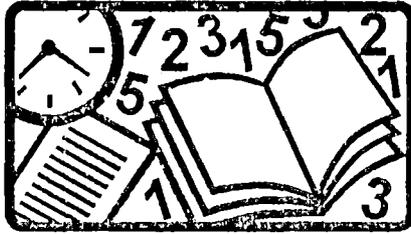


Chapter: 7



Conclusion

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A detailed enquiry into the system of education in colonial Bengal in the three selected districts of Eastern Bengal – Rajshahi, Rangpur and Pabna as case studies has revealed several hitherto unexplored phenomena thereby extending the frontiers of our knowledge and information. It is in the background of colonialism that the study has been conducted, i.e. colonial political control which capsulated colonial interest, policies, ideas, ideologies, culture and of course colonial state and administrative institutes. The post colonial discourse taking into account the colonial design of cultural subversion, colonial subject making, mimicry hybridity syndrome, the quest for authenticity has also been explored. Major transformations were introduced in the field of administrative economy and social formation and structures. As Arif Seal has pointed out British rule in India became the most spectacular case of imperialism in modern times. As the British rule was first established in Bengal it was here that the impact of the western spirit was first felt. Though initially aloof it gradually introduced reformative measures in politics, economy and society to sustain its colonial domination. It was not the East India companies policy however to spread education among the Indians till 1813. In that year by the Charter Act the East India Company was given the responsibility of educating the Indians. Gradually the Christian missionaries who became closely associated with British imperialism in India were induced in the scene and permitted to establish schools in European model.

Education, specially English education was henceforth to become one of the tools of control sustenance and subjugation of the vast Indian empire, as well as a legitimizing

agency for conveying the values of the ruling class. It was to become the *modus operandi* for the colonial system to meet the requirements of British imperial interest. With this aim in view teaching in oriental languages was replaced by English. Lord W. Bentinck and his successors took major steps to spread English through schools and colleges. The educational Council of 1842 attempted to establish English schools in each district. In 1844 came Lord Hardinges famous resolution for the development of English education. It made English compulsory qualification for Government services. The thrust obviously, was on the creation of a support group from among the Indians. In this context the district headquarters established Middle Vernacular Schools in the Moflāsail and others schools rural areas. In this way some Government aided English School and Colleges emerged in the districts of Rajshahi, Pabna and Rangpur. Though during the period between 1854-1947 the education system of those district was haphazard and un planned. Most of the educational institutions were sponsored by private personalities. Many were run without Government aid. The local zamindars used to help with land, building and finance in those institutions.

The Christian missionaries played an important role in the spreading the English education. But there main motive was to convert the Indians to Christianity, believing that the rulers and the ruled would be well communicated through the preaching of Christianity and English education. Joshua Marshman, a Baptist missionary (1813) wrote that 'the most effective way to make the British rule permanent would be to get the supports of the native people'. Missionaries were active in the districts in Rajshahi, Pabna and Rangpur but there was no religious conversion in significant number in these

districts. The reasons were simple. Being Muslim majority areas of East Bengal where people mostly lived in rural areas they were profoundly and significantly influenced by the *Mullahs* and *Moulovies*. They propagated against Christianity in mosques and madrasahs. Even the replacement of the Persian by English language in 1835 was looked upon with doubt by them. Moreover they regarded the English learning as the primary stage of conversion in Christianity. Thus missionary activities were less influential in these districts. However among the tribal people of these districts missionary influence was considerable. This was mainly due to the social welfare works conducted by them for the development of the tribal societies. The tribal pockets did provide a virgin soil for missionary activities.

All said about British colonial interests in India the question remains as to how did they look upon the Indians. Debates about the accession of political power by the British revolve round several issues of which one was the civilizing mission of the white. The British imperial colonial construct of Indians is to be traced to British imperial interest. The East as counter poised against West was seen as fragmented, divided, devoid of a universal language of the West. The concept of 'We' and 'They' underlined every activity of the British in the Indian colony.

However, as a result of prolonged contact with the British there was the rise in the Indian social context of an educated, westernized, modernized elite class. Bengal was to experience this first. The Bengali Hindus took an early and keen interest in British rule, interacting with them and offering them services. At the same time they became

involved in a critical dialogue with them and in the process developed a rich tradition of discourse, a phenomena that was unique and not to be found in other Indian communities. The growth of a hybrid culture can be located at this point. But the process did not stop here. The Hindu discourse revealed an unusual feature: the colonial rule was located and discussed in the wider context of their social regeneration. The Hindu elite started reinterpreting Indian traditions, culture, history, thought in a very creative way in response to European criticisms. They indeed borrowed ideas and institutions from the British but these were subjected to rigorous reinterpretation and analysis. They discovered that there was no way of countering the various questions, often sharp and critical, raised by their rulers, save by providing an alternative and deeper question of self-definition. How were they to do so unless they conceptualized themselves as a single homogeneous community which would ensure their collective identity? Almost all Hindu thinkers from Rammohun Roy onward laid emphasis on this crucial question of self definition. The colonial rule acquired new significance in the fact that it was like a mirror against which the Hindu could see himself with his strength as well as weakness and determine thereby who and what they were. In other words it helped him to discover his "authentic" self. This was in brief the impact and response British rule of the Hindu elite in Bengal first and then in the rest of India.

But this particular response did not bear the stamp of uniformity. In fact the Indian responses to their rule were diverse articulated at various levels both regional and communal. The Muslim awakening came late due to their apathy toward English education and their weak economic condition. A small body of politically powerful

Muslims constituted a very important part of the pre British aristocracy of India, while the bulk of them, converts from the low castes, remained poor and at the bottom of Muslim caste hierarchy. Till the last quarter of the nineteenth century they were opposed to westernization. Ultimately when they decided to come out of their self imposed isolation. They found that the Hindus were far ahead of them.² However when this realization came upon them they did contribute toward the extension of the boundary of Bengali middle class. The Mohammadan Literary Society of Abdul Luteef and Central Mohammadan Association of Syed Ameer Ali played important role to awaken the Muslim society. At the same time a large number of Muslim writers took to English education. Kazi Emdadul Haque (1882- 1926) realised its importance in Muslim society. His novel *Abdullah* (1933) underlined the importance of spreading English education in Muslim society. Najibur Rahman Sahitya Ratna (1880-1931) made a sincere effort to explain to fellow Muslims the necessity of English. The main characters of his novels namely *Anowara* (1914), *Premar Samadi* (1915) and *Goriber Meye* (1923) were the representatives of the Muslim middle class. Nurul Islam, a main character of the novel *Anowara* had established a free minor school for the poor Muslims on humanitarian ground. Some Bengali Muslims leaders realised the importance of English. They also tried to explain to their fellow Muslims that English was necessary if they wished to improve their lot. Among this part, the first Provincial Muhammedan Educational Conference was held at Rajshahi in 1904. It can be said that the main purpose of this conference was to express opinion and undertake programmes on educational matters.³

The issues of hybrid culture and the authentic self as described above in Hindu society were applicable here too but in a more restricted form in the regions of Rajshahi, Rangpur

and Pabna which were far removed from Calcutta, the throbbing centre of British activities. Westernization of the Muslims was to bear fruit in different way. The emergence of a separatist ideology initiated by the first westernized Muslim Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and further developed by the poet philosopher Sir Allahma Mohammad Iqbal was finally given shape by Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the formation of Pakistan.

But the lot of the poor agricultural masses of Eastern India remained almost unchanged few exceptions e.g. the emergence of talukdars, ijadarar, jotdar etc. as a new social class, who tried to adopt western ways in their living style. The education that was introduced by the British was alien to the country's tradition. The vast majority of the Indian population, clinging on to their traditions and customs, neither understood the language of English education nor could they afford it. To them 'hybrid culture' was an alien domain 'self definition' or discovering the authentic self was not their cup of tea.

In conclusion therefore it may be said that in the case of Rajshahi, Rangpur and Pabna western education had a limited application in the construction of the 'subject' and the colonizer's assertion authenticity. Here the problem was not the crisis of identity leading to assertive authenticity within the framework of derivative discourse. The small group of westernized Muslim intellectual did succeed eventually in imparting in the masses a different crisis of identity which led them to give active support to the partition of the country in 1947.

Notes and References:

¹. Srinivas, M.N., *Soc. & Change in Modern India* Los Angeles: 1966, p. 75.

². Srinivas, M.N., *Ibid.*, p. 73

³. Imam, Abu. 'The First Provincial Muhammadan Educational Conference at Rajshahi in 1904,' *I.B.S. Seminar*, Vol. 4, 1981, p. 399.