

Condition of Education in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Bengal-An overview

A. Condition of Education in Pre-Colonial Bengal.

In the pre-British period a typical type of education prevailed in Bengal nay India which may be considered as the indigenous system of education. The popular education prevalent in India during this period was based on the ideas and principles enshrined in Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. Education centered round the house of a teacher, variously known as Tole, Chatuspathy, Maktub, Imambara and Madrasa. The curriculum of the education system was associated with customs, languages, social values and various thoughts of the people concerned. Before the introduction of modern education the system of education was being conducted and reared by native people over the centuries. The existing system of education, in fact, continued up to the end of the Mughal rule and some of its important methods and norms remained un changed during the Colonial rule. This system of education was called indigenous education. Indigenous educational institutions were conducted and patronized by the rulers, zamindars, philanthropists and local elites¹.

Indigenous educational system may broadly be divided into two time-periods and be discussed as under : (a) Education in Ancient Bengal and (b) Education in Medieval Bengal.

(a) Education in Ancient Bengal

In the Ancient Bengal there was no use of keeping historical record in a systematic way. Consequently it is difficult to re-constructed a correct picture of education of this period. Whatever it is in a situation of insufficient data and limited sources of information the following statement is the meager, the condition of education of Bengal during the priod under consideration.

The educational system prevalent during the early part of the Aryan period in Indian subcontinent was called Brahmanical education. In this system education

was confined only in the Hindu society particularly among the Brahmins. Gradually the Aryan society was divided according to professions and with the passage of time the education became a monopoly of the Brahmins when the whole society was divided in to some division according to their social and economic position. It may be noted that the aboriginals who were graded in the fourth stage were, termed as the Shudras who had no right of education like their fellowmen who were known as the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas.

During the Aryan period the main object of education was to mould the Brahmin children into priests (religious heads). About 500 B.C Kshatriya and Vaisya children began to gain education of their own respective professions. As a result of this change in the educational field, educational institutions like parishad, tole, pathsala were built up. Pathsala did the work of primary school and the doors of the primary schools were open to all except the aboriginal and Sudra class.

In that age primary schools continued in each big village of Bengal. But no arrangement for buildings or tin sheds, as we make today were made to conduct the work of primary schools. This schools worked under trees, in temples, yards of houses or guest houses. Each school contained not more than 20 students. A teacher, taking the responsibility of conducting the school was engaged. He taught the children education and mythology. Besides these the main role of worship of gods and goddesses was one of their functions. The teachers did not have any fixed pay. He was given rent-free land or a portion of crops as the remuneration of his work.

Inspite of very narrow object of education in the Aryan period some reputed scholars specially astronomers and mathematicians were born. The conception of zero bears the testimony of credit of the scholars of this age. Depending on this conception of 'zero' Arabian and European scholars of subsequent age placed mathematics on a strong basis².

During the subsequent period of time the advent of Buddhist religion added a new chapter in the field of education. Buddhist system of education was formed on the basis of Buddhist doctrine. The centre of Buddhist education was sangharam. The sangharams were also famous as Buddhist Bihara. In these institutions, the doors of education were opened to all- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra

without any distinction of rich and poor. As a result, the number of students of sangharams increased rapidly and these became large educational institutions.

The idea of establishment of university in Indian subcontinent was built up centering round the above mentioned large educational institutions like the sangharam-class. The Buddhists were the first to initiative in spreading mass education in this country. Emperor Ashoke introduced unique system in the formal way to spread mass education for the welfare of the common people. He engraved moral and human welfare advice on the walls of the mountains. Besides this, he made arrangements to engrave different edicts in the educational epitaphs. In this way during his reign numerous monasteries established by himself played an active role to spread primary education.

In the primary stage of Boudha education system 'Prakrit' was the medium of mass education. Of course, Sanskrit, Pali, regional language and religious education were also taught to the students. With the spread of Boudha religion, change in the syllabi took place. Arrangements were also made to teach some subjects included in Veda education in the teachings of Boudha Bihara.

In the spread of higher education, Buddhists were the first to play fore-going role in the establishment of university. Universities established during the Boudha reign as the centres of higher education are considered as the rich source of heritage of education and culture till today³.

Nalanda remains as the owner of the highest glory and best heritage among the field of education of Ancient India. Students crowded from different corners of the country and even from China, Korea, Tibet and Sirlanka for taking higher education. With the passage of time Nalonda became internationally famous university. This university was built up in Baragaon village 40 miles away from Patna of Bihar province of India. By excavation work the large building, pool and classrooms of this university have been discovered which proves flourishment of this university.

The right of admission to all learners was opened without any distinction of nationality and religion. But for admission there was provision of entrance

examination. Passing of entrance examination bore and identity of extraordinary credit. The subjects included in the syllabi of Nalanda University were the four Vedas, Hinjanshastra, Mahajanshastra, the theories of eighteen branches, the science of logic, grammar, chemistry, magic, medical science, abstract meditation, astronomy, jurisprudence, art, metallurgy, Tantric Boudhashastra etc.

In Ancient India Vikramsila University was next to Nalanda University was the owner of fame. It was situated on the bank of the Ganges near ancient Magadh. Dharmapal of Pal dynasty was the founder of this university. Though the study of theories of religion was given prominence in this university, grammar, science of logic, magic, mathematics and astronomy were studied here. Here the examination system was verbal. Of the professors of Vikramsila University the most famous was Atish Dipankar. He was an inhabitant of Vikrampur of Dhaka district.

Vaidic and Boudha education system was in practice in Bangladesh, a rich region of Indian subcontinent. It is clearly evident from the ancient writings of ancient times that the study of Brahminical education and Sanskrit literature started more than a thousand years ago. It is known from the writings of Huen Sung that in the then Bengal many Boudha Vihara were built up and in those institutions other branches of knowledge were reared carefully with Boudha religion and study of knowledge.

Of these Boudha Vihara, the name of Vasu Vihara near Mahasthan Garh was noteworthy. Besides these the greatest Boudha Vihara of this age was situated at Paharpur in greater Rajshahi district. In the eighth Christian century, Dharmapal, the greatest king of Pal dynasty built this huge Vihara consisting of 177 rooms⁴. The Boudha Vihara of Paharpur was well known as Sompur Mohavihar in all Buddhist world.

Evaluation of Education in Ancient Bengal

The role of above mentioned universities in ancient India was extraordinary. These universities in no way were of standard lower than the modern universities. In these educational centres thousands of students and teachers lived together and studied knowledge. In spite of less historical information, it is not difficult for us to

know that in the remote past Bangladeshi's devotion to education and learning was chaste. Sufficient evidence of study of knowledge and wisdom and education and learning is found in the panegyric inscriptions of the contemporary age. Astronomy, grammar, logic, mimansa, the vedas system of philosophy (upanishad), praman, sruti (holy write), purana (hindu mythology), poetic literature etc. belonged to these. In the Ancient period, the study and teachings were confined to the four Vedas. These studies and culture were not confined to the scholars and learned persons only. Kings, servants like ministers and generals also studied this Shastras.

Therefore it is obvious from the part-picture of the study of knowledge and wisdom in Bengal that a close communication existed between Bengal and the Universities of Nalanda and Vikramshila of the neighboring province of Bihar. These centres of higher education played an illustrious role in spreading knowledge and wisdom in Bengal in one hand, and on the other hand the above mentioned educational centres progressed much with the patronization of the people of this region. Support of this saying is available in the remark of Nihar Ranjan Roy, "Knowledge and wisdom and teaching and culture of Bengal of sixth-seventh century had also a close connection with Nalanda University and the efforts made by the learners, acharyas (teachers) and the members of royal family for the welcome of Nalanda Mahavihara can not be neglected"⁵. The founder of Vikramsila was king Dharmapal and **Bengali** Silvadra and Atish Dipankar were ^{the} Vice-Chancellors of Nalanda and Vikramsila respectively. These scholars of extraordinary talent glorify till today neglecting the frown of eternity.

Besides these the name of gramatist Chandragomi, ^{stands on} the top of the list of the names of learned men what we get in this period. History proves that Bengal was famous for the study of grammar since very ancient time. Chandragomi was one of them whose contribution brought Bangladesh this game. The greatest achievement of Chandragomi was "Chandro Boykaran". Once this grammar was taught in Kashmir, Nepal, Tibet and Srilanka. Besides grammar he got proficiency in literature, astronomy, logic, medical science and other subjects of arts.

In that period scholar Gourapad activated unparallel fame in philosophy. Gourapad composed a karika entitled "Sankha Karika" which came to the hand

of famous scholar Alberuni. Nagarjun achieved uncommon fame by carrying out experiments in chemistry and metal. One of his assistants was Nagbodhi. Besides this, in the ancient history the name of a Boudha acharya named Jotari who was a famous acharya (teacher) of Vikarmsila Mahavira and the teacher of Atish Dipankar. He lived till the later half of the tenth century. He was as an inhabitant of Bangladesh. (Bengal)

Though fewer in number some above mentioned scholars and their achievement bears the testimony that in Ancient Bengal the study of knowledge and culture was wonderful and very high standard. Another important thing was that acquiring of knowledge was not limited to a few persons. On the background of the noble credit of the above mentioned scholars there were glorious heritage of continued efforts of many small and great learners and scholars of ages together.

As once Boudha Vikkhu (saints) and Sramans devoted themselves to the study of knowledge silently in the lonely room of their Vihara, so the people of that age did not show any negligence inspite of their utmost poverty and disturbance. As a result of such heritage of learning and culture many scholars appeared in Bangladesh in many ages. The shining tradition of this acquiring knowledge was a great wealth of the learned society of Bengal in India.

(b) Education in Medieval Bengal

The arrival of the Muslims in Indian subcontinent started a new era in the field of language, art, literature, education and culture. With political idea they also brought their educational and cultural thought. N.N.Law remarked that the invasion of India by the Muslims was not only confined to the political and social objects, but also started a revolutionary change in the field of education and knowledge ⁶.

During the Medieval period it is found that Muslim rulers, ameer-omrahs, officers, olamas (scholars) and sufi-saints engaged themselves in the progress and spread of education. Most of them made efforts to establish certain madrasas, schools or colleges. Following the instances of these outsider Muslim rulers and sufi saints, aristocrats and donators of Bengal played an important role in the field of education. As a result many madrasas, educational centres and schools were built up. In fact Muslims upheld the ideas of globalization and broadness in the

field of education of Bengal nay this subcontinent. They opened the door of education to all people even to the lower class of Hindus who were neglected by the Brahmins.

I. Primary Education

In the Medieval Bengal primary education was common among the Muslims. Education was regarded as a religious obligation and as matter of social distinction. There was general urge for education among them and they had also the ability to provide for the same. Hence, it was not a problem for them to provide for the primary education of their children. A maktab and a mosque were a common feature of every Muslim locality. It is known from the evidence of a Hindu poet Mukundaram that even a small Muslim locality in a Hindu area had makbabs for the education of the Muslim children. In his 'Chiaindikavya' the poet says, "Maktab were set up where all Muslim children were taught by the pious maulavis". Maktab, a primary school, was also known as pathsala in Bengali. The writings of the Muslim poets give an idea that there was co-education in the primary schools. Daulat Wazir Bahram writes that Laila and Majnun in their early age read in the same primary school and many other boys and girls attended that school⁷.

Generally the education of the Muslim boys and girls began at the age of five. But the usual practice of the Muslims, particularly of the upper and middle class, was to initiate their children to education formally at the age of 4 years, 4 months and 4 days. This formal initiation of the child to education, known as the ceremony of 'Bismillah Khani', was observed all over Muslim India, including Bengal. At an hour fixed in consultation with an astrologer, the child took his first lesson from the teacher. The teacher read out a selected verse of the Quran and the child repeated the same⁸. This 'Bismillah Khani' ceremony represents the great importance paid by the Muslim parents to educate their children.

Religious teaching formed the first and essential element of primary education. Every Muslim child, boy or girl, was taught the Quran and the fundamentals of the religion. Poet Vipradas says that Muslim children were taught prayer and ablution in the maktab. Besides religious subjects, the study of other branches of knowledge was also given due importance. Elegant penmanship was cultivated, and if the boy wished to learn the arts and crafts, he has apprenticed an ustad or a master.

The students in the primary schools had to learn three languages- Arabic, Persian and Bengali. It is known from the Bengali work named 'Shamsher Ghazir Puthi' that Shamsher Ghazi, who founded a Tulbaikhana (school), brought a munshi (Persian teacher) from Dacca, a maulavi (Arabic teacher) from Hindustan and a pandit (Sanskrit and Bengali teacher) from Jugdea (Noakhali district) to teach Persian, Arabic and Bengali to the student of his school⁹. This proves that Persian, Arabic and Bengali were in the courses of study in the schools of Bengal.

Akbar's Educational Regulations throw light on the curriculum of the primary education in India, including Bengal, before the time of this Emperor. He introduced a system through which a boy would master the alphabets in two days, the words in a week, and in a short time be able to read and understand verses. The Emperor hoped, "If this method of teaching is adopted, a boy will learn in a month, or even in a day, what it took others years to understand, so much so that people will get quite astonished"¹⁰. Primary course in Bengal thus consisted of an elementary knowledge in Arabic, Persian and Bengali and subjects, such as religion, morals, prose and poetry. The knowledge of arithmetic was an essential part of the primary education. The elements of arithmetic, such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division as well as kadakia, gandakia, kathakia and bighakia relating to the measurement of land were taught in primary schools.

One noteworthy feature of the primary education of Medieval Muslim Bengal was that Hindu boys, particularly of the kayastha families, often received their education from maktabas under maulavis. The kayastha Hindus also followed the 'Bismillah Khani' ceremony like the Muslims at the time of initiating their boys to education. This ceremony was performed by the family maulivi and the letters of invitation were written in Persian. This practice is known to have obtained in Northern India even up to the time of the partition of this subcontinent¹¹.

Persian was the language of the court and the enlightened section of the Hindus aspired for employment in the government. Necessarily they have to learn Persian. The educated and enlightened Hindu families regarded education incomplete and ineffectual without a knowledge of Persian. Quite a large number of the Hindus of the upper classes are found in the service of the Muslim state from the early

period of the Muslim rule in Bengal. The revenue department was manned by the Hindu Kayasthas. These Hindus must have learnt the Persian language, otherwise they would not have been employed in the government service. Besides these, the Hindus held high civil and military offices in the administration of nawabs. They were well-versed in Persian. According to Ghulam Husain Tabatabai, Raja Kiratchand, a diwan of Nawab Alivardi Khan, excelled in his knowledge of Persian. His compositions in this language won high appreciation of his contemporaries.

In the Education Report of 1835, Adam referred to the state of primary education in the Muslim period. He stated that there were 100,000 primary schools in Bengal and Bihar, the population of which was estimated at 40,000,000, so that there would be a village school for more than three hundred school-going boys and girls between the ages of 5 to 12. He observed that, though this calculations were based on uncertain premises, still it would appear from these that the system of village schools was extremely prevalent and the desire to give education to their children must have been deep-seated in the minds of parents even of the humblest classes¹². Such a large number schools for a small population shows that the primary education was common in the Medieval Bengal.

II. Secondary and Higher Education

i. Education in the Madrasas

The secondary and higher education was highly developed in the Medieval Bengal. This has its basis on the evidence of the remarkable intellectual and cultural life of the time. The Muslim rulers were all well-educated. The age produced a record number of illustrious scholars who were specialized in various branches of knowledge. They produced a large number of works in Persian, Arabic, Bengali and other languages and on various subjects. The Muslim felt the need for education on both religious and material grounds. They had also financial ability necessary for the pursuit of higher learning. The rulers and well-to-do Muslims established madrasas and endowed them with landgrants for maintenance. This gives the impression that many madrasas were set up in the province, and most of the towns and important localities had a secondary school to cater the educational needs of the Muslim people. It is to be noted that Shaik Mubarak had a seminary at his

residence and the versatile scholars and learned men like his sons Faidi and Abul Fadl and Mulla Abd al Qadir Badauni, the well-known historian, received their education from him¹³. These facts express that secondary education was quite-spread and leaning also made a significant progress in the society. So Abul Fadl could rightly claim, "All civilized nations have schools for the education of the youth; but Hindustan is particularly famous for its seminaries".

Secondary and higher education was imparted in the madrasas. One significant feature of the secondary and higher education was the provision of the study and teaching of both religious knowledge and secular sciences in the madrasas and academies of the time.

The secondary courses included the study of the Quran, the Hadith, theology, jurisprudence, history and other Islamic subjects. Secular sciences, such as logic, arithmetic, medicine, chemistry, geometry, astronomy and others were also taught in the madrasas. Speaking about the course of study, Abul Fadl states, "Every boy ought to read books on morals, arithmetic, agriculture, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household matters, rules of government, medicine, logic, higher mathematics, sciences and history, all of which may be gradually acquired¹⁴. Abul Fadl's statement shows that there was provision for the study of all arts and science subjects in the secondary and higher education and the education of a youth in the madrasa was quite comprehensive. The student at the secondary stage was not required to study all the subjects mentioned above; he had to select a few of them in the beginning and then study most of them as he advanced in the higher course of education. These regulations shed a new light to schools, and cast a bright lustre over madrasas.

The early English administrators also noticed comprehensive courses of study at the madrasas of Bengal. Reporting on the state of education in the province in 1835, Adam wrote that the Arabic schools maintained course of study of a very wide range. It included numerous grammatical works, systematized and profound, complete course of rhetoric, logic and law, and studies of the external observances and fundamental doctrines of Islam. The works of Euclid on geometry and Ptolemy on astronomy, in translation, together with natural philosophy and treatises on

metaphysics were used in some schools. Comparing the course of study in the madrsas with the course in the tols, i. e., the Sanskrit institutions, Adam remarked that the instruction at the former had more comprehensive character and more liberal tendency than that pursued in the latter and the persons educated in Muslim institutions possessed an intellectual superiority¹⁵.

Commenting on the comprehensive character and high standard of education among Muslims, General Sleeman wrote, "Perhaps there are few communities in the world among whom education is more generally diffused than among the Muhammedans of India. They learn through the medium of Arabic and Persian languages, what young men in our colleges learn through those of Greek and Latin—that is, grammar, rhetoric and logic. After his seven years of study, the young Muhammedan almost as well filled with the things that appertain to these branches of knowledge as the young man raw from Oxford. He will talk fluently of Socrates and Aristotle, Plato and Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna (Ibn Sina)".

In discussing the higher education, it is noteworthy that chemistry, medicine and natural sciences were taught in the madrasas of Bengal as in other parts of this subcontinent. The Unani and Irani medicine was studied and practiced in this province. 'Sharfnama' mentions of a fourteenth century distinguished Bengali physician, named Amir Shahab al- Din Hakim Kirmani. For his great reputation in the practice of medicine, he was called the 'pride of physicians'. In the time of Mirza Nathan, a large number of physicians, apart from the kaviraj class, are found practicing in this province. It is known from Subh-i- Sadiq of Muhammad Sadiq that Mir Ala al-Mulk, a profound scholar who excelled in medicine as well as in other sciences, lived in Jahangirnagar in the time of the author¹⁶.

Ghulam Husain Tabatabai has given the names of a large number of physicians flourishing during the period of the Bengal Nawabs. The most celebrated physician of the time was however Hakim Hadi Ali Khan, the court physician of Nawab Alivardi Khan, has been compared by Ghulam Husain Tabatabai with Plato and Galen in his medical knowledge and treatment. This comparison of the Bengali Muslim physician with the Greek (Unani) physician- philosophers Plato and Galen expresses the influence of the Unani knowledge of medicine on the education of the province and also the skill of its physicians in this system of treatment.

An idea of the knowledge and skill of Muslim physicians may be available from the writings of contemporary Europeans. Bernier, who was himself a physician of the seventeenth century European system, speaks highly of the Muslim physicians of this subcontinent and also refers to the ignorance of the Hindus in anatomy. According to Bernier, the Muslim physicians, although unacquainted with the European new discoveries in the science of medicine, were nevertheless successful in the treatment of medicine and healing on the system of Galen as well as of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, the great philosopher-physicians of the early Muslim period¹⁷. Adam noticed the study of medicine in the madrasas of Bengal even in the early nineteenth century.

The science of astronomy formed part of the education in the madrasa. It is used to be associated with the knowledge of mathematics, mechanics and music and these combined components were known as the science of riyadi. In the earlier period of the Muslim rule in this subcontinent astronomy was not much in study. But from the time of Emperor Akbar, the study of astronomy was revived among Muslims. At that time a versatile scholar of the sciences of medicine, mathematics, astronomy and mechanics named Amir Fath Allah Shirazi, translated for the Emperor 'Zich-i-Jadid-i-Mirzai' a notable astronomical work of Ulugh Beg Mirza, a Timurid prince of Samarqand¹⁸. There were in Bengal Muslim scholars who were distinguished in the science of astronomy. Ghulam Husain Tabatabai refers to Muhammad Hazin, a scholar at the court of Nawab Alivardi Khan, as one of the notable astronomers of the time.

ii. Female Education

The Muslims favoured the education of their girls. The father regarded it as a religious duty to educate his daughters, so that they knew the fundamentals of religion, the reading of the Quran and the observance of the rites in a proper manner. The female children were initiated to letters, like the boys, with the 'Bismillah Khani' ceremony and they read in the same maktabas. Adam's Report also testifies to the education of the boys and girls in the same primary schools. It may be presumed from this that the female education was common at least up to a certain stage of the primary standard.

Secondary and higher education for girls was restricted by the 'purdah system' in the society. Co-education was unknown in the secondary stage. There was also no regular system of secondary and higher education for girls. After primary standard, education of girls was practically confined to the higher class and upper middle class people, who could make special arrangement for the same. Emperor Akbar established a school in his palace at Fathpur-Sikri for the girls of the royal family and of the nobles¹⁹. This suggests that the kings, nobles and well-to-do Muslims set up secondary schools to educate their daughters. In the Mughal society there were ladies who were distinguished for their literary attainments. They compiled valuable works, composed elegant verses and wrote books on theology, mysticism and other subjects²⁰. Educated ladies took to the profession of teaching girls. The princes, nobles and wealthy peoples engaged educated women as tutoresses of their daughters.

The educated and enlightened Bengali sultans, subahdars, nawabs and nobles follows this Muslim tradition of maintaining tutoresses for the education of their daughters. Adam noticed this practice of providing tutors by wealthy Muslims in Pandua for the education of their sons and daughters²¹. It was indeed the continuation of the practice that obtained on a wider scale during Muslim rule in Bengal. In this way the Muslim girls received secondary and higher education. As this was a special arrangement, the number of girls receiving secondary and higher education was, therefore, very limited.

The contemporary records express that ladies of the upper class in Bengal were highly educated and enlightened. By their education and talent, some of the ladies exercised influence on the affairs of the state and figured in the history of the time. Ruqaiya Begam, wife of Ibrahim Khan Fateh Jang, subahdar of Bengal, was noted for her learning and accomplishment. The daughters of Shayesta Khan were highly educated and cultured, According to tradition Pari Bibi was a very accomplished lady of the time²². Zinatun Nisa Begam, wife of Nawab Shuja al-Din, was one such talented and accomplished lady whose influence was felt in the administration of her husband. Among the highly educated and talented ladies of the period, the name of Sharfun Nisa, Begam of Alivardi Khan, comes out prominent. The contemporary Persian as well as European writers speak highly of

her accomplishment, enlightenment and generous disposition. The daughters of Alivardi Ghasiti Begam, Maimuna Begam and Amina Begam were well educated.

The life of these ladies illustrates that women of the upper class received good education and their enlightenment and talent enabled them to come to the limelight of history. The talents of Muslim ladies found expression because of their high degree of education. Education endowed them with courage and strength of mind. In this way it is found that there were well educated and enlightened women in the Medieval Muslim society who were devoted to intellectual and mystical pursuits.

iii. Education of the Hindus

The general education of the Muslims effected a revolutionary change in the attitude of the Hindus towards education. In Ancient Bengal education was confined mostly among the Brahmins and the lower class Hindus were denied the right to any kind of knowledge whatsoever. The Brahmins maintained the exclusive monopoly of the sastras (religious scriptures). So, when Chaitanya introduced equality of all castes and equal opportunities for knowledge to all, the Brahmins were mightily enraged against the Vaishnava teacher and complained to the Muslim rulers. They represented this as an irreligious act and said, Chaitanya is destroying the Hindu religion by agitating the heretical people. The low class people are repeatedly chanting the name of Krishna (God). This sin (of irreligious work) will ruin Navadvip²³.

The establishment of the Muslim rule liberated these unprivileged Hindus from the domination of the privileged class and also emancipated their intellect from the perpetual bondage. The lower class Hindus took to education and learning from the beginning of the Muslim rule in Bengal. It is gathered from a work Manik Chandra Rajar Gan, of a Hindu poet that the Haris and Sauds of the lower class Hindu society were educated enough to read and write documents in the Muslim period.

The Hindu boys and girls were given primary education in the pathsalas which were generally attached to rich men's houses or under some trees in the dwelling of the gurus (teachers). Sometimes a maktab and pathsala were combined under one

roof. The munshi (Muslim teacher) took classes in the morning and the guru taught the students in the afternoon²⁴. Wealthy Hindus provided for the maintenance of the pathsalas. Poet Vijayagupta, author of the work, *Manasamangala*, says that Chand Sadagar (Sawdagar) bore the expenses of a big pathsala in which his six sons received education from a guru named Somaj Pandit.

Like Muslims, there was co-education of Hindu children in the primary stage. The Hindu girls also read in the pathsalas. Mainamati, a princess, received education from a guru in the pathsala attached to her father's house. In *Saradamangala*, a seventeenth century Bengali poetical work, there is reference of five princesses reading in a pathsala, where many boys including a prince received education²⁵. This leaves the impression that there was female education and there are instances which show that the women in general could read and write. Primary education was spread over six years. It is known from the *Ramayana* of Krittivas that the poet finished primary education at 11 and at 12 he went for higher education.

There are references of highly educated women in the Hindu society. The washer woman Rami, the beloved of poet Chandidas, composed verses in Bengali. Madhavi, a follower of Chaitanya, was well-educated. She composed many beautiful verses. Chandravati, a daughter of poet Bansidas, was a gifted poetess of the sixteenth century Bengali literature. Khana was an accomplished woman; her wise sayings on astronomical observations have become household proverbs in Bengal²⁶. She lived in the early period of Muslim rule in this province. The 'Vidyasundara Kavya' of Bharatchandra reflects that there were women in the society who were accomplished in learning. Rani Bhowani of Natore was a well-educated lady. A daughter of Rasoraj, the famous buffoon at the court of Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia, was well-conversant with literature. The female mendicants were fairly educated.

iv) Education in the Tols (Sanskrit learning)

After the completion of the primary education, the Hindu boys, who desired to acquire higher education, generally entered the tols, which were institution of Sanskrit learning. The tols were exclusively meant for the education of the Brahmin students. Because of wealth and influence, the rich merchants also could occasionally have their sons educated there.

The various branches of the Sanskrit literature such as *kavya* (poetry), *vyakaran* (grammar), *jyotis* (astronomy), *chhanda* (rhetoric), *nirukta* (lexicon), and *darsan* (philosophy) were studied in *tols*. Theology and philosophy formed an important course in the education of *tols*. There was also provision for the study of *itihash* (history) in the Sanskrit institution. Bengali and Persian were also taught in some of the *tols*. The works of Kalidas and the commentaries of Panini's grammar as well as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were the prescribed books in the *tol*²⁷.

The study of the science of medicine was given much importance at Sanskrit institutions. A section of Brahmins called *vaidyas* or *kaviraj* were devoted to the study of medicine. The medical works of Vijaya Rakshit, Chakradatta, a scholar of eleventh century, and Amar Singh were widely studied by the *vaidyas*. The *vaidyas* showed remarkable skill in treatment of diseases. In the time of the sultanate of Bengal, some of the *vaidyas* rose to the position of royal physicians of Barbak Shah, Husain Shah and others. Mirza Nathan records an appreciation of the healing of the *vaidya*. Mirza Nathan writes that his father fell dangerously ill and no Muslim physician could cure him. At last a *vaidya* cured him by treating with some herbs²⁸.

The science of *jyotis* (astronomy and astrology) was one of the subjects in the education of *tols*. A section of Brahmins were devoted to its study and practice. They are known as *Daivagyas*. The writings of sixteenth century poet, Dvij Hariram, express that Hindus valued the knowledge of astronomy and astrology. Speaking of *Daivagyas*, the poet writes, a few of them read annotations of astrology known as *Bhaswati-dipika* and some study *Zodiac*. Others again discuss the forecast of the almanac (*panjika*) of the new year, while some carefully calculate the true position of a planetary body in the *Zodiac*. Some of them draw the horoscope of a boy²⁹. Bernier refers to astronomical knowledge of Hindus and observes, In regard to astronomy, the Gentiles have their tables, according to which they foretell eclipses not perhaps with the minute exactness of European astronomers, but still with great accuracy. The evidence shows that the Hindus valued the study of astronomy and made some contribution to the knowledge of this science.

In Medieval period there were several centres of Sanskrit learning in Bengal. The most celebrated of these was Navadvip. In Navadvip many *tols* and thousands

of distinguished pandits, scholars and professors who enriched the knowledge of the time³⁰. In this period several Muslim rulers patronized Sanskrit learning and a few Muslim learnt Sanskrit and even wrote books in this language. Thus Sanskrit learning made a remarkable progress under the enlightened and liberal policy of the Muslim state.

Impacts of Education in Medieval Bengal

There was no appreciable progress of the knowledge of sciences in the Medieval Bengal or in the subcontinent as in contemporary European countries after the Renaissance. In this period no significant invention was made under review. The knowledge of sciences which was inherited from the Arabs and Central Asia continued to be the standard of education in this subcontinent. The distinguishing feature of sciences and knowledge of the time was however its wide diffusion. The knowledge of the Arabs and of Central Asia was widely studied by the Muslims of Bengal as of other provinces. The Period witnessed a large number of scholars, who were reputed for their knowledge of religious as well as natural sciences. There was no creative activity in the field of natural sciences. In the domain of religious sciences, however, Muslim scholars of Medieval Bengal made significant contributions.

A noteworthy contribution of Muslims to the learning and education of Bengal and the subcontinent was the introduction of historiography. The Bengali Hindus did not know the art of writing history. Hence, there was no history of pre-Muslim Bengal and no feeling for the study of this important subject among Hindus. With their advent, Muslims began writing and studying history and this in course of time influenced Hindus. The Muslim brought in many institutions and agencies which facilitated the diffusion and promotion of education among the people of Bengal. They introduced paper as writing material. In appreciating the services of the Muslims to knowledge and culture, Sir Jadunath Sarkar observes, "We owe to the Mohammedan influence the practice of diffusing knowledge by the copying and circulation of books, while the early Hindu writers as a general rule loved to make a secret of their productions"³¹.

It is also a remarkable contribution of the Muslims in Medieval Bengal that they introduced a liberal force in the field of education, which effected a

revolutionary change in the educational life of the Hindu society. The monopoly of Brahmins in education and learning was broken and the lower class people got opportunities to education and development of their life. Moreover, Muslims made very significant contributions to the growth and prosperity of the Bengali language and literature by their patronage, compilations and the introduction of vocabularies and vast thematic wealth of the Arabic and Persian literatures. It is also to be noted in this connection that the Persian language and Muslim culture dominated the intellectual, cultural and social life of the people of Bengal. Its impact was so tremendous on the Hindu upper and middle class that they became Persianised in language, culture, dress and etiquettes, just as many people became Anglicised during the British rule. This domination of the Muslim culture continued among Hindus even long after the fall of the Muslim rule in Bengal.

B. Condition of Education In Colonial Bengal

The advent of the East India Company

The British trading ships like that of the Arabs first anchored in the soil of Bengal. In 1690 Job Charnok bought Sutanoti, Gobindapur and Calcutta and made trading house. Fort William was built in 1696 in Calcutta because of security. In 1717 the British East India Company got a mandate from Forrukshior, the Emperor of Delhi and gained the facility of trading in Bengal without any tax. The Company won the military and political power after the fall of Sirajuddowla in the Battle of Plassi in 1757. Defeating Mir Kashim in the Battle of Boxer in 1764 and getting Dewani from the mandate of Shah Alam, the Emperor of Delhi, the Company got the authority of collecting revenue of Bengal. In 1772 making an end of diarchy and shifting the capital from Murshidabad to Calcutta, the Company got the supreme authority of Bengal.

Apathy of the Company towards Education

During the period gaining power by the Company, degradation in the field of education is marked. Even after getting the power of administration by the Company, depreciation in the field of education did not stop. At the beginning, the Company was indifferent to the education of the countrymen. According to Major B.D. Basu, the Company was mere a trading institution. They did not know

anything except profit and loss. So they thought it to be wastage of money to spend some money for the education of the subjects. A member of the Court of Directors of the Company, remarked for it, that there was no need of spending money to teach the Indians about Shakespeare. Another cause of neglecting the spread of education by the Company was that the Court of Directors feared that if education and religious condition be interfered, the Indians might revolt. The testimony of this mentality is found in the evolution of British policy during the later period: 'to leave the traditional modes of instruction undisturbed and to continue to them the support which they had been accustomed to receive of from the Indian rulers'³².

Besides this, for the extensive depreciation found in the social life of Bengal nay India on account of the destruction of former political structure, the study of intellect, education and mental progress was naturally obstructed. Above all, in the changed situation, the ruling class was so busy with war, business complexity, re-allocation of revenue and judicial system, deciding and inventing policy etc. or for their won survival that no attention was given to education at the beginning. As a result the opportunity of education was reducing. On the other hand, for the absence of instances of co-ordinate government educational system in England, no well patronization was expected. So the new rulers of Bengal first paid their attention to the revival of Indian educational study.

Warren Hastings, the Governor General, at the request of the Muslims of Calcutta founded the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781. It was the oldest educational institution conducted by the state management under the British rule. The main object of establishing this Madrasa was to teach Persian language, Arabic, Muslim law (Fikah) to persons who might be employed to the lower post of the Courts of Justice. According to 'Mohammedan Education in Bengal' by Abdul Karim,....'to promote the study of the Arabic and Persian languages and of Muhammeden law, with a view more specially to the production of qualified officers for the Courts of Justice'³³. In this way it was also an object to please the displeased Muslim aristocratic community because hopeful employment opportunity will be created for their children. It was also admitted thorough these efforts of Hastings that all hoped for the direct patronization of the government.

After a decade in 1792, Jonathan Duncan, the President of the East India Company established a Sanskrit College in Benares for the education of the Hindus. The object behind the establishment of this college was not different from that of the establishment of Calcutta Madrasa. Afterwards Elhinstone did the same thing in Poona for the education of the Hindus. On the other hand, Sir William Jones established Calcutta Asiatic Society in 1784 for the research on the oriental knowledge. Besides these Nathaniel Hallhed composed the first grammar book in Bengali language. Charles Willkins made printing letters of Bengali alphabet. As a result of this it was possible to print books in Bengali. But inspite of these, the patronization of education made by the British was very meagre in comparison with that of the recently power-ceased Indian rulers and its advantage was enjoyed by few students.

In 1800 Fort William College was established by Wellesley, the Governor General inside Fort William. But Fort William College was not a complete government institution as Warren Hastings Calcutta Madrasa and Jonathan Duncan's Benares Sanskrit College and the doors of this college was not open for the common students. Wellesley felt the need of teaching institutional education and moral training of the new comer European officers about Indian language, history and administrative custom and established this college. But at last this college was closed according to the intention of the authority of England. Since then the arrangement of teaching the civilians appointed to India were made in Haileybury College of England.

Though the existence of Fort William College was short, the teachers and former learned persons of it played an important role for the improvement and modernization of Bengali language and most of other languages in India. Of the Bengali teachers of the college the most famous were Ramram Basu, Tarinicharan Mitra and Mrittunjay Vidyalankar. With the help of these teachers, the professors of the college conducted all examinations for promoting the standard of Bengali literature and implementation of Bengali prose³⁴.

The Spread of Western Education in Bengal

Though the Company government was indifferent to education and culture of the subjects, interest in western education was found for different reasons. First,

a class of people showed interest towards English education for the opportunity of earning livelihood, service and trade. Secondly, many English knowing men were needed to work as clerks, translator and copyists in the various institutions of the government of the Company. But for the practical reasons it was not possible for the Company to bring sufficient number of people from England giving excessive pay. In these circumstances, different trade institutions were willing to employ native people with low pay. For this reason too, many people showed interest to learn English. According to Alexander Duff, people requested in the streets and ways for the opportunity of learning English.

Side by side with this a good number of intellectual knowledge seeking modern educated persons realised the need of learning western knowledge and science and showed interest in learning English. They had pure thirst for knowledge. They understood that if the Indians did not study the knowledge and science of the English with which they ruled India, they will lag behind for ever. These intellectual persons, understanding the utility of learning English tried to spread English education. It is true that European Missionaries played foregoing role in this regard but newly educated Bengali local people and also their European associates did not lag behind. With reference to this the memorable contribution of the persons named William Carey, J. Marshman, William Ward, Charles Grant, Ram Mohun Roy, David Hare, Alexander Duff, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar may be cited³⁵. So it is not a matter of surprise that undivided Bengal was the starting place of the movement of India for acquiring western knowledge and Ram Mohun Roy was the pioneer of it.

a. Non - Government Efforts

The spread of English education had been advanced to a great extent in the non-government stage before the efforts taken by the Company government for western education. According to R.C. Majumdar, English schools and colleges were being established with non-government efforts without any support and help of the government. Some patrons of Anglo-Indian community established English schools in Calcutta. Of these schools 'Dharmatala Academy' of Henri Drummond and 'Serborne School' which was situated in Jorasanka

were famous. Many scholars of modern Bengal were educated in Serborne School. Orator Ramgopal Ghosh, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore were the Students of Serborne's School. Besides these schools, an English School was established in 1800 at Vabanipur and David Hare established Potaldanga Academy or Hare School (at present) in Calcutta. The next year, Hare established School Book Society for printing and publishing English and Bengali books. Text books were supplied to schools at low price by this book society.

In this way the idea of establishing English school got the practical shape and the plan of English education in India gained the support of all. In these circumstances Hindu College of Calcutta was established in 1817 with the effort of Sir Edward Hyde East, the Chief Justice of Calcutta Supreme Court and patronization of David Hare, Baidyanath Mukherjee and Radhakanta Dev. The establishment of Hindu College was a landmark in the field of spreading western education in Bengal. The sons of Hindu gentlemen showed inspiration in English education and thus the popularity of English education increased. The standard of education in the Hindu College was very high. The foremost object of establishing Hindu College was to teach English and Indian languages and with that the literature and science of Asia and Europe. The main leaders of modern Bengal passed as the student of Hindu College and played distinguished role in the Renaissance in Bengal. In fact, Hindu College played an important role in social and cultural life of Bengal. In the later period (1854) this Hindu College was converted into renowned Presidency College of today³⁶.

English schools were also established in district out side Calcutta with personal efforts. The zamindar (land lord) of Taki established an English School at Taki. Besides these, it is found that the other zamindars of Bengal established English schools in a good number of other districts. A non-government school was established in Rajshahi in 1828 with the efforts of same patrons of learning. Mohsin College was established in Hoogly with the help of Mohsin Fund. The establishment of the Mohsin College was welcomed by 'Edenborough Review' as one of the symbols of starting new era by the study of knowledge in India³⁷. In this way it is found that with the efforts of some patrons of learning English education had spread in Bengal even before the government efforts were made.

b. Contributions of the Missionaries

The contribution of the preachers of Christianity or the missionaries was extensive and deep. At the beginning of the nineteenth century three European Baptist missionaries William Cary, J. Marshman and William Ward played an important role in the spread of English education. These three missionaries engaged themselves in social reform and spread of education side by side with the preaching of religion. They established more than a hundred missionary schools, syllabi of which included primary lessons of modern science, geography and history. Even the people of low caste would send their children to these schools and educate them in fundamental education.

In 1800 William Carey kept the record of his highest achievement by establishing 'Serampore Mission press' where wooden letters of the alphabet made by Panchanan Karmakar were used. The translation of the Bible and the books entitled 'Hitupadesh' and 'Kathopakathan' were printed from Serampore press. 'Kathopakathan' by W.Carey reflects contemporary social life of Bengal. Besides these, William Carey edited the second weekly newspaper 'Samachar Darpan' and another newspaper entitled 'Friends of India' published in English from Serampore Press. These newspapers played an important role to draw the attention of the government to the contemporary social problems. Besides, these publications, no doubt, made remarkable contribution in the advancement of Bengali prose literature.

The missionaries co-operated actively with those who took initiative in establishment 'Calcutta School Book Society' in 1817. This society printed thousands of copies of books suitable for the use of the primary schools.

In 1818 William Carey and his two associates Marshman and Ward built Serampore College, with the money they saved through out their whole life³⁸. This is the oldest institution of western education in India. Here oriental literature and western science were taught to the Asian Christians and the other youths of different communities together. At that time, though education was imparted without distinction of religion in Hindu College, it was confined to a small number of rich students. There was no opportunity of education of the common people. W. Carey and his associates felt the need of an institution for the common people and with

this aim they established Serampore College. This is the first and till today the only institution of India where religion, human education and secular subjects are taught together.

Though William Carey preached Christianity, he was specially a broad minded and patron of learning. He said about the necessity of teaching mother tongue Bengali with English. Besides this he expressed his opinion to teach western science in Bengali.

Bishops College was established in 1820 in Calcutta in the honour of Bishop Middleton. Besides these, the Christian institutions like London Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society established some English schools.

A new force was transmitted in to the spread of English education owing to the efforts of the missionaries after the arrival of Scottish missionary Reverend Alexander Duff in 1830 in Calcutta, Duff was a bright student of St. Andrew's University of Scotland. Alexander Duff was the most learned person of the missionaries who came to India and he had great influence over the educative and social rules of the British government of India.

With the real encouragement and inspiration of the English Alexander Duff established in English school called 'General Assembly's Institution' in the house of Kamal Bose, an Anglo-Indian at Calcutta in July, 1830³⁹. Later on in 1835, this school was shifted to his own house and it became Scottish Church College. By establishing this college he created the opportunity of fulfilling the earnest desire of Bengali youth of being the gainer of western knowledge. By dint of the sincerity of Duff's teaching the fame of Scottish Church College spread all around. Alexander Duff insisted on teaching mother tongue Bengali with English, science, philosophy etc. It appears from the composition of Reverend Lal Behari Day that the standard of education of Duff's College was high. The answer scripts of the examination of the students of this college were examined by Lady Acley Eden herself.

Besides Scottish Church College, Jesuit missionaries established St. Xavier's College. Outside Calcutta missionaries also established many schools. In this way the extensive spread of English education in Bengal was made by the efforts of the Christian missionaries.

c. Initiatives of the Government

After re-establishing stability to some extent in the Company governed Bengal, the root object of the structure of education raised in the Charter Act of 1813 was to create a small number of people of this country who would be native Indians in figure and appearance but Englishmen in taste and ideas. Whatever might be the object, the education system of the Charter Act of 1813 may be called the first step of spreading education by the government in India. Because inspite of helping to spread education the Company did not admit that it was the responsibility of the government and society to spread education. In the section 43 of Charler Act, the government authority first recognized the three responsibilities-the spread of education, determination of education policies and spending money for education. In this section, recommendation of granting rupess one lakh under the head of mass education was made. But there were some shrewd tricks in the Charter Act, as a result of which it was not possible to spend even a single rupee for the welfare of education before the year 1823.

I. Committee of the Public Instruciton

To conduct the educational work of Bengal province 'General Committee of Public Instruction' consisting of ten members was formed in 1823⁴⁰. The amount of one lakh rupees sanctioned by Charter Act to be spent under the head of education was handed over to the committee. As there were majority of patrons of Arabic and Sanskrit languages among the members of the committee, the committee took the following resolutions :

- a) Reorganization of Calcutta Madrasa and Benares Sanskrit College.
- b) Establishment of Sanskrit College in Calcutta in 1824.
- c) Establishment of two oriental colleges in Delhi and Agra.
- d) The arrangement for printing and publishing of books written in Arabic and Sanskrit.
- e) Translate English books of knowledge and sciences into oriental languages by the appointing native pandits.

The above mentioned resolution of the committee faced opposition from the Indian quarter instead of favorable response. The leader of the opposition party Raja Ram Mohun Roy complained to the Vice-Roy for setting aside the resolution of establishing Sanskrit College in Calcutta. But the complaint was not fruitful and Sanskrit College was established in Calcutta in 1824. In the mean time, the demand of learning English among the Indians became very strong. But in this regard the committee were divided in their opinions. The older members of the committee took the side of inspiring oriental system of education but younger members took the side of inspiring the spread of western knowledge and science through the medium of English. As there were equal number of members on either side the conflict became keen and so a dead lock was seen in the work.

In the mean time contemporary reputed intellectual and renowned historian Lord Macaulay came to India on the 10th June, 1834 as the member in respect of law- affairs of the Council of Governor General Lord Bentinck. Lord Bentinck appointed him president of the Education Committee. Macaulay was out and out an Anglicist. He looked down upon Sanskrit and oriental education. The power of pen and eloquence of this orator and writer of Oxford was extraordinary. He took the leadership of the followers of the group of English and western education system and said, "Though English educated persons of India are Indians in the colour of the body, they will be Europeans in taste and mental ideals. That will be the victory of the British rule in India". Macaulay assured those officials who expressed fear that Indians like American colony would want freedom from the British rule after learning English language and literature saying, "That day will come after a century. When that day will come, it will be the greatest success of British rule in India".

II. Macaulay's Minute and Bentinck's Educational Resolution, 1835

The Committee disputing about the system of educational course in India appeared before Bentinck, who referred the matter to Macaulay and sent for his opinion about it. In this regard a long decisive debate was made by Macaulay with Princep, the advocate of oriental educational system. At last on the 2nd February 1835, Lord Macaulay composed a famous memorandum or minute and submitted

it to Lord Bentinck, the Governor General. The minute of Macaulay is called the direction in the field of spreading English education in India. Macaulay, by expressing his opinion in support of western education through the medium of English in his minute caused an end of the controversies of long period of time. According to the recommendation of Macaulay's report (minute) Lord Bentinck by the regulation of 7th March, 1835 accepted the patronization and spread of knowledge and science through English medium in India as the purpose of education policy of the government of India⁴¹.

The minute of Macaulay is not only an important document of history but also a compositions of great literary value. This document may be compared with the speeches given by Admond Bark in Indian affairs on the House of Commons for their excellnce in oratory and dramatic expression. Of course the difference is that, the aim of Bark's oratory was the East India Company and its employees; and Macaulay's argument was against Indian people and institutions. In the field of intellect Macaulay's achievement was extraordinary. But as regards nationality and caste he could not rise above the mentality prevailed about the non-European culture of that age.

Lord Bentinck could not make extensive effort to establish schools and colleges for mass education. The allotment of money of the government under the education head of accounts was so small that it was not possible to establish a large number of schools and colleges. For this Bentinck took the Downward Filtration Theory. That is, water of the filter flows downwards from upwards, in the like manner educated people would educate other illiterate people and he hoped that English education would spread in this way.

After accepting the Downward Filtration Theory, a good number of government conducted and government grant receiving schools and colleges were built up in the district head quarters of Bengal. In these schools and colleges science through English medium was included along with English in the syllabus. Besides this, Bentinck founded the Calcutta Medical College in 1835 with an aim to educate the youths of the country with out any distinction of race and colour in the European method of medical science. The Calcutta Medical College played the role of the guide of formal teaching in the field of the medical science of the west and with this a new chapter was opened in the history of medical science in India⁴².

As a result of the introduction of Downward Filtration Policy, though a class of people was created for the time being to work in favour of the British government after learning English language, this new education was confined only to a class of opportunities. The plan of reaching this education after having been purified, as had been expected by the authority was no longer effective; rather it created class distinction in the field of education and as a result native education system gradually went downwards. Many years after the implementation of the Downward Filtration Policy, Lord Curzon admitted that as a result of this policy, much damage of native language and text books were caused. The report implemented by William Adam in 1835-38 reflected the truth of Lord Curzon's word.

The result of two important government decisions of 30 and 40 decades of nineteenth century, the demand of English education increased more. One of this was the introduction of English of the offices and courts in lieu of Persian language in 1837 and the other was the implementation of the policy of giving priority to the English knowing persons to the government service in 1845⁴³. Before this the Committee of Public Instruction was abolished and the Council of Education was established and all the responsibilities of the former committee were vested on the new committee. In 1845 Lord Hardinge declared that the Council of Education would select candidates through competitive examination to join government service and English knowing persons would be given priority. As a result, interest in English increased and schools and colleges of English medium were being established in different regions of Bengal.

With reference to this, it may be mentioned that Dhaka College in 1841, Sils Collage in 1843 in Calcutta and other six colleges from 1843 to 1845 were established in Bengal. Besides these Krishnanagar College in 1846, Hindu Metropolitan College in 1853 in Calcutta and Bahrampur Collage were established in Bahrampur. In the same continuity Hindu College was converted into the famous Presidency College in 1854.

III. Wood's Educational Despatch, 1854

Though western education developed in this way on the soil of this country through the establishment of various schools and colleges, the whole of it was built up with much confusion and whim. There were a great scarcity of well-defined

government rules and expert and well arranged government machinery. In these circumstances the time of renewal of the Charter Act arrived in 1853. Before the renewal of the Charter Act, the British Parliamentary Select Committee thoroughly discussed the existing circumstances in the Indian educational field. On the basis of it, Sir Charles Wood, the then President of the Board of Control, implemented his famous Education Despatch in 1854.

Wood's Educational Despatch was really a mile stone in the history of modern education of India and it brought forward an extensive plan for the subsequent educational system of this subcontinent. Various important points were discussed in this document consisting of a hundred para. Bearing in mind that it was the sacred duty of the government of India to develop both native languages and English and to make their far-reaching spread, the following steps were recommended for acquiring the desired aim⁴⁴:

1. The constitution of a separate department of the administration for education.
2. The institution of universities at the presidency towns.
3. The establishment of institutions for training teachers for all classes of schools.
4. The maintenance of the existing government colleges and high schools and the increase of their number when necessary.
5. The establishment of new middle schools.
6. Increased attention to vernacular schools, indigenous or other, for elementary education; and
7. The introduction of a system of grants-in-aid.

The attention of government is specially directed to the importance of placing the means of acquiring useful and practical knowledge within reach of the great mass of the people. The English language is to be the medium of instruction in the higher branches, and the vernacular in the lower; English is to be taught wherever there is a demand for it, but it is not to be substituted for the vernacular languages of the country. The system of grants-in-aid is to be based on the principle of perfect religious neutrality. Arrangement for granting stipend on the basis of grades should be introduced and there should be simple and earnest support of the government in respect of female education.

In the conclusion of Wood's proposal this comment was made that specially the institution of higher stage would be safely closed or their power would be transferred to the local administration and their grant would come from the provincial government.

With the above mentioned recommendation of Wood the new educational system gradually developed in Bengal. The government education office or the Department of Public Instruction was opened in the year 1854. Government schools and colleges were being established in the main district towns as the model to be followed for the non-government efforts. About 79 English High Schools and 140 Middle English Schools got the monetary help of the government in 1855 under the shade of grant-in-aid. This system encouraged setting up non-government institutions. In these institutions the fees for the students were comparatively low and the rules and regulations were more relaxable. The aim of the government was to popularise education without increasing the fees and this aim was successful to a great extent.

In Wood's Educational Despatch it was said to establish Universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras following London University. At that time the programme of London University was confined only to giving examinations. In the situation prevailing in India, London model was considered the fittest because no arrangement better than this was possible at low expence.

IV. The University Act, 1857

The University Act of 1857 was passed during the administration of Lord Canning, the Governor-General (1856-1862). With the power of this Act, Calcutta University was established on the 24th January, 1857.. About the object of the Calcutta University the preamble of the Act states that, for the better encouragement of Her Majesty's subjects of all classes and dominations within the Presidency of Calcutta and other parts of India in the pursuit of a regular and liberal course of education, it has been determined to establish a University at Calcutta for the purpose of ascertaining, by means of examination, the persons who have acquired proficiency in different branches of Literature, Science and Art, and of rewarding them by Academical Degrees as evidence of their respective attainments, and marks of honour⁴⁵.

At the beginning Calcutta University had four faculties, Arts and Science, Law, Medical and Engineering like other two Universities of Bombay and Madras. Affiliation and Examinations were the works of these Universities. They had no programme of teaching of their own. These circumstances existed till the first several decades of the twentieth century.

The establishment of Calcutta University was a landmark in the history of modern Bengal. In fact, the establishment of Calcutta University was a revolutionary event in the history not only of Bengal but also of India. Though the Universities of Bombay and Madras were established at the same time, later on Calcutta University advanced forward with development, standard of education and fame leaving the other two far behind. And with that the youths of the institutions under Calcutta University being educated in western education were able to keep their impression of credit not only in Bengal but also in all India. The achievement of these youths was in the field of education and administration in one hand and on the other hand in the political and cultural field which played a hopeful role for the independence of Indian subcontinent.

V. The Indian Education (Hunter) Commission, 1882

Lord Ripon, the Governor-General constituted a commission consisting of 20 members and made Sir William Wilson Hunter, member of his Executive Council, the president of the commission to discuss the nature and progress of Indian educational system from the time of Wood's Despatch to the later period and in response to the various complains of the missionaries in the field of education. Though it is officially known as Indian Education Commission, 1882, it is better known as Hunter Commission after the name of its president William Hunter. The main object of the Hunter Commission was to give direction to the government and non-government policy and role about the primary and secondary field of education of the subcontinent. Keeping this purpose in front, the commission discussed different points connected with the primary and secondary education. And with this the commission also discussed the points of higher education. With reference to all these in 1883, the commission submitted to the government a large report consisting of 222 preambles in 600 pages⁴⁶.

Among the recommendations of the commission, thirty six recommendations were about making primary education free and compulsory. Besides these, inspection and guidance, establishment of night schools where possible, fixing time period of staying in schools according to the convenience of the village families, making arrangements for religious teaching etc. were worth mentioning.

The commission, thinking that higher education as like as primary education was equally necessary for the balanced progress of the society, made twenty three recommendations. By gradually relaxing the control of the government from the field of secondary and higher education for making the education of multipurpose system, the committee recommended for introducing syllabi accordingly.

The government of India approved almost all the recommendations made by the Hunter Commission. But many recommendations of the commission were not implemented properly. Yet in the modern history of India, the importance of the Hunter Commission can not be under estimated. This is because the Hunter Commission alone first recognised the imparting of the primary education as government duty and broadened the way of its future progress. It may be said that the recommendations of the commission brought new speed in place of slow speed of advancement in the field of education. On the other hand as a result of the recommendation made by the commission for encouragement to the field of non-government efforts for higher education, an extensive spread of higher and secondary education took place in the subcontinent.

It is obvious that more wide spread education in higher and secondary stage took place in Bengal than any other province of India. This is because higher education, on the whole, was cheaper in Bengal than any other province of India. Average annual expense and fees of each student were lowest in Bengal. The number of students studying in the colleges was also largest here. In case of secondary education the condition of Bengal was the best of all provinces of India. About half of the 3097 English high schools of India were situated in Bengal in 1901-02. There was a secondary English school in every 104 square miles. Like colleges most of these schools were non-government. The number of students studying in these schools was the largest here and the number of these students was increasing in a comparatively rapid speed.

Of course the quality of education was not so good though the number was increasing. The standard of education was degrading because of crowded class rooms, inadequate buildings and equipment, low paid unfit teachers, syllabi of low standard, unequal spread of education owing to the distinction of gender, community and locality, and too much inclination to humanities.

VI. University Reforms Act, 1904

At that time in the subcontinent Lord Curzon took over the charge of administration. At first he paid attention to the education of this country and made necessary arrangements for the progress of education. Lord Curzon wanted to remove the above mentioned defects through his University Reforms Act, 1904,⁴⁷ but his political purpose was more wide spread behind it. He believed that cheap and low-grade education system without any guidance of the government created discontent anti-British citizens, so it should be prevented at any cost. But the measure he took under Indian University Act to prevent it could not fulfil his purpose completely. It could not improve the standard of education well, the spread of education was not slow rather the structure of education was Indianalised more quickly. Consequently establishment of more government control remained beyond reach as before.

In this way the change of role and conduct of the universities of India started at the background of Curzon's improvement. From the very beginning the work of Indian universities were making syllabus, conduct examinations, conferring degrees, affiliation of colleges and giving recognition to schools. The real responsibility of imparting education was given to the colleges. With the able leadership of Asutosh Mukherjee in the first decade of the twentieth century, Calcutta University first started teaching at post graduate level and introduced higher research programme in its own guidance.

VII. The Calcutta University (Sadler) Commission, 1917

Within a short period of time, complete teaching programme came under the direct control of Calcutta University. Side by side with it, this university was able to acquire fame as a centre of higher research in all India. But in course of

doing all these, Sir Asutosh had dispute with the government. As a result of rapid spread of teaching and research programme of Calcutta University, various problems were created in administrative and academic affairs. The government of India constituted the Calcutta University Commission in 1917 to enquire about the connected problems and to ascertain work for education and organisation. The president of the commission was M.E Sadler the Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University of England. The commission was well known as the Sadler Commission after his name. The other members of the commission were : Ramse Muir, J.W. Gregory, P.J. Hartog, Asutosh Mukherjee, Ziauddin Ahmed, W.W. Hornel and George Anderson⁴⁸.

The Sadler Commission first met on the first week of November, 1917. The members of the commission, according to the advice of the president conducted their enquiry into most of the educational institutions including other universities without confining their enquiry work into Calcutta University only. After direct inspection and detailed discussion of the connected affairs for long seventeen months, the commission submitted its large report of thirteen parts, on 18th March, 1919 to the government of India.

The main recommendations of the Sadler Commission focussed on different points specially on the existing educational system. The commission advised to take some important steps for removing defects of the university education system. One of its purposes was to make Calcutta University a real educational institution and realisation of the plan of establishing a University at Dhaka as soon as possible. Besides these, the commission recommended for perfectly reorganisation of secondary education system to advance forward the educational system of the university stage in Bengal. For this purpose the commission recommended for establishing a Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board. The commission also urged for establishing a special Board for Female Education. Besides these, recommendation of the commission for ascertaining the place of Indian languages in the university education, introduction of degree course for three years, separation of intermediate education from the university education etc. showed the far reaching out took of the commission.

Like those of the previous commissions regarding education many recommendations of the Sadler Commission were not materialised owing to indifference of the government and education authority. Besides, some recommendations of the commission created controversy. As a result no remarkable change in the organisations of the then system of educational arrangements took place.

But some important resolutions of the Sadler Commission were materialised. One of them was the establishment of Dhaka University in 1921. As a result remarkable opportunity of higher education was created for the people of East Bengal (Bangladesh at present) in one hand and on the other hand Calcutta University got rid of the responsibility of the colleges of East Bengal.

In the history of education of this country no other report so evaluated education as the report of the Sadler Commission. About education, there was no point which was not discussed in the Sadler Commission. Though the Sadler Commission was constituted for Calcutta University, the recommendations of this committee played a very important role for the universities imparting education in all India.

The next thirty years after the constitution of the Sadler Commission or in the year 1947 till the period of leaving India by the British the background of socio-economic, political and historical of Bengal nay the subcontinent changed. Some times this change was very rapid and with it the spread of education and higher education occurred. The number of colleges and universities increased and in these institutions the work of teaching and research were done sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly but they were continuous.

Effects of Western Education in Colonial Bengal

Of course, it is true that as a result of giving too much importance to English learning, learning of native languages was neglected. Though a class of people was created for time being to learn English and to work in favour of the British government, this new education remained confined to an opportunist class of people. As a result this system of education introduced by the English could not

bring desirable fruit for the people near the soil of native villages. Rather it created class distinction in the field of education and thus created obstacle in national solidarity. In this way a great vacuum and interruption were created in the field of education. But if modern knowledge and science were taught through mother tongue, it would cross the impediment of the language and create extensive spread of education. For this many educationists condemned the loading of the burden of English.

On the other hand, the benefit of learning English was not significant. Whatever might be the motive of introduction of higher education, that is the education through English medium, the more the spread of study of the western knowledge and science through the medium of English, the more the character of education became rational and secular. As a result, by acquiring experience in history, philosophy and science through this kind of education, a class of rational and educated people who were the pioneer of Renaissance of India nay Bangladesh was created. They tried to form a new society full of vitality by removing indolence, superstition and blind belief. These were the people who were the pioneers of the independence movement of India. The pioneer of India Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the religious preacher and reformer Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda and many other reputed sons of India belonged to them. At the beginning, the Muslim community, owing to the influence of the conservatives turned their faces from English education but later on owing to the influence of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Ammer Ali came forward to take this education. As a result a new class of intellectual Muslims was born.

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In the Mughal society well-educated women were Khadzadeh Begam, sister of Babur, Gulbadan Begam, Mariam Begam, Ruqaiya Begam, Salima Sultana Begam, Maham Anaga, Nurjahan Begam, Mumtazmahal Begam, Jahan Ara, Raushan Ara, Jahanzeb Banu Begam, daughter of Dara Shikoh and wife of Prince Azam, and Zeibun Nisa Begam. Gulbadan compiled Humayunnama. Nurjahan was a talented poetess and Zeibun Nisa's poetical compositions are a valuable piece of the Persian literature.

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