



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Historical Significance of the British Education System in Colonial Punjab: A Study in Perspective of its Consequences on the Native Society and Education**

Dr. Khalil Ahmad <sup>1</sup> Ahmad Ali <sup>2</sup> Haris Kabir <sup>3</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Ph. D Scholar Department of History, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering & Information Technology Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan

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**Corresponding  
Author:**

dr.khaliliub@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

This historical research discovers the key features, highlighted principles and the subsidizing factors of the British educational system in colonial Punjab. The objective of this study is the appropriate consideration of the British as well as Indigenous education. Although this study renounces the popular allegory of the radical changes claimed by the British educational system, yet it launches that how it donated to the literary, academic, economic, social and political progression of Punjab. Its outcomes for the regional vernacular were gigantic. It discloses how English became a means of communication, reprisal and confrontation at the hands of inhabitants. In its nature, it is a descriptive and historical one. It critically traces the contextual history of western education with English as the means of instruction in the subcontinent and its influence on the teaching of several subjects and indigenous languages in the postcolonial period. It investigates that how the education in the subcontinent was exaggerated in the wake of diametrical move in the British political policy from engraftment, orientalism, conciliation and amalgamation to antagonism, oppression and hostility

**Introduction**

Gender is Systematized education has an extensive history for India. The Gurukul education systems one of the ancient systems and was dedicated to the premier ideals of all human mental, physical and spiritual development. Outdated Hindu residential schools, normally a monastery or the teacher's house were

Gurukul. Education was free of cost and restricted to the upper castes. After the completion of their studies, the students from elite families paid Guru da kshana that was considered a voluntary contribution. In these schools, the teachers conveyed the knowledge of Philosophy, Religion, Warfare, Scripture, Medicine, Statecraft, Literature, Astrology and history. Before the British, Indigenous education was imparted through Maktubs and Pathshalas as elementary education whilst Madrisas for higher education. This education was based on ancient texts such as Vedas and their interpretations. Such kind of education was not measured to be up-to-date because it did not keep pace with the universe.

## **Conceptual framework of Study**

### **Indigenous Education**

Before arrival of the British, the indigenous educations for government service were given in Persian. Arabic, Gurumukhi and Sanskrit were for religious purposes while *Lande* and *Mahajni* were for the trade. (Kansal, 1984) The Persian schools were famous because Persian was the official language of the Lahore *Durbar*. These schools were known as *Maktubs* and run by the *Maulavis*. In these schools, texts of *Gulistan* and *Boostan* were taught. *Quran* schools had been attached to the mosques where Arabic was taught. For more unconventional study in Arabic, *madrasas* were established. The Hindi schools taught basics of arithmetic in Hindi. Besides this, *Pathshalas* had been set up for Sanskrit learning. (Singh H. , 1974)

Children were sent in these schools between 5 and 7 years old. Both girls and boys taught in the same primary school. The Sikh children learnt Sikh texts, the sign of measure and weights, the forms of the digits and simple enumeration. If they wanted to learn multiplication table then they could join *Lande* and *Mahajnis* schools which were run by *Brahmin Pundhas*. (Lietner, 1971)

During Ranjeet Singh's era, some well-known schools were set up in Amritsar by state patronage. The most popular of them was Bhai Jona Singh's school, where the *Dasam Grunth*, *Adi Grunth* and some other religious books, along with *Vyakaran*, arithmetic and *Purans* were taught. No fees were received and the meals were provided to the students. Besides this, another famous school was Bhai Lakhen Singh's school. It was in teacher's his own house where religious books were taught. Similarly, Bhai Ram Singh had a flourishing school, where students from remote areas came to teach higher education such as the *Alankar*, scriptures, Literature, *Vyakaran*, *Kaviya*, *Pingal* (prosody in Gurumukhi), *Nitti*, History, Astronomy and Arithmetic. (Lietner, 1971) Leitner states:

Although education among Punjabi women of the higher castes of Hindus, the better Mohammadans and all orders of Sikhs is not so uncommon as would be supposed from the interested outcry of native reformers. Indigenous female education in the Punjab requires less development than revival. The girl who was

ever taught to read *Nagrior Gurumukhior* Arabic in her home or in a friend's house where other girls could also assemble, now has a brother at a Government school reading Urdu and becoming daily more dissociated from her in language and feeling. (Lietner, 1971) He further says:

The Punjab has ever been more liberal in religion and manners, than the impenetrable North-Western provinces. The native girl is even more intelligent and enquiring than her brother, and few were the families in which the father, brother or mother did not take a pride in teaching the younger female members to read; there the education stopped short in theory, but the timid little girl would nestle up to her brother and imitate his writing, till she became fairly proficient in that accomplishment. (Lietner, 1971)

We know that the Sikhs had governed over the Punjab about eighty years. However, they were split among various groups. This annexation ended this partition and amalgamated all the Sikhs under British. (Jones, Arya Dharma, Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab, 1976) The British organized a widespread and well-ramified government to run the territory. A large number of educated were needed to run the government. But it was impossible to secure the provision of educated people from Britain. (Desai, 1982) To them, indigenous officials were not right for above avenues. So, it became obligatory to launch up-to-date education in the Punjab so that they would operate the managerial apparatus of the British. (Jones, Hum Hindu Nahin: Arya Sikh Relations, 1973)

On the whole, till the advent of the British, the education system in the Punjab had been religion based. Ranjeet Singh had tried their best to set up an English school for the advantage of his family's children as well as the *Sardars*. This was a measure of his modernization which had played a vital role in his army. For this purpose, he invited John C. Lowrie who the first American Presbyterian missionary. But this strategy fell due to Ranjeet Singh's refusal. The reason was that a condition was imposed to teach the *Bible* in this school. (Emmett, 1983) That's why, the educational system remained traditional before the annexation of Punjab. But this was not acceptable for the British *raja*.

### **British Education System in Colonial Punjab**

The Punjab was annexed by the British on March 30, 1849. They restructured the former administration. Dalhousie granted Henry and John Lawrence along with Charles Mansell the supremacies of judiciary, finance and military. (Jones, Arya Dharma, Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab, 1976) As a result, the Punjab was to be linked with other regions of the sub-continent. This process paved the way for the advent of new inspirations. (Grewal, 1994)

In the Punjab, to maintain the land revenue records, the British government established an official education system to meet the needs of lower level employee. In central Punjab, the first government school was established at Amritsar in 1851

with the donation of 5,000 rupees. It provided teachings in oriental and English languages. The subjects were Geometry, English, Arithmetic and Geography. Within a year the number of students increased by 50 per cent. During the years of 1853-1854, the school of Amritsar had 308 scholars including 84 Muslims, 84 Sikhs and 137 Hindus. On the same model, the British government opened such sponsored schools at Multan, Rawalpindi, Gujarat, Jhelum, Shahpur and Jalandhar. Almost this kind of thirty-five schools had been established till 1856. (Oberoi, 1997) These schools attracted the liberal Punjabis so, they, to take benefit in government jobs, brought up their children on modern lines.

### **Wood's Despatch Scheme**

Under Wood's Despatch education scheme, the British government opened separate education department in 1856. For the enhancement and broader extension of education, the Despatch requested the special attention of the Government both vernacular and English. The means recommended for the fulfillment of these objects were the constitution of a separate administrative department for education; the set up of institutions for teacher's training of all classes and the organization of universities at the presidency towns. The current government high schools and colleges were to be preserved, and new ones opened where required. New elementary schools were to be setup and more care was to be taken to indigenous and vernacular schools. To inspire private enterprise in the cause of education, a system of grants-in-aid was introduced. (Mehta, 1971)

The main objective of Wood's Despatch was to spread the education of women. (Kamat, 1985) For this, the Education Department paid special heed to it. They opened girls' schools and granted endowment to private ones. Arnold, the first Director of public instruction (DPI), wrote that when this department was systematized it was recommended to let the question of girls' school stand over till the normal establishments were set on foot. The requirement for educating girls was seriously felt. The experiment was effectively tried in the limited regions. The Punjab educational authorities started operations by affecting the people for the significance of teaching of their sons and daughters. (Khan, 1973) Child marriage, poverty, *pardah* system, lack of girls' schools and women teachers, people's hatred for western culture, religious and social customs and traditionalism of people were some of hindrances in the way of women education. (Johri, 1963)

In the Punjab, the first dream to female education was seen by Captain Elphinst one who was Deputy Commissioner at Jalandhar. An imperative step towards the inspiration of this movement was taken on 14<sup>th</sup> of February; 1863. Robert Montgomery, the Lieut. Governor of Punjab held an educational Durbar at Lahore to draw attention of the aristocracy and nobility to the requirement for providing education for their girls and guaranteed the liberal support of government for this purpose. Thus a movement for intellectual and moral well-being of the people was launched. The victory of his mission was

gigantic and a large number of girls' schools came into being in the Punjab. (Punjab District Gazetteer Jullundhar, 1980)

In initial stages, modern education for women was encouraged by the missionaries. In all the Churches, 1833 charter opened up Indian missions. During Ranjeet Singh's era, Christian missionaries reached in the Punjab and American Presbyterians were the first who landed at Ludhiana in 1834. Soon in 1852, the Church Mission Society of England followed. The Church of Scotland, Baptists, United Presbyterians of America, Catholics and Methodists also came in the Punjab. The Church Mission Society and American Presbyterians remained the most dominant. (Emmett, 1983) Presbyterian's missionaries prolonged their activities in entire province. In 1846, they opened missionary stations in Jalandhar and in Ambala 1848. Besides this, they started their activities in Lahore in 1849 and Rawalpindi in 1856. (Webster, A Social History of Christianity in North West India Since 1800, 2007) To promote their thoughts, they employed two ways: the education and publication of literature. In Punjab, when the British desired personnel to endorse literature and the study of English language, the missionaries were willingly available in good numbers.

### **Evangelical Mission Schools**

Evangelical missionaries were top in the area of education. Like other schools, they opened mission schools in Ambala, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Lahore, Kotgarh and Amritsar. They performed as sovereign bodies with their own methods, purposes, policies, standards and curricula. The mission schools, apart from the others, were setting their evangelistic ambitions carried out through Christian worship, classes on Christianity and western curriculum conducted in English. (Webster, A Social History of Christianity in North West India Since 1800, 2007) These missionaries made a massive investment in education along with grant-in-aid scheme. Each mission had at least one school and mostly students were the Muslims, Hindus and the Sikhs.

Presbyterian Mission started their activities with a Girls' Elementary School at Ludhiana in 1836. (Mehta, 1971) Its curriculum was consisted of writing, reading, Arithmetic, Geography, cooking, sewing, knitting and religious teachings. Besides this in 1850, a girls' school was also opened at Jalandhar. (Singh K. , 1968) Later on, Christian Mission Society started girls' schools in Jandiyala, Amritsar, Kangra and Narowal. (Webster, A Social History of Christianity in North West India Since 1800, 2007) In 1866, a midwifery school was started in Amritsar. Similarly in 1878, they also set up Girls Alexandra High School and a middle school in Amritsar. In 1906, the Shrimati Dayawanti Kanhiya Vidyala was established. (Govt. of the Punjab, 1980) In the Punjab, Evangelism focused on the educational work by Christian missions. They, including women, addressed evangelical themes as the charter of God, the compensating death, human impiety, renaissance of Christ, punishments to all the classes and the doctrine of endless rewards. (Webster, A Social History of Christianity in North West India Since 1800, 2007) During 1881 to 1901, Christian

increased from 3,912 to 37,980 which terrified the religious leadership of the Punjab. (Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, 1999)

To offer equal position to women in the society, the mission activities worried the local leaders. The *Zanana* missionary and women's medical mission were crucial aspects of the diverse Christian missionary struggles in Punjab. (Jakobsh, 2003) The *Zanana* missionaries endeavored to reach women in the isolation of their homes when the men were in the fields and thus they succeeded in reaching the unreachable. (Jones, Arya Dharma, Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab, 1976) By nature, the *Zanana* missionaries were both evangelistic and educational. Their work was known as women's work for women. The impact of these missionaries could be seen in the Punjab when some Punjabi women of the Muslim and Hindu families started to leave their homes to transform to Christianity. (Webster, A Social History of Christianity in North West India Since 1800, 2007) The situations behind this transformation lay in the social structure of the society of Punjab, sponsored evil performs and imposing many restrictions in the religion.

### **Consequences of British Education System in the Punjab**

The Punjabis observed British rule and Christianity interlinked. They extremely disliked *Zanana* missionaries for alleviating with the secrecy of their women and violating the sacredness of their homes. They blamed the missionaries of girl-stealing and kidnapping. Besides this, they urged their co-religionists to teach their women in accordance with their own ethical, religious and moral values. They also wished to open their own Girls' Community Schools. Thus the women education became the leading concerns of the reformers. It was measured as an imperative remedy to get their society from the ruin. In 1885, a Muslim territory of Amritsar pleased Muslims to teach their women in such words:

“The missionaries, who pour like a flood into their country, are striking deadly blows at the root of our faith. They know how much depends upon the women, so on various acting of readings, teaching and needs work, they enter your houses and sometimes even plant schools there! By this means a loophole is made for the Bible. Soon the women learn to despise their own religion and the evil seed is shown in their hearts.” (Webster, A Social History of Christianity in North West India Since 1800, 2007)

The impact of Christian missionaries and western education gave birth to a new awakening in the Punjab. The enlightened and rational prominent Muslims, Hindu and the Sikh started socio-religious reforms movements. By these socio-religious organizations such as the Hindu's Ariya and Dev Samaj, the Muslim's Ahmadiya and the Sikh's Singh Sabha, a radical work of women's education was carried on.

By launching their systematized educational programs, the revolutionary class of Punjab replied to the Christian missionary. All three groups organized themselves under various religious and social organizations which revitalized their unique literary and religious traditions. (Singh K. , 1968) These movements opened many colleges and schools in the Punjab. Their aim was to convey modern education in amalgamation with culture, religion, values and traditions of their corresponding communities.

Among Hindus, Sanatanists were the first who set up Vedic and Sanskrit educational institutions and encouraged Hindi as a language of administration and education. Sanatanists stressed such education which was based on religion including the learning of *Purans*, *Vedas* and Sanskrit. Pundit Shradha Ram Philauri was the first hero of the 'Sanatana cause'. To sustain Sanatana Dharam, he set up a Hindu Sabha at Ludhiana in 1867-68. At the same time, he also established a Hindu school to teach Persian and Sanskrit. To teach Vedas, he also opened HariGayanMundiratPhilaur. (Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, 1999) Central body of this Dharam was known as Bharat Dharam Mahamondal. It was organized in 1887 by Pundit Deen Dayalo Sharma. It adopted educational growth as its main concern and stressed that religious teachings should be made compulsory in all schools and *Pathshalas*. They also paid their heed towards female education. (Pall, Sanatan Dharm Institutions in Colonial Punjab, 2010)

In 1917, Sanatan Dharmis set up Sanatan Dharam Pratinidhi Sabhaat Lahore. Its major aim was to set up high schools, local Sabhas and *Pathshalas*. It had nine departments to do various functions. Later on in 1923, it was revived at the Sanatan Dharam Conference of Sargodha. For the promotion of education, it opened education department and a large number of boys' and girls' schools were coordinated by this department. The annual expenditure of the Sanatan Dharam was approximately 17, 00,000 rupees. (Pall, Treatment of the Sanatan Dharm Movement in the Colonial Punjab and the Historian)

The Sanatanists also opened many educational institutions. One of them was Sanatan Dharam College at Lahore which was established by Pundit Deen Dayalo in 1916-17. It was associated with the Punjab University. English, Persian, Sanskrit, History, Philosophy, Economics and Mathematics were included in B.A. course while for M.A. courses in Sanskrit and Economics. For girls and boys, they established forty-eight primary schools, forty-five middle schools and twenty-six high schools. English, Science, Mathematics, Persian, History, Geography, Psychology, Sanskrit, Hindi, Drawing and Hygiene were taught. In the Punjab, they also established 83 *PutriPathshalas* for girls which emphasized on religious teachings. Multan, Shahpur, Gujarat, Attock, Jhelum and Ferozepur were major center of these institutions. (Pall, Sanatan Dharm Institutions in Colonial Punjab, 2010) Besides this, *Istrisatsangs* were arranged to defend widows and women from the corrupting inspiration of *Dharmnashini* societies which stimulated them to rewed. The *satsangs* were organized in the afternoons when the women were free

from house-hold activities. All women joined in the singing of hymns and collected money for widows and orphans.(Pall, Sanatan Dharm Institutions in Colonial Punjab, 2010)

After the war of independence, the Barahamo Samajists entered in the Punjab and opened a branch of the Barahamo Samajat Lahore in 1864. They appreciated western science, English education and the freedom of press. In 1876, Barahamos also set up a society so that their literature was translated into Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi.(Sharma, 1999) However, this movement could not succeed in the Punjab but it introduced new educational system. Dayal Singh Majethiya, who was main representative, opened a library and a college and started a newspaper *The Tribune* in Lahore.(Puri, 1985) Their Anglo-Vernacular Girls' School Lahore, which was being patronized by the educated class, attracted the students of rich families. The students were taught a limited curriculum in Hindi. They were learnt knitting and sewing.(Sharma, 1999)

In 1887, Dev Aatma left Barahamo Samaj, came to Punjab from U.P. and founded Dev Samaj. He said that the future of women is thankful to education. He emphasized the need for the spread of women education which could open for them occasions of insight and freedom for public and professional life. For this, he educated his wife and skilled her to be an exceptional public worker.(Kanal, 1973) It opened many colleges and schools for boys and girls. For women, it opened two colleges, one at Ferozepur and other in Lahore. It also opened four girls' and sixteen boys' schools. (Ahuja, 1984) Girls' High School Ferozepur was the first Hindu Girls High School. In the Punjab, It created first M.B.B.S. who was appointed the Principal of the Lady Harding Medical College. It also gave the first B.A., B.T. to Punjab.(Kanal, 1973)

For widows and female education, it opened four widows' homes and two *Nari Ashrams* to make themselves-dependent. Its main objective was to turn out its students to be liable mothers, good daughters and self-sacrificing as well as devoted wives.(Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, 1999) Its success can be seen from this fact that it had 100% literacy rate. Among all reform movements, Ariya Samaj was the most important one. In the Punjab, it arranged the Hindu community on a large scale. In 1875, Swami Diyan and Saraswati established it and focused on female education.(Jones, Arya Dharma, Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab, 1976) For women folk, his philosophy of social reform had a well-defined place.(Banga, 1996) He instructed the Samajists to assist the women to build up their physical strength and intelligence and enable them bring their means of economic freedom.(Shukarchakia, 1987) In 1880, they had founded girl's schools in various cities of the Punjab.

Till 1885, they started many girls' schools in Lahore, Jalandhar and Amritsar. In 1889, it opened girl's school at Ferozepur and Gujarat. During 1903-04, many schools for girls were set up at Abohar as *Ariya Putri Pathshala*. Similarly

in 1921, Ariya Girls' Middle School was established. (Singh S. , 1983) In addition to basic literacy, the curriculum of the *Pathshala* consisted of embroidery drawing, sewing, poetry, cooking, music, arithmetic, games, hygiene and religious literature. (Sharma, 1999)

In the field of female higher education, Lala Dev Raj declared that the Samaj proposed to set up a girls' high school at Jalandhar, but Lala Lajput Rai wished to open only girls' primary schools. (Singh S. , 1983) In 1892, Lala Dev Raj opened girls' elementary and high school at Jalandhar. They were opened in the family home which was reinforced by 'waste paper'. The teachers were compensated with food from his mother's home. A team of skilled female teachers and administrators had planned special instructional resources. This occupied a distinct place in the society and became a substance for various kinds of changing to promote female status in the Punjab. (Sarkar & Sarkar, 2007) This Samaj reversed with its goal of female higher education and opening a girls' boarding house, the *Kanya Ashram*. (Jones, Arya Dharma, Hindu Consciousness in 19th Century Punjab, 1976)

The Muslims appeared less enthusiastic about the opportunities of female education. As a whole, they were uninterested in adapting the changing circumstances under British rule. (Basu, 1974) They opposed English education because it would damage their religion. Moreover, it was considered illegal to learn English except for the aim of writing letters. (Mathur, Muslims and Changing India, 1972) They feared that the western language and educational system would corrupt the manners and morals of the learners.

The Punjabi Muslims mostly belonged to agricultural community and they were not in need of English education. Furthermore, they lived in country side areas, where there were few English schools. (Basu, 1974) The Muslims were more interested in Ahl-e-Quran and Ahl-e-Hadith movements. Anjuman-e-Punjab, which was established in 1865 at Lahore, revitalized oriental learning and the dispersal of suitable knowledge in mother language. It promoted the study of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit and organized specific oriental classes. In 1870 at Lahore, the Punjab University established Oriental College which is carrying on these studies with alteration. (Mathur, Growth of Muslim Politics in India, 1979)

For the Muslim community, Anjuman-e-Islamia encouraged the English education and religious work. In 1887, this Anjuman opened Primary School at Amritsar which, later on, upgraded to middle standard and then a high school. (Singh F. , 1978) To save the Muslim from the effect of other religions, another organization Anjuman-e-Himayat-e-Islam began to teach the Mohamman religion to girls and boys and supported the orphan and poor children. It set up many schools which helped in founding educational institutions in the Punjab. At Amritsar, a girls' school started its work with 88 pupils. With separate accommodation for girls and boys, an orphanage was established in 1887 and provided suitable maintenance and religious as well as secular teachings.

(Shukarchakia, 1987)The mission of female education was filled by Ahmadiya movement which opened *Purdah* girls' schools and claimed 75% female literacy.(Smith, 1973)

To introduce western education, Gurumukhi language and literature became very essential. The Sikh pupils, who admitted in the western educational institutes, were not educated anything correlated with their cultural heritage and religion. They were kept away from their parent's religion, education and history. Later on, the Sikhs raised their voice to open their own community schools and thus launched their association named 'Singh Sabha'. So, they broke down the traditional obstacle against female education and their earlier socio-religious organizations, *Namdharis* and *Nirankaris* worked for the female upliftment. However, they couldn't start female educational institutes but emphasized on gender equality. Later on, Chief Khalsa Diwan introduced educational setup for the Sikhs. Yet, the Sikhs had forgotten the actual lessons of the Gurus. They indulged in superstitions, prejudices and the caste system and thus costly ceremonialism, Brahmanic influences, emotional depravities, violence and individual betrayals became their motto.(Ahluwalia, 1965)

### **Conclusion**

Any reform is impossible without social awareness and social awareness always originates with education. But the British established this system for their own political benefits. They were not concerned to make education worldwide because it had already been revealed that it generates a desire for involvement in government work and authority which they would never want. So, they launched such education system in India which prepared only subordinate servants and clerks to run the administrative machinery. Besides this, this educational system had much comprehensive aims. One was to keep the public away from their society, religion, culture and moral tradition. The other was to teach the European conducts in the form of language, dress, domestic furniture and architecture because they, through this new educational system, were supposing a broader transformation to Christianity. In fact, there would be a need for presenting a new system of education with right aims, goals and objectives which could meet the individual as well as the collective aspiration and needs of the people. But the British government did not take it serious.

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