Transforming Knowledge: The British Impact on Punjab's Education System, 1849-1947

Keywords: Colonial Education # British Rule # Punjab # Indigenous Practices # Second Anglo-Sikh War

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Abstract: The annexation of North India, particularly the state of Punjab, on March 29, 1849, following the conclusion of the Second Anglo-Sikh War, marked a significant moment in colonial history. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India at the time, faced the formidable task of establishing a peaceful administration in the region. Prior to British rule, the educational landscape in North India, especially in Punjab, was characterized by a fragmented system. There was little uniformity in curriculum, and education varied widely based on factors such as gender, religion, age, and caste. Traditional education primarily took place in religious institutions, contributing to the diversity and complexity of the educational milieu. This paper seeks to assess the transformation of education in Punjab following British rule. Drawing from secondary sources and archival records, it aims to analyze the contrast between indigenous educational practices and the changes introduced by colonial

authorities. Additionally, the paper endeavours to evaluate the merits and shortcomings of the new educational system implemented under British administration. By examining the evolution of education in Punjab under British rule, this study sheds light on the impact of colonialism on the region's educational landscape, offering insights into the broader socio-cultural changes that accompanied British annexation.

Introduction The annexation of North India, particularly the state of Punjab, on March 29, 1849, following the conclusion of the Second Anglo-Sikh War, marked a significant moment in colonial history. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India at the time, faced the formidable task of establishing a peaceful administration in the region. Prior to British rule, the educational landscape in North India, especially in Punjab, was characterized by a fragmented system. There was little uniformity in curriculum, and education varied widely based on factors such as gender, religion, age, and caste. Traditional education primarily took place in religious institutions, contributing to the diversity and complexity of the educational milieu. This paper seeks to assess the transformation of education in Punjab following British rule. Drawing from secondary sources and archival records, it aims to analyze the contrast between indigenous educational practices and the changes introduced by colonial authorities. Additionally, the paper endeavours to evaluate the merits and shortcomings of the new educational system implemented under British administration. By examining the evolution of education

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Foundations of Learning: Indigenous Education in Pre-Annexation Punjab

Preceding the annexation of Punjab, the indigenous education system deeply intertwined with the region's social and cultural fabric. Learning primarily took place within religious institutions like gurdwaras, temples, and mosques, serving as pivotal hubs for knowledge dissemination. Here, moral values, spiritual insights, and cultural legacies found expression through the teachings of religious texts and scriptures. Community engagement played a vital role, with families and local communities actively participating in educational endeavours. However, access to formal schooling remained constrained, especially for marginalized segments such as women, lower castes, and those facing economic hardship. The educational curriculum exhibited considerable diversity, shaped by religious affiliations, caste dynamics, and regional nuances, thus lacking uniformity. Despite these constraints, the indigenous education system nurtured a profound sense of cultural identity and safeguarded traditional wisdom through oral traditions. The advent of British rule in Punjab heralded significant transformations in the educational sphere, ushering in novel systems and institutions that would redefine the region's educational trajectory.

Several British inquiries into Indian education have noted that prior to British rule, indigenous schools

in the region were not considered to be of a high standard. (Majumdar, 2008). This was attributed partly to the lack of uniformity in education across different societal strata and partly to the religious orientation of indigenous education in India. Muslims primarily attended madrasas where they were taught the Quran, along with subjects such as theology, fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), astronomy, and Yunani medicine. (Jafar, 1973). On the other hand, Hindus received education in pathshalas and chattsals. Pathshalas served as local primary schools for Hindu children, while chattsals, also known as Mahajani Landa Schools, catered to trading communities. In chattsals, teachers known as padhas taught students mental arithmetic, enabling them to conduct business transactions and maintain accounts (behi khatas) mentally. The curriculum of pathshalas included subjects like philosophy, astronomy, astrology, and even medicine. (Nehru, 1945).

The Sikh seats of learning bore witness to the profound quest for Jhana, or divine knowledge, demonstrated by their students. (Grewal, 1998). Teachers of this era were typically esteemed individuals who not only provided education free of charge but also offered students food, clothing, and shelter. In exchange, students were not expected to present gifts to their teachers. Thus, the native education system flourished and enjoyed popularity across a significant portion of North India until 1849. However, it must be acknowledged that women and individuals from marginalized social strata were largely excluded from this educational paradigm, highlighting its inherent discriminatory nature. It's worth noting that the assertion that indigenous education in India was "not of

a higher order" may not be an accurate critique of the existing system; rather, it likely stemmed from colonial biases and a failure to comprehend the interconnectedness of religion, philosophy, art, and science within the Indic educational framework. Additionally, it's plausible that the indigenous education systems had reached an advanced stage of stagnation by the time of British annexation of Punjab, owing to the tumultuous state of politics and society.

The forthcoming sections of this paper will focus on examining the transformations in Punjab's educational landscape following its annexation. Rather than adhering to the conventional approach of analyzing these changes through the lens of different commissions and programs introduced under British rule, this study will adopt a thematic approach. Specifically, the changes and advancements in primary, secondary, and higher education will be scrutinized. By structuring the analysis around these key educational tiers, a comprehensive understanding of the evolving educational paradigm in Punjab post-annexation will be elucidated.

Primary Education

With the annexation of Punjab, which essentially encompassed nearly half of modern-day North India, the British administrative framework was instituted in the region. However, given the urgent need to reorganize a province spanning approximately 100,000 square miles with a population of 10 million people, education did not receive special attention initially. Nonetheless, it was not entirely overlooked either. Even before British troops took control of Punjab, Christian missionaries had embarked on the task of establishing schools in the region. The first missionary institution,

Gorton Missionary School for boys, was established in Kotgarh, situated in the Shimla hills, in 1843 by the Church Missionary Society. (Wace, 1884). Although initially only an elementary institution, the establishment of the Church Missionary School in Kotgarh paved the way for the founding of additional English schools across various cities in Punjab. Following this precedent, schools were established in Jalandhar (1848), Lahore, Ludhiana (1851), Amritsar (1853), and Ambala (1854). Inspired by the missionary efforts, the government also took steps to set up schools in cities and larger towns, while District Officers initiated and maintained schools in smaller areas with local funding support. The first government school was inaugurated in Shimla in March 1848. Subsequently, in 1851, eight District schools were established, with an additional eight following suit in 1854. The curriculum of these schools encompassed a range of subjects including English, Geometry, and Geography, alongside Persian and Arabic languages, as well as Urdu.

The involvement of Christian missionaries and the proactive measures taken by the government heralded a new era in primary education in India. However, there was a recognized need to enhance indigenous schools without eroding their distinctiveness, a sentiment echoed by Sir Charles Aitchison. (Howell, 1872). This imperative gained further traction with the Wood's Despatch of 1854, which outlined the primary objective of India's education policy as the "improvement and wider extension of education, both English and Vernacular." In response to the guidelines set forth by the Wood's Dispatch, revised grant-in-aid rules were introduced. These rules included provisions for payment based on

results and staff grants for certified teachers employed in schools. Consequently, the number of indigenous schools in Punjab surged from 3,372 in 1854-56 to 4,662 in 1871-72. By 1882, the region boasted 13,109 indigenous schools, alongside 2,011 government schools. This concerted effort marked a significant expansion and improvement of primary education in Punjab during this period, reflecting a growing commitment to fostering education across linguistic and cultural lines. (Barrier and Singh, 1976; Mookerjee, 1944).

In 1886, an educational experiment aimed at catering to the children of agriculturalists was initiated, leading to the establishment of Zamindari schools. These schools introduced a unique half-time attendance system, allowing children to attend classes while still being involved in agricultural activities. Operating on this schedule, the schools would close during the harvest period. The curriculum primarily focused on providing elementary knowledge in reading, writing, and arithmetic. (Adas, 1991). Initially, from 1886 to 1892, these schools showed promise and garnered some success. However, they gradually lost favour due to their failure to prepare students for government employment opportunities. By 1901, only 187 such schools remained in North India. To address the shortcomings of the Zamindari schools, Village Schools were introduced in 1904. These schools followed a simplified curriculum tailored to meet the specific needs of agriculturalists. The emphasis was placed on practical skills and knowledge relevant to agricultural life, reflecting a pragmatic approach to education in rural areas.

Despite increased investment in primary

education in Punjab and the implementation of free primary education for all, there was a noticeable lack of significant progress in literacy rates. This slow and sluggish development became a major concern for the government. In 1910, Sir H. Butler, the first education member of the Viceroy's Council, successfully allocated a significant portion of Royal Grants for primary education. This infusion of funds provided a significant boost to the expansion of primary education in Punjab. (Chaudhary, 2009). In 1918, Sir Michael O'Dwyer initiated a five-year program aimed at expanding and enhancing vernacular education in rural areas. Subsequently, in 1919, the Compulsory Education Act was passed. Although initially applicable only to boys and for a period of four years, this legislation had a notable impact on enrolment rates. In Multan, enrolment rose to 54%, while in Lahore it reached 62%. These measures underscored the government's commitment to improving access to education and addressing the persistent challenges hindering educational progress in Punjab. (Whitehead, 2005).

Secondary Education

The effective organization of secondary education in North India can be traced back to 1860. As education began to spread, it became easier to recruit teachers for middle and high schools, allowing for an increase in the number of high schools at a relatively low cost. A typical middle school comprised a primary department and a middle department, while a high school consisted of primary, middle, and high school departments. The middle school curriculum spanned three classes and concluded, in the case of vernacular schools, with a middle school examination. The high school curriculum extended over two years, culminating

in the matriculation and school leaving certificate. The government actively promoted secondary education in vernacular languages at the district level, resulting in rapid progress in secondary education. Consequently, the number of high schools surged from 25 in 1883-84 to 161 in 1920, indicating significant advancements in the secondary education landscape during this period. (Sundaram, 1946).

The Hunter's Commission of 1882 advocated for private enterprise and recommended the withdrawal of government from directly competing in the promotion of secondary education. Consequently, a plethora of non-official agencies such as D.A.V. (Dayanand Anglo-Vedic), Chief Khalsa Diwan, Dev Samaj, Sanatan Dharma, and Christian missions emerged, establishing numerous schools offering secondary education. Among these agencies, the D.A.V. institutions played a pivotal role in the establishment of secondary schools in the region. By 1947, Punjab boasted 823 high schools, showcasing a remarkable expansion of secondary education. With each passing year, these institutions produced an increasing number of matriculates, indicating the growing importance and accessibility of secondary education in Punjab. (Talbot, 1991).

Higher Education

The Wood's Dispatch of 1854 paved the way for the establishment of colleges and universities in various provinces, including Punjab. However, the implementation of this initiative was postponed in Punjab, and college education did not commence in North India until 1864, when the first colleges were opened in Lahore and Delhi. Subsequently, students from the region began to appear for the Entrance

examination of the Calcutta University. (Raina and Habib, 1993). Initially, colleges in Lahore and Delhi were established, along with the introduction of two college classes at St. Stephen's School in Delhi. However, these colleges faced challenges. There was no provision for studies in science, and attendance was low due to financial constraints. Many students could not afford the cost of books and maintenance, hindering their access to higher education.

During this period, G. W. Leitner, the first principal of Lahore College, established the Anjuman-i-Punjab in 1865 and proposed the establishment of a university independent of government control. The government considered this proposal and subsequently sanctioned the establishment of 'The Punjab University College' in 1870. This institution, administered by a Senate of Seventy Members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor, aimed to promote vernacular education and European sciences. (Zaman, 1999). Over the following years, the Lahore Medical College was affiliated with the University College, and faculties for Law, Arts, Medicine, and Engineering were established. Entrance exams were introduced, and special examinations in Arabic, Sanskrit, and Persian were instituted. By meeting the conditions set by the promoters, Punjab University was finally established in Lahore in 1882. Following the University Act of 1904, the university came under direct government control, and the Senate of Seventy Members was reinforced. (District Census Handbook, 1961).

Subsequently, colleges proliferated across Punjab, with Lahore emerging as the educational hub of North India. The city became home to prestigious

institutions such as the Oriental College, the Central Training College, Aitchison College, Forman Christian College, D.A.V. College, and Islamia College. In 1884, a Medical College for girls was established in Ludhiana, followed by the establishment of an Agricultural College in Lyallpur in 1909 and an engineering college in Rassol in 1912. Other notable colleges like Khalsa College, Khalsa Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Kanya Mahavidyalay, and Hansraj Mahila Mahavidyalaya were established in Amritsar and Jalandhar. (Zaman, 1999).

The rise of nationalist movements and the outbreak of the Non-Cooperation Movement, Gurudwara Reform Movement, and Civil Disobedience Movement in Punjab disrupted education in the region. Despite these challenges, it was through education that the masses of Punjab became awakened to the political and social conditions surrounding them. Education played a crucial role in empowering individuals to understand and engage with the issues of the time, contributing to the mobilization of communities and the advancement of nationalist causes. (Grewal,1998). Despite the disruptions, the importance of education as a tool for social and political awakening remained undeniable in shaping the trajectory of Punjab's history during this tumultuous period. (Chandra et.al. 1989).

Technical Education

Since the inception of Indian education, there has been a notable deficiency in purely literary teaching. The necessity for technical education was keenly felt as early as 1886. Prior to this, the Medical and Veterinary College, along with the Law and Engineering classes of Punjab University, were the only significant technical institutions in the province. (District Census Handbook Simla, 1961). In 1918, with the

introduction of the Reforms Scheme, control over industrial education was transferred to the Department of Education. Subsequently, in 1922, the Maclagan College of Engineering was established at Mughalpura, fulfilling the need for a higher institute of engineering in Punjab. These developments marked significant strides in addressing the demand for technical education in the region and underscored the growing recognition of the importance of practical and vocational training alongside literary education. (District Census Handbook Simla, 1961).

Female Education

The importance of female education was emphasized for the first time by the Wood's Despatch of 1854, leading to the establishment of several schools for girls in Punjab as early as 1855. Sir Robert Montgomery, responsible for judicial administration in Punjab, convened a Durbar at Lahore to seek the cooperation of local chiefs in enrolling girls in these schools. (Kamat, 1976). By 1886, approximately 1000 schools with 20,000 girl scholars had been established. However, attendance began to decline as orthodox Punjabis, particularly Muslims, were hesitant to send their daughters to these schools. (Sayyid, 1998). Consequently, little progress was made in the field of female education until 1889, when efforts were renewed. A better system of female education was devised, and an Inspectors of Schools was appointed. Education became free for girls, and in middle school, one out of every two girls was eligible for a scholarship. These initiatives marked a significant step forward in promoting female education in Punjab and addressing the barriers that hindered girls' access to schooling. (Zahid, 1997).

The Kanya Mahavidyalaya, established by Lala Devraj of the college wing of Arya Samaj in 1888-89 in Jalandhar, stood as a pioneering institution dedicated to promoting female education. Despite objections from some Hindus and the gurukul wing of Arya Samaj, Lala Devraj pursued his vision of empowering women through education. (Kishwar, 1986). The institution aimed to provide women with holistic education encompassing physical, mental, and religious aspects, along with practical skills in household economy, handicrafts, health, and hygiene. Rather than aiming to create elite women capable of revolutionizing society, the goal was to nurture good wives and mothers who could match the intellect of educated men and raise disciplined and cultured children. However, as the Kanya Mahavidyalaya attracted more students, individuals like Lala Devraj found themselves challenged by the outcomes of their own experiments in women's education. The success of the institution forced them to reassess their preconceived notions and myths surrounding womanhood, leading to a re-evaluation of their perspectives on gender roles and the purpose of female education. (Kishwar, 1986).

Around the turn of the century, numerous private institutions joined the social reform movement in championing the cause of female education. Among the most prominent institutes in this field were the Hansraj Mahila Mahavidyalaya and the Sikh Kanya Mahavidyalaya. Additionally, the opening of the Normal School for women in Lahore in 1905 signalled a new era in the development of female education, marking a significant milestone in Punjab's educational landscape. Over time, these initiatives contributed to the gradual growth and expansion of female education

in the region, reflecting a shifting societal perspective towards the importance of educating women. (Sharma, 1986). As early as 1902, there was a growing recognition of the need to teach English to girls in order to bridge the gap between men and women. Despite initial protests, English education commenced at KMV (Kanya Mahavidyalaya) in 1906, starting from class five onwards. This decision faced considerable resistance from the community. Nevertheless, women's education gained momentum in Punjab, and girls from these institutions emerged as the first women political workers produced by the region. Education not only opened their eyes to their own challenges but also empowered them to actively participate in the social landscape, becoming integral members of the society they inhabited. (Kishwar, 1986).

The Impact of British Annexation on Education in North India

By 1947, education in North India had indeed progressed significantly, yet it was not devoid of shortcomings. Firstly, inadequate funds were allocated by the British for education, hindering its development. Secondly, there was a lack of emphasis on promoting vernacular education, leading to a low level of interest among the populace in sending their children to school. Additionally, the absence of free and compulsory education resulted in a staggering 90% illiteracy rate among the population of Punjab. Furthermore, the British Government failed to take effective measures to promote women's education, contributing to its neglect. The scarcity of engineering, medical, and agricultural colleges limited the advancement of technical education in the region. Moreover, the primary objective of education, from the British perspective, was to

produce clerks and soldiers, rather than nurturing individuals in line with the educational standards in Britain itself. This disparity between the education provided to Indians and that received by their British counterparts remained a glaring issue.

Despite the drawbacks of the education system under British rule, it ultimately proved beneficial for Indians, playing a significant role in their cultural, social, and political awakening. Exposure to Western education opened Indians' eyes to the shortcomings of their own society, prompting them to advocate for social reforms. Moreover, the spread of education among the masses led to a heightened political awareness and the rise of national consciousness. The foundation of education laid down by the British not only sensitized Indians to the flaws within their society but also provided the basis for the educational system that persists in India today. The legacy of British-era education continues to shape the educational landscape of India, underscoring its enduring impact on the nation's development and collective consciousness.
Pedagogical Paradigms: Contrasting Approaches in English and Indigenous Education

The spread of education in India during British rule is often contested, with some arguing that the British cannot be solely credited for it due to the advanced state of scientific education and traditional knowledge systems prevalent before their arrival. However, it's undeniable that the British education system brought about a level of uniformity and equality that was previously absent. Education in ancient and medieval India was heavily influenced by religious and social factors, such as the caste system. Comparing this to modern universities introduced by the British or

those established in post-independence India is oversimplified. Traditional educational institutions like Taxila and Nalanda were more monastic in nature, primarily catering to men of a particular religious background seeking a monkish lifestyle. The assertion that these systems were comparable to modern universities is flawed. It's crucial to acknowledge that traditional knowledge systems in India became increasingly caste-based around 1000 CE, further entrenching existing social hierarchies. The British education system inadvertently played a role in challenging these caste-based restrictions by promoting a more uniform and inclusive approach to education. Despite criticisms, the British educational reforms inadvertently contributed to breaking down caste-based barriers and promoting a more egalitarian approach to learning in Indian society.

It's important to recognize the historical denial of education to women in India, a trend that had been in decline since the Gupta Age, coinciding with the popularity of pre-puberty marriages. Even during the Vedic times, women's participation in education was limited primarily to religious and philosophical spheres, such as composing Vedic hymns or engaging in philosophical discourses. (Chopra, Puri, Das, 1974). Furthermore, the vocationalisation and specialization of crafts or traditional knowledge were often determined by the caste of the pupil rather than their individual abilities. This caste-based system restricted opportunities for individuals to pursue education and skills development based on their talents and interests, perpetuating social inequalities and limiting socioeconomic mobility.

Conclusion:

The consequences of British education in North India present a complex picture, as exemplified by the case study outlined above. While the introduction of the British education system did lead to the decline of several traditional knowledge systems and the loss of culturally relevant information, it also brought about significant changes that continue to shape the educational landscape of India today. One of the key outcomes of British education was the promotion of a more secular and egalitarian approach to education. The British system, driven by administrative exigencies rather than a deliberate effort to facilitate reform, introduced a level of uniformity and equality that was previously lacking. This inclusive system provided opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to access education, regardless of caste or social status. However, it's important to recognize that this shift towards a more secular and egalitarian approach came at a cost. Traditional knowledge systems, rooted in centuries of cultural heritage, suffered as a result of British education policies. Many indigenous practices and forms of knowledge were marginalized or disregarded in favour of Western-centric curricula. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to leverage both the strengths of the British education system and the richness of India's traditional knowledge base. By integrating scientific temperament with traditional wisdom, it is possible to create a more holistic and balanced educational framework for present-day India. This approach acknowledges the importance of preserving cultural heritage while embracing modern advancements, ultimately paving the way for a more inclusive and sustainable educational system.

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