

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE IN THE EXPANSION OF SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN BENGAL

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ABSTRACT - The British Government built a few Agricultural schools and colleges in Bengal in order to bring about progress in scientific agriculture in Bengal and also to increase interest about agriculture in the minds of the peasants of Bengal. In the primary stage, the government tried to provide agricultural education to the gardeners so that this education would spread among the urban population but their endeavour completely failed. Their second initiative of motivating the landlords to extend agricultural knowledge remained a failure too. Although they founded a few theoretical and practical educational institutions, but within a very few years their existence became endangered. The British Government failed to eradicate the insolvency towards agriculture which was deep rooted within the minds of the common folks. The British Government did not even try hard to do the same. Moreover, their inability to raise interest in agricultural education among the people of lower strata of the society let not their effort to see the implementation of their plan.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Bengal, British Government, gardener, landlords, Peasants, Scientific education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the mother of progress. And therefore scientific agricultural education is necessary for the development of agriculture. The British Government took initiative for the expansion of agriculture and organized agricultural fairs, agricultural exhibitions in different places of Bengal. They also established agricultural schools and colleges to arouse consciousness about the science of agriculture among the rising generation. Most of the European intellectuals opine that the agriculture of Bengal during pre - colonization period was backward, undeveloped, unscientific and superstitious. They thought that all the development in this field have been initiated after the advent of the British in this country. It is quite natural to assume that the progression also took place among the peasants along with the development of agriculture in our country. Through the present research paper, we will try to look into how much the peasants were benefitted from the so call development of agriculture and scientific agricultural education.

Initially the British Government did not endeavour to educate the rural population reaching them directly. On 16th March, 1847, the agricultural committee gave proposal to the British Government for providing the gardeners with agricultural education and the proposal was accepted by the British Government too.¹ The Government started thinking about opening agricultural schools because they hoped that the trained gardeners would raise interest in the minds of the people living in the semi urban areas. But the trained gardeners repudiated the idea because they were unwilling to move to the semi urban places leaving behind the aspiration of getting a salaried job at Calcutta. They also aspired to participate in the different agricultural exhibitions and obtain rewards.² The gardeners who were trained under the Society were comparatively more adept and proficient in gardening.³ As the society generally looked down the work of a gardener, the trained gardeners often took low salaried government jobs.⁴ To solve these kinds of problems, the society appealed to the landlords to educate the rural population and to bring the trained gardeners

back so that they could educate them. In order to raise interest in the said field the British Government declared that the qualifying students from the agricultural schools and colleges will obtain certificates and a job with the salary of Rs. 30 - 35 in the branch gardens of the Society. But unfortunately more than 10 - 12 students never took admission in this school.⁵

On 3rd July 1847, a school was established for educating the sons of the gardeners under the supervision of Dr. McLeland, which also met the same fate.⁶ In 1851 - 1852, Dr. F. J. Mauet proposed to built farms with a few of the Jillah Schools to educate the student through realistic experiences.⁷ The school was started with 50 student and they were given practical training with the seeds and saplings collecting from the 'Agricultural & Horticultural Society of India'⁸. But the school soon got closed because its students were not willing to take agriculture to be their profession.⁹

In August 1864, the Directorate of Education wanted to know from the Agricultural Society, British India and Land Holders' Association whether it would help the country and its people if the peasants would be provided with the scientific education on agriculture. It was also inquired whether one can expand his property being a farmer if he is given a primary agricultural education.¹⁰ Because the British Government believed that if the affluent people like the members of Land Holders' Association, Taludars, business tycoons, who possess rights over lands and who are capable of investing, are trained and given agricultural education, the superstition respecting to agriculture will permanently be eradicated. Moreover the Rayots would understand the excellent quality of the new methods and would move ahead to accept them.¹¹

The Secretary of British India Association proposed agricultural education to the part of regular education. On 20th August 1864, when the Education Director of Agricultural and Horticultural Society asked W. S. Atkinson, whether it had been possible to educate people of India on scientific agricultural education standing at that point, and whether they could progress the country by taking agriculture as a profession, Mr. Atkinson expressed his reluctance to answer the question.¹² He abrogated the proposal of establishing agricultural school in India and to show the reason behind his action, he told that it was not the right time to bring agricultural education in India and he also told that there was lack of suitable people to accomplish the entire thing. John Stalcart submitted a proposal to the minister of Bengal on 2nd March 1867 and told that some experienced agriculturalists must be appointed for the development of the lands of the zamindars and also to instigate them to make farms at their own expense. He told that if the plan is followed, the landlords themselves encourage their subjects in the work.¹³ Committee was formed with S. H. Robinson, Jaykrishna Mukherjee, Ramanath Tagore, Haru Chandra Ghosh, Pyarichand Mitra, John Stalcart to reach a decision regarding the matter. These respectable members became united in the proposal of creating experimental farms near the city head quarters and the agricultural colleges and to provide people with practical agricultural education.¹⁴ According to the proposal of the committee, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal established 7 model farms which were destroyed completely during the famine of 1870.¹⁵

During the years 1880 and 1886, the British Government sent eleven Bengali graduates to the Cirencester College in London for acquiring agricultural education there.¹⁶ These eleven selected candidates were Ambika Charan Sen, Sayaid Shakhwat Hossain, Girish Chandra Bose, Byomkesh Chakrabarty, Atul Krishna Roy, Bhupal Chandra Basu, Nitya Gopal Mukherjee, Dwijendralal Roy, Nagendranath Banerjee, Debendra Mukherjee, Dwijadas Dutta etc. Some of these scholars had also tried to make progression of agriculture after getting back from there. It took very long to the appearance of scientific agricultural books in Bengali language though. The agricultural periodicals appeared even after that. In the year 1787, the Botanic Garden had been established with the enterprise of the officer of the Army and Botanist Colonel Robert Kyd.¹⁷ In 1830, the 'Agricultural & Horticultural Society of India' was established upon the two acre land provided by the Botanic Garden.¹⁸ It was with the initiative of this society that the first agricultural book was published in the same year, which was written about the cultivation of linseed.¹⁹ Gradually then after, many agricultural books and magazines started to be published in Bengali language by the intellectuals of Bengal. Mention may be made of the following books which appeared during this time:

1. 'Krisi Sangraha' (Nityagopal Chattopadhyay),
2. 'Krisi Paddhati' (Umesh Chandra Sengupta),
3. 'Krisikshetra' (Prabodh Chandra De),
4. 'Sachitra Krisitatva O Bharat Bandhu' (Nabin Chandra Saha),
5. 'Krisi Bijnan' (Upendranath Basu),
6. 'Krisi Rasayan' (Nibaran Chandra Chaudhury)

Among the agricultural magazines, the significant were:

1. 'Krisi Chandrika' (Umesh Chandra Sengupta),
2. 'Krisi Tatva' (Bipradas Mukhopadhyay),
3. 'Krisi Gazette' (Girish Chandra Basu),
4. 'Krisi Sampad, Krisi Samachar' (Nishikanta Ghosh),
5. 'Krisak' (Nagendranath Swarnakar)

In the Agricultural Conference of 1893, emphasis was given on increasing interest among the people of India on agriculture. It was proposed that the things like primary education, students, text books, trained schools and higher education agriculture must be well thought upon.²⁰

Aim of establishing agricultural college at Shibpur was to provide the student with the opportunity to participate in agriculture after being trained and after researching the same in laboratories.²¹ It came into being in June - July 1898.²² The British Government spent Rs. 10,000 and appointed professors who were remunerated with Rs. 300 each.²³ The Agricultural Department was reconstructed in 1905 and after that agricultural colleges were established in Bombay presidency of Puna, Madras of Coimbatore, Sabar of Bengal, Laylapur of Punjab, Nagpur of the central province etc.²⁴ The agricultural college of Sabar was founded in 1910 and it was shut down in 1924 owing to the lack of students.²⁵

Aim of establishing the agricultural research centre was to do experimentation upon agricultural instruments, usage of fertilizers, development of the beasts of burden, diagnosing the diseases of plants etc. Mr. Miggits had elaborately discussed the significance of nitrate and phosphate fertilizers in the red soil of East and West Bengal.²⁶ Pusa was the principal centre of Indian Agricultural Department. Sir Henry Philip contributed 20,000 dollars for its establishment.²⁷ During the years 1913-1914, the number of students of Pusa were as follows:

1. 5 Students in Chemistry,
2. 2 Students in Entomologist,
3. 1 Student in Bacteriologist,
4. 1 Student in General Entomologist.²⁸

This account turn to be as follows during the years 1918 - 1919:

1. 2 Students in Entomologist,
2. 1 Student in Chemistry.²⁹

Agricultural Middle School was opened in 1910 in the Bombay presidency. In the Conference at Simla in 1916, which was presided by Sir Clod, it was proposed to open this kind of schools in each and every province of the country.³⁰ This proposal had

been strengthened in the meeting of the Board of Agriculture at Pusa in the year 1917. Schools were opened following Bombay in the Central Province, Madras and Bengal. Two schools were opened in Bengal, one of which was closed shortly owing to the lack of students and the features of the other had been transformed to other.³¹ On 18th June 1917, several proposals were taken respecting agricultural education, text books, teachers, trainings etc.³² In the middle agricultural schools, where there were technological and technical schools as well gave provided general education for the first three years along with practical education on agriculture. Although number of students was quite scant but it was decided that the students would be given the scholarship of Rs. 10.³³ Thousand student applied for admission in this school because they hoped that the Government would provide them with jobs after the completion of their education. But as it did not happen in reality, the number of students went down to 22.³⁴ Mr. J. A. Richie wrote that there was an average of 16 students in the middle agricultural schools in Bengal during the years 1924-1925. British Government spend Rs. 6573 for the establishment of these schools.³⁵

On 15th January 1920, an agricultural school was founded in Dacca where the medium of instruction was Bengali.³⁶ 1st and 2nd August 1921 were the days when Dr. N. C. Sengupta proposed in the Annual Conference of Bengal Agricultural Board at Decca that Bengal needs agricultural education immediately. He added that the practical education in these agricultural schools must be made compulsory so that the agriculturalists can have freedom of acquiring knowledge.³⁷ According his proposal, the British Government built experimental agricultural fields in different provinces along with the agricultural schools for the primary, secondary and higher education on agriculture.³⁸

Realizing the significance of agricultural education, the British Government appointed Dr. N. C. Sengupta to be the head of the agricultural department. He supposed to formulate the rules of the creation of the agricultural schools.³⁹ In 1938, the National Planning Committee (N. P. C.) was established with the initiative of the British Government, in which emphasis had been attributed upon the development of agriculture, agricultural education and research.⁴⁰ The agricultural schools and colleges which had been opened in Bengal were closed one by one for different reasons. The Government College at Shibpur was shut down by the British Government itself in 1907. Although Nagendranath Ganguly was appointed as the professor of agriculture in Calcutta University and he had been working there for ten years but no student ever took admission there. Starting from 1st December 1931, there was no professor of this science for a very long period in Calcutta University.⁴¹

The agricultural organizations which were established throughout India following the western trends got their vindication in Bengal (Calcutta). Foreign seeds were brought first in Bengal and it was in here they were cultivated for the first time too.⁴² But in spite of that, the British Government did not perform to uproot superstitions and narrow vision towards agriculture from the mind of the indigenous people. It was told in the *Krisi Tattva* magazine that a graduate can determine the speed rules of comets but he is ignorant the fertilizer applied to the sugarcane fields. Students are taught chemistry, physics, geometry, geography in middle and high schools but strangely, they do not even made known about the months when brinjal,patol etc plant are cultivated.⁴³ '*Beta Jeno Chasa*' or '*Na chasa sajjanayate*'⁴⁴ are the common Bengali or Sanskrit terms which are used to humiliate or ignore the peasants of our country.

Conclusion

At the primary stage, motto of the British Government was to create an aristocratic class by developing agricultural education amongst the landlords. They never intended to empower the country by spreading agricultural education among the poor peasants. Moreover, the people upon whom the British Government delivered the responsibility of developing agriculture, turn it into a business. Hence, no progression of the peasants and agriculture took place in reality.

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