

Growth and Development of Modern Education in the Princely State of Cooch Behar,1860-1900

Biswajit Nandi
Asst. Teacher, Patlakhawa High School

The primary objective of this paper is to illuminate the growth and development of modern education in the princely state of Cooch Behar and its acceptance by the general people. Before going into details about the growth and development of modern education in the princely state of Cooch Behar, it is necessary to discuss the condition of educational background which was prevailed in the state. The dynasty of Cooch Behar founded by Vishwa Singha in about 1515 AD, though attained its zenith by his son Maharaja Naranarayan (1534-87), could not make any progress in the sphere of modern education. Before the second half of the 19th century, the progress of popular education was limited and the rulers of Cooch Behar encourage only Sanskrit learning and supported the pundits. The traditional educational institutions like tolls, path sals and gurukuls were prevalent for the education of the Royal Princes, sons of Brahmins and officials. But for the education of the general people, there was little encouragement of it. Even in the first decade of the 2nd half of the 19th century, in spite of the effort of the state to spread and popularize modern education among the people, the progress of modern education was very slow. We get a glimpse about the backwardness of popular education from the account of Sri Braja Mohon Mallik's report (1863), "The place was so backward and the people so unwilling to support our endeavor that the spread of education could not be satisfactory at all unless a very large expenditure was incurred by the state. At first, the people used to pay something but when the novelty wore out and they saw that the education received by their children instead of bringing in a suitable return, unfitted the boys in many cases for their ordinary works, a reaction set in and subscriptions were stopped. The boys coming to these schools did not quite like to handle the ploughs in the afterlife" (1). This report shows the backwardness in education in the princely state of Cooch Behar. But after this time under the kind patronage of Maharaja of the state and the care of the educational department, all sense of alarm and insecurity had been removed and steady and satisfactory progress was followed in popular education.

During the period of Maharaja Narendra Narayan, modern education, both the Vernacular and English, had been started in the state. The progress of modern education began in the state with the establishment of a vernacular school in 1857 AD (2). Thus it may be said that this school sowed the seed of popular learning in the state. The establishment of an English school in 1861 AD, which was named 'Jenkins school' after Colonel Jenkins (the Governor-General's Agent in the North-East Frontier), accelerate the development of modern education in the state. In the beginning, it taught up to the third standard of the entrance curriculum.

For the spread of education, the establishment of school was not only confined in the capital town but also in the interior of the state. To spread the light of education among the general people, three vernacular schools were opened in the interior of the state. These

schools were placed under the direct management of the state. To afford facilities for the education of the Maharaja's relations, a Boarding Institution was established at this time in the capital town of Cooch Behar, where the kinsmen of Maharaja obtain an education free to all charges (3). The state took special attention in establishing primary schools and maqtabas in the interior of the state for increasing the literacy rate among the people.

In 1865 AD, the educational function of this state was alienated from the Honorary Inspector of School to the hands of a local committee of Public Instruction which was assisted periodically by the Inspector of Schools of the North-East Division. Under its supervision, a local Deputy Inspector of Schools visited the interior and indulged in the spread of education. During the five years i.e. from 1865 AD to 1870 AD that followed the progress of education considerably. In 1870 AD three boys from the Jenkins School, out of five candidates, passed the Entrance Examination for the first time in the state. The number of village schools came up to 58 and the total expenditure on education came from Rs. 7,022 in 1865 AD to Rs. 29,515 in 1870 AD, of which Rs. 2,884 was contributed by the people (4). This contribution made by the people shows the increasing interest in education in the state.

The gradual spread of education and institutions not only in the capital town even in the interior of the state made it difficult to maintain educational functions properly for the local committee of Public Instruction. So, for better management, a separate Superintendent ship for the Educational Department was set up in 1870 AD. The objectives of the department were (1) to advise in all matters connected with education; (2) to inspect and examine the schools; (3) to deliver occasional lectures (5). The works of the department were carried for extending the scope and sphere of education in the state. The rapid progress of education and increase of expenditure in the state from 1871 AD TO 1880 AD are shown in the following table.

Table-1

Description of Schools	Year		
	1871-72	1875-76	1879-80
State	4	7	6
Aided	49	177	289
Unaided	29	98	95
Total	82	282	390
State	Rs. 22,233	Rs. 42,591	Rs. 60,685

Amount of Expenditure	Private	Rs. 6,273	Rs. 22,357	Rs. 33,213
	Total	Rs. 28,506	Rs. 64,948	Rs. 93,898

From the table, we notice the rapid progress of education in the state and during this time the base of modern education was cemented by the establishment of educational institutions almost all over the state. This considerable progress was possible for a large amount of expenditure made by both the state and the general people of the state.

But in the early 80s, the progress of education faced some difficulties. A very marked decrease saw in the number of schools and private subscriptions. The number of schools came down from 390 to 324 and private subscriptions from Rs. 33,213 to Rs. 22,274. The causes of this decrease were¹ the limitation of the allotment for grant-in-aid under orders of the Lieutenant-Governor,² the practice of revising and lowering state grant to schools year after year and³ the enforcement of the conditions for the payment of local subscriptions⁷. To overcome this problem, the state authority of Cooch Behar sought the assistance of the British Government of Bengal. Under the supervision of Babu Brahma Mahan Mallick (an assistant Inspector of Schools of the Burdwan Division), the British authority of Bengal appointed a commission to investigate and instructed to prepare a report on the state of education. After a thorough investigation, Babu Brahma Mahan Mallick submitted his report. He thus summed up:- “ It will now be quite clear that the so-called collapse of the grant-in-aid system in Cooch Behar is actually not at all so serious as it has seemed to be; that the statistical tables which have exhibited falling off and fluctuations in the number of schools are explicable on sufficient ground; and that although the Cooch Behar rulers stand in urgent need of improvement, there can be no doubt that their operation, such as it has been, has brought in to existence many schools and enabled a large number of boys to obtain useful instruction. There was no effort to bring education to the door of everyone willing to avail himself of it. After All the inquiries, I have been able to make into the educational operations of Cooch Behar. I have become convinced that no sweeping reform or radical change of policy is wanted there”.⁸ He recommended some positive measures for the improvement of this difficult situation. In this report, the commission admired the effort of the state for the development of education.

The history of the educational development of Cooch Behar will be incomplete without mentioning the contribution of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan (1863-1911). The secular attitude of the Maharaja Nripendra Narayan in respect of spreading education in all classes of the society enumerated. It was during his period primary education, higher education, female education and even adult education had not only been spread but also popularized. The name of the Maharaja Nripendra Narayan will be remembered by the people whole of North Bengal particularly Cooch Behar for the establishment of a college, named after Queen Victoria, in 1888 AD. This college was considered as a first-grade college with Arts up to B.A standard and was affiliated to Calcutta University and science up to Intermediate⁹. To encourage native youths, a boarding institution was opened in this college for the

accommodation of the student. Very soon this college became an attractive and useful institution by providing free education, regular scholarship and other facilities. The college has been fortunate, in securing for its principal, Babu Brajendra Nath Seal, of whose vast erudition all Bengal is proud. Gradually the Victoria College became one of the leading colleges and opened the door of higher education in the princely state of Cooch Behar.

Towards the end of the 19th century, an important point in the educational history of Cooch Behar was that the establishment of the Entrance Schools in the interior of the state. To spread educational facilities in the interior of the state Primary Schools for literacy and Entrance Schools for higher education was established in the sub-divisions of Mathabhanga, Mekhligang and Dinhata in 1890 AD. Besides the financial assistance by the state, a sum of money was also collected from the local people for the maintenance of these schools. This private investment in the development of education is a sign of interest and involvement in the education of the general people. In respect of higher education, Maharaja Nripendra Narayan was with the view, "I wish, in other words, that in the state may found every opportunity of any of my subjects to prosecute such studies as he or his parent's desire". The remarks corroborate the attitude of the ruler toward the development of higher education¹⁰.

In this connection, the education for the female deserves special attention. Previously the ladies of the palace were not allowed to receive education in the traditional educational institutions like tolls, path sales and gurukuls. Though they got their education in morality and religious-spiritualism from the elder members of the family through the Kirtana, Namaghosh and scriptures-based stories in their houses as well as in the village Namaghar¹¹. Up to the first half of the 19th century, there was no girl's school in the state. But from the second half of the Nineteenth Century, various steps had been taken for female education by the authorities of Cooch Behar and the effort of educationists of the state. A lecture of the Hitaisani Sabha, informs us that some modern education-minded people of Cooch Behar started thinking about education especially for women's education. The Headmaster of Jenkins School, Tribhanga Mukhopadhyay in his lecture on education pleaded for English-Bengali schools in Koch Behar. Harimohan Babu, a teacher of the same school also had given a lecture in favor of women's education. He said in his lecture, a well-educated woman produces well-educated children. He also said: We should not only build schools for boys, for the proper development of the country we should also focus on education for girls. As God has gifted both men and women intellect and ethics, we should not neglect education for girls. As a result of that, many girls were opened by the modern-minded people of the state. Rajput Zoardar Chandradhar Singh of Mekhliganj and Krishna Kumar Lahiri of Bamanhat established two girls' schools at Mekhliganj and Bamanhat respectively. Ratikanta Babu of Koch Behar established a Gurukul-type girl's school at Koch Behar¹². This lecture was a landmark in the history of women education in Cooch Behar because it was for the first instance that educationist directly advocating for women education and thereafter the establishment of girl's school increased tremendously.

During the reign of Maharaja Nripendra Narayana education for women get a special preference. In 1881 AD a landmarking step had been taken for the cause of women's education in the state. This year the school for girls named Sunity Academy was established

in the capital town. The school received the direct patronage of Maharani Sunity Devi. From the beginning, Sunity Academy has become the guiding force of women's education in Cooch Behar. In this school 'the girl's student was not only exempted from tuition fees and the cost of the books but also they were invited, on their success, to the Lansdown Hall almost every year and were piled with sweets and prizes'¹³. Besides the Sunity Academy, the girl's schools were also established in the interior of the state. W.W Hunter in his "Statistical Account of Bengal" (popularly known as Hunter Reports) gives us the following table of the number of girl's schools and the number of girls' student.¹⁴

Table-2

Year	Nos. of Girls Schools	Nos. of Girls Students
1868-69	06	130
1875-76	23	352
1878-79	48	560
1879-80	50	641
1881-82	34	383
1891-92	10	214
1893-94	11	396
1897-98	12	178

This table shows that in the session 1879-80 the girl's schools reached their highest number but after that, there was a great decrease in the number of girl's schools. The cause of this decrease was the cut-off of grants in education, especially in women's education. During this period the girls' schools were urban-centric and all schools were confined in lower primary, primary and middle primary. Thus in spite of the effort of the state, the educational development among women met with little success and the progress was very slow.

The light of modern education not only touches the youths but also spread among the adults by the efforts of the state. For the upbringing of adults to the level of general education, Night Schools were opened in the state. In the year 1891-92 AD there were 39 Night Schools in the state, out of which 23 were aided and 16 were unaided. In the same year, there were 714 people on the roll of the Night Schools and of them, 478 attended daily on an average¹⁵. These schools nearly covered the entire state. In 1900 AD there were 44 Night Schools in the state, out of which 14 were aided and 30 unaided. Mention should be made

that the opening of Night Schools for adult education has been a reflection of the modern mind of the ruler and the authority of the state.

Modern education was extended to all classes of society without any differentiation. To spread education among the masses, no educational institution was categorically restricted to any particular class of the society. The lower classes of the society were given a better opportunity, irrespective of their caste, creed, race, religious belief and economic status in the state. In Jenkins School, out of 401 pupils, 24 only belonged to the upper class of the society, 307 to the middle class and 70 to the lower class. In the year 1891-92 out of 8,731 pupils reading in their different classes of the schools in the state, 5,768 were Hindus and 2,868 were Mahomedans¹⁶. The Muslims, backward in education in comparison to the Hindus, had received fresh importance. For the benefit of the Mahomedans, Persians Schools were established in the town and Muktabs were also set up in the Mahomedan populated villages of Cooch Behar. This effort augmented a sense of enthusiasm among this community. Mention should be made that the authority of the state had a vision of secularism to spread education among the grassroots of the society.

To spread and popularize vocational education, Artisan Schools and Vocational Institutions were established. Realizing the value of Physical and Moral educations, the state took initiatives to spread this kind of education among the people. Thus spectacular growth and development of all kinds of education can be found in the state. In the year 1900 AD the Princely State of Cooch Behar has now a first grade College, Higher and Middle English schools and middle Vernacular schools, primary schools, Sanskrit Tolls, Persian schools, Pathsalas, Night schools and Girls schools. Some of these schools were established and maintained by the state directly and the other schools were established and maintained by the subscriptions of the people. This revealed the fact that the state was able to evoke interest among the general people especially in respect of modern education.

From the above discussion, it can be said that the remarkable growth and development in education have been possible for the positive drive of the enlightened ruler as well as the educational department of the princely state Cooch Behar. Here is no doubt to say, the education system of Cooch Behar was greatly influenced by the British education system of Bengal proper. Under the kind patronage of the ruler and the care of the education department, we observed steady and satisfactory progress in modern education year after year. The state has done and is still doing after this period i.e. 1860-1900 AD, a great deal to impart education, both primary and high, to its people.

Notes and References

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