of Bengal.

The elites of this area were very much interested in spreading English education for their own cause as having English education was a status symbol and it also serve the purpose of the British who liked such type of Indians whom they made the ladders for their own ascent.These elites were the policy makers who were holding chairs in the district boards. The government also tried with their scanty funds,as no government ever want to spent much money for the non beneficial services like education and for the neglection by the Government this sector could not go beyond the hopes. The Common People also kept themselves away from these new trend of Education till 1920 and after that a number of indigenous schools were set up to serve the cause of education and then the speed of education accelerated but slowly,and got its full speed after independence in free India.

Conclusion

The missionaries took steps towards the growth of college education from1903 onwards and became popular among the elite people of other districts. Even in 1920s 50% of the college students were not of Bankura district. The college was feeded by the scholars from other districts of Bengal. The elites of this area were very much interested in spreading English education for their own cause as having English education was a status symbol and it also serve the purpose of the British who liked such type of Indians whom they made the ladders for their own ascent.These elites were the policy makers who were holding chairs in the district boards. The government also tried with their scanty funds,as no government ever want to spent much money for the non beneficial services like education and for the neglection by the Government this sector could not go beyond the hopes. The Common People also kept themselves away from these new trend of Education till 1920 and after that a number of indigenous schools were set up to serve the cause of education and then the speed of education accelerated but slowly,and got its full speed after independence in free India.

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