

RISE OF MIDDLE CLASS IN EDUCATIONAL SECTOR: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY IN BARAK VALLEY

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ABSTRACT: Compared to Bengal and Sylhet, the origin and growth of education in the valley was very late. Small number of people used to send their boys and girls to Sylhet and Calcutta for school and college education even before the establishment of Calcutta University in 1857.¹ Up to 1935, the scenario of College Education in North-East India was as follows, Murari Chand College, Sylhet (1892), Cotton College, Guwahati (1900) St. Edmund's College, (1924) and St. Anthony's College, Shillong (1934). But the establishment of Guru Charan College (1935) at Silchar, ushered a new era which on the other hand, registered the beginning of higher education in Barak valley.² This paper studied the rise of middle class in educational sector in Barak valley.

KEYWORDS: Bengal, Sylhet, middle class, Barak Valley.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early phase of the British rule, radical change had taken place in the field of education. Up to 1856-57, there was not a school worth its name in the educational history of Barak Valley.³ But in comparison, the position of Sylhet was much better which had 285 schools with an enrolment of 1127 students. To extend educational facilities to the people of the valley without delay, Fisher, the first Superintendent of Cachar in his report in June 1834 observed.

...business of public instructions appears now generally to be considered the duty of the state, the absence of it has long been among the better informed natives the approach of our rule in India. Christian education alone could not be proposed without incurring the most alarming risques (risks). The scholars should be allowed to receive instruction of their own faith. At the same time I think it would be desirable to furnish a portion of the pupils with the means of persecuting their studies under more advantageous circumstances either at Calcutta or Serampore where they might enlarge their minds and prove on their return perhaps the means of effecting great improvements among their countrymen. ...the entire instruction in this district is to be conveyed in the Bengali language.⁴

In 1857, three schools were established at Silchar, Hailakandi, and Katigorah on the basis of private subscriptions.⁵ However, in 1859 Rev. Pyrse had started one English School at Sylhet under Calcutta University and Babu Nabokishore Sen, a student of this School came out successfully.⁶ But in the 60's of the 19th century, English education in Cachar came to be regarded as a passport to wealth and jobs with various agencies of the Government. English education system came to the valley when in 1863, Pyrse came to Silchar and first High English School was started by him with 80 students. Babu Nabo Kishore Sen was appointed as the first Head Master and the Superintendent of Cachar sanctioned a monthly subscription of Rs 80/- on behalf of the Government.⁷ In 1868 it was converted into Government school. In 1872, the school came directly under the Management and control of the District Committee.⁸ Along with this school, the middle school established at Silchar in 1876, but in case of Pathshalas it was not brought under the Scheme of the grant in aid until 1872. A good number of Primary school had been opened in the Thana and Sub-divisional and as well as Bazar areas. The tea-estates were also interested for the opening of primary schools for education of their children in the locality. Side by side, in rural areas Vernacular Primary Schools were opened to facilitate the educational system for children. So up to 1874-75, the district possessed 131 schools attended by 2,508 pupils. There were 108 primary schools attended by 2,508 pupils. Education made more progress in the Cachar. In 1903-04, the total number of pupils increased up to 8,090. Thus, the development of education up to 1904 had been satisfactory and it is also evident from the fact that the number of pupils at schools in 1903-04 was more than three times of the number of twenty nine years before. At the census of 1901, 5 percent of the population in the plains (9.1 males and 0.4 females) were identified as literate. So in 1903-04 there were 6 secondary schools and 2 special schools in the district. The number of females in the schools was 298. Majority of the boys and girls were in the primary stage. The male population of the same age, less than one percent, were under primary level. The total

¹ Rajen Saikia, *Social and Economic History of Assam, 1852-1921*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2000, p. 168.

² An Article of J B Bhattacharjee in the G C College, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, "In Institution of Excellence in the Barak valley" Silchar, pp. 22-33;

H K Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol-IV, Modern Period- Yandaboo to Diarchy, 1826-1919*, Publication Board of Assam, Gauhati, 1992, Pp 340, 362

³ B C Allen, *op. cit.*, n-18, Cachar, p. 146, Sylhet p. 262.

⁴ D Dutta (ed.), *op. cit.*, n-3, pp. 17-18 (for further reference please see S K Bhunya (ed.) *Cachari Buranji*, 1936, Gauhati, p. 121).

⁵ C R No. 234 of 1862.

⁶ C R No. 512 of 1863.

⁷ C R No. 512 of 1863, Superintendent's letter of 3 February, 1864.

⁸ D Datta (ed.), *op. cit.*, n-3, p. 11; Secretariat circular no. 31, General Department, dated 2 May, 1879.

expenditure on education was Rupees 63,000 of which Rupees 13,000 were derived from fees. About 43 percent of the direct expenditure was devoted to primary schools.⁹

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN BARAK VALLEY

The Normal School at Silchar served the interests of the teachers of both Sylhet and Cachar. In 1895, Welsh Presbyterian Mission Girls' High School started at Silchar. Besides this, Narshing M E School was upgraded to an Aided High School. In similar way in Hailakandi one High School was established. But the medium of instruction of the majority schools was Bengali. In 1868, Rai Bahadur Haricharan, first student of the Silchar Government High School came out successfully in the Entrance Examination and he was the first BL, in the legal profession in Cachar and he was the first lecturer in the Law College in Silchar. In 1865, Babu Nabakishore Sen was appointed the first Deputy Inspector of Schools. But in 1874, with the creation of the chief commissionership of Assam, the Surma Valley was given one Inspector of Schools, with its headquarters at Silchar. However, in the meantime, several Swadeshi schools were established. Some Swadeshi teachers and the several students left their schools, who opened several indigenous schools in different parts of Silchar. The foundation of "Dinanath Nabakishore Valika Vidyalaya popularly known as Swadeshi School" marked the rise of nationalist zeal. Again, to protest against the Cunningham Circular 'Cachar High School' at Malugram and 'Ambicapur High School' at Ambicapatty, later renamed as Adhar Chand High School, presently upgraded as 'Adhar Chand Higher Secondary School' were established. Thus up to this stage, the British Govt. was mainly stressed primary education. Up to 1931 percentage of literacy was eleven.¹⁰ Educational progress in primary level in the district from 1874 to 1901 is as follows¹¹:

Year	No. of Secondary Schools	Pupils	No. of Primary Schools	Pupils	Total no. of pupils
1874-75	7	373	108	2119	2492
1880-81	7	446	99	2565	3001
1890-91	3	413	190	4708	5121
1900-01	4	654	248	7188	7842

Source: Author's Findings.

The census report, in 1891 had observed that, the proportion of literate male is highest in Cachar plains, where 89 out of every 1,000 or I in II are able to read or write. But according to the census report of Assam in 1901, education had made more progress in the Surma Valley and in the Cachar plains 91 out of 1000 and in Sylhet 81 out of 1000, males were classed as literates.¹²

The gradual development of education enriched the valley and side by side a wealthy class of teachers began to participate in the Socio-political activities in this valley. Among them, the noteworthy personalities were Nabakishore Sen, Abhoy Charan Bhattacharjee, and Brajendra Kumar Biswas. The other successful students of Silchar Government High School were Hari Charan Das (1868), Kali Mohan Deb (1870), Mahesh Chandra Dutta (1872), Tara Kishore Gupta (1874) Atul Chandra Deb (1877) Kamini Kumar Chanda (1879), Prasanna Kumar Gupta (1879), Kalika Prasad Das (1880), Dinanath Das (1882), Guru Charan Sarma (1880), Kailash Chandra Endow (1883), Raj Kishore Swaram Nath and Chandra Nath (1887), passed the Entrance Examination.¹³ Besides this, the female education also progressed. The remarkable candidates who appeared in the Matriculation examination of 1901 were pupil like— Jyotsna Chanda who in subsequent period held the position of MLA and M.P. in Silchar. Rasida Haque Choudhury (Former Central State Education Minister). Uma Sen (Historian), Parveen Sultana (a famous classical artist). Parimal De (Ex-principal of Silchar Women's College) Amiya Biswas whose contribution in Socio-cultural and Political life of the people of Barak Valley in the pre-Independent and post-Independent period was immense. Thus it can be seen that they not only passed Matriculation examination but also played a significant role in their society. Teachers like Shyama Charan Deb (Cachar Gandhi), and others from Dhalai rural area of Barak Valley took an active part in the Gandhian Movement. In rural areas of Dhalai, one school started in the year 1922 by a group of educated people Nitya Nanda Barman, Krishnadhan Barman, Krishna Mohan Singh, and Krishna Jiban Purkayastha.¹⁴

3. THE ROLE OF MIDDLE CLASS

⁹ W W Hunter, *op. cit.*, n-7, pp. 455-457;

Census Report of India, 1891, Assam, p. 146.

¹⁰ D Dutta (ed.), *op. cit.*, n-3, pp. 12, 24, 27-28; Census of India, Assam, Vol. III, p. II, p. 214; B C Allen, *op. cit.*, n-18, p. 246.

¹¹ B C Allen, *op. cit.*, n-18, p. 146.

¹² Census of India, 1891, Vol. I (Assam), p. 146;

B C Allen, E A Gait, H F Howard, C G H, Allen, *op. cit.*, n-18, p. 118.

¹³ 125 Anniversary Celebration Souvenir (Government Boys' Higher Secondary School, Silchar, 1863-1988, p. viii)

¹⁴ 'The Report of the General Secretary' (Editorial Board), - *Bam Nityananda Uchcharat Madhyamik Bahumukhi Vidyalaya*, Dhalai (Golden Jubilee), Smiriti Grantha, 1994, Pp 1-10

A group of educated intellectuals constituted a Middle class by their service as a teacher in the Silchar Government School. They were, viz Raisaheb Nabakishore Sen (1863-64), Abhaya Charan Bhattacharjee (1865-86), Prasanna Kumar Sen (1886-88), Abhaya Charan Das (1888-1907) Purna Chandra Mohanta (1907) Sarat Chandra Basu (1910-11) Raj Kumar Das (1911-12) Bisweshar De (1912-20) Bisweshar Dasgupta (1920-24) Jotindra Chandra Acharjee (1924-25), Raisaheb Bharat Chandra Choudhury (1925-27), Jagannath De (1927), Rai Saheb Kshirode Chandra Purkayastha (1927-33) Maulavi Mufizar Rahman (1933-34), Digendra Chandra Das (1934-39), Jamini Kumar Bhattacharjee (1939-40) Raisaheb Sarat Chandra Ganguli (1940-44), Romani Mohan Chakraborty (1944-45), Suresh Chandra Kar (1945-46) etc.¹⁵ The slow growth of education limited scope of higher education. But the advent of higher education opened the windows of their mind to search for new ideas and thoughts. The dominant group of educated Middle class undoubtedly influenced socio educational life the valley but they were mostly outsiders. They played a similar role to the other parts of Bengal though the later group was more advanced than that of Barak Valley.¹⁶

Thus, the intelligentsia worked to upgrade the standard of higher education (i.e. Collegiate Education) in late colonial phase. The pioneering attempt in this direction was taken by Arun Kumar Chanda with the establishment of Gurucharan College at Silchar. Mrs Kiran Sashi Nag, the wife of Guru Charan Nag and her donation helped the opening of progressive scheme of higher education in a Bungalow at Rongpur. The college first started with 60 students in first year Arts. Arun Kumar Chanda first principal of this college worked on honorary basis. During the formative years the illustrious teachers of this college were Mahesh Chandra Dey Digendranath Bhattacharjee, Dhinendra Kumar Bhattacharjee, Pramesh Chandra Bhattacharjee, Rabindranath Dutta, Kamini Kumar Adhikari, and Rev. T W Rees. The college was affiliated to Calcutta University. The opening of Guru Charan College marked the way for the growth of Higher education in Barak Valley as well as in North-East India.¹⁷

This group of intellectuals behaved as Middle Class, stimulated the minds of the people in respect of caste and creed connected with the greater part of East Bengal and Bengal. They up to 1935 restricted their educational activities to the High School level. However from 1935, onwards their increasing tendency worked gradually for the creation of a greater social circle. Subsequently, this *Abhijata Sikshita Bhadrolok* dominated the socio-political activities of Barak Valley also. Though the scope of medical and engineering education in India and abroad was extremely limited the Barak Valley too had its representatives in those professions also.

The education also helped to produce officials who were called Babus and Bhadroloks. The gradual social and economic change and the infusion of the British Colonial rule extended all over the district. Such process of transformation immediately opened up roads, internal communication and helped to channelize the valley with other neighbouring parts like Manipur, Bengal, Assam and Lushai Hills. The introduction of Post and Telegraph Service, the radical increase of population, introduction of Tea Industry, cut down the size of arable land. The traditional occupation of agriculture was given away to the plantation workers in the tea estates and the traders and Babus lived in towns. Thus purely agricultural based economy produced a mixed economy in the urban areas and a class of economically dominant Middle class cropped up.¹⁸

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Western English education had changed the social hierarchy. The social order was no longer dominated by a single caste and community or profession. In the late 80's of the 19th Century, these new social classes in the urban areas gained prominence in public affairs. In this way this special category earned repute in the valley and called themselves *Bhadroloks*, *Madhyabitya Sreni* or *Middle stratum* or *Middle Class*.¹⁹

In the Semi-urban or petty town areas, the immigrants Bengalee Hindus were mostly absorbed by the government jobs and business sectors. The urban and rural areas were dominated by the non-indigenous Middle Class up to the third decade of the 20th Century. Petty clerks, cashiers, *khajanchis* came from the neighbouring province of Bengal, Sylhet etc. This category also known as *Bhadroloks*, was involved in the British service the people of this class, which included all the caste of Bengal searched for its model in the European "Middle Class" and compared them with the *Bhadralok* class.²⁰

However, the rise of the middle class added new problems. The joint family system lost its importance. The majority of students who flocked to the schools and colleges belonged to the orthodox middle class family. Most of these families lived in the villages. Since the introduction of English education, however, there had been a regular influx of *Bhadralok* classes towards the towns or to one or other of the mafassol and village areas.

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- ³ B C Allen, *op. cit.*, n-18, Cachar, p. 146, Sylhet p. 262.
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¹⁵ 125 Anniversary, *op. cit.*, n-49, p. ix.

¹⁶ H K Barpujari, (General editor), *Political History of Assam, Vol. I, 1826-1919*, Government of Assam, Dispur, Gauhati, 1977, p. 120.

¹⁷ D Datta, *op. cit.*, n-3, p. 54.

¹⁸ Jharna Datta, *op. cit.*, n-23, pp. 227-28.

¹⁹ H K Barpujari, (General editor) *Political History of Assam, Vol. I, 1826-1919*, Government of Assam, Dispur, Gauhati, 1977 p. 120.

²⁰ C R No. 181, July-December, 1876, p. 227.

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¹⁰ Census Report of India, 1891, Assam, p. 146.

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