

HISTORY OF HINDU COLLEGE: A JOURNEY INTO THE PAST

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 Before the establishment of Hindu College in 1817 (some scholars contend it was 1816) the educational scenario in Bengal was like this. There were Tols and Chatuspathis which were colleges of Sanskrit learning. There were Madrasas where Arabic and Persian were taught. At lower level there were Pathsalas and Maktabs. These were elementary schools. It appears that the number of elementary schools in Bengal and Bihar was about a

lakh. The Higher education of the Hindus was imparted in Tols and Chatuspathis where Pandits taught Sanskrit language, Grammar, Logic, Philosophy and Jurisprudence. The scholars lived in the houses of their Pandits. Teaching was free and the pupils also had free boarding and lodging. Pandits depended on gratuitous donations by rulers and Zamindars. Muslim higher learning was imparted from Madrasas. It is interesting to note that there was no mutual connection or dependence between these Pathsalas and Tols. Elementary schools were for trading and agricultural classes and Tols were for religious and learned classes. The two systems imparting higher and elementary education were independent of each other. As the Tols and Pathsalas had to depend solely upon donations and grants made by Zamindars and rulers, they were decaying. According to the estimate made by William Adam there were hardly 100 Tols in each district on an average and the total number of teachers and students in those Tols was approximately 12600. This was the position towards the end of the 18th Century. The teachers who were teaching for free received gifts on the occasion of important religious functions and with such gifts they had to support themselves and their students. Due to economic changes the Tols gradually lost the patronage of Princes and local potentates. It became very difficult for the Pandits to maintain Tols.

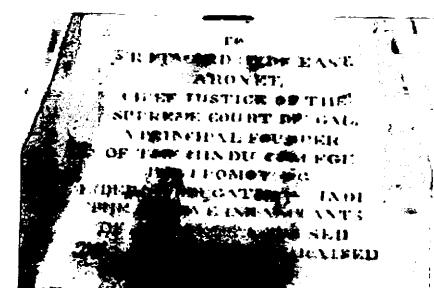
The Madrasas were not very many in Bengal, but they were comparatively well endowed. The Persian language being the language of Law Course and revenue administration, many Hindus also went to Madrasas for learning Persian. In a survey of five districts in 1835, it was recorded that 2087 Hindus learnt Persian language as against 1409 Mohammedans.

There was not much cultural interaction between Indians and Englishmen up to the eighties of the eighteenth Century. Englishmen wanted to do business with Indians. For that purpose, they had to learn the native language. Indians who wanted to be associated with the British for the purpose of doing business with them, had to acquire some kind of workable knowledge of English. The East India Company Management was of the view that the company employees employed in India should learn the Moorish and Gento languages. But they were not so particular that Indians should learn the use of the English language to help the British business and administration. This understanding came much later.

Calcutta Madrasa was founded by Warren Hastings in 1781. Sanskrit College was founded in Benaras in 1792. Between 1792 and 1797 the British Parliament was vigorously debating introduction of European education in India. Asiatic Society was founded in 1784, but there was no Indian in the Society till 1829.

Lord Wellesley established Fort William College for the training of young Civilians in 1800 which was for the purpose of bringing English officers and Indian Pandits together. Formerly the study of English language was confined to interpreters, clerks and gomastas. But now the interaction was at a higher level. Among the English people there were two distinct schools of thought. One school believed that stress should be given in imparting the native population knowledge of the English literature and Science through the medium of the English language. The other school laid greater stress on study of Sanskrit and Persian. One school believed that there was a progressive decay of literature and science in Bengal. They wanted to promote European education among the learned natives in India.

Two modes were suggested for imparting education. One by establishing English schools to instruct Indians in the English language and through English



medium conveying to them knowledge of European science and literature. The other school supported giving educational instructions in the language of the country. One school believed that the Indians had to be allured to study European science and literature in English language. The other school encouraged translation of useful European works into Arabic, Sanskrit and popular dialects. They believed that the restoration of old learning among Indians was to be achieved. Even among the Hindus there were clearly two views: one school thought that ancient and medieval oriental education should be adhered to, the other school was in favour of Western learning and in favour of liberal education.

Enlightened Hindus led by Raja Rammohan Roy considered that existing Sanskrit learning in the new situation was futile, untimely and pointless. They wanted to start an academy for imparting Western education which would be of practical use to the students. The British administration also felt that the administration could not be run only with British Civil Servants with the help of natives not having any western education. They also wanted to foster a class which would help them in carrying out the work for administration. They also understood that some kind of professional education had also to be imparted for running the show.

It appears that from 1815 an idea of instituting an academy of imparting western education was emerging. There is some controversy regarding the origin of Hindu College. In 1815 Rammohan Roy entertained some of his friends at his residence and proposed the foundation of Atmiya Sabha for promoting moral conditioning of the people of India. He wanted to start a movement against idolatry. David Hare who was present suggested that it was more important that a college should be founded for imparting Western education. Rammohan Roy agreed. David Hare was a watch dealer who came to India in 1800 to do business. But he was very genuinely interested in promoting Western education in India. It appears that the idea for establishing Hindu College originated with David Hare. If a single individual is to be credited as the founder of the Hindu College, he is David Hare. David Hare understood that without European education Calcutta boys did not have any future. He was quite close to Rammohan Roy.

In that very year i.e. in 1815, David Hare prepared a proposal for his projected Hindu College. Somehow, David Hare thought that he should not directly approach Sir Edward Hyde East, the Chief Justice of Supreme Court with regard to this matter. He handed over his note to one Dewan Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay, who handed the note to Sir Edward Hyde East.

Sir Edward Hyde East, in a letter to Mr. J. Harrington, (a judge) wrote that in or about the beginning of May 1816 a Brahmin of Calcutta well known for his intelligence and active interference among the principal native inhabitants and also intimate with many British gentlemen had called upon him and informed him that many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of the children in a liberal manner as practised by Europeans

of condition and desired that Sir Edward Hyde East would lend them his aid towards it by having a meeting held under his sanction. After his departure, he communicated to the Governor General what had transpired. The Governor General laid his communication before the Supreme Council and all Members approved of the course he had taken and they had no objection to his permitting the parties to meet at his house.

A meeting was accordingly held at the residence of Sir Edward Hyde East on 14th May 1816, at Old Post Office Street with 50 members. Almost all respectable Hindu inhabitants of rank and wealth attended including the principal Pandits. At that very meeting a sum of nearly half a lakh of rupees was subscribed and many more subscriptions were promised. Prominent benefactors were Maharaja Tejchand Bahadur of Burdwan and Gopi Mohan Tagore.

It is interesting to note that some people present at the meeting were against Rammohan Roy and one gentleman openly opposed association of Rammohan Roy with this project. Hindus present were enthusiastic about the foundation of the college. They were also of the view that Sanskrit learning in this new institution would be futile. But at the same time orthodox Hindus had reservations about Rammohan Roy as they thought that Rammohan's direct involvement with the institution would have a harmful effect on the Hindu pupils of the institutions. David Hare discussed this delicate matter with Rammohan Roy and he decided to maintain a distance out of the broadness of his mind. He wanted the institution to be established and he also wanted to avoid any controversy arising out of his association with the institution.

On the 21st of May there was another meeting at the residence of Sir Edward Hyde East and on that day a decision was taken to establish Hindu College of Calcutta in which Sir Edward Hyde East was President and Justice John Herbert Harrington was the Vice President. 8 Europeans and 5 Pandits and 15 students constituted the General Committee. The committee was able to raise about Rs 1,13,179/- for the institution.

On 27th May, Mr Joseph Barretto became the Treasurer and Lt. Col. Francis Arvind became an European Secretary and Dewan Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay became the native Secretary. A Sub-committee was formed and the task of identifying a suitable location for the proposed college or to rent a suitable accommodation for the college for the purpose of holding classes was given to the Sub-committee. With the efforts of the Sub-committee, the house of Gorachand Basak at 304, Chitpur Road was taken for setting up of the college and that was the first address of the Hindu College. After the house of Gorachand Basak, the college was shifted to the house of Rupchand Roy at Chitpur, from there to the house of Kamal Bose at Jorasanko and thereafter, it was shifted to another house in Burrabazar. Ultimately, the Hindu College came to its present address in 1826.

The school opened on January 20, 1817 in that Garhata

house at 304, Chitpur Road with 20 students. The college was divided into two sections, junior and senior. In the former, then known as Vidyalaya, boys in the 8 - 12 year age group were admitted. The maximum age limit of admission was 14. The students started the junior school with elementary English and promoted to higher classes. On promotion to the senior section, they proceeded with the same course of studies, in addition to History, Poetry, Natural Philosophy, Algebra, Chemistry and Mathematics. The syllabus for the upper section of Literature, Mathematics, History and Philosophy was gradually diversified. The name Vidyalaya was dropped in 1826.

The progress made by the students was very encouraging. The committee reported in 1831 that a command of the English language and familiarity with its literature and science had been acquired to an extent rarely acquired by any school in Europe. C.E. Trevelyan wrote that the establishment of the capacity of the natives to acquire a first rate education in English language was first fully tried and established in connection with the Hindu College.

It has already been noted that from the beginning of the 19th Century till the middle of it, there were two distinct camps, Orientalist and Anglicists. Orientalists did not take the view that teaching of English among the natives was unimportant. But they were of the opinion that much greater stress should be given in India on the study of Persian and Sanskrit and Arabic literature on the one side and a working knowledge of English was enough. On the other hand the, the Anglicists of which, Macaulay was the leader, were of the view that teaching of English language and introductions of learning of the West was of paramount importance.

Orientalists canvassed the idea of establishing and promoting Sanskrit schools and Madrasas under Government patronage. Anglicists thought that no useful purpose would be served thereby. Students would acquire only what was known to them thousand years ago. They would only receive a training in what was described as, "vain and empty subtleties". Only Western education taught through English could regenerate the nation. This view found support in the influential section of Hindus who realized that only in receiving such western education and learning the English language remained their future. The Hindus realized that knowing English would give them good job in Government and the English administration who realized that they needed more and more persons with knowledge of English and experience to Western education would substantially help the administration. In 1828 it was decided that jobs would readily be given to those who qualified from Hindu College.

The establishment of Hindu College signified the triumph of the Anglicists view over the Orientalists. Lord William Bentinck was very much delighted with the Hindu College. He and Lady Bentinck used to come to Hindu College very frequently. Bentinck was an ardent Anglicist.

The Hindu College emerged as a very popular institution among students. In 1817 it started with 20 students. In less than three months the number of students rose to 69. In 1823

the number of students attached to the Hindu College in two sections Junior and Senior was 402 and in 1828 it rose to 436. Between 1828 and 1850 the average number of students attending the College was about 450. The institution at first started as a free teaching institution. But soon it was found that it was difficult to run an institution like this without charging fees from students. In 1823 we find that among 402 students, there were 300 paying boys, 60 free, 30 school society boys and 12 donation scholars.

Herry Louis Vivian Derozio joined Hindu College as a teacher in 1826, at the age of 17 only. He taught English, History, Literature in classrooms and interacted with his pupils outside the college on subjects of interest. His magnetic personality and his influence on students were fantastic. Students became so attached to him that even in their private concerns, they would not take any decision without his counsel and advice. Derozio taught them the evil effect of idolatry and superstition and encouraged them to rise above the antiquated ideas.

In 1828, Derozio established what was known as academic association, with which persons like Ramgopal Ghosh, Ramtanu, Lahiri, Piyari Chand Mitra were actively associated. The association became one of the most reputed debating clubs. Debates and discussions were attended by persons like David Hare, Col. Burson, Secretary of Lord Bentink, Dr Mills, Principal of Bishop College, Calcutta. The academic association brought about an intellectual revolution among the young people. Ironically in 1831 Derozio was dismissed. No account of Hindu College is possible without noting the role of Derozio.

In 1842, David Hare died. In that year, Sir Edward Ryan who succeeded Macaulay as the President of the General Committee of Public Instructions left India. In 1844, Lord Hardinge declared English education as a qualification for public service. Hindu College was at that time prospering but it was originally founded as a school imparting English education to Hindus only. The Council of Education initiated a move to extend the benefit of Hindu College to non Hindus as well.

In a meeting held in 1852, November 27th there was a proposal that the Hindu College should be thrown open to all classes without distinction. Accordingly, the Hindu College was divided into two institutions on May 13, 1854. The school remained exclusively for Hindu pupils but the College became open to all classes. This Hindu College which was thrown open to all classes was renamed as Presidency College on June 15, 1855 under the orders of the Court of Directors to instruct along with a general course of education, special courses of Law, Engineering and Medicine. The Council of Education proposed that the four branches of instruction in the new college would ultimately be raised to the dignity of University. Presidency College which enjoyed a privileged position and served as a model institution of higher learning in Bengal afterwards provided facilities of post Graduate teaching in English, History, Mathematics, Political Economy.

It is interesting to note that at about the beginning of 1841 the services of a barrister was requisitioned at Hindu College to teach law at Hindu College at a salary of Rs 300/- per month. In 1843 the Advocate General offered his services to deliver such lectures without charging any remuneration. The lectures were attended by senior students of Hindu College. In 1852 another Barrister was appointed in the Law Department of Hindu College. 1852-53 law classes were attended by 30 students, of which 25 belonged to the college and 5 ex-students. Six students went up for examination with law as a subject and passed with credit. A professorship in Civil Engineering was found in Hindu College in 1843-44. But this lectureship was created on condition that lectures would be open to all classes.

Thus we see that the idea of introducing modern subjects as Law, Medicine and Engineering and the idea of throwing open the Hindu College to all communities were making progress hand in hand. We have noted earlier, the Hindu College was renamed Presidency College in 1955.

Presidency College which is now a University, in that sense, is senior to the University of Calcutta. University of Calcutta founded two years later in 1857 started as a purely examining body. In 1854 when Court of Directors had sanctioned the object for foundation of Presidency College in Calcutta, they had directed that the building of the proposed college should be so arranged as to afford space for transaction of the business of Calcutta University and for holding the University examinations. The reasons put forward for the failure to establish a series of University professorships was that ample endowment of Presidency College met the need. Presidency College enjoyed high status and dignity since its very inception.

The foundation of Hindu College can be considered to be the beginning of modern education in Bengal.

About the Author

The author had the good fortune of being a student of Hindu School for six years (1947-1953) and of Presidency College for another six years 1953-1959) for undergraduate and post graduate studies. Thereafter he studied law at the Calcutta University and Oxford University. He is a Barrister (of the Inner Temple) and a designated Senior Advocate.
