

Evolution of Elementary Education in the North Western Provinces 1833-1857

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Education has always been endemic to Indian society as Amir Khusro puts it 'that foreigners have come to India in their quest for knowledge but no Indian has gone out from India to any other country to seek education,' reflects the attainment of Indian scholars in the domain of education in the past.¹ However, with the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, India witnessed a rapid decline in Education. Both the Hindu and the Muslim seats of learning languished in the absence of patronage. It must be said to the credit of Indians that even under a period of stress and political turmoil, the Kayasthas and the Brahmins maintained their private schools; and likewise, the *Maulvis* managed their *Makhtabs* and *Madarsahs*. Needless to say that education imparted there had a deep religious influence. With the establishment of the Company's rule the character of education also underwent a change. The attitude of the Company's administration towards education was extremely hesitant and uncertain. Till 1813 it did nothing for the spread of education. In that year, for the first time, it provided a small sum of Rupees One Lakh for the spread of Education for the 'natives of India'. The reason for their lack of interest was perhaps the uncertainties which clouded their vision. Firstly, whether to participate in the system of Education or not; and secondly, whether they should support a reformed indigenous system in the lower and higher grades or introduce Western Education through the medium of English. The controversy was set at rest by William Bentinck's Resolution of March 7, 1835 which declared "The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European Literature and Science among the natives of India".²

During this period the demand for education was catered to by indigenous schools. These indigenous schools were run through the voluntary efforts of private organizations or of the local people for the children of their own community. Boys from neighboring areas could also join, but on payment of prescribed fees. The teacher maintained the school on his own account and these schools had their own methods of teaching and syllabus, which was not very encouraging and comprised of only the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic). Most schools were without a building or classrooms and teaching took place in the temples, mosques or thatched huts or even under the shade of trees. There were no gradation of classes and books were rarely used. The average duration of school life of a student was three to four years.³

The education system introduced in 1835 was probably the largest single westernizing agency in the nineteenth century India. In 1837, English replaced Persian as the official language and in 1844 Lord Hardinge's administration declared that those educated in English would be preferred in all appointments to subordinate services. The result was the rapid increase in demand for English education. Under the changing political and administrative needs, the *taluqadars* and *zamindars* realized that the traditional education being imparted in the North Western Provinces would not be beneficial. Just at this time, Indian dominions were opened to Christian Missionaries who saw "in the opening of western influences as an opportunity for the propagation of Christianity in India by means of missionary schools"⁴. It is an admitted fact that western education was inaugurated by Christian missionaries who maintained several schools in all the principal towns and prepared young men for appointment in the new job opportunities under a new regime. The Indian elite- the zamindars of Agra and the *taluqadars*, not only supported the missionary schools but started their own schools which were run through their benevolence.

The control of the educational institutions of the North Western Provinces was transferred from the Government of Bengal to the Local Government, together with the funds and all local resources by a resolution dated April 29, 1840.⁵ At that time there were a few institutions in which Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian were taught and these hardly answered the colonial concepts or requirements. The subjects taught in these schools were considered useless for the objects which the government desired.⁶ When James Thomason became the Lieutenant-Governor of the North Western provinces(Dec.12, 1843-Sept.27, 1853) he favored the indigenous system of education but which he wanted to improve and mould it to cater to the colonial needs. His scheme was somewhat unique, aiming at, the most, the elementary education for the masses. According to him Indians were essentially an agricultural lot and anything which concerned their land, immediately riveted their attention and excited their interest. It led him to aim at educating the people by exhorting some pressure on them, exercised through the land system.

During the previous land Settlement in the North Western Provinces, a measurement was made and a map drawn of every field and a record kept of every right attached to the field. The *Patwari's* papers, based on the Settlement constituted an annual register of the property rights and were regularly filed in the collector's office. Since it was important for the peasant-proprietors to protect their own land and to acquaint themselves with the principles on which the papers were compiled, it was also necessary for them to satisfy that the entries affecting them were correct.⁷ It was also deemed necessary by Thomason to supply, "a direct and powerful inducement to the mind of almost every individual to acquire so much of reading, writing and arithmetic and mensuration, as could suffice for the protection of his rights."⁸ He had decided to impress upon the people the necessity of this kind of elementary education in their own indigenous schools through the medium of vernacular language. For this object he prepared a scheme to encourage and improve the existing institutions. He placed before the Government of India a proposal for the creation of village schools. His proposal was forwarded for the consideration of the Court of Directors.⁹ The Court of Directors realized the necessity of giving a powerful impetus to Elementary Education in the North Western Provinces and expressed its desire to "sanction the adoption of some more comprehensive

plan for extending and improving the means of popular instruction throughout the Country,” but hesitated as it observed some doubts on the plan as suggested by Thomason and considered some features of the plan “as open to objections”. To eliminate doubts from the minds of the Court of Directors, Thomason set himself with earnestness to devise a plan which he could finally place before Lord Dalhousie for the latter’s sanction in April 1848.

Thomason’s scheme contemplated the establishment of one Model Government School in each *Tahsil*. It provided for a powerful committee which would visit all the indigenous schools. It would furnish the people and the teachers with advise, assistance and encouragement by rewarding those teachers who might be found most deserving.¹⁰ For a time being Thomason did not introduce his plan in the whole province but confined his scheme to only eight districts.¹¹ Dalhousie recommended Thomason’s scheme to the Court of Directors. They accorded their sanction to the plan which was put to trial. Thus, the *Tahsili* Schools were established in the North Western Provinces and the local government announced “There will be a government village school at the headquarters of every *Tahsildari*...which will be conducted by a school master who will receive Rs.10/- to 20/- per mensem, besides fees, as he may collect from the scholars”¹² The curriculum in these *Tahsili* schools included reading, writing, arithmetic mensuration of land and book keeping.

Thomason’s experiment in the eight districts attracted considerable attention from all quarters. The Bengal Council of Education deputed its Secretary F.J.Mouat to visit Thomason’s experimental schools to gain first-hand knowledge. In June 1853, Mouat made inspections of these schools in the eight districts. In August 1853, the Government of the North Western Provinces submitted a proposal for the extension of the scheme of these village schools in the remaining districts of the Province. Dalhousie, while approving the recommendations of the scheme, recorded an interesting minute in which he ordered the introduction of village schools in Bengal also. The Court of Directors approved the proposals on May 8, 1856.¹³ In the meantime Thomason had established at Agra, an institution to train teachers for these village vernacular schools. For the teachers of the Normal School, he introduced such subjects as Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Geography and History. To ensure the success of the scheme he also provided for governmental supervision. H.S.Reid was appointed Visitor-General and with the organization of the Education Department in 1855, he became the first Director of Education of the North Western Provinces. Others officers, such as the *zilla* visitors and the *pargana* inspectors of schools were also appointed. Thus, a well-organized system was provided with for its systematic implementation.

Normally these village schools had six classes, viz. from I to VI.¹⁴ Subsequently, they were designated as upper vernacular schools. In 1872, they were called as Vernacular middle schools. The number of classes was reduced from six to four, i.e., they now had classes III, IV, V and VI. This gave rise to the establishment of upper primary schools with classes III and IV and the Lower primary schools with an infants’ class and classes I and II.¹⁵ It is noteworthy that towards the end of the 19th century, middle classes were separated from the upper primary classes and subsequently one more class was added to the middle level which thereafter consisted of three classes, V, VI and VII. The introduction of village schools in the North Western

Provinces by James Thomason was a unique educational experiment, embodying a keen desire to educate the masses.¹⁶

Closely connected with the village schools scheme was another educational plan, called the *Halkabandi* schools. The successors of Thomason conceived and developed the system of *Halkabandi* schools and abandoned the indigenous agency, in favour of direct intervention of the Education Department. In 1851 Alexander, the Collector of Mathura, introduced it as an experiment.¹⁷ Since funds did not permit the establishment of new schools in each village, a cluster of villages, about four or five, was marked out. The central of these villages was fixed upon as the site of the school. It was termed as *halkabandi* school.¹⁸ The revenue of the *halka* was calculated and the *zamindars* of the area were persuaded to contribute towards education. The salaries of the teachers of these schools varied from Rs.36/- to Rs.60/- per annum. These schools were free schools. The scheme which was introduced in Mathura showed encouraging results, subsequently *halkabandi* schools were established in the districts of Agra, Bareilly, Etah, Etawah, Mainpuri and Shahjahanpur. By the close of the year 1854 there were about 17,000 boys receiving education in them.¹⁹ These schools imparted education in reading and writing the vernacular languages- both Urdu and Hindi, arithmetic, mensuration of land. The gradation of classes was from I to IV and sometimes upto VI, like the *Tahsili* schools.

The teachers in both schools received fixed salaries which were paid directly by the Government, which collected funds for the *halkabandi* schools by raising one percent cess on revenue. This levy at first was voluntary but in the subsequent years it was made compulsory from April 30, 1857. The Educational Despatch of 1859 recommended compulsory local levy, as the best means of financing elementary education. By 1866 this cess assumed a form of tax on the *zamindars*. With the increase and success of the *halkabandi* schools, the indigenous schools gradually started to degenerate and by the end of the 19th century, the *halkabandi* schools formed the main plank of primary education in the North Western Provinces. They also came to be known as vernacular primary schools. In 1854 came the Woods Despatch, which is regarded as the Magna Carta of English Education in India. Among its several recommendations; one was that the state should gradually withdraw itself from the direct control of education; instead, it should confine itself to a system of grants-in-aid and to encourage and foster private enterprise in the field. In the North Western Provinces, under Woods Despatch, the Department of Education was established which brought the elementary education under its control. It was self-contradictory that on the one hand it emphasized to encourage indigenous schools and on the other they were deprived of the grants-in-aid. In spite of the indifference of the government, the indigenous schools continued to make progress and their number exceeded that of the Departmental schools. In 1881-82, there were 5845 schools under the Department of Education, while the number of indigenous schools was 6712.²⁰

Thus we find that elementary education made a humble progress in the erstwhile North Western Provinces during the period 1833-1857. The year 1857 witnessed the uprising which in its wake wrought about tremendous changes. Thereafter, the affairs of India came under the close supervision of the British Government and all policies riveted in the interest of colonial rule. Education could not escape from such scruples.

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9. *ibid.*(The proposal for the establishment of village Schools was submitted in letter dated Nov.18,1846, to which the Court of Director's reply came in a Despatch dated Aug.25,1847).
10. Thomason's Despatches, Selections from Government Records, Vol.I, p.400;also see Indian Education Commission, pp.9 and 105.
11. These were: Mathura, Agra, Bareilly, Etawah, Aligarh, Farukhabad, Mainpuri and Shahjahanpur.
12. Indian Education Commission, p.9; Regional Archives Office, Benaras Collectorate Educational Correspondence, pp.105-106.
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17. Indian Education Commission 1882, p.106.
18. Cluster or group of Villages, also arrangement of villages in circles for accounts purposes.
19. Indian Education Commission, 1882, p.106, Also see S.E.R.(*op.cit.*) Part II, p.231.
20. Indian Education Commission, pp.69 and 86. In 1884 it was estimated that about 80,000 pupils were under instructions in indigenous schools.