

HUNTER COMMISSION (1882) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract: The 1882 report of the Hunter Commission is a landmark work in the history of education in India. There were various complaints that the 1854 Wood's Despatch had not been appropriately implemented. Under the circumstances, governor general Lord Ripon appointed a commission headed by Sir William Hunter, consisting of twenty-two members, to report on how the ideas and provisions of the 1854 Despatch had been implemented in the country. Additionally, 'the present state of elementary education and the means by which this can be extended and improved' was also required to be reported by the Hunter Commission. The progress of the college work and some other aspects of education were also reported upon, though the general operation of universities was out of the commission's term of reference. But the commission provided some important suggestions regarding higher education also. This research paper is a historical review of the Hunter Commission, 1882 and the development of Indian education in which it is studied about recommendations and clauses for primary, secondary, and higher education along with its impact.

Key Words: *Hunter Commission, Grant-in-Aid, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, Training of Graduate Teachers*

Introduction

The revolt of 1857 distressed the foundation of British Empire in India. The administration was taken away from the company and transferred to the crown. The normalization of conditions took some time. By 1882 it was considered necessary to assess the development of education in the country and to remove the defects which had crept into it. For this purpose, Lord Ripon appointed the Indian Education Commission on February 3, 1882, under the chairmanship of William Hunter, a member of the executive council of a Viceroy and former solicitor general of Scotland. The commission, popularly known as Hunter Commission after the name of its chairman, had twenty-two members, some of whom were Indians. Among these were Syed Mohmud, Anand Mohan Basu, P. Ranganada Mudaliar, Hazi Gulam, K. T. Talang, Maharaj Jitendra Mohan Tagore and Bhudeo Mukherji. Dr. Miller was its member as a representative of the missionaries, B. L. Rice, the director of the public instruction of Mysore, was the secretary of the commission.

The Aims of the Commission

- ✓ To assess the position of primary education and to give suggestions for its reforms.
- ✓ To evaluate the work of the missionaries in the field of education.
- ✓ To find out if the government institutions should be allowed to continue.
- ✓ To assess the utility of the grant-in-aid system. To find out the attitude of the government towards the private Indian enterprises in the field of education. To find out if they received encouragement from the government.
- ✓ To study the problem of primary education and to suggest measures for its reforms. But the commission also chose to investigate the affairs relating to secondary and higher education.

After hard work of ten months the commission produced a report of about 700 pages which had historical importance. The commission made several sittings for the first two months in Calcutta, then for the next eight months it toured round the whole country. The commission extracted opinions from provincial governments. It formed several committees in various provinces to study the problem of primary education. It obtained more than 300 suggestions from various groups of people.

The recommendations of the commission are highlighted in the following heads:

Primary Education

After studying the problems of primary education from every angle the Hunter commission provided detailed suggestions for its reforms. The education policy, the financing system, training of teachers, organization, and curriculum, etc., were studied by the commission. For primary education, the commission recommended the following points:

- ✓ **Policy:** The commission observed that primary education should be related to life. It should be practical and useful. Its purpose should make students self-dependent. Its curriculum should consist of such subjects which may further these goals. The students should be given primary education through the medium of their mother tongue. Persons who have received primary education should be given preference in services suitable for them. Primary education should be encouraged. Steps should be taken to develop primary education. The backward and tribal people should be encouraged to receive primary education.
- ✓ **Management:** The Hunter commission placed the responsibility of primary education on district boards, municipal boards, and town areas. Thus, it made the government free from its responsibility.
- ✓ **Training Schools:** The Commission urged the necessity of opening training schools for the training of teachers. It rightly found training of teachers necessary for the development of primary education. It suggested that (1) training

schools should be established at such places from where trained teachers may be made available for the areas where there are no trained teachers. There should be at least one normal school within the jurisdiction of each inspector of schools. (2) Inspectors of schools should take personal interest in the organization and maintenance of normal schools. (3) Normal schools should also get a reasonable share of the grant sanctioned for primary education.

- ✓ **Curriculum:** The commission left the organization of the curriculum on provincial governments with the suggestion that they should organize the same in their respective areas according to the needs of the locality concerned. At the same time the commission also suggested that subjects useful for life should be incorporated in the curriculum. It opined that agriculture, physics, trigonometry, geography, medicine, and accountancy should be included in the curriculum as these subjects are closely related to life.

The impact of the recommendations of primary education was favorable for Indians. By bringing primary education under the local boards, the Hunter commission changed the shape of primary education. This measure made the government free of any responsibility for the same and gave an opportunity to the local boards to serve the people. Luckily, the local boards performed their task well and the condition of primary education improved. As the local boards were required to run primary schools, the provincial government had to release the grants sanctioned in their favour and they could not divert it to other purposes. This eased the financial difficulty of primary schools to some extent.

At the time of Hunter commission there were many indigenous institutions imparting education to people on the old traditional Indian pattern. The commission regarded these schools as very useful for imparting primary education. So, it recommended financial grants for them.

Secondary Education

Although the commission appointed only for primary education, the Hunter commission examined the condition of secondary and higher education as well. The commission gave the following three important suggestions for secondary education:

- ✓ The government should entrust the responsibility of secondary education wholly to the Indians. It should only give financial grants for removing certain difficulties.
- ✓ The commission indirectly pleaded for English as the medium of instruction. It ignored the claim of the mother tongue for the same. For the middle schools the managers of schools were made responsible for organizing education according to the local needs.
- ✓ The secondary school curriculum should be divided into two parts. In the first part literary and science subjects should be grouped and in the second part there should be such vocational subjects which might be useful to life.

Training of Graduate Teachers: The Commission emphasized the necessity of teachers' training for raising the standard of secondary education. At the time of Hunter commission there were only two training schools in the country, one at Lahore and the other at Madras. The commission recommended that the duration of training for graduates should be shorter than for those who are not graduates. The trainees should be examined both in theory and practice of teaching.

Grant-in-Aid: The Grant-in-aid system was started in England in 1861. It was started in India in 1865. There was no uniformity in this system in India. In Madras it was based on teachers' salary, in Bombay on examination result, in central provinces and north-western (U.P) provinces it was only for a fixed period. The commission urged that there should be uniformity in this system and the same policy should be followed throughout the whole country.

Education Department: Hunter commission realized that the efficiency of education department had gone down. It was not helping the development of education. So, the commission gave the following suggestions for the reorganization of education department:

- ✓ For inspecting primary schools such local people should be appointed who are conversant with the local environment.
- ✓ The number of education inspectors should be increased.
- ✓ The number of assistant inspectors should also be increased.
- ✓ Mostly Indians should be appointed as inspectors.

Higher Education

The Hunter commission gave some important suggestions for improvement of higher education also. It observed that at the time of giving grant it should be checked that the educational institution utilizes the given grant well. The grant should be determined keeping in view the strength of the teachers, students, and the need and capacity of the institution. The colleges engaged in higher education should be given sufficient grants for experimental laboratories, reading rooms, libraries, equipment, science rooms, buildings, and furniture etc.

Indianization of Resources: Hunter Commission was required to consider whether the government schools should be under the control of the government or should they be transferred to Indian hands. This problem arose because most of the schools and colleges were opened by the government according to the recommendation of Wood's Despatch. Missionaries were also influenced by this measure as they found the government at their rival in the field of education. Consequently, missionaries also opened several schools. So, the government thought over the problem of retaining its schools or handing them over to Indians. Some people were of the view that the government should withdraw itself completely from the field of education. The other group of people wanted the government to wholly control the education. The commission studied this issue and recommended that the government should withdraw itself completely from the field of education.

Religious Education: The Hunter commission was required to give its opinion regarding the policy that the government should adopt for religious education. The commission recommended as follows:

- ✓ The government should have no hand in the religious education in schools.
- ✓ The managers of the non-government schools should be free to give or not to give place to religious education in their schools. The government should place no restriction in this respect.
- ✓ While giving grants special attention should be paid to the standard of the schools which give religious education.

Women's Education: The Hunter commission made the following recommendations regarding women education:

- ✓ Education in special subjects: The commission maintained that, because of the different nature of their life duties, the curriculum for girls should be different from that for boys. Subjects useful in their life should be included in their curriculum. The commission observed that literary subjects would not be useful for girls. Therefore, they should be given education in subjects useful in their life.
- ✓ Education by local boards: The local boards would be made responsible for women's education. In the absence of such a local board in some areas the government should shoulder the responsibility for women education.
- ✓ Women teachers: Only lady teachers should be appointed in girl's schools.
- ✓ Inspectors: Female inspectors for girl schools should be appointed which encouraged women education also.

Muslim Education: After studying the problems of Muslim education Hunter commission gave the following suggestions to improve it:

- ✓ Local bodies should be made responsible for Muslim education.
- ✓ The indigenous Muslim schools should be encouraged.
- ✓ The medium of Muslim schools should be Hindustani except in those schools where the people do not want this medium.
- ✓ Muslims should be given greater assistance in the field of higher English education.
- ✓ Special provisions should be made for scholarship for Muslim students.
- ✓ The number of scholarships for Muslim students should be fixed.
- ✓ Normal schools should be opened for training of Muslim teachers.
- ✓ The existing Muslim schools should be recognized and encouraged.
- ✓ Muslim inspectors should be appointed for Muslim schools.

Education of the Backward Classes: Hunter commission recommended that in government schools' special facilities should be provided for backward classes. It further suggested that some government schools should be opened for children of backward classes. The suggestions of the commission led to the progress of education of backward classes.

Education of Indigenous: Hunter commission suggested that special provision should be made for education of indigenous keeping in view the geographical and social conditions and traditions of the people. Special types of schools would be opened in their areas.

The Missionaries: Missionaries had become rivals to the government in the field of education. On the appointment of the Hunter commission, they had hoped that they would be given special facilities and consideration in the field of education with permission to open as many new schools as they wanted. They had also hoped that they would be recognized as supreme in the field of education. But these hopes of the missionaries were disproved. They did not mind when primary education was entrusted to local boards, because they had no interest in this area. They were glad when it was suggested that the government should withdraw from the field of secondary education. But they were annoyed when the commission suggested that the government should be entrusted to private enterprises, and it did not include missionaries in private enterprises. Against the missionaries, the commission observed that 'they (missionaries) should never be given full control in the field of education as they can never win the sympathy and respect of the Indian people'. Hence the missionaries were very much discouraged. Thus, the recommendations of the commission encouraged Indian private enterprises a great deal.

Special Education Plan: Hunter commission recommended that special schools should be opened for the children of Rajas, Maharajas, Nawabs, and Talukdars.

Implications of Hunter Commission

The Hunter commission, though appointed only for primary education, studied the problems relating to secondary and higher education as well. The government attached great importance to the suggestions given by the commission and tried to implement them as far as possible.

According to the recommendations of the Hunter commission the responsibility for primary education was entrusted to the local bodies which were established in the country during the days of Lord Ripon. County councils were established in Britain at this time and the local bodies in India were formed on the same pattern. As progress appears to be very slow in the beginning of any new scheme, so the progress of primary education under the local bodies appeared to be very slow in the beginning. The indigenous schools were also brought under the control of the local boards due to which they got a great set-back and began to fade away from the scene. At places where they were added to the government schools, they lost their identity. In 1882 only Rs. 24 lakh and in 1902 Rs. 46 lakh recommended full government financial assistance for primary education, but this assistance was almost negligible. During a period of 20 years the government help was increased only by Rs. 22 lakhs. As the local boards were not rich, primary education did not progress satisfactorily.

Secondary education was also benefited by the recommendations of the Hunter commission. The commission had recommended total government withdrawal from the field of secondary education. But the education departments continued their control over secondary education. This situation helped the development of secondary education because the education departments worked for its expansion to make their own position stronger. Formerly, the department had not taken so much interest in the development of secondary education. The financial position of government schools was quite sound and the standard of education in them was better than that in the aided schools. The aided schools were facing financial stringency.

The Hunter commission had recommended diversification of the secondary curriculum into two separate parts i.e. literary and science; and vocational. In which the first was meant to prepare students for university classes while the second was meant for imparting vocational education useful in practical affairs of life. Those days the students were more interested in procuring services. They had little interest in vocational education. So, vocational education could not be encouraged, although some arrangement for vocational education was made after 1882.

Secondary education prepares students for higher education. Therefore, its progress had its impact on university education. As secondary education progressed between 1882 and 1902, university education also progressed during this period. Youths began to come to universities to obtain good services. As the commission had recommended encouraging private enterprises in the field of education, many colleges were opened by voluntary organizations. Their number was larger than the colleges started by missionaries. By 1882 there were 37 colleges run by missionaries, whereas the number of colleges run by voluntary organizations at this time was 42. By 1902 there were 191 colleges in the whole country. Out of these 145 were art colleges, 30 law, four engineering, five training, four medical and three agricultural colleges. Besides, there were 12 women's colleges for higher education in the country by 1902.

The Indian National Congress was established in 1885. It created a feeling of nationalism and patriotism. Youths educated in colleges were greatly influenced by the revolutionary ideas of Rousseau, Byron, Burke, Bacon, Milton, Locke, Wordsworth, and others. The educated Indians were imbued with the ideals of sacrifice, national morality, and independence. They were perturbed over the foreign rule in the country, and they began to dream of national freedom. This situation led to the generation of nationalism in education. The Indians intensely realized the necessity of education. They thought that education would be a good tool for obtaining freedom. Therefore, the task of expansion of education was accelerated by private enterprises under the control of Indians. It was at this time that several great personalities were born who took the vow of national service with the ultimate objective of winning national freedom. High schools began to be developed into colleges and several new colleges were also established. Great people like R.P. Paranjape, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Triplankar, Aiyangar took the work of education in their hands. Ferguson College was established at Poona (Pune) in 1870. Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee controlled the management of Ripon College in Calcutta.

The name of Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati will remain immortal in the field of education in India. He stood for ancient ideals of education and established several D.A.V. colleges in the northern part of the country. He tried to remove the evils of Hindu society and religion through his educational ideals. The Arya Samaj took up his work and tried to propagate his ideals of life throughout the whole country.

In the city of Banaras (Varanasi) Mrs. Annie Besant established the Central Hindu College in 1898 on based Hindu ideals. Later, this college became the nucleus for the Benaras Hindu University (BHU) established by Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya.

Conclusion

The recommendations of the Hunter commission have a special place in the history of Indian education. Hunter commission tried to give a direction to Indian education which was in a bad shape. It drew the attention of the government towards the neglect of vocational education and to overemphasis on bookish education. It encouraged private enterprises in the field of education. It helped the development of education in the country. However, some recommendations of the commission have been proved harmful too i.e. (1) The commission neglected the claim of the mother tongue and supported English as the medium of instruction. Consequently, the Indian languages were neglected. (2) The commission suggested charging lower fees in private institutions. This led to the opening of schools of lower standard. (3) Since education was entrusted to private enterprises, the government became indifferent to the education of the people. This attitude ultimately harmed the cause of education.

According to the suggestion of the commission the government was to control the inspection department. Hence the governmental control over education was tightened leading to loss of flexibility in education.

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