

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION DURING EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

Education is a potent tool for personal and societal growth. It is difficult to discern the method and type of education in ancient Bengal; yet, there is enough evidence of the thriving circumstances of knowledge nourishment in ancient Bengal. The development of a distinct style of education system in Bengal was especially notable during the early mediaeval period. This research focuses on the history of education in Bengal during the early mediaeval period. Despite the fact that a number of researchers observed its presence in Indian history, the era early mediaeval is very contentious in terms of its many historical elements. Many changes occurred during this time, including social, political, economic, religious, and cultural ones. As a result, political decentralization, the rise of landed intermediaries, self-sufficient village economies, peasant subjugation, caste proliferation, the emergence of regional kingdoms, and the development of regional languages, literature, and culture were key elements of this time.

Keywords: Bengal; Western Education; Language; Ancient

I. INTRODUCTION

Bengal was also impacted by the early mediaeval period's nature and traits. The formation of local dynasties, the system of land grant, the development of Bengali literature and language, and other events occurred in early mediaeval Bengal. With the entrance of Muslims on the Indian subcontinent, a new era in language, art, literature, education, and culture began. They brought their educational and cultural ideas together with their political ideas. According to N.N. Law, the Muslim invasion of India was not limited to political and social issues, but also ushered in a revolution in the fields of education and knowledge.

Muslim monarchs, ameer-omrahs, officers, olamas (scholars), and sufi-saints all participated in the advancement and dissemination of education during the middle Ages. The majority of them attempted to construct madrasas, schools, or institutions. Following in the footsteps of these external Muslim kings and sufi saints, Bengali aristocrats and donors played a significant role in education. Many madrasas, educational institutions, and schools were created as a consequence. In truth, Muslims promoted globalisation and diversity in Bengal's and the subcontinent's educational systems. They made education available to everyone, even Hindus from the lower castes who had been neglected by the Brahmins.

II. STAUS OF SECONDARY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION IN MEDIEVAL BENGAL

• PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary schooling was prevalent among Muslims in mediaeval Bengal. Education was seen as both a religious responsibility and a social status symbol. There was a broad desire for education among them, and they possessed the means to deliver it. As a result, providing for their children's basic education was not an issue for them. Every Muslim community had at least one maktab and a mosque. According to the testimony of a Hindu poet named Mukundaram, even a small Muslim community in a Hindu area had makbabs for the Muslim children's education. "Maktab were built up where all Muslim youngsters were instructed by the devout maulavis," the poet writes in his "Chiaindikavya." Pathsala was the Bengali name for Mabktab, an elementary school. The writings of Muslim poets suggest that co-education was used in primary schools. According to DaulatWazirBahram, Laila and Majnun attended the same primary school as many other boys and girls when they were younger.

In general, Muslim boys and girls begin their education at the age of five. However, it was common practise among Muslims, particularly among the top and middle classes, to begin formal education for their children at the. This official initiation of the child to school, known as the 'BismillahKhani,' was observed all across Muslim India, including Bengal, at the age of 4 years, 4 months, and 4 days. The youngster received his first instruction from the instructor at an hour determined by an astrologer. The instructor recited a passage from the Quran, which the kid

then repeated. This 'BismillahKhani' ritual symbolises the emphasis that Muslim parents place on their children's education. Religious education was the earliest and most important component of basic school. The Quran and the foundations of Islam were taught to every Muslim kid, boy or girl. Muslim youngsters were taught prayer and ablution at the maktabas, according to poet Vipradas. Aside from religious matters, the study of other fields of knowledge was also prioritised. Elegant handwriting was fostered, and the youngster had apprenticed a ustad or a master if he wanted to pursue the arts and crafts. Primary school kids were required to master three languages: Arabic, Persian, and Bengali.

• **SECONDARY EDUCATION**

In Medieval Bengal, secondary and higher education were well established. This is supported by evidence of the period's outstanding intellectual and cultural activity. All of the Muslim monarchs were educated. The period produced a record number of eminent intellectuals who were experts in a variety of fields. They created a significant number of works in Persian, Arabic, Bengali, and other languages, covering a wide range of topics. On religious and material grounds, Muslims recognized the necessity for education. They also have the financial means to pursue higher education. Madrasas were created by kings and wealthy Muslims, who provided them with land grants to maintain them. This provides the idea that the province had several madrasas, and that most cities and major areas had a secondary school to meet the Muslim people's educational demands. It should be remembered that Shaik Mubarak established a seminary at his home, where he educated diverse academics and knowledgeable persons such as his sons Faidi and AbulFadl, as well as MullaAbd al QadirBadauni, the well-known historian¹³. These figures show that secondary education was widely available, and that leaning had made tremendous progress in society. "All civilized nations have schools for the instruction of their youth; but Hindustan is particularly famed for its seminaries," AbulFadl could rightfully remark.

III. IMPACTS OF EDUCATION IN MEDIEVAL BENGAL

Science knowledge did not advance as rapidly in Medieval Bengal or the subcontinent as it did in modern European countries following the Renaissance. During this time, no noteworthy inventions were under consideration. The level of education in this subcontinent remained the knowledge of sciences inherited from the Arabs and Central Asia. However, the widespread dissemination of sciences and information at the period was a distinctive quality. The Muslims of Bengal, as well as those from other regions, studied the Arabs and Central Asia extensively. A vast number of intellectuals were known for their mastery of religion and scientific sciences throughout this time period. In the sphere of natural sciences, there was no innovative activity. However, Muslim academics from Medieval Bengal made major contributions to religious sciences.

The introduction of historiography was a significant contribution of Muslims to Bengali and Indian learning and education. The Bengali Hindus lacked historical writing skills. As a result, there was little pre-Muslim Bengal history or interest among Hindus in learning about this essential subject. Muslims began writing and researching history after their arrival, and this affected Hindus throughout time. Many institutions and agencies were established by Muslims, which aided in the dissemination and advancement of education among Bengalis. They invented paper as a writing medium. "We owe to the Mohammedan influence the practise of diffusing knowledge by the copying and circulation of books," Sir JadunathSarkar says, praising the Muslims' contributions to knowledge and culture. "We owe to the Mohammedan influence the practise of diffusing knowledge by the copying and circulation of books, while the early Hindu writers as a general rule loved to keep their productions secret."

It is also noteworthy that the Muslims in Medieval Bengal established a liberal influence in the sphere of education, resulting in a revolutionary transformation in the Hindu society's educational life. The Brahmin monopoly on education and learning was shattered, and lower-class individuals were given opportunities for study and personal growth. Furthermore, Muslims contributed significantly to the development and flourishing of Bengali language and literature via patronage, compilations, and the infusion of vocabulary and rich thematic wealth from Arabic and Persian literature. It's also worth noting that the Persian language and Muslim culture dominated the Bengali people's intellectual, cultural, and social lives. It had such an influence on the Hindu high and middle classes that they became Persianized in language, culture, dress, and etiquette, much like many people did during British control. Even after the Muslim reign in Bengal came to an end, Hindus remained to be dominated by Muslim culture.

IV. SCENARIO OF EDUCATION IN COLONIAL BENGAL

• **The advent of the East India Company**

The British merchant ships, like the Arabs', moored in Bengali soil first. Job Charnok established a trade firm in 1690 by purchasing Sutanoti, Gobindapur, and Calcutta. Fort William was established in 1696 in Kolkata for security reasons. The British East India Company received a mandate from Forrukshior, the Emperor of Delhi, in 1717, allowing them to trade in Bengal without paying any taxes. Following the fall of Sirajuddowla at the Battle of Plassi in 1757, the Company gained military and political control. The Company gained the ability to collect Bengal

income after defeating Mir Kashim in the Battle of Boxer in 1764 and obtaining Dewani from the mandate of ShahAlam, the Emperor of Delhi. The Company gained supreme power over Bengal in 1772, after ending the diarchy and relocating the capital from Murshidabad to Calcutta.

- **Apathy of the Company towards Education**

During the era when the Company was gaining control, there was a significant decline in the field of education. Even when the Company gained administrative control, depreciation in the realm of education continued. The Company was first unconcerned about the education of the countrymen. The Company, according to Major B.D. Basu, was nothing more than a trading house. They had no other knowledge than profit and loss. As a result, they considered it a waste of money to spend money on topic education. There was no need to spend money to teach the Indians about Shakespeare, according to a member of the Company's Court of Directors. Another reason for the Company's disregard of education was the Court of Directors' worry that if education and religious conditions were messed with, the Indians would rebel. The history of British policy during the later time bears witness to this mentality: 'to leave the old ways of instruction undisturbed and to continue to provide them with the backing that they had been accustomed to receive from the Indian rulers.'

- **The Spread of Western Education in Bengal**

Though the Company government was indifferent to education and culture of the subjects, interest in western education was found for different reasons. First, a class of people showed interest towards English education for the opportunity of earning livelihood, service and trade. Second, numerous English-speaking men were required to work as clerks, translators, and copyists in the Company's different institutions. However, for practical reasons, the Company was unable to bring in a significant number of personnel from England at a high wage. Various trading institutions were prepared to hire local people for minimal wages in these conditions. Many others expressed an interest in learning English as a result of this. According to Alexander Duff, people asked for the opportunity to study English on the streets and in other places.

V. EFFECTS OF WESTERN EDUCATION IN COLONIAL BENGAL

Of course, it is true that by placing too much emphasis on English acquisition, native language learning has suffered. Despite the fact that a class of individuals was formed for the time being to study English and work in the British government's favor, this new education was limited to an opportunist class of people. As a result, the English education system failed to provide ideal results for the people living near the soil of local communities. Instead, it established a divide between classes in the realm of education, obstructing national unification. In this way, a huge void and disruption in the sphere of education was created. However, if current knowledge and science were taught in the native tongue, it would overcome the language barrier and enable widespread education. For this reason, many educators have criticized the burden of English.

However, the advantage of learning English was not great. Whatever the motivation for introducing higher education, that is, education via the English medium, the more the study of western knowledge and science through the medium of English grew, the more rational and secular education became. As a result of gaining experience in history, philosophy, and science via this type of education, a class of sensible and educated individuals was developed, who were the forerunners of the Renaissance in India and Bangladesh. They attempted to create a vibrant new society by eliminating indolence, superstition, and blind belief. These were the persons who were at the forefront of India's independence struggle. They were the ancestors of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, religious preacher and reformer Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, and many more well-known Indian boys. Initially, the Muslim community shied away from English education due to traditional pressure, but later on, due to the influence of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Nawab Abdul Latif, and Syed Ammer Ali, they stepped forward to pursue it. As a result, a new class of Muslim intellectuals emerged.

VI. CONCLUSION

The ancient Indian educational system has some parallels with the early mediaeval Bengali educational system. It is impossible to say if the rulers of Bengal had any role in different phases of education during the early mediaeval period; yet, it appears that the nature had distinct perspectives on primary and higher education. During this time, concerns such as Brahmanical manner of education, monastic education, and some practical education provided by common people affected elementary education. During that era in Bengal, the foundations of Brahmanical education were solidified, and it had a significant effect on basic education in following periods. It also existed during the British period. 6 It was the product of Bengal's early mediaeval era endowment of indigenous classical education. During the early mediaeval period, some societal modifications were discovered that were influenced by Brahmanism and Buddhism. The changes in society at that time period expedited the educational system. There was a correlation between societal and educational improvements, according to the findings.

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