

EDUCATION UNDER THE BRITISH RULE

Introduction:

The traditional Gurukula system of education existed in Tamilnadu, till the arrival of the British. The privileged high caste pupils benefited by this system. These religious oriented schools taught vedas, puranas, epics, dharma sastras, grammar, astrology, medicine and astronomy to the students. In those days the varandha (thinnai) of the house of the guru, mandapams of the temples and buddhist monasteries acted as schools. It provided education only to a limited student. The unprivileged majority people in the society were neglected by this system. But the rapid social and political changes, economic developments and the growth in population made this system outdated and insufficient, knowing the limitation of the gurukula system, the British introduced a new system of education, which made radical social changes and economic developments. With the introduction of British system of education the outdated traditional Gurukula system began to diminish.

Beginning of British education

The charter act of 1600 authorised the London Merchants to establish a company to maintain trade with India. The East India Company, founded on the basis of the charter, established companies in chief centers of India, including Madras. The company was involved deeply in trade, whereas, the missionaries who accompanied the traders concentrated more to propagate Christian faith among the natives. To achieve this, goal, they utilised education as a weapon. Hence, they started a number of educational institutions in various part of Tamilnadu with the financial and material assistance of the company. The first school was established in 1717 at Cuddalore in Madras Presidency. Irrespective of caste, religion and status, this school permitted all sections of the pupils. Subsequent to this, a number of schools were started at various centers. Particularly, schools were started in Tanjore, Sivagangai, Ramnad, Trichy and Nagapattinam by the hard effort of *Fr. Schwartz* and missionaries of Madura mission. These schools enabled to eradicate illiteracy among the natives to some extent. During the administration of the company, due attention was given to popularise both native and English education.

Lord Minto and education

Lord Minto the Governor General of India took keen interest to promote education. His report published in 1801 emphasised the need to open more schools and colleges to improve the knowledge of Indians in literature and science.

The Charter act of 1813 and education

The Charter act of 1813 was considered to be a milestone in the history of Indian education. Based on the provisions of the act, the government allotted a sum of a lakh of rupees for the education of the people. Moreover, missionaries were also permitted to start schools. The government promised to render necessary assistance to them. But due to various reasons, the money allotted for this purpose, was not fully utilised.

School book society

At the initial stage, the books required for the schools and colleges were published by the missionaries. The standard of the books was not up to the mark. Moreover, these books were religious oriented. So with a view to publish standard and secular books a school book society was constituted in 1819. For this society Sir Thomas Munroe (1820-1827) allotted a sum of seven hundred rupees. He also submitted a report on education to the Board of Directors of the company. The company accepted the suggestions of Sir Thomas Munroe and decided to promote education. But a controversy arose among the company officials in India over the type and medium of education. A few supported the native system of education. But, others preferred an English oriented modern education. Finally it was decided in 1835 to impart European system of education for the upliftment of Indians.

Lord Elphinstone and University Board :

In 1838, Lord Elphinstone was appointed as the Governor of Madras. He took keen interest in the higher education of Indians. During this administration, a group of educated persons under the president ship of Lord Norton submitted a memorandum signed by more than 70,000 to the governor. It requested the government to start a college at Madras to impart English education. The governor conceded the request and established an Institute of Collegiate Education on the line of a University. To govern the Institute, a University Board was

constituted, with a Chairman and fourteen, other Directors. Among them; seven, were Indians from Madras Province. The Institute functioned with two sections. It acted as a high school to teach English literature, regional languages, philosophy and science. It also served as a college to impart higher education in literature, philosophy and science.

The Board of University was started in 1840 with George Norton as president. The first section of the University Board namely the high school was started in 1841. It started in a rental building at Egmore. The first headmaster of this school was Eyer Barton Powell. Consequently, four government schools were started in four districts in Madras province. But the College courses were started in 1853. Thus teaching was upgraded from high school level to University level.

Wood's Report (1854)

The charter of East India Trading Company was revived in 1853, based on the political interference, the economic development and the growth of education, during the administration of the Company. At this juncture, Sir, Charles Wood acted as the chairman of the board of control. He paid special attention to improve the condition of education in India. With this view, he submitted a report to the government in 1854. As he was mainly responsible for the report, it was known as the Report of Wood on Education. It emphasised the ways and means to improve the condition of education in India. As the report concentrated more on Indian education, it was considered to be a milestone in the annals of the history of education in India.

Recommendation of the report

The report contained various suggestions to improve the condition of education in India. He recommended to form a department of education in every province in company's rule with a view to increase the number of schools, colleges and teachers training schools. He also suggested encouraging private sector to start educational institution. It enabled the government to minimize the financial losses considerably.

The most important recommendation of the report was to start universities at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras modeled on the lines of London University. It suggested the government to appoint Chancellors, Vice - Chancellors and the members of the governing council to look after its functions.

Though Wood emphasised more on English education, he also requested the government the need to start native schools for the benefit of the common people. This report mentioned the importance of the division of educational institution into primary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges and Only for the convenience of administration and effective functioning.

Besides, the report demanded the government to implement the grant-in-aid system in India especially in Madras presidency. The report, also suggested to appoint inspectors for the periodical inspection of schools. Such inspectors helped the government to understand whether the grant was utilised properly for the said purpose. The grants-in-aid system attracted the attention of the missionaries. They received major portion of the grants and constructed schools throughout Tamilnadu. Thus majority of the schools came under the private sector.

The Wood report of 1854 also mentioned the medium of instruction. It never insisted English as the medium of instruction. But it suggested English should be the medium of instruction at the higher level. But practically due to job opportunities in the government the people had a fascination towards learning English even at primary school level.

Formation of universities

Government conceded the demands of Wood and decided to start universities at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. For this purpose, an act was enacted by the Indian constitutional council. Based on the act, the University Board High School was converted into Madras University in 1857. The high school formerly governed by the university board was placed under the department of public Instruction and renamed as the presidency college. The newly formed university controlled the colleges affiliated to it and conduct the examinations. As the buildings for the Madras University were not completed, it functioned in a portion of the Presidency College till 1873. The university conducted the first matriculation examination in 1857. It conducted the B.A. degree examination for the first time in 1858. Only two students from Jaffna attended the examination. The university also shouldered the responsibility of conducting examination for professional courses. Hence the university conducted examinations for the medical college, the engineering college and the law college at Madras.

Due to the implementation of Wood's report the number of educational institutions increased considerably during the period between 1857 and 1871. Particularly, the number of college increased during this period. The high school at Kumbakonam was upgraded into a college. The Madras Christian college was started by a private management. The Christian missionaries also established college at Madras, Nagapattinam and Coimbatore. As a result, twelve colleges were started in 1871. Only highly qualified and efficient persons were appointed as principals in these colleges E.P. Powell was appointed as the first principal of the Presidency College at Madras.

Within twenty five years of the implementation of Wood's report radical changes took place in the field of education. As a result of the rapid growth of education, the number of schools and colleges increased. College increased from 24 in 1881 to 62 in 1904. Technical institutions also increased from three to six. Considerable changes were introduced in the system of syllabus, research and examinations. Thus the Wood's report made marvelous changes in education. Hence, scholars and statesmen considered this report as the Magnacarta in the history of education in India.