

The Reformist Alexander Duff in Nineteenth century Bengal: A Study

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Abstract:

This article examines the important role of Alexander Duff, a Scottish missionary, in Bengal's social reform from the 1900s. Duff came to India in 1830, and became a pioneer for instructional and social reforms that trade the vicinity. Through its establishment of General Assembly's Institution (now Scottish Church College), Duff brought Western education, emphasizing the significance of English language, literature and technology. This caused a big trade inside the intellectual situation in Bengal, and promoted a brand new era of thinkers and reformers. Duff advocated women's education, played a key role in the abolition of Sati and social justice and he greatly contributed to many other things including the social reform in the region. This article expounds the vision, strategies and legacy of Duff and highlights their permanent effect on modernization and social alternate of Bengal.

Keywords: *missionary, reform, pioneer, Sati, legacy, modernization*

Introduction:

The nineteenth century marked a crucial length within the facts of Bengal and India as a whole. This century emerged a cultural, intellectual, and social awakening called the Bengal Renaissance. It sought to reform traditional practices, modernize Indian society, and cope with enormous social injustices. One of the maximum influential figures in this transformative era was Alexander Duff who was a Scottish Christian missionary and whose contributions to education and societal reform left an indelible mark in Bengal. Duff's paintings performed a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual and social landscape of Bengal, thereby fostering the modern ideals that defined the era.

This article delves into the multifaceted role of Alexander Duff in the social reformation in nineteenth century Bengal and he put an effect on the Bengal Renaissance and his advocacy for rational questioning brought broader sociopolitical transformation of the area.

Introducing Alexander Duff:

Alexander Duff was born in Moulin, Perthshire, the very centre of Scotland on 25th April, 1806. He came of a highland Stock, his father James Duff spoke English and Gaelic. From the country school the lad passed to the University of St. Andrews where he cut a most brilliant career and, of still more importance, came under the influence of Dr. Chalmers. Subsequently he undertook his mission to India. After a most adventurous voyage during which he was twice shipwrecked, Alexander Duff arrived in Calcutta on 27th May, 1830. People of his time saw in his survival in successive shipwrecks an evidence of the Divine Will to utilize the favourite of the gods for some notable work in India.

Alexander Duff arrived in India in 1830, at a time while British colonial rule became consolidating in its effect on Indian society and became grappling with the demanding situations posed through the usage of traditional practices and the encroachment of Western modernity. Duff's venture had twofold purpose: to spread Christianity and to introduce Western-style training as a technique of cultural and intellectual upliftment.

Duff's arrival in Bengal coincided with a growing reputation amongst British directors and Indian reformers of the need for educational reform. He came up with an extremely good suggestion for the advent of English-medium training and he laid the foundation for a modern-day technology of highbrow awakening in Bengal.

Introduction of Western Education:

One of Duff's maximum substantial contributions to the social reformation of Bengal has become his pioneering function in introducing Western education. At a time when conventional Indian education became ruled through Sanskrit schools

(pathshalas) and madrasas, which focused on non secular and classical research, Duff anticipated an academic device that would equip Indian teenagers with current knowledge and abilities.

In 1830, Duff installed the General Assembly's Institution founded on the 13th July, 1830, later known as the Scottish Church College, in Kolkata (then Calcutta). This organization has become a beacon of present day education in Bengal. Duff's curriculum emphasized: Duff believed that English turned into the important thing to the West's big storehouse of expertise. English education, he argued, would have impacts on Indians in cutting-edge technology, literature and philosophy.

Unlike conventional faculties which gave precedence to religious texts, the Duff institute delivered topics which included mathematics, technology, records, western philosophy and so on. While selling secular topics, Mr. Duff also incorporated Christian values into his teaching, aiming to instill in his college students a sense of moral and social duty.

Impact on Indian society:

Duff's instructional application had a profound effect in 19th century Bengal. It additionally exposed Indian students to Western idea and technology and developed their logical, analytical and vital wondering talents. His efforts bridged the space among conventional Indian training and modern western education and created a brand new class of knowledgeable Indians who performed a critical function in social and political trade so far.

Impact on the Bengal Revolution:

The Bengal Renaissance was a period of great cultural and intellectual change, when reform leaders, writers and thinkers sought to modernize Indian society, the contribution of Alexander Duff in this movement was countless.

Duff's emphasis on education as a means of changing society coincided with the aims of the Bengal Revolution. His students, many of whom became prominent figures in the movement,

were greatly influenced by his teaching. By presenting his teachings as Western liberal ideas, Duff empowered them to challenge traditional practices and advocate progressive change..

The Bengal Renaissance began within, and in direct opposition to, the British colonisation of India. The commodities of knowledge, religion, and art were, however, exchanged between the two nations as they sought to identify themselves within the larger colonial world. The Bengal Renaissance witnessed the collaboration of Alexander Duff (1806-1878) and Raja Rammonhun Roy (1772-1833).

Duff is remembered primarily as a missionary but his reputation lies in his educational legacy. Roy's legacy lies in his fashioning of a cultural self-image that pulled from both Eastern and Western thought.

Dr. Kaberi Chatterjee, Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Scottish Church College Kolkata, India has highlighted in her article "The Scottish Church College and the Scots Missionaries: Continuities and Influences", "So deep had been the intellectual incursion by the Scottish missionaries into the psyche of the average Bengali, that Rabindra Nath Tagore used the name of Dr. Duff as a metaphor in his short story Ramkanaier Nirbuddhita (1891 rept. in Golpo Gucchho vol 1, 1972, 27) while describing the character of Gurucharan as 'dof shaheber chhatro' (student of Duff) to denote an innate radical leaning against conventional social mores and orthodox Hinduism among the youth of those days. When an educator/ missionary becomes a metaphor used by the greatest literary luminary of that society then we may conclude that his 'teaching' had outstripped the original intention of 'preaching' the gospel to the 'natives' that had initially inspired this foray into India."

After much consultation and careful thought, the Rev. Alexander Duff opened his institution in Feringhi Kamal Bose's house, upper Chitpur Road, Jorasanko. Dr. Duff expressed his desire that the school be opened daily with prayer. Raja Rammohan Roy suggested that the Lord's Prayer be so used. In 1836 the institution was moved to Gorachand

Basak's house in Garanahata and in 1836 the present building was begun.

Foundation of Scottish Church College and Duff's role in the dissemination of learning:

Dr. Alexander Duff had founded a model institution namely General Assembly's Institution in 1830 (now Scottish Church College), to bring about a measure of modernization through the 'engraftment' of Western learning upon oriental culture. Meanwhile in the General Committee of Public Instruction a fierce controversy was raging between the 'Orientalists' who saw value in oriental learning and were not prepared to forgo it in favour of European culture, although they agreed to borrow its plus points with caution. Another group the 'Anglicists' who wanted to force the change opposed the 'Orientalists' and desired the introduction of Western education in which they saw a multitude of benefits. Dr. Duff was a staunch supporter of the idea that the promotion of European learning through the medium of English rather than by translation was the best way of spreading enlightenment in India. The final seal to this controversy was given in Lord Macaulay's famous Minute and the resolution adopted by the Governor-General Lord William Bentinck regarding the future educational policy of the Government and the decision to introduce English as the medium of instruction on March 7, 1835. But the endorsement of the resolution did not win over everyone in favour of a programme of reform and although the successors of Lord William Bentinck, Charles Metcalfe and Lord Auckland were not unsympathetic to reform, the decision was challenged both in India and in Britain by Orientalistsympathizers. Much depended upon the Anglicists. In his devotion to the cause Dr. Duff played a very important role during the period and ably supported Charles Edward Trevelyan who as a member of the General Committee had influenced the educational policy of the Government of India in favour of the Anglicists before and after March 7, 1835 (see J. Hilliker: 'Charles Edward Trevelyan as an educational Reformer 1827-38'; Canadian Journal of History). Finally he influenced the drafting of the Wood's Despatch of 1854 which sketched the outline of educational system in India (see

George Smith "The life of Alexander Duff" - Vol. II, p. 295). Here it is mentioned "Duff always maintained and upheld the view that all educational institutions should be equalized and state patronage should not be the monopoly of any one or any group." He was in favour of de-provincialisation or de- governmentation of education (see "The formative years 1857-1882; Hundred years of the University of Calcutta"). Dr. Duff was requested to shoulder the responsibility of the office of the Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University. 'It is yours by right' wrote Charles Trevelyan in his letter to Dr. Duff dated 22nd March, 1863. It was only the failure of his health which drove him finally from Calcutta that prevented his being made the Vice Chancellor in 1863.

The Students and the Teachers of Scottish Church College:

Among all the students who entered the portals of this College, two most exceptional personalities are Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The former graduated from the General Assembly's Institution in 1883 and the latter from the Scottish Church College in 1919. In spite of the distance and difference between these two great sons of Mother India they had certain ties that linked them in idealism. Both of them were fired with the zeal of uplifting the downtrodden masses of India and Subhas Chandra the most valiant freedom fighter, was inspired by the message of strength and dynamism in the writing of Swami Vivekananda. "My vision", said Swamiji, "is not Ramkrishna's nor Vedanta's nor anything but simply to bring manhood to my propel" (see 'Sister Nivedita' by Pravrajika Atmaprana, Adivata Ashrami, 2nd Ed. P. 141). "I will help you" ,Nivedita had sworn. In the 20th century this vow was taken by many freedom fighters and among them was India's leading revolutionary Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose.

Co-education in Scottish Church College:

A distinguished achievement of the Scottish Church College was the introduction of systematic under- graduate co-education. Although girl students were admitted in one or two men's colleges in Calcutta ,the Scottish Church College adopted co-ed as a definite policy. The first woman graduated

from this college was Miss. A. Alton. Alexander Duff played an important role in the spread of women's education and it is to be noted that long after he left India, Miss. Chandramukhi Basu passed the F.A. of the Calcutta University in 1880 and in 1884, she passed M.A. in English - the first woman student of the Calcutta University to gain this honour - from the Free Church Institution (see Alok Roy - 'Duff and some of his followers', pp 37-72).



Alexander Duff and his 'India and India Missions'

Dr. Duff in his "India and India Missions" spoke of the results of the system followed by him in the following words; "The great and unexpected success wherewith Divine providence was pleased to accompany this examination gave a mighty impulse to all our future labours. The favourable opinion so decidedly expressed by influential members of the British community reacted powerfully on the native mind at large, in the way of conciliating prejudices, inspiring confidence and securing a more hearty and general co-operation. The interest manifested on the part of so many magnates of the ruling caste in the progress and welfare of the pupils put forth animation and vigour into all of their onward endeavours after the attainment of the English language and the incalculable wealth of knowledge, human and divine, that is treasured up in it." On the reopening of the seminary, the number of new applications for admission was more than trebled. Additional accommodation was provided in the course of little more than a year. 'Elementary tuition', says Dr. Duff, 'was gradually

advanced into an academical or collegiate course somewhat similar to that pursued at one of our Scottish Universities. The five who entered on the day of its first commencement have since swollen into an average attendance of eight hundred. And the Governor-General, the fort of all power, honour and influences at length did homage to it by publicly proclaiming in the face of all India that it had produced unparalleled.'

Conclusion :

So it is noteworthy that the contribution from Alexander Duff to the social reformation in 19th century Bengal was deep and long. Through the leading efforts for education, law formation for women's rights and advocacy of social justice, Duff played an important role in changing the intellectual, social and cultural landscape in the region. Their heritage spread across the walls of the institutions that he established, inspired generations of thinkers, reformers and leaders who shaped modernization and social change of Bengal. When we reflect on his life and work, we are reminded of the permanent importance of education, social justice and compassion in creating a more value-based society. His commitment to the values of sympathy, equality and social responsibility inspires us today, and provides valuable lessons for our own efforts to bring positive changes to the world.

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