

School Books in the India Office Library : an evaluative study

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Abstract :

The study has confined its focus on the evaluation of school textbooks in colonial Bengal especially deposited in the India Office Library as it found authentic depository of the period. It has been carried out with the objectives, to acquaint with knowledge worthy for colonial students, to what extent published textbooks were consistent to it, to evaluate school textbooks in the India Office Library, to familiar with the pioneer textbook writers in different subjects. A thorough study of the catalogue of the Bengali books in the nineteenth century in the India Office Library has been done to do a comparative study with school books and books on other subjects. 2400 Bengali books are found collected in the library. 12 % books found for schools. School books comprised of grammar, mathematics and readers. A good number of mathematics and zamindari account are found collected in the library. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Satkari Dutta, Jadugopal Chattopadhyay, Ramgati Nayaratna Bhattacharya, Madan Mahan Tarkalankar, Gopal Chandra Bandopadhyay were pioneer child book reading writers. The India Office Library collection appeared as an authentic source of school books and its contributors which is helpful in present-day syllabus and textbook designing in elementary education.

Keywords :

Colonial Bengal, School books, India Office library, Colonial students, Grammar, Mathematics, Readers.

1. Introduction :

The centrality of school textbooks in the Indian education system means



that concerns, debates and controversies in Colonial and Post- Colonial India must be the focus of discussion to understand the central question of the curriculum as well as prescribed textbooks. In the present context, the study has confined its focus on the evaluation of school textbooks in Colonial Bengal especially deposited in the India Office Library as it found authentic depository of the period. An attempt has been made to examine the topics with some definite objectives.

2. Objectives :

Objectives are given below, such as,

- i) To acquaint with knowledge worthy for colonial students.
- ii) To what extent published textbooks were consistent with it.
- iii) To evaluate school textbooks in the India office library.
- iv) To familiar with the pioneer textbook writers in different subjects.

Non-availability of textbooks of the nineteenth century was the main problem to determine the merits of the same. Text books used to preserve seldom in personally or in the library though few textbooks were preserved in libraries of India and abroad. We have to depend upon old lists of textbooks to determine their characteristics.

There are so many books; articles have been written on colonial education, curriculum, and textbooks selection policy. Ashis Khastagir has contributed a representative work on Bengali Primer. The numbers of lists, catalogues have been found on colonial publications. But an exhaustive collection of school books in the India Office Library which has been attracting source to the scholar of Indology, authentic document to present-day educational planning is almost absent in the preceding studies. The present study is an attempt to fill up the gap in the subject.

3. Methodology :

A thorough study of the catalogue of the Bengali books in the nineteenth century in the India Office Library has been done to do a comparative study with school books and books on other subjects. Physical verification has been done by the help of the historical collection of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and Asiatic Society library, Kolkata. Educational records have been consulted to acquaint with the Colonial education policy in Bengal. The data sheet has been prepared to comprise subjects' name, authors' name, and publishers' name and so on to

collect data. Collected data have been analyzed and presented in a tabular form for their qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

4. Findings and discussions :

Our study has laid special emphasis to the School books in the India Office Library catalogue. The sudden boom in the book trade after the mutiny in 1857 had another very important consequence. It summoned the state to intervene and take cognizance of this rapidly proliferating industry. Ostensibly to keep itself informed about the effects of education on the native mind, the colonial state began to devise mechanisms of control and censure. The state's intervention was not without its effects on Bengal's literate society and how it set out its criteria of classifying printed literature by quality and taste. The massive spate of new books in the 1860's prompted the government to put in place comprehensive machinery for the surveillance of Bengali publications. An act was passed in 1867 for the regulation of printing presses and Newspapers, for the preservation of copies of books printed in British India, and for the registration of such books (Act XXV, 1867).

The India office library has been in existence since 1798, when the court of Directors of East India Company passed a resolution to denote a portion of their famous India House in Leaden hall Street, London to the establishment of a library and museum. Employees of East India Company including high-rank English officials' rulers brought books and manuscripts of Indian language with them of the time of their return from India and deposited them to the Company's Leaden hall Street. Directors of the company established India Office Library with those books and manuscripts. The library of the East India Company was no longer a store of books though it was a merchant institution. The company was keen to enrich the library with a new publication. It was unknown how much money allotted to purchase books of the library but it was usable to the inquisitive researcher of Indology due to the attachment of the personal collections of different persons.

The Indian Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867 was a landmark in the library's history, for under its proceedings the library was given the privilege of requisitioning a copy of every book printed in British India in any language. As a result, a flood of Indian printed books and periodicals began to appear in the library. Printed books in the library number about 300,000 of which about three quarters are in someone hundred oriental languages (mainly Indian and one quarter in



English and other European languages. 24000 books on the Bengali language i.e. highest among all Indian languages). Converting the figure into different subjects, it appears as 55.4 % are classified as literature. This compares with 22.5 % theology, 12.4 % arts and sciences, and 12 % books for schools. Of the literature titles, 33.2 % were dramas, 37.7 % poetry, and only 18.3 % fiction. (Blumhardt, 1905) Following table shows broad classification School books in the India Office Library catalogue.

Table - 1

School books in the India Office Library

School Books		
Grammar	Mathematics	Readers
Bengali	Algebra	Bilingual
English	Arithmetic	General
French	Geometry	Keys and Glossaries
Hindi	Trigonometry	Miscellaneous Manuals
Hindustani		
Persian		
Sanskrit		

As the then elementary education primarily based on three R's, i.e. reading, writing and arithmetic. So, School books were written and published basically on Grammar, mathematics and books for readers. Naturally, School books collection comprised of grammar, mathematics and readers. Grammar had divided in Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Hindustani, Persian, and Sanskrit. Mathematics divided into Algebra, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Trigonometry. Readers had also divided among Bilingual, General, Keys, Glossaries, and Miscellaneous Manuals.

We have found more than fifty Bengali grammar books preserved in the India Office Library. More than 20 Bengali grammar books are found edited time and again proved them as a bestseller. SahityaPravesa grammar of the Bengali language with a history of the Bengali language and literature and the rules for the



construction of sentences by Prasanna Chandra Chakraborty appeared as most popular among Bengali grammar books of the nineteenth century. It had edited Sixteen times from 1869 to 1883. Vyakarnasara, 9th ed., 1860, Dacca by Gobinda Prasad Roy earned popularity followed by Bangla Byakarana by Loharama Siroratna, 1867, Calcutta and Vyakarna Manjari by Kalikumar Das, Calcutta, 1869. Other Bengali grammars were Bodhasaraby Nilmani Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1872, Gauriya Byakarna by Raja Rammohan Roy, Loghuvyakarna by Joygopal Goswami, Calcutta, 1868, Sishubodh Vyakarana by Loharama Siroratna, Calcutta 1867, Vyakarna Pravaśa by Jogesha Chandra Chakraborty, Calcutta 1867 and so on occupied better position in student's community.

The same number of both English and Sanskrit grammars are found acceptable to the student's community. Twenty-two Sanskrit grammars have been collected in the India office library. Upakramanika, introduction to Sanskrit grammar for the use of the government Sanskrit College of Calcutta by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was praiseworthy to the students. Vyakarana Kaumudi outlines of Sanskrit grammar by same Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was also favourable to the students.

More than twenty-one English grammar books were in current, side by side Bengali and Sanskrit grammar. Elementary lessons on English composition prepared on Dr Arnold's plan for the junior classes of schools by Gangadhar Bandopadhyay published from Calcutta in 1875 acquired popularity followed by Help in learning English by H.F. Harding, Calcutta, 1871; Engreji Byakarana Sanjibani, the grammar of the English language with occasional explanations grammatical editions and phases, adopted to the use of the middle-class English Schools in Bengali by Jasoda nandan Sarkar, Calcutta, 1878, and like (Blumhardt, 1905).

A good number of books on mathematics had published in the century to develop students' mental horizon in science. Jasoda nandan Sarkar won fame for his Bijaganita pravesika introduction to Algebra. It was first published at Calcutta in 1872. Patiganita, arithmetic and mensuration (mental mathematics) by Gopal Chandra Bandopadhyay was regarded as best book to the students. It had edited seven times from 1873 to 1878. Ganitika: arithmetic, comprising the five fundamental rules by J. Harley and Ganita Vijnana. Arithmetic by Joygopal Goswami won equal fame in the students' community. Dharapat; arithmetical tables, weights and measures were effective to the students. A good number of Dharatpat books written and published by A good number of 'Dharatpat' books written and published by Calcutta School Book Society, Gopal Chandra Das, Hemendra Majumdar, Saratchandra Sil etc.



Influence of Zamindars in the social and cultural life of Bengal in the nineteenth century was undeniable. Most of Pathshalas and elementary schools were established under the assiduity of them. A good number of people were employed to maintain the Zamindari account. So, books were also composed and written to fulfil the purpose.

Zamindari Mahajani o Byaye rHisab: Zamindari, Mahajani and cost accounts with a short history of Zamindari revenue and commerce in Bengal by Nrisingha Chandra Mukhopadhyay edited in time and again, which proved its popularity. Other books, such as Zamindari MahajaniHisab by Haridas Gangopadhyay, Tarini Charan Basu Chowdhury, Kaliprassana Sengupta etc.

At least thirty-five geometry books of different authors were in current for the school students. EucliderJyamiti: Simpson's Euclid, books I and II translated with notes and exercises by BrahmamohanMallick followed by Jarip o Parimiti, surveying and mensuration by Kshetranath Bhattacharya and Sahaj Parimiti, simple mensuration for the use of Primary school by Nrisinha Chandra Mukhopadhyay had appeared as a bestseller (Blumhardt, 1905).

Akshay Kumar Dutta wrote Padarthabidya: Jarer gun o Gtir Niyam in 1865 and probably it was first physics textbook by native writer. Rajkrishna Adhya wrote PadarthaGyandarpan in 1858. Nabin Krishna Bandopadhyay and DwarakaNath Das wrote Prakritatatwabibek and Padarthatatwa in 1860 and 1862 respectively. In 1863, Bastusiksha printed in Sulavjantra Dacca. In 1867 and 1870, Padarthatatatwa by Pratap Chandra Sen and Padarthadarshan Mahendra Nath Bhattacharya printed from Maymensingha.

Gopal Lal Mitra and Bhuban Mohan Mitra jointly advanced to write textbooks on chemistry. They translated Kautuktarangini from English in 1844. PriyanathSen wrote Rasayanik PadarthaBijyanin 1872. 'Rasayan' of Jadav Chandra Basu published from Roy Press in 1878. Some more Chemistry textbooks were Kanai LalDey's Rasayan Bijyan, Bhuban Chandra Basak's Rasaratneswar, Chuni Basu's Rasayan Sutra etc.

Some textbooks on Botany were written in the century and included in the collection of the library. Balak Sikshartha Udvijbidya translated from English by Braja NathVidyalankar in 1854. Shiv Chandra Dev published a list of Indian plants in 1856. Hara Narayan Roy's Chara Prasanga published from Bengali Press in Dacca. The sixth edition of Udvid Bichar by Jadu Nath Mukhopadhyay published in 1877.

An important Botany text book was Hari Mohan Mulhopadhyay's *Udvid Byabachhed Darshan*, published in 1880. Librarian of Bengal Library was put up his comment on the book that it was a useful publication, and was believed to be the only one of its kind in the language (Khastagir, 2000).

A significant number of history and geography textbooks were written by Bengali writers after the introduction of these two subjects in the school curriculum and included in the library collection. Missionaries were also found pioneer in these subjects as in the case of Science textbooks. Tarini Charan Chattopadhyay's book acquired popularity as a text book. Its eleventh edition was published in 1870. Rajani Kanta Gupta won fame as a writer of *Sipahi Judhyer Itihas*. Mahendra Nath wrote *Prachin Arya Ramaniganeer Itibritta*. Naba Gopal Mitra wrote *Hindu Melar Bibaran* in 1870. Apart from books on the history of Bengal and India, writers were also enthusiastic to write books on world history. Nilmoni Basak wrote *Itihas* in 1859. Trailokya Sanyal wrote *Prithibir Itihas* in 1875. Shyama Charan Bhattacharya wrote *Gurusishya Sambad*, a world history in verse. An ample number of geography textbooks were also written in the age. The geography textbook by Tarini Charan Mitra was most popular among the books. Shyama Charan Basu translated *Bharatbarsher Bhugal Brittanta* in 1862. Pyaricharan Sarkar's *Bhugal Brittanta* published in 1855 (Khastagir, 2000).

More than a hundred child reading books were in vogue in the market to a developmental horizon of the pupil. Calcutta School Book Society, Christian Vernacular Society, Sreerampore Mission were relentless in this work. More than a hundred authors contributions enriched the library collection. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Satkari Dutta, Jadugopal Chattopadhyay, Ramgati Nayaratna Bhattacharya, Madan Mahan Tarkalankar, Gopal Chandra Bandopadhyay were pioneers among them.

Aphorism book series is found was another popular textbook in that age. Bengalese first acquired real taste of Aesop's fable through Aphorism. School Book Society published several Fable books. Aphorism book series was sovereign before the appearance of rudiments of knowledge series. Ramkamal Sen translated 49 fables of Aesop in Bengali as *Hitopadesh*. It was letter familiar as *Nitikatha*. A good number of aphorism school textbooks were written by authors in that time, such as *Jnanarnab* by Prem Chand Roy, *Jnanachandrika* by Gopal Chandra Mitra, *Nitidarshan* by Ram Chandra Bidyabagish, *Pratham Nitipustak* by Chandra



NathBasu, Subodhini by Bipin Chandra Pal etc. Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay brought a new taste in the world aphorism textual book. He translated Hence Anderson's tales published by Vernacular Literature Society (Bandopadhyay, 1961). Badhodaya, rudiments of knowledge by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar appeared as the best child reading in contemporary time. It was edited fifty-eight times from 1852 to 1878. Barnaparichay, spelling book and primer by Vidyasagar was appreciated by both teacher and taught. His Kathamala, Charitabali and Barnaparichay were equally popular even in the Twenty-first Century. Vidyasagar entered the textbook world through Betalpanchabingshati in 1847. Despite detraction, Bodhodaya, Barnaparichaya, Kathamala, Charitabali used to read in schools of Bengal organized by Missionaries (Basu, 1993) (Khastagir, 2000). Pratham Path and Tritiyapath by Satkari Dutta had edited more than twenty times which proved its popularity. Sishusiksha, the infant teacher by Madan Mohan Tarkalankar well-regarded in the door to door in Bengal. It was proved as ideal education book not only for girl student but also all students (Khastagir, 2000). Sisupatha, a reader in prose and verse by Ramgati Nayaratna, SaralPatha, by Kashinath Bhattacharya were accepted as premier category child reading books. Charupath, entertaining lessons in science and literature by Akshay Kumar Dutta was a book to introduce scientific knowledge by means of literary flavour. The book had a great attraction to the students.

Question papers for Entrance Examination by the Senate of the Calcutta University for the year 1869 to 1866 used to access for the students too. Sishubodhaka, a manual of useful instruction for Hindu boy's comprising rules of simple arithmetic, a letter writer and poetical reader or NabaSisubodha, the Pathsala course or a manual of instruction in arithmetic, mensuration and Bookkeeping by KshetraNath Bhattacharya were popular and effective to the students. Notes and glossaries on different subjects were popular among students in the nineteenth century. Not only keys of English prose or verse, notes on Bodhodaya, Charupath, Sishusiksha, Narisiksha etc. were in popular in the book market. More than fifty keys and notebooks were in vogue in the book market (Shastri, 2003). An ample number of textbooks were written and published to cope with the gradual increase in school and colleges. Central Textbook Committee was formed to maintain qualities of textbooks in the eighth decade of the century (Mamun, 1985).

In the curriculum of the post-1858 era, Girls would have been provided needlework. For girls in both town and village, course of botany, natural history

and domestic economy were prescribed. (Government of Bengal, 1899) Library collection reveals that Balabodhu, Narisiksha, Balabodhika, Balikabodh and like texts were included in the school curriculum to spread female education in the nineteenth century. Despite low literacy among females, some of them found as female text book writer. Balabodhika by Kaminisundari Debi, Balikabodhika by Pratul Kumari Dasi, and Balika Sikshasopan by Sarojini Devi were significant among them (Long, 1855).

5. Conclusion :

The ability of children to make meaning and construct knowledge, place of disciplinary knowledge and boundaries, local knowledge and formation of a nation are incorporated in the present-day school curriculum. Such a culture, with its Colonial legacy, laid less emphasis on memorization, on recitation without meaning rather involve cognitive engagement and interaction with the contents of the textbook. Bengali textbook collection of the India Office Library has been bearing authentic historical information of the knowledge provided as worthy for colonial students. The library collection appeared as an authentic source of school books and its contributors which is helpful in present-day syllabus and textbook designing in elementary education. Research on nineteenth-century school education would be incomplete without a thorough knowledge of the school books collected in the India Office Library.

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