

Introduction

Before the advent of the colonial rule in Bengal there was an indigenous education system in practice. In every village there there was at least one school almost everywhere at that time. Indigenous schools like *Tol*, *Chathushpathi*, *Guro Mahasayer Pathsala*, *Moktab*, *Madrassa*, *Imambara* etc. were the common institutions for general learning. In this regard Max Muller rightly said, 'Prior to the British occupation there were more than 80,000 native schools in Bengal or one for every 400 of the population'.¹ It is no less interesting that there was a trend when Hindu boys used to go to the Madrasas and Maktabs to learn Persian and Arabic languages, some Muslim boys used to go to the the Tol or Guro Mahasayer Pathsala etc. to learn Sanskrit. This indigenous education system continued centuries after prior to the British rule.

In the beginning, the East India Company Government did not show much interest in education of Bengal. It was Warren Hastings who being Governor General of Bengal made preliminary reforms in education system of Bengal. For the improvement of Arabic and Persian languages and Muslim law, he established Calcutta Madrasa in 1781. Sir William Jones founded Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784 so as to extend research in English literature, History, Philosophy and Religion. In 1798 Lord Wellesley took the office of the Governor General of East India Company and established the Fort William College in 1800 just to train up the civilians in Indian languages, law, creed, custom and culture.

A section of people of the then undivided Bengal became very much eager to learn English language. Their aim was to get Government services and also to get privilege in business and other professions. On the other hand the Company Government thought that to run the administration they needed some English knowing people. So the Government paid due attention to develop English education throughout the country. Some philanthropists like David Hare, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Edward Hyde East, Baidyanath Mukharjee, Raja Radhakanta Dev realised the importance of English education in Bengal. With their tireless efforts Hindu College was established in 1817.² The establishment of Hindu College (later on Presidency College) may be considered as a landmark in the history of the

progress of western education in Bengal. Soon it was followed by the establishment of large number of schools and colleges in and around Calcutta. The contributions and efforts of the Baptist Missionaries and a few enlightened native elite's in this regard are worthy of mention.

The Baptist Missionaries founded an English medium school in 1818. Later on this school was converted into Srirampore College. In 1820 Bishop's College was established in Calcutta in honour of Bishop Middleton. It is worth mentioning that in 1823 the Committee of Public Instruction was set up to take over the whole management of State Education, including the expenditure of public funds. Alexander Duff established an English School named General Assembly's Institution in 1830 which in 1835 became the Scottish Church College. The Jesuit Missionaries established another College named St. Xaviars College in Calcutta.

This trend was followed in some other districts of Bengal and it may be said that in such a situation some local people and few Britishers established an English medium school at Rajshahi named 'Bauleah English School' in 1828.³ In 1836 the Government took up the school and upgraded it as Zilla School⁴

In 1872 some local zamindars and the elites of Rajshahi sat together to devise ways and means for the establishment of a college at Rajshahi town. Accordingly they managed to start F.A. course in Rajshahi Zilla School. The first Arts classes were added to the Zilla shchool in 1873 and had its opening with six students. Interestingly enough out of these six students, there was only one Muslim student in the college in 1873.⁵

After few years the local zamindars and the Rajshahi Association were trying wholeheartedly to raise its status as a first grade college, and accordingly it was raised to the status of a first grade college in 1878.⁶ Mr. F.T. Dowding was appointed as an officiating principal of the college among other staffs. It received B.A. affiliation from Calcutta University in the same year and the college named as Rajshahi College. It may be noted that in Rajshahi College B.L. and M.A. classes were introduced in 1881 and 1893 respectively.⁷ This new addition was, however, withdrawn in 1909 when a special regulation was introduced in Calcutta University in this regard. Incidentally, the college has crossed its historic century in 1973 and it

was an occasion when hundred years of the institution was celebrated with the memories of its glorious past.

Statement of the Problem :

The Rajshahi College, an old institution of higher education side by side with Presidency College of Calcutta, needs a comprehensive study for more than one reason. Right from the inception till date, the Rajshahi College has not only proved its worth as a notable centre of learning but also played a significant role for the spread of higher education of Bengal. The College has fulfilled a great mission for the people of Bengal and the regeneration through education is a great achievement of this institution. Its facilities for higher education produced a new generation in a region other than Calcutta and could create a new educated middle class of Bengal at a time when education was not brought to popular level.

The youths educated from the institution of Rajshahi College were recruited in many prestigious positions in different fields of the national life of undivided Bengal and Bangladesh afterwards and have left imprints in social and political development scenarios of this country.

In spite of such a background the Rajshahi College failed to draw the attention of scholars and the attempts for studies so far done are either distorted or full of confusion. Hence, there is a need to make a comprehensive study of the college keeping in view the trend and tone of the educational progress of Bengal in between 1873-1973. The Proposed dissertation is expected to cover a wide spectrum to trace the evolution of higher education in Bengal and how Rajshahi College earned fame and dignity as a centre of higher learning.

In fact, in our disposal there are centenary volumes of Presidency College, Calcutta or the Cloister's Pale - *A Biography of the University of Bombay* when remarkable steps are found to have been taken to study the institutions of higher learning.

As a result, over the years we have enriched our knowledge with the publications of (a) *The History of the University of Dacca* by M.A. Rahim. (b) *The History of Aligarh Muslim University, vol.-I* by K.A. Nizami; and (c) *Aligarh Muslim*

University Perfect Past and Precarious Present by Anil Mahes...& wari to name a few in our disposal. These efforts are no doubt path-breaking as to the study of academic institutions but till date no step has been taken to study the academic institutions established in various parts of Bengal other than Calcutta. The emergence of Rajshahi College is no doubt a break through in the history of educational growth of Bengal but surprisingly it failed to draw any attention from the academics. Some articles on the college have come to our notice and most of them have been published in various journals and centenary volumes or periodicals. A few of them are not only well-documented but also highlight many unknown facts relating to the growth and development of this institution. Some of these titles are presented here to form a preliminary idea about the beginning of the college.

- (a) *Rajshahi College-Kichhu Smriti Kichhu Katha* (Rajshahi College some memories and statement) by Mukhlesur Rahman.
- (b) *Uchha Siksha Vistare Rajshahi College-Prasanga Katha* (Rajshahi College in spreading higher education-An overview) by S.M. Abdul Latif.
- (c) *Rajshahi College-ye Bhasa Andolan O Samasamayik Kichhu Ghatana* (The Language Movement in Rajshahi College and a few contemporary events) by Md. Akramul Hoque.
- (d) *Oitijhey Rajshahi College- Smarak Grantha* (A Collection of Documents on Rajshahi College) ed. by A.K.M. Hasanuzzaman etl., Published by K.M. Jalaluddin Akbar, Principal Rajshahi College (2000-2002).
- (e) *Reactions and Reconcilement* by Abu Hena, and so on. But all these documents are merely sketchy references and not an exhanstive studies about the college. In fact these are not sufficient to fill up the gaps of our knowledge or to present a complete picture about this leading institution of higher learning.

Under such a situation here is an humble attempt to study the college from various perspectives and assess its role in our national life.

Broadly speaking, the objectives of the study are to investigate the situation

leading to the foundation of the Rajshahi College and its contribution to promote higher education in Bengal. In addition to this the proposed study is intended to-

- (a) examine the circumstances that led to the establishment of the college from a school;
- (b) draw a pen-picture of the administration and academic life of the institution;
- (c) assess the contributions of the enlightened personalities and institutions for the idea and growth of the college;
- (d) examine the mutual relationship with other sister academic institutions of Bengal;
- (e) examine its role behind the emergence of Rajshahi University;
- (f) assess the achievements of the Rajshahi College as a seat of higher education;
- (g) investigate the role of the college as a centre of political awakening;

On the basis of the above objective of our study the following issues have been taken into consideration for this dissertation-

- (a) the emergence of Rajshahi College was an outcome of the social needs of the time ;
- (b) the intellectuals an elites of the region were dominating figures of the movement for higher education of Bengal and could share their sentiments with the regional people ;
- (c) the growing middle class of Bengal utilised the sentiment and came forward for the interest of the institution ;
- (d) the Rajshahi College could prove its worth as a centre of learning by its luminaries;
- (e) the Rajshahi College as an academic institution was a centre of political consciousness of our national life ;
- (f) the Rajshahi College had a significant role for the growth of other academic institutions namely Universities and centres for undergraduate studies;

- (g) the Rajshahi College contributed to the emergence of educated intelligentsia of Bengal.

But the glory and the prestige as a centre of higher education that was achieved by the Rajshahi College can be compared with any leading institutions of its nature during our period of its consideration. This can be justified if one is to examine the documents of this college which are preserved but not consulted seriously by the scholars. The present work is thus an intensive study on the basis of the source materials available in different academic centres of Bangladesh and India. A few important documents are presented here initially in order to understand the quality of these sources and how these are intended to represent our scope of study in the light of some outstanding models done by modern scholars. A few examples of these source materials are as under:

- (a) Letter Book of Baulia School;
- (b) Various correspondences with D.P.I. Bengal and Calcutta University;
- (c) Annual Reports on the Rajshahi College;
- (d) Quinquennial Reports of the Rajshahi College;
- (e) Calcutta University Calendars;
- (f) Adam's Report on the state of Education in Bengal;
- (g) Gazetteers and Journals;
- (h) Memoirs and so on;

Apart from the above sources some of the works like-

- (a) *Education in Muslim India* by S.M. Jaffar;
- (b) *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal* by M. Azizul Haq,
- (c) *Education in India under East India Company* by Major M. Barn,
- (d) *The Indian Musalmans* by W.W. Hunter,
- (e) *The Bengal Reactions to Christian Missionary Activities* by M. Mohar Ali,

- (f) Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920 by Aparna Basu,
 - (g) *Promotion of Learning in India during the Mahammedan India* by N.N. Law,
 - (h) *The History and Prospects of British Education in India* by F.W. Thomas,
 - (i) *Reactions and Reconcilement* by Abn Hena,
 - (j) *A History of Education in India and Pakistan* by F.E. Keay,
 - (k) *History of Traditional Islamic Education in Bangladesh* by A.D.M. Ayub Ali etc.
- supply us many additional information for this study. Some of the documents available relating to Calcutta University and some contemporary Colleges like Presidency College, Hugli College, Dacca College, Chittagong College, Patna College are equally important from our point of view.

With the sources mentioned above we intend to prepare our study of *Progress of Higher Education in Colonial Bengal and After- A Case Study of Rajshahi College (1873-1973)*. The entire dissertation is dividend into several chapters. The First Chapter is an Introductory one which elaborates the condition of education in pre-colonial and colonial Bengal. The Second Chapter is an analysis of the idea and origin of the Rajhahn College and to record how through various vicissitudes the present institution under consideration came into being in 1873.

The Third Chapter gives an idea of the admistrative setup and the academic pursuit of the institution. Here special attention has been given to highlight management, academie staff and student patteran of the College during the period of our study.

Important issues like growth and prospect of the institution have been incorporated in the Fourth Chapter of the thesis. Here steps have been taken to estimate a few leading personalities behind the College and also to analyse how this institution gradually turned into a reputed centre of higher education. This chapter also highlights how this College could maintain her relations with some of her contemporary sister academic institutions of those days.

The Fifth Chapter is a through study on the issues how the college could over come many constrainst and incourse of time by virtue of its contributions in socio-

Political life of colonial Bengal and afterwards. There is also an attempt here to present a list of a selected students who were not only brilliant products of this institution but also have also had their recognition in academic and national life during the period of our study.

The Last Chapter is, of course, on the Conclusion which is intended to focus and analyse some of the points related to the ideas being shaped through this dissertation. Infact the documents which have been used in the dissertation require an assessment in view of the present work and also to note how the idea of Rajshahi College hinted the minds of some contemporary intellectuals and through certain evolutionary process the institution came into existence in 1873.

Lastly it may be noted that the main focus of the dissertation is to present the circumstances favouring the establishment of the college in 1873 and in course of time how it played an important role in the academic and socio-political life of Bengal as a whole and Bangladesh afterwards.

Notes and references

1. Verendra Anchale Shikshar Patabhumi, an article by Amanullh Ahmed in Varendra Anchaler Itihash (History of Varendra Region), Rajshahi, 1998, P. 1113.
2. Serajul Islam (ed) : *Bangladesher Itihas* (1704-1971), vol. III, Dhaka, 1996, PP. 101-102.
3. Quazi Muhammad Messer : *Rajshahir Itihas (Bengali)*, vol. I, Bogra, 1965, P. 108.
4. Sree Kalinath Choudhury : *Rajshahir Sangkehipta Itihas*, Calcutta, 1901, P.80
5. For details see Rajshahi University Calendar, 1956.
6. Rajshahi College Prospectus, 1933-34, P. 1.
7. The Calcutta University Calendar, 1931, P. 540.