

EDUCATION IN BIHAR DURING COMPANY'S RULE

Dr. Chandan Kumari

Vill.+ Post- Ekahari

P.S.+ Via- Ladania

Dist- Madhubani-847232

During the East India Company rule in Bihar traditional higher learning continued to flourish and Patna was especially noted for Persian learning and it was here that Raja Ram Mohan Roy learned Persian. The closing years of the eighteenth century and the earlier decades of the nineteenth century provides a transitional period in the history of education because of the impact of various new forces in different spheres of life. During this period education was not under the control of the government. On the other hand the rich, pious and benevolent individuals used to promote education.¹

There were four types of indigenous schools in existence in the province, namely, (1) Sanskrit schools, called Chatuspathi or Tol, (2) Madrasa, (3) Maktab, (4) Pathashala. The Pathashalas and Maktab were schools of elementary education while the Madrasas and Sanskrit Schools were colleges for higher studies.

The Sanskrit school was called Chatuspathi. It was a place where four Shastras, namely Grammar, Law, Purana and Philosophy were taught. The rich Hindus or Rajas generally supported these schools. In majority of them students were supported by the well-to-do people of the village in which the school was situated.² In many cases teachers took great pride in supporting the students at their own cost. During his survey Adam found a number of Sanskrit teachers who were themselves very poor but even then they maintained students at their cost. Consequently, they had often to incur debts to meet their expenses.³

The teachers of those schools were invariably Brahmins and were called Pandits.⁴ The classes were generally held in the house of the teacher. The number of pupils varied according to the reputation of the teacher and facilities of boarding and lodging provided by him. The Sanskrit teachers enjoyed great respect in the society. They were invited to all public ceremonies and were recipients of valuable presents on those occasions.⁵

The usual course consisted of Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Puranas, Mathematics, Hindu Law and Astrology. Out of these Grammar, Law, Metaphysics and Astrology were most popular. Books were not very much in use. Generally, classes were held in the morning and afternoon. About three hours' recess was given. This period was devoted to bathing, worship, eating and resting. At about three in the afternoon they resumed their study. The school broke at about sun-

set. In schools here the number of students was very large the teacher personally engaged the classes of the senior-most students and these students taught in the junior classes. In Patna and Gaya districts Buchanan found a good number of reputed Sanskrit Pandits. But the number of Sanskrit schools began to decline after the opening of English and Vernacular schools on the lines suggested in the Wood's Despatch of 1854. Towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century there remained very few schools of this class.

In the second class of indigenous schools were the Arabic schools called Madarasas. The Madarasas received some grants or endowments by some wealthy Mohammedans or by former Mohammedan rulers of India. Some of the teachers, however, gave free instruction to their pupils and also sometimes food. The teacher of a Madarsa was called Mulla. As a rule, the Madrasa consisted of advanced students only though some times beginners were also admitted.

There were very few schools buildings. Generally the classes were conducted in mosques, Imambaras or in the dwelling houses belonging to the patrons or teachers. The school started early in the morning and continued till 4 P.M. There was a lunch-break during the mid-day. Arabic students enjoyed weekly holidays on Tuesdays and Fridays while the Persian students observed it on Thursdays and Fridays. The schools remained closed during the whole month of Ramgan, for ten days during Muharram and for five days on other religious festivals during the year the year.

Rich men also employed some teachers who received one and a half rupees to two rupees a month along with food and warm clothes in winter for instructing the children. The children of the neighbourhood were also taught by these Maulavis who received from two annas to six annas a month.⁶ Presents of clothes and uncooked article of food were also made periodically. Another important source of income for the teachers was Shurvati was a form of payment which every scholar had to make at the commencement.⁷

The Arabic course included Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Mohammedan theology (consisting of Qoran, Hadis and Shurbab) with Philosophy and Mathematics.⁸ The translated works of Euclid on Geometry and Ptolemy were also studied. The knowledge of Metaphysics was regarded as the highest attainment. The external observances and fundamental doctrines of Islam were minutely studied. Calligraphy formed an important branch of learning. Beautiful penmanship was considered a great accomplishment. Those who were devoted to this art worked over it from three to six hours a day. Buchanan had visited the three Madrasas at Phulwarisharif on the outskirts of Patna. Azimabad (Patna) was a very important centre of Persian learning in Bihar. A number of scholars, well-versed in Persian came to India from Iran and settled particularly in Patna and the neighbouring districts.⁹

The third category of indigenous schools were called Maktabas. These schools were of two kinds. One was maintained by the whole village and the other was run by one individual.

Generally, a wealthy villager supported a school of second kind for the instruction of his own children. He also allowed the children of his neighbours to receive education without any payment. The teacher of such schools was called Maulvi or Mianjee according to greater or less knowledge he possessed of Persian and Arabic languages.¹⁰ The pupils were called Bacchas. This class of institutions was not so numerous as the Pathshalas. The Maktab was housed either in a mosque or in the residential building of some wealthy person of the village. The son of the owner of that house was, therefore called Shah Maktab i.e. king of school.¹¹

The income of the Mianjee varied from Rs. 1 to 3 and some grains and clothes. But the teacher employed by some rich person did not charge any fee from the students as they got fixed salary from their employers. The students also gave 1 or 2 annas and 5 to 7 seers of grain to the teacher. Both Hindu and Mohammedan students made additional payment to their teachers on the occasion of festivals.¹²

Maktabs were not so numerous as the Pathshalas. These were found only in towns or large villages. The system of instruction was different from the Pathsala system of the Gurus. The Mianjee was always a Mohammedan. He sat on a wooden platform or mat while his pupils sat on a strip of gunny or mat.¹³ There was no fixed scheme of study. Every boy read separately by whatever book he preferred or happened to possess. The course of study continued unchanged for the last few centuries. Arithmetic was hardly over taught in Maktabs. As for the mode of instruction, the teacher dictated a passage in Urdu to be rendered into Persian. The pupil's translation was then corrected by the teacher and the student had to copy the corrected translation several times. This process was repeated day after day till the pupil had it by heart. But the corrections of the teachers were generally inaccurate. The reason perhaps was that the selection of a Mianjee was seldom made according to merit. It mostly went by favour.¹⁴ In the fourth category came the Pathshalas. The rich people, for the education of their children engaged private tutor, while the poorer classes sent their children to Pathshalas. That is why, we find that there was a large number of these schools. Each town and every village having a population of 1,000 had at least one Pathshalas or Chatsal.¹⁵ This kind of education was usually maintained by some rich individual of the village or town who generally opened it for the instruction of his own children. The children of the neighbours were also allowed to attend the school. The medium of instruction was mostly Hindi or the language of the locality.¹⁶

The teachers of these schools were generally Kayasthas and some times Kurmis or other caste-men but very seldom Brahmins.¹⁷ The teachers were called Guruji and the pupils were known as Chhatras.¹⁸ The fee of the teacher was very small. Each boy gave one to two annas plus five to seven seers of grain per month according to the customs prevalent in Maktabs.¹⁹ On an average, the annual monthly income of the Guruji came to about Rs. 3 a month in addition to grain and clothes. The teacher enjoyed high social prestige.²⁰ Usually children between 6 to 10 years of age attended these schools Instruction was given to the students in reading, writing and arithmetic. They first began to write on the ground with a pencil of white clay. Later they wrote

on black-boards or palm-leaves. After having attended greater proficiency they wrote on paper with ink made of lamp-black.²¹The number of Pathshalas in Patna division during 1870-71, was 109 in Patna district. The total number of students attending these schools stood at about 15,720.²²

In the beginning the East India Company did not take any interest in the education of her Indians. Government's efforts for the spread of education were, however, intensified after 1835 and more particularly after 1854. Anglo Vernacular School called Chatsals or Pinda or Pat were established by the government in several district. These schools were fashioned on the model of Pathshalas. In these Chatsals the Guru personally taught the most advanced students, who, in turn taught the rest of the boys. When the school was about to break each boy came to the teacher and received on his palm a number of light strokes from the teacher's cane corresponding with the order of his arrival, that is Mir, Dulla and so on.²³

Books were rarely seen in these schools. The day's work began with the prayer "Kamagati Dehi, Sumati, Ona masi, dhanga" etc. It was an invocation to God to help them in perfecting themselves in their task. The students were first taught to read and write Ka-Kahra (consonants) and afterwards to join vowels with consonants. When they acquired some practice in this they were taught to write names, than letters and lastly Dustavez or deeds.²⁴

The teaching hours were not fixed but the school generally sat from morning to 10 a.m. and again 2 to 5 p.m. In the morning the teachers asked the boys to repeat their old lessons after which new lessons were given. The afternoon was spent in writing exercise and some new lessons. There were no recreation hours in the Chatsals. Although these schools were organised on the lines of the Pathshalas, the Pathshala teacher and his pupils were better dressed and looked more respectable than the Guru and the pupils of the Chatsals.²⁵

Sanskrit

Sanskrit education was gradually on decline. Some of the causes were as follows : Mithila, the centre of Sanskrit learning had lost its former fame and after 1740 the centre of learning had shifted to Navadwipa (Nadiya) where even scholars from Mithila began to visit. Varanasi was another famous place of Sanskrit learning. Students had to go to Navadwipa and Varanasi to complete their studies in Vyakarana and Vedanta respectively. The study of Sanskrit was generally confined to the Bahmins, although there was no restriction for the people of other castes to study it. The main branches of learning in Sanskrit were Grammer, Law, Metaphysics and Astrology. Out of these Metaphysics and Logic were considered to be subjects of great honour in the society. Study of a particular branch was associated with or confined to a particular family or village. This was because books were very scarce. Many scholars learnt Vedas and tantras. It is surprising to note that though there were no schools for study of medicine, yet the study and practice of medicine was in a creditable state all over Bihar. Many Pandits were

engaged in teaching medicine. The Sakaldwini Brahmins had almost monopolised the medical profession. In Patna and Gaya about seven hundred Sakaldwini Brahmin families practised medicine.²⁶ With the advent of the Company's rule the condition of education deteriorated. This was because in the beginning the attitude of the Company's officers was very indifferent. However, there were some officers who showed interest in education of Indians. But they did so in their individual capacity. A typical case of an individual officers initiative in founding a Sanskrit College at Arrah in Patna Division in 1801 is found.²⁷ Lord Minto's Minute of 6 March 1811 is another example of this type. Minto strongly recommended the establishment of Sanskrit Colleges at Baur (Tirhut), Navadwipa and Varanasi and some other places.

At the time of Adam's survey there were 27 Sanskrit Schools and teachers in the district of South Bihar, with 437 students.²⁸ The subject studied were Grammer, Dericology, Literature, Vedanta, Mimamasa, Samkhya, Medicine, Logic, Law, Rhetoric, Mythology, Astrology and Tantra. Two of the teachers, Chakrapani Pandit and Heera Lal Pandit were famous authors.

Very few schools had their own buildings. The teachers took classes on the Verandahs or in the out house of their own residence.²⁹ Generally, classes were held in the mornings and afternoons. About 3 hours' recess was given. It was devoted to bathing, worship, eating and resting. At about 3 in the afternoon they resumed their study. This continued upto twilight. The students prepared the task for the next day in the night. But, whenever the teachers did not finish their course they used to take night classes.³⁰ The school holidays were the first and eighth days of waning and waning moon. During Saraswatipuja, Holi, Diwali, Durga Puja also there were vacations. Moreover, during the entire rainy season the schools remained closed.³¹

The method of teaching was also very much different. Only one subject was taught at a time. The syllabus was fixed in order of taking classes and the books were also set accordingly. The number of books for each class was fixed and unless a scholar did not master one book he was not allowed to read the higher books.

Senior students and scholars also participated in teaching and took classes of their juniors. But the highest classes were taken by the teacher himself. Each lesson was revised several times and during revisions the senior students served as teachers. The lessons were got by heart. This fulfilled the object of examination daily. However, there was no time-limit for the students to finish one book and in fact, each student took his own time. Therefore, there was a running system of assessment. After finishing his studies the prestige of his teacher was his only certificate. The fact that a student had studied under a particular teacher carried much weight. Therefore, on special occasions scholars used to be introduced by the name of his teacher.³² As was true with the student it was also true for the teacher whose prestige really depended on the performance of his students. The teacher was conferred the title of Upadhyaya when his student succeeded in some Shastrarth (scholastic disputes) and was declared fit to teach. Similarly the title of Mahamahopadhyaya was conferred on the teacher when his student became Upadyaya.

The title of Mahamahopadhyaya was considered to be the most honourable academic decoration of a teacher.

To every scholar who after completing his studies came back to his village a special reception was given. It was considered to be a rare honour if a scholar came from Varanasi of Navadwipa after completing his education. However, in all such questions the merit of the scholars was adjudged by the local Pandits who put very difficult questions in such cases. If the scholar failed to give satisfactory answer he was refused admission in the house and had to go back again to prepare himself for the test. But those who came out successful at the test a ceremony called Chumaon was organised by the family to receive its scholar-member. Similarly receptions were accorded to him by other families of the village.³³

The number of students being small, each teacher knew the acquisition and depth of knowledge of his students, so that there was no question of examinations as at the present time. Therefore, there were no set rules for examination nor were there regular examinations. In fact, the system of teaching in Tols actually did not necessitate holding of examinations. The teacher knew his pupils so well that there was a kind of regular assessment. The assessment made by the teacher was final and no one could question his authority.

Buchanan has mentioned a special type of examination called Dhوتي examination.³⁴ According to him 10 or 12 men annually finished their education and qualified themselves for the title of Pandit. This title was conferred without any diploma but each one of them presented before an assembly of 5 or 10 Pandit, who finally declared them fit for the degree. The Assembly was held before the Raja who then gave a dress and placed mark on the forehead of the successful candidate.³⁵

Insitutions for primary education were widespread in the urban and rural areas throughout Bihar. Almost every village had a school where instruction was given to the children in reading, writing and aritimatic. The medium of instruction was mostly Hindi or the language of the locality.³⁶

The schools were usually maintained by some rich individuals who supported it for the instruction of his own children. But children of his neighbours were also allowed to attend the school.³⁷

During the first stage the student were taught the formation of alphabets words etc. In the second and third the boys were instructed to learn agricultural and commercial accounts.³⁸ However, the final education was given by the parents of the children who taught them to write on paper. Where there were no teachers the parents were through the entire process.³⁹

Thus we find that even in the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a kind of mass education existing in Bihar. But with the destruction of village communities and the

impoverishment of the people, which was inseparably connected with the British mode of administration the indigenous system of education and the erstwhile flourishing educational institutions decayed.⁴⁰

References :

1. Judicial Record, Monghyr, letter No. 406.
2. Sinha, B.K. "Indigenous Schools in Bihar during the Middle of the 19th Century", Journal of Historical Research, Vol. XIII, 26 January 1971, No. 11, p. 8.
3. Adam's Report, pp. 268-272.
4. Report on the State and Progress of Education in Patna Division for the year 1871-72, para 16.
5. Report of the Hunter Commission (1882-83).
6. Buchanan, Account of Shahabad, p. 171.
7. Adam's Report, p. 277.
8. Report on the State and Progress of Education in Patna Division for the year 1871-72, para 16.
9. Datta, Survey etc. op. cit. p. 18.
10. Report on the State and Progress of Education in Patna Division for the year 1871-72, para 16.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Sinha, B.K. Indigenous etc. op. cit. p. 11.
14. Report on the State and Progress of Education in Patna Division for the year 1871-72, para 16.
15. Ibid.
16. Buchanan, Account of Patna and Bihar, p. 22; Account of Purnea, p. 169.
17. Report on the State and Progress of Education in Patna Division for year 1871-72, para 16.

18. Adam's Report, p. 248.
19. Buchanan, Account of Shahabad, p. 169.
20. Adam's Report, p. 252.
21. Buchanan, Account of Patna and Bihar, p. 292.
22. Report on the State and Progress of Education in Patna Division for the year 1871-72, para 9.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Buchanan, Account of Patna and Bihar, pp. 101-102.
27. Jha, J.S. op. cit. pp. 43-45.
28. Diwakar, op. cit. pp. 716-717.
29. Adam's Report, pp. 268-272.
30. Jha, J.S. op. cit. p. 6.
31. Ibid. p. 14.
32. Mithila Bharti (Patna), Vol. I, part III-IV, p. 106.
33. Jha, J.S. op. cit. p. 7.
34. Buchanan, Account of District of Purnea, 1809-10, p. 176.
35. Ibid.
36. Buchanan, Account of Patna and Bihar. p. 292.
37. Ibid.
38. Buchanan, Account of Purnea, p. 170; Account of Patna and Bihar, p. 292.
39. Buchanan, Account of Bhagalpur, p. 198; Account of Shahabad, p. 169.
40. Basu, B.D. History of Education During East India Company, pp. 17-18.