



Western and Indian Sights on Education: A Study on the British Colonial Period

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a pivotal role in rebuilding and upholding the nation over the years. The British who first came to India as simple traders before holding the power as it's rulers as well as administrators, had significantly influenced the whole political, social, educational and economic setting of India. It was not possible for the British to control Indians easily; they made earlier attempt to develop a new education system in India so that the native Indians can be manipulated easily. At the same time India was the witness of those notable Indians who sacrificed their lives in order to make India better developed. Their tireless efforts made Bengal Renaissance easier at that colonial period. The present paper is an attempt to discuss some educational concern at that British colonial period and at the same time, to explore the contributions of Indian great social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in the journey of Bengal Renaissance of 19th century.

Keywords: British Raj, Charter Act, Oriental-Occidental Controversy, Macaulay Minute, Wood's Despatch, Bengal Renaissance, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

Introduction

From the early beginning, education is the most important tool to reconstruct and also maintain the society as well as the nation. Power of knowledge and education is rapidly taking over the battlefield throughout the years (Adhikari and Saha, 2023a). 19th century is the period of Indian history when India was under the ruling of British Raj. Basically, it was the time when India was a matter of colonial interest and was wrapped with western culture and values (Adhikari and Saha, 2023b). At the same time, the Indian eminent educators as well as social reformers raised their hands to ensure Bengal Renaissance and thus, the period has become an amalgamation of Western and Indian thoughts in order to reshape the entire Indian education and society. It is important for Indians to introspect how these reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar tactically incorporated traditional thoughts with westerns (Sen, 2023). It is obvious to define the presence of women in the society with having equal access to high quality education (Saha, 2023). At the period of Bengal Renaissance, Indian educators fought relentlessly to make women's position better for establishing a better future of Indian society.

Objective of the study

The present study focuses on revisiting some crucial events in the journey of education in British Colonial period. It also emphasises the efforts made by great educators as well as social reformers in Bengal Renaissance of 19th century.

Delimitation of the Study

History of India is the witness of continuous evolution of education system right from the beginning. Specially, the 19th century is the crucial period in the pages of Indian history for the development of Indian education. The authors have delimited their study in highlighting Charter Act (1813), Oriental-Occidental Controversy, Macaulay Minute (1835) and Wood's Despatch (1854) in reshaping Indian Education of British era. The study is also delimited to the initiatives taken by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar only in Bengal Renaissance of 19th century.

Journey of Education in British Era

Charter Act, 1813

19th century was the period when India was going through the ruling of British raj and it influenced directly our Indian education system. In spite of coming as a simple trading company, gradually the Britishers started ruling India in each and every aspect such as economy, administration, education and so on. They were actually not concerned about the development of Indians but still education was included in their concern just for strengthening their power in India. During this period in 1811, the Governor General Lord Minto highlighted the deplorable status of existing education in his report (Minto's Minute) and appealed to the company for financial support to secure Indian knowledge. In this regard, the Charter Act was introduced in British parliament in the year 1813. It was stated in the section 43 of Charter Act that, at least one lakh rupees will be expended annually by the Company in the revival of Indian literature, encouragement of learned native Indians and in promoting scientific knowledge among students of British ruled India. It can be regarded as a turning point in Indian educational history because for the first time the British Parliament recognized the importance of educating Indians (Vennila, 2018).

Oriental-Occidental Controversy

India was enriched with its own literature and science but at the same time the British rulers made attempt to introduce English literature and western science in the field of traditional Indian education. Meanwhile, a bitter contradiction was started during this British colonial rule over native Indians. The Orientals prefer Indian languages like Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic as the medium of instruction whereas, the Occidentals thought that English is the most reliable and rich language used as the medium of instruction in educational institutions rather than other Indian languages. Even the Occidentals favour the teaching of European literature in various educational institutions and they strongly opposed the traditional indigenous knowledge of India. The Charter Act (1813) was unable to specify the exact methods in the fulfilment of pre-determined objectives that are improvement of literature, science and encouragement of learned natives. This ambiguity in the clause 43 of the Charter Act (1813) was the central cause of this historical Oriental-Occidental or East-Western Controversy.

Macaulay Minute (1835)

One of the most highlighted parts of Indian educational history is the historical minute published in 1835 by Lord Macaulay that is called Macaulay Minute. It was his strong attempt to make English as the medium of instruction specially for the higher-level students. Macaulay dreamt that kind of education which will develop personalities with Indian blood and colour; but there will be English in their thoughts, opinions and intellects. He contributed a lot in spreading western literature, science and value among the native Indians. He neglected the indigeneity of Indian knowledge in the development of Indians. Indian culture, literature, science, language- all of these were considered backdated; hence, the western literature and science became popular in this regard with his efficient hands. Macaulay Minute was developed in complete support of British raj which prioritised the hegemonic influence of English in overall educational system.

A well-planned trick of Macaulay was the acceptance of '*Downward Filtration Theory*' in providing education to Indians. Macaulay suggested that it is literally impossible to educate the entire mass with the limited means. So, it was found easier to deliver education to only upper classes of the society rather than providing elementary education to the mass of people. This education will be filtered down among the grass root level or lower-class people. Macaulay did not emphasize the importance of offering education to each and every individual of the nation.

Wood's Despatch (1854)

Wood's Despatch (1854) is a milestone in Indian history of education that was successfully able to make a balance in the Oriental-Occidental Controversy. Charles Wood was definitely in favour of imparting western knowledge and culture among Indians but still he established a landmark in Indian education. The central cause is his willingness to educate the mass of people in native India; even if the hidden purpose was to supply a large number of educated Indians as reliable and efficient public servants to the East India Company. In this regard, Wood strongly opposed and criticised the '*Downward Filtration Theory*' of Lord Macaulay so that education can be spread among mass of people which would be helpful for the Company. In this regard, the grant-in-aid was introduced to meet the objectives. Passing of three universities in India (in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay) was the great outcome of Wood's Despatch. In general, there are lots of recommendations made by Wood to improve the existing status of Indian education whatever the actual purpose was.

Bengal Renaissance in the Light of Ram Mohan and Vidyasagar

Prodigious Activities of Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Raja Ram Mohan Roy is recognised as the '*Father of Bengal Renaissance*'. This social reformer is the great personality whose influence can be felt in Indian history socially, politically, educationally and so on (Gorain and Roy, 2022). In order to reform the society, he campaigned against so many social issues which were general causes of social backwardness such as polygamy, dowry, female infanticide etc. Ram Mohan had a great contribution in Indian history to stamp out the inhuman custom of '*Sati*' in which the widow woman had to sacrifice her life into the funeral pyre of her late husband. He strongly opposed the orthodox Hindu rituals and superstitions and wanted to make people rational for the development of society. He was also the pioneer of education; he made attempt to flourish the Indian or traditional education by combining it with the westerns. Hence, his speculations did not confine his educational thoughts into Oriental or Occidental, he had made a path break for new educational ideas to enrich Indian education by synthesizing eastern and western thoughts (Adhikari and Saha, 2021a). He enriched the part of academics with his broad outlook and deep understanding in every sphere of knowledge. Rammohun was really careful about the women. He has fought to abolish the practices of child marriage with his efficient hands. Ram Mohan was the precursor or founding father of '*Brahma Samaj*' which served for the modification and purification of Indian society. Even if the period was British ruled, he successfully took help of British rulers to fight against social evils and also emancipated Indian

society from the dark and heinous social practices of that period. It was his realization that a well-organized progressive society cannot be formed until or unless members of the society are being educated (Chowdhury, 2021). Ram Mohan has carefully chosen the spread of education as the most powerful weapon to make society able to destroy the stereotype thoughts (Roy et al., 2023). He has tried to establish humanity and equality in the society with his deep insight and scientific temper in order to make Indian culture and society liberal from inhuman social boundaries.

Contributions of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

The great social reformer as well as educator Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was one of the pioneers of the Bengal Renaissance. He is that shining star of India who is remembered for his significant contributions in making society free from several ignorance and also making the platform of education broaden to all. He strongly believed that education has the power to bring dignity and respect for the women in social circumstances (Das, 2021). In his educational thoughts, women education is given most priority in reforming society and also in considering women liberal. Shortly it can be said that, as a pioneer of education, the name Vidyasagar is associated with so many educational institutions such as Metropolitan Institution, Sanskrit College, Fort William College, Bethune School etc. He has made attempt to make education easier for children in their own Bengali language with his great creation 'Varnaparichaya'. The crying of widow touches the heart of this great man; hence, Vidyasagar has created a new episode in the Indian history by introducing *widow marriage*; it was a marvellous step to enlighten the society. This philanthropist served tirelessly to make educational opportunities available to the people and specially to include women and underprivileged under the umbrella of education. Vidyasagar was greatly inspired by the journey of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. India is the witness of his benefaction in abolishing the practice of polygamy and child marriage. Throughout the life Vidyasagar struggled against the conservative forces in the society through education and social movements (Dhara and Barik, 2021). When our society was full of sins, superstitions, illiteracy and unconsciousness, Vidyasagar was raised like the sun to shed light in that orthodox society. He also emphasised the importance of value education in Indian art and iconography (Adhikari & Saha, 2021d; 2022) through narration of tales from mythology and also admired the pictorial interpretations of mythology of his contemporary Raja Ravi Varma (Adhikari & Saha, 2021c). This phase was also a time when women educationalists and reformers inspired by Vidyasagar and Rammohun led challenging activities to progress women education (Adhikari & Saha, 2021b).

Conclusion

It was a long period when India was under the British consideration. The British, came as traders and rose to power as rulers and administrators of India, had a major impact on the entire political, educational, and economic system of India. It was their primary motivation to visit India i.e., to increase their trading profits in this country. However, it was not so easy to make control over Indians without changing the social and educational system of India. So, it was their first target to create a new education system for Indians which will be beneficial to the Company in their fulfilment of pre-determined goals. At the same time there were some eminent educators who dedicated their lives in serving India. The process of social advancement can be sparked by widespread education through positive changes of social attitudes, convictions, and traditions. Regardless of caste, class, religion or social background, a strong education can foster an environment of social equality. It also makes people aware about how to lead quality life and assists them in letting go of rigid social norms. When we reflect on the last few decades, it is evident that women's roles in society have changed substantially in a variety of ways with proper implication if education. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar established a milestone in reforming Indian education and society in that colonial period, they have played a crucial role in coming Bengal Renaissance at that colonial period of 19th century.

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