



# An Assessment of Social Progress in 19<sup>th</sup> Century through Education

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## Abstract:

From time immemorial, humans have lived in groups. Over time, various adversities have taught them to live together to develop cooperative and interdependent relationships among themselves to survive in daily life. As one of the builders of society, the human brain gives immense importance to education. Then education equally promotes humans, and as a result, they may go on a social process. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Indian society was full of problems like caste discrimination, child marriage, polygamy, the sati system, and untouchability. At that time, the lack of education deprived women of society's normal social status and rights.

Consequently, The East India Company initially showed little interest in education. Later, they were forced to change their thinking to serve their interests. During this time, education began to improve through the concerted efforts of Christian missionaries and Personal initiatives. More over, education and social systems were so advanced by the efforts of educational and social reformers. In this way, education and culture promote social conditions. That gradual reform is called Bengal Renaissance. The present study seeks to investigate the nineteenth-century social system and how education played a key role in social progress.

**Keywords:** *Social Progress, Educational Policy, Education and Social reformers, Missionaries Initiative, women's education*

## Introduction

Colonial rule began after the Mughal Era. Not only did the Indian education and social conditions deteriorate at the beginning of colonial rule, but this situation continued almost from the Middle Age. That time the main purpose of foreigners was trade. In this way, the East India Company also came to the country for trade, but the abundance of India's resources fueled their greed (Bora, 2016; Lawson, 2014). Then the gradual exploitation by the British Government completely broke the Indian social structure. Not only the British Government, but it was also responsible for Indians themselves, who were resisting their progress through lack of education, social prejudices, caste discrimination, etc (Srinivas,1957). As trade was, the main goal was the British Government. They did not think about Indian education and then they became to start the rulers of our country. The thinking changed after a while and they started the development of education in the first half of the

nineteenth Century. Christian missionaries first emphasized school education to propagate the religion and later, the British Government continued to formulate various educational policies. That time social reformers of Bengal, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar played the most prominent role in the expansion of Indian education, particularly in Bengal. Women education is also starting over various hurdles, which create a deep stir in society (Dhara & Barik, 2021; Rahman & Rahman, 2018). Education and social progress are complemented by each other. The social progress of the nineteenth century through education, we need to know social prejudice and social barriers both were the burning factor in changing society through educational movement.

### **Social condition of 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The social life of the nineteenth century is deeply affected by various social evils (Guha & Gadgil, 1989; Shamshad, 2011). Untouchability and the caste system were abhorrent practices in those days. Lower class people were associated with work like cobblers, sweepers etc. Not only could they not participate in government jobs, they were also forbidden to go to places like temples and schools and not only that, they had no right to collect drinking water along with the others of the higher classes. There were no laws to protect their common rights, the upper classes of society always exploited them. In this society, they were untouchables. As a result, a massive imbalance was created at that time. Not only that, some of the social evils like child marriage, polygamy, the sati system, etc., of that time, made the life of women absolutely miserable. Also, it was said that girls would be widows if they were more educated. Naturally, through this, girls were kept from education and had no rights over the property. So, the position of women in society was not good in any aspect. However, situation was started to change. Christian missionaries helped a lot in this regard. Some acts of the British Government were somewhat helpful in the progress of the women's education, and their position in society was changed (Borthwick, 2015).

### **Government Initiatives**

Since the late eighteenth century, the British Government has initiated the establishment of several educational institutions; although their initiatives were based on oriental learning. From the company, the first initiatives on Indian education were seen by Warren Hastings. Calcutta Madrasah was established in 1781 on his initiative (Smith, 2008). Then William Jones founded The Asiatic Society in 1784 and Varanasi Sanskrit College was established in 1792 by Jonathan Duncan (Cohn, 1961). Another important institution of oriental studies is Fort William College which Lord Wellesley founded in 1800 (Khan, 1997). The Government's main objective behind establishing this college was to train British officers in Indian languages. The establishment of these institutions completed the first phase of the British Governments' educational activities.

### **Charter Act 1813:**

The Company's first step in promoting modern education was the Charter Act of 1813. It was for the first time that it was understood that Indian education was the responsibility of the Company. This Act was the first to allocate funds to the Indian education sector. Section 43 of the Act of 1813 stated that the educational policy was aimed at the revival and improvement of literature among the Indians in the British territories, encouraging

the education of the Indian natives and promoting science education to the Indians (Mondal, 2017). But nothing was said about how the funds would be used in the education sector. To solve this problem, the General Committee of Public Instruction was formed in 1823 at the initiative of Lord Amherst, which was formed to guide the Company on educational matters (Sangwan,1990). However, the members of this committee adopted the Oriental approach to education and survived till 1824. After twenty years, this act was supposed to be renewed, but until then, nothing was said about how the funds would be used. However, influenced by the liberals, new members were subsequently appointed to the committee, so the committee lost its singular authority and, by 1835, had intensified the Oriental and Western debate.

### **Macaulay Minutes of 1835:**

The year 1835 was an important period in the formulation of Indian education policy. On March 7, 1835, the Macaulay Minutes were published. Bentinck fully supports this minute; The resolution of March 1835 finally defined the aims and medium of education in India (Macaulay,1835). The Macaulay Minutes they were decided to spread of western education. Arts education is said to be viewed as an object of British government education. Indigenous educational institutions are said to be closed.

### **Hardinge's Proclamation of 1844:**

Later, Lord Hardinge's declaration of 1844 reinforced the decisions of the 1835 Macaulay Minutes. It was decided to give preference to those educated in English schools in government jobs and few Indian natives were trying for government jobs at the time. As a result, English education became compulsory for Indians. Through this decision, the British Government aimed to produce good clerks (Wright, 2016).

### **Wood's Despatch of 1854:**

The British parliament appointed a special parliamentary Committee to formulate an appropriate education policy for India. This committee was formed in 1854 and was chaired by Sir Charles Wood. He observed and evaluated the Indian education system and presented his proposals for promoting Indian education, known as Wood's Despatch (Moore, 1964). The despatch emphasized expanding public education, with great emphasis on establishing primary, middle and high schools. In addition, this despatch recommended the establishment of universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and emphasized the teaching of Indian languages along with the teaching of English.

### **Hunter Commission of 1882:**

After the proposal given by Wood's Despatch, no special inquiry was made about the condition of the education system for a long time. As a result, there was stagnation in the education system. In these circumstances, the British Government felt the need for an inquiry into the present condition of the Indian educational system. For this purpose, Lord Ripon appointed the Indian Education Commission through the Government of India resolution in February 1882 under the chairmanship of William Hunter, Member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council (Whitehead, 2005). Within ten months, the commission submitted a report of about 700 pages after hard

work but did not offer substantive advice or instructive ideas. This report was a revised and expanded version of Charles Wood's despatches.

### **Missionaries Initiatives:**

Christian missionaries played a leading role in the spread of education in the nineteenth century. From the beginning of this century, they helped establish various educational institutions. Through their main objective is to spread religion, Indians are particularly benefited from this institution especially women are benefited more. So, their role in the advancement of education was undeniable (Porter, 1985).

### **Serampore Baptist Mission:**

Among the educational institutions established by Christian missionaries, Srirampur Baptist Mission played a leading role. It was founded by William Carey, J.C. Marshman and William Ward in 1800. William Carey first established the Baptist Mission in Britain in 1773, intending to promote the greatness of Christianity (Noonkester, 2002). Carey's activities centred mainly on preaching, teaching and translating the scriptures. Srirampur Mission Church was inaugurated on 24th March 1800. This mission was self-reliant. Marshman and William Carey continued missionary work earned from teaching. The mission directly took a leading role in the fields of art, literature, science, newspaper and social reforms.

### **General Assembly Institution:**

Alexander Duff founded General Assembly Institution. He wanted to establish an organization where western education combined with a Christian mission and development of the people. Duff opened the first school in a house located on Chitpur Road near Jorasanko in old Calcutta. A wealthy Hindu named Firingi Kamal Bose helped acquire the house. The school was soon transformed into a missionary college known as the General Assembly Institution. Eventually, in 1830 Alexander Duff and his fellow Scottish missionaries established the General Assembly Institution with the assistance of Raja Ram Mohan Roy (Smith, 1879).

### **Serampore College:**

Serampore College was opened in India on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1818 by the initiative of William Carey, Marshman and William Ward. Oriental literature and Western science were provided simultaneously in this institution. The college was open to all persons of any caste or creed, and the founders ensured that no denominational test would apply to faculty members. Not only that, secular education was also provided here (Hudson, 2018).

### **Private Initiatives**

Government and Missionary initiatives helped expand education during the colonial rule, but it cannot be denied that the Indian education system could never have progressed completely without individual efforts. During this time private institutions mostly supported the spread of western education (Lankina, & Getachew, 2013). In the 18th and 19th century, the advent of some educational and social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, David Hare, Radhakanta Deb, Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay, Gaurmohan Adhya, Drinkwater Bethune, Ishwar

Chandra Vidyasagar, Surendranath Banerjee, Keshab Chandra Sen ensured education and social progress. Mainly due to their initiatives, several famous institutions were established for the education of that time, and not only did they think about the expansion of education for boys, but also their contribution to the expansion of women's education was undeniable.

### **Vedanta College and Anglo Hindu School:**

As a private entrepreneur, Raja Ram Mohan Roy's contribution to the expansion of the education system is undeniable. In 1816 he established Vedanta College and, in 1822 the Anglo-Hindu School in Calcutta. He established the school entirely on his own initiative and bore all the school's expenses. He devoted himself to the spread of liberal education. Although he was a supporter of Western education, he was not against the study of Sanskrit, but he opposed the idea that all education should be through Sanskrit. He was also a profound Orientalist. On the one hand, he wanted to introduce Western education to free people from superstitions and enlighten their minds with reason. On the other hand, he felt the need for Hindu scriptures, Hindu literature and philosophy. That is, introducing the practical approach in the field of education, he created a beautiful match between the orientalist and western (Heimsath, 2015; Jones, 1976).

### **Hindu College:**

Calcutta Hindu College was established on January 30, 1817 to educate some upper caste Hindu boys. It was built by some wealthy persons personal initiative, who bear the expenditure of establishing the college. Although the British Government gave both encouragement and approval to it. Initially the Hindu College was divided into two branches, one School (Pathshala) and the other College (Maha-pathshala). In the school taught English, Bengali, Grammar, Mathematics, while the college taught languages, History, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Mathematics, Chemistry, and other subject of science. Although the institution was established for Hindu children, emphasis was placed on Western education. On its opening day Hindu College had twenty students and the next three months it increased to sixty-nine. This institution started his journey on 15 June 1855 as Presidency College (Buckland, 1971).

### **School Book Society:**

Apart from establishing Hindu College, David Hare contributed to establishing several other educational institutions. He founded the Calcutta School Society on 1st September 1818. David Hare and Radhakanta Deb were the secretaries of this society (Ahmed, 1961). This society has significantly contributed to the spread of education in Bengal. He took the initiative to print and publish textbooks in both English and Bengali.

### **Metropolitan Institution:**

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar established this institution in 1872 with personal initiative. It was a secular institution where academic and cultural matters were extended. Vidyasagar was intimately associated with the college from the beginning, and the institute was the result of his hard work. After Vidyasagar death in 1891, the institution came to be known as Vidyasagar College in 1917.

**Calcutta Female School:**

John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune established the Calcutta Female School on 7th May 1849. Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay helped him financially to establish this school. This school was started in Mukherjee's house. The school began its journey by enrolling the first 21 women, the next year, this number increase to 80. In November, the foundations were laid for a permanent school building on a plot on the west side of Cornwallis Square. In 1856 it was taken over by the Government. It was Bethune School till 1863 and in 1879 it was converted into Bethune College (Singh, 2000). It was the first women's college in India and the first women's school in the whole of Asia.

**Oriental Seminary School:**

Gaurmohan Adhya founded the Oriental Seminary School in 1829. This primary school was open for the children of Hindu parents in Calcutta. It was probably the first completely private school in India, even known as Hindu School and later as Hindu College. In earlier days, students interested in learning English had to go to missionary schools, where they were under considerable religious influence. A major contribution of Gaurmohan Adhya was establishing an English school free from religious influence (Basu, 1974). As a result, traditional Indian educational centres where Sanskrit and French were taught began to disappear. Peary Mohan Bandopadhyay was the headmaster of this school. Akshay Kumar Dutta, Kailas Chandra Bose, Umesh Chandra Banerjee, Gurudas Banerjee etc. were famous students of this school.

Apart from the above educational institutions, some other institutions were established, like Ripon College, now known as Surendranath College, in 1884, and Metropolitan Institution in 1872, founded by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (Das, 2022). Thus, it can be said that from the early 19th century, the private initiative was heavily emphasized in the expansion of education, and large numbers of students also started joining educational institutions established by private initiatives for education. As a result, it can be said that there was a renaissance in the field of education in the nineteenth century.

**Women's education and social progress:**

The social position of women is a very important and debatable topic not only in the nineteenth century but also in the present day. Nineteenth-century Women's education was limited to girls from a few upper-class families.

The first steps in the advancement of women's education in the modern era were taken by Christian missionaries. In 1819, Baptist missionaries established the first girls' school in Calcutta under the name Female Juvenile Society (Bartle, 1994). Danish missionaries established female schools in Bombay in 1821 and Calcutta in 1829.

During this time, some European liberals also began to think about improving women's education. In 1820, David Hare founded a girls' school in Calcutta at his own expense. Dr. Bethune, who was a member of the Governor General's Councillor and President of the Education Department of Bengal, established a girls' school in Calcutta and maintained the school at her own expense till her death in 1851 (Marshall, 2000).

Then the Educational Despatch of 1854 opened a new chapter in the field of female education. These despatches encouraged and directly helped women. This despatch allocated funds for female education for books, buildings, teachers, etc.

The Bethune School was a transition from school to college that was the first institution of higher learning for women and started with just six students. Yet, women continued to face barriers to higher education. In 1857 Colleges were established in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madrasa but women were not allowed to be admitted there. It was only in 1877 that the University of Calcutta allowed women to be admitted to the examination (Sen, 2004). During this period, some educational and social reformers made progress in women's education through personal efforts and government aid. Although, this task was not very easy for them because superstitions surrounded our society at that time and parents did not want to allow girls to reach the school grounds. But with the constant efforts of these social reformers broke society's evil practices and brought the light of women's education.

As a social reformer, we can talk about the contribution of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who believed that evil practices like sati system, and child marriage were responsible for this low status of Indian women. He also fought against polygamy and wanted women to be educated and regain their property rights. Through his efforts and with the help of Lord William Bentinck Sati system was abolished under Regulation act no. 17 of 4<sup>th</sup> December 1829. Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was another social reformer who established several women's schools under his own responsibility. In Bengal he established about 35 female schools between 1855-58. He also established a fund called 'Nari Shiksha Bhandar' for the purpose of the school building. As a result, Bethune School was established in Calcutta in 1849 which was the first women's school.

Keshabchandra Sen, the main leader of Brahma Samaj, was interested in improving the status of women. She started the Victoria Institute for Girls in 1871 which gradually expanded into a women's college. A society called 'Brahmabandhu Sabha' was founded in 1863 which took an active interest in promoting women's education. A special monthly Bengali journal for women, called 'Bamabodhini' was published under the editorship of Umesh Chandra Dutta. Prarthana Sabha gave a great impetus to the women's education of the Brahma Samaj, established in 1867. A devoted disciple of Sri Ramakrishna was Swami Vivekananda. He laid great emphasis on female education.

Gaurmohan Vidhyalankar's book 'Stri Shiksha Vidhayak' was published to encourage women's education. Reverend Krishnamohan Banerjee, poet Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Pandit Bhudev Mukhopadhyay are the three members of the New Bengal Association, they take an important role in women's education (Specker, 1989). In 1845, the British Indian Society and Jai Krishna Mukherjee, the zamindar of Uttar Para, initiated the establishment of a girls' school. Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, a member of the New Bengal Party, provided land for the Bethune School, Keshab Chandra Sen established several schools for women's education, including the Antapur Stri Shiksha Sabha and the Native Ladies' Normal School. Keshab Chandra Sen published the magazines 'Bamabodhini' and 'Indian Mirror' to emphasize the need for women's education (Mukherjee, 2017). In 1878, women got the opportunity to take the exam from Calcutta University. In 1883, two daughters of Bengal, Chandramukhi Bose and Kadambini Ganguly received the first B.A degree.

## Conclusion

Various social and religious prejudices, lack of proper education, and undermining of women's education and social rights in society are responsible for the social stagnation during colonial rule. But big issues cannot be solved overnight. Likewise, overcoming the obstacles, social progress in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not happen overnight. From the beginning of this century, Christian Missionaries founded a few schools that time British Government also set up some schools and set some educational policies. That progress enhanced by some social reformers who devoted their lives to education. Although this task was not very easy as the society was full of various social evils, they endured various social obstacles and personal attacks by some anti-social. However, they continued to strive for education and social progress by establishing school one after another and writing books and magazines, sensitizing people from door to door, presenting their demands and rights to the Government, and demanding education and social rights for women's. Although there were some differences in educational matters, the increase in the number of schools one after, the significant increase in the number of students, the abolition of practices like polygamy and sati system, and the starting of the practice of widow marriage led the society as a whole towards progress. And without education, this social progress would not have been possible in any way. However, it is not true that all evil customs were completely abolished in the nineteenth century. However, after a long period of stagnation in education and society, progress came in education and social culture during this period can undoubtedly be called the Era of the renaissance.

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