The Seat of Learning Recast: Examining The Archive of the Transformation of Hindoo College to the Presidency College

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The historiographical lacuna in the studies of the functioning of higher educational institutions in the early colonial period has long been a norm in Indian history. Apart from the initial politics of the inauguration of these institutions, their subsequent changes have been almost entirely overlooked in mainstream historiography, which is particularly lamentable in view of the rich state archive that records the functioning of these institutions minutely. One such archival record, which is a collection of official letters dealing with the transformation of Hindoo College in Calcutta into Presidency College, will be critically examined here in order to underline the massive transformations that a mere change of nomenclature entailed, the official rhetoric that concealed larger political suppressions, to recover the voices of the indigenous actors and stakeholders who were involved, and to further identify how particular archival records interacted with the larger policies of the colonial government.

Keywords: Archive, critical reading, education, marginalisation, institutional histories.

Introduction

The archive relating to the colonial government and the affairs of formal educational institutions, especially those of the early colonial period, is quite dense, yet scholastically unanalysed. This scholarly lacuna becomes exceptionally prominent when examined in the context of the Orientalist obsession with 'Native' education. While the establishment of these

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educational institutions is remarked upon in historiography, subsequent transformations are conveniently obfuscated. For example, as per the official colonial sources, the transformation of Hindoo College, Calcutta, into Presidency College is portrayed as an unimportant moment in the educational, political, and economic history of colonial Calcutta, as well as that of India. The contemporary media, as well as the secondary sources which deal exclusively with the history of the Presidency College and the larger educational history of the period, have largely internalised the official narrative and viewed this moment as a mere change in nomenclature and the subsequent creation of the iconic structure of Presidency College on College Street. *The Gazette* has a report of the takeover of Hindoo College on 16th April 1854 and the creation of Presidency College on 23rd June 1855. Both of these reports are quite brief and framed in a bland official tone, projecting nothing but the colonial narrative. An example of a secondary source that can exemplify the aforementioned point is Prithviraj Sen's work, titled *From Hindu College to Presidency University*. However, by critically looking at the primary document chosen here, and contextualising it in the contemporary socio-economic milieu, along with the political ideas and policies of the company state, one can read how crucial this moment is in the larger politics of colonial policies of education.

The primary document in question is a selection from the records of the Bengal Government, consisting of papers relating to the "establishment of the Presidency College", published by the Bengal Military Orphan Press in 1854.[1] These official letters were exchanged between Fred J. Mouat, Secretary to the Council of Education, and Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, between the years 1850 and 1854. This particular collection of official letters was published by the government to promote greater transparency within the governmental system, especially in matters dealing directly with the natives. Though the collection was published in Calcutta, the intended audience was not the educated Indian social strata, but Company officials and the general public back in Britain. This document, therefore, demonstrates the official correspondence between two officials of the state and is, thus, clearly a part of the state archives and consequently reflects the dominant voice and perspective of the colonial regime. Through a detailed rereading of the said

[1] F. J. Mouat and Cecil Beadon, *Papers Relating to the Establishment of Presidency College* (Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1854), Title Page.

archive within the larger historical context, one is allowed to explore the myriad dimensions of contemporary colonial socio-politics, including aspects of colonial educational policy, the colonial construction of religion as a binary to rationality, as well as aspects of and understandings regarding the voices, identities, and representations of all actors—colonial officials, native gentlemanly patrons, and the students of the educational institution.

Background: Politics of 'Native' Education in the Early Colonial Period

One of the first provinces of India to come under the influence of modern English education was Bengal. The question of native education was quite contentious, as seen in the debates between the British individuals who would later be grouped into the Anglicists and the Orientalists. The Act of 1813 created the provision for a substantial annual sum of money being set aside by the colonial state for imparting education to the 'natives.'[2] As it was the Orientalist idea that gained eminence in this period, Bengal saw the establishment of two institutions for higher education: the Mohammedan College or Madrassa, exclusively for Muslim students to study Arabic and Persian forms of education, along with the Sanskrit College meant for the upper-caste Hindu students to access Sanskrit education, following the Orientalist rhetoric. Thus, knowledge and education for the natives were perfectly segregated by the colonial state along religious lines.

Public figures such as Raja Rammohan Roy were staunch critics of this step taken by the Company state, as they demanded a move towards a Western style of education, especially focusing on Western sciences over indigenous education, as they believed that it was the only way that influential Indians—specifically Bengalis—could sustain their influential social position under the aegis of the colonial state. Laxmi Subramaniam further traces this Bengali intellectual movement to the influence of Christian missionary critiques of the Hindu religion, and the Bengali intelligentsia's simultaneous internalisation and resistance to it, which was crucial in shaping the identity of the *bhadralok* (gentlemen).[3] A group of 'liberal-minded' individuals, including both English

[2] Ishita Banerjee Dubey, *A History of Modern India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 89.

[3] Lakshmi Subramanian, *History of India: 1707 to 1857* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2010), 167.

gentlemen and Bengali landlords, came together for the foundation of the Hindoo College, with the primary aim of imparting western knowledge solely to upper-caste Hindu students. These individuals were compelled to do so, as the Company state—still following Orientalist ideas—refused to sponsor such an institution. Soon, however, the Orientalists started losing popularity, and the ideology of the colonial state regarding education gradually underwent a major change. Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education', delivered in 1835, was a watershed moment as, following this, the colonial state progressively began to abandon the Orientalist principles of education in favour of educating Indians through the Anglicist model. Yet for the time being, the government tried to strike a balance between the two systems of education, as evident in the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission of 1882.

Simultaneously, as Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out, from the second decade of the nineteenth century, the East India Company was attempting to reduce its costs of governance and inculcate loyalty by employing Indians in subordinate positions of administration, ultimately popularizing the Anglicist form of education while the Orientalist form was slowly rejected.[4] The increasing significance of the Anglicist form of education can be expressed through the statistics of B. N. McCulley, who calculated that, by 1885, the number of English-educated individuals in India amounted to fifty-five thousand, the majority of whom belonged to Bengal.[5] Therefore, the historical moment in question can be seen as a transitional period in which the Company state shifted from patronising Orientalist education to the promotion of an Anglicist form of education, and it is within this context that the said document needs to be examined.

Disdain for "Religious" Education: Vilification of Students from Mohammedan College

Interestingly enough, the first in the series of letters from Mouat to Beadon, does not directly refer to the establishment of Presidency College but opens with a discussion of a problem faced by the Company state:

[4] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2020), 193.

[5] B. T. McCully, *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), 187.

> The Council of Education have had their consideration for sometime past the present course of education at the Muhamedan College or Madrissa of Calcutta and the present system under which the Hindoos are exclusively educated at the Hindoo College whilst there is in Calcutta no Government College whatsoever accessible to youths of any class…[6]

The colonial emphasis on the lack of an institution imparting higher education to "youths of any classes" a phrase that implies the secularity of the British, which would always be contrasted against the religiosity of the Indians, is ironic, given that it was the state itself that had preferred and promoted the Oriental form of education.[7] The document then alludes to the department of English (Anglo-Arabic classes) of the Mahomedan College, a report on which had been called upon by the Officiating Under Secretary in 1850. This is followed by a detailed description of the financial resources invested in the department from its inception in 1829 to the present. The endeavor of the Mohammedan College has been presented by the Education Department as an economic and ideological failure on three counts: a low number of enrolled students, only two students having gained junior scholarships, and the fact that students came from economic backgrounds not considered "gentry"—"shopkeepers, retailers, attorneys, and Moonshees"—and not those from the "better class of Mussulmans".

This clearly demonstrates the desired demography of students by the colonial state that had to include the Muslim middle class who were to act as the native collaborators of the state.[8] This also presents a crucial difference between the Missionaries and the Company, as the Missionaries were always eager to work with the underprivileged section of the society, even if it was to convert them, whereas the Company wanted to educate existing Indian elites in the idioms of the English language to create political collaborators and low-level bureaucratic officials. Further, it is not surprising that the Muslim students of the Mohammedan College avoided the English department, because the

[6] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 1.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 4-8.

teaching of English literature was a form of political indoctrination.[9] The document points out how previous attempts at introducing changes in the Mohammedan College had been strongly resisted by the students: "… a premature attempt to introduce reforms into the Arabic department of the Mudrissa by Dr Spinger on his own authority was forcibly resisted by the Students who broke out in an open rebellion against his authority…"[10] Thus, although there is only a year's gap between the writing of the letter and its publication; the events 'leading up' to the creation of the Hindoo College have been narrativised by the state within the archive.

It is not surprising that education in the English language gains such prominence that the colonial state proposes major reforms for this department. As underlined by Gauri Viswanathan, the introduction of the curriculum of English literature in Bengal was not only a linguistic exercise but also a political one. It was kept completely separate from Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit studies, and the study of the English language was to lead to the internalisation of the superiority of colonial ideas over indigenous ones, as highlighted in the document itself. A report of the English Department of the Madrassa suggests: "It is clearly to be understood that the study of English is in no account to interfere with the established studies of the Institution nor will it ever be admitted as a plea of deficiency in any other branch of study."[11]

This enterprise of the Company state was enjoying its utmost popularity during the time period in question. Students affiliated solely to the English department were required to write essays on social, cultural, religious and political issues. The essays, which were an integral part of the written examination conducted in the English departments of various state-owned and aided institutions in Bengal, were framed in a way which predetermined the response of the examinee such as: "On the Merits of Christianity," "The Effects Upon India of the New Communication With Europe by means of Steam," "The Diffusion of Knowledge through the Medium of English

[9] Gauri Viswanathan, "Currying Favour: The Politics of British Educational and Cultural Policy in India, 1813-54," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 127-128.

[10] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 3.

[11] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, ii.

Language in India"—and the students were expected to write exactly what their white examiners demanded.[12] Moreover, English had been completely separated from the Arabic and Persian departments, meaning that the students who chose to study in the English department could not study in the other departments. Therefore, the English department did not merely instruct the native students in English grammar and literature rather acted as a colonial instrument of popularising the merits of colonialism upon the colonised. It has always been important to Indian Muslims, especially Bengali Muslims, to attain sound education in Arabic and Persian traditions, thereby making it impossible for them to abandon them in order to join the English department. The Bengali Muslim community was not incorporated into clerical jobs under the colonial state, unlike the upper-caste Bengali Hindus, thereby removing crucial incentive for the adoption of English education.

However, if one looks beyond the immediate text, the need to simultaneously reduce the significance of the Mohammedan College, increase state control, and redirect government funds towards the Hindoo College can be contextualised in the light of the contemporary social and political scenario. As students from the Mohammedan College and Sanskrit College withdraw themselves from direct contact with the colonial state, students of the Hindoo College—enjoying the twin advantages of their upper-caste identity and sound Western education—were employed in scores as *Kerani* and *chakurijivi* (Clerks), both in government departments and private British firms; thus, making it more worthwhile for the government to invest heavily in nurturing such a crucial class of collaborators. Moreover, intellectual groups like Henry Vivian Derozio's Young Bengal Movement, as Laxmi Subramanian underlines, not only questioned and criticised contemporary Hindu society but also created a distinct Bengali *bhadralok* sensibility. Therefore, during this particular period in time, they were seen by the colonial state as their greatest allies.[13] Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, too, argues that as a group, they had complete faith in British rule, Western ideologies, and English education.[14] It is, therefore, not surprising that the government would have sought to invest more resources into an institution which was creating a new Indian economic and political elite, and aimed to control it more directly.

[12] Viswanathan, "Currying Favour," 127.

[13] Subramaniam, *History of India*, 168.

[14] Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition and After*, 196.

Politics of Voice, Agency and Representation

The dominant voice in the entire document is that of the British colonial officials who held the pen in this case. For the changes proposed in the administration of the Mohammedan College, the voices of any Indian involved with it, in any capacity, are silent. The document itself, however, is forced to refer to these lower-class Muslim students not in reference to the creation of Presidency College and the transfer of the English department, but only in reference to an "uprising" against the white management of the Mohammedan College in 1850.[15] The document alludes this to the abolition of the "religious offices" of *Khuteeb* (Muslim preacher) and *Mouzzim* (Muslim reciter of prayer), and the appointment of Dr Sprenger as Principal and Moulvee Sadududdeen as *Ameen* (Muslim Principal), both of whom were critical of the system of education followed in the institution, "most lax discipline; a system of study regulated entirely by the Mohammedan Professors," as well as of its "superstitions."[16] The colonial obsession with native "superstitions" as the religious other to secular rationality obfuscates the fact that education segregated along religious lines was not a pre-colonial continuity, but an Orientalist creation:

> The influence of superstition too was not wanting to confirm the general alarm in which both professors and students seem equally to have partaken. A person is said to have dreamed that some great calamity was to befall the college and to have urged the professors and the students solemnly to repeat the form of prayer prescribed in the Koran to avert it… To account for the degree to which such an alarm was likely to excite the minds of the professors and students it must be mentioned and borne in mind that for many years past that the Mudrissa had been regarded by them…as a place for the performance for religious observances than as a mere place of secular learning.[17]

The "uprising," as the document calls it, was nothing but peaceful. The document itself says that, at first, the students submitted a petition to the Principal regarding the omission of classical Arabic texts—which were

[15] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 3.

[16] Ibid., viii-x.

[17] Ibid., ix.

dismissed as "philosophies from dark ages"—from the syllabus, replaced by Urdu texts written by British authors. When their demands were not met, they started to boycott classes.[18] The student body was united, and the management was forced to cede to their demands.

As the document moves from the abolition of the English department in Mohammedan College to the changes proposed for Hindoo College, a subtle change in rhetoric can be observed. While the students of the former establishment are dismissed as "backward," "religious," and "superstitious," the students as well as the management of the latter are praised for being "progressive," "modern," "intelligent," and "rational."[19] As the Hindoo College was established as a collaboration between private British gentlemen and Hindu landlords, it was important for the state to at least record the voices of these landlords, who had provided not only generous funds but invested the initiative with legitimacy among the Bengali *bhadralok,* even though their objections were overridden by the state. Their letters have been presented in the official document verbatim, within quotations. This depiction beguiles the audience and creates a sense of proximity between the speaker and the reader, almost as if the latter is eavesdropping on the former. At the same time, this proximity is nothing but an illusion, as highlighted by Renato Rosaldo. Rosaldo opines that the trope of making voices directly audible to the reader in any context must be examined critically, as it is impossible that the 'data' of direct testimony remains completely untouched by the context of domination, especially when it is written by the wielders of power themselves.[20] Similarly, the background provided by the author in this document shapes the image of the statements in the minds of the readers in a way that is approved by the state.

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[18] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, x.

[19] Ibid., 2,3,4,10,11.

[20] Renato Rosaldo here does not talk about the officials of the colonial state but about more neutral agents of knowledge production, like ethnographers and historians, who similarly present their 'testimonies' verbatim. If their testimonies are so questioned, then the officials of the colonial state, with much more power at their disposal and a greater interest in creating a certain image of the colonised, should be examined even more critically.

Renato Rosaldo, "From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldwork and the Inquisitor," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* ed. James Clifford and George E Marcus (California: University of California Press, 1986), 79.

There were two important Indian stakeholders: the hereditary governors of the Hindoo College, whose consent would have been theoretically necessary to implement any changes in the administration of the College, although in reality these would be quite easily overridden by the state. In 1850, the hereditary governors were Baboo Prosunno Coomar Tagore and the Maharaja of Burdwan. The former, as the document specifies, attended one of the meetings held on 27th November 1852, where he presented his opinion on the issue at hand. His speech has been paraphrased and possibly shortened in the letter. According to the letter, although he had "no personal objection to the proposed measure, which he deemed in himself to be a good and proper measure", he could not agree to it on the grounds of infringement of the "contract between the Government and founders of college".[21]

The other hereditary governor, the Maharaja of Burdwan, wrote a letter with his opinion on the matter, which has been fully reproduced in the document. He too argues in a way that is quite similar to that of Baboo Prosunno Coomar. He states that he cannot agree to the proposal as it would go against the intent of the founders of the institution and interfere with their monetary arrangements for advancing Western learning among upper-caste Hindu boys. However, he clarifies his personal secular ideas in the following lines:

> Upon principle, I have always thought that any distinction of caste or religion should never be made in a seminary of Education: such distinction is especially unnecessary in a school or college in which no religious doctrines of any kind can be taught. In my English and Bengalee schools at Burdwan, I admit boys of all classes and creeds.[22]

Next, the opinions of the Indian management are recorded, although this is prefaced by the claim that their views are not crucial at all, as their tenure lasts but for a single year. The first opinion recorded is that of Baboo Russomoy Dutt, whose opinion is preceded by a very favourable description of him as an integral part of the management who takes an active interest in the administration of the institution. Dutt, not surprisingly, strongly approves the implementation of the changes proposed by the government. Yet another opinion, again reproduced verbatim, is that of Baboo Ausootosh Dey, who is

[21] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 22.

[22] Ibid., 23.

described as someone recently elected and who has attended the meetings "only twice." He too objected to the proposal on two grounds. The first, as with anyone else, is that it would infringe upon the agreement between the government and the founders. The second is more revealing:

> However enlightened and liberal may be the views of individual Hindoos, the generality of them, especially the higher classes, with very few exceptions, are very scrupulous, so that they would not willingly place their children to be instructed under the same roof with the children of all castes and creeds; the consequences of throwing open the Hindoo College for the admission of all children without distinction, would be the withdrawal of the majority of present students…[23]

Thus, Baboo Ausootosh highlights a major fear in the minds of both the institutional administration and the government. While the former openly fears such a consequence, the latter does not articulate or record this fear. Nonetheless, this would almost certainly have been a concern for the government as well, as they would not have wanted to alienate the Brown sahibs—a fact demonstrated by the words devoted to showing this objection as invalid. The government, through the document, states that the implementation of the proposed changes will not affect the number of Hindoo students, that it will remain the best institution for the study of English and, therefore, Hindus could not boycott it. It further asserts that the Council had full faith in the "growing intelligence and liberality" of the "Hindoo gentry of Calcutta".[24]

Another important reason why upper-caste Hindu students could not stay away from the institution, which is not noted in the document, was that doing so would jeopardise their job prospects under colonial rule. The primary reason for the council to reject the most recurring oppositions—on the grounds that the contract between the government and the founders of the Hindoo college—is that this contract was deemed legally non-permanent and could be dissolved by either the government or the management at any point of time. In spite of that, the colonial government was eager to retain the semblance of consent from the native founders, acknowledging the financial patronage that

[23] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 24.

[24] Ibid., 26.

these men extended to the College, thereby reducing the financial burden of the government:

> …It may be conceded that the Government in future throw open the Hindoo College against the will of those who represent the original subscribers, assuming that will be capable of except upon the terms of paying back the aforementioned sum of Rs30000. That done, it appears to the Council that the Government may reorganize the College as he pleases. The only loss to the college which the repayment of the money would cause, is the reduction of so many scholarships.[25]

Examining the aforementioned rhetoric within its discursive context offers valuable insights. The very first commonality among the arguments made by the Indians disagreeing with the government is that, had the decision rested solely with them, they would have agreed to it and gone to some length to prove that they are modern and rational and not steeped in religious orthodoxy. The lengths that these men went to in order to portray themselves as modern can be contextualised in an era where the colonial state saw religion and rationalism as contrasting ideals and would reject any argument coming from a person who would be considered religious, even though the argument in itself is rational. However, the objection on the same grounds, which might have been their own as well, has been blamed on the less progressive of the Bengali *bhadralok*. Moreover, internalisation of colonial ideas and concepts can also be seen in the interchangeable use of the words 'class' and 'caste' and in projecting a *Vidyalaya* (Bengali primary School) as a place where only Hindu students study.

While these men might have quite simply not wanted to give up their connection with the institute completely to the government with no native representation, they, however, had to articulate their objections in terms that would be acceptable to the British, underlying the extremely asymmetrical relationship between the colonial state and its 'collaborators.' To support their objections, they invoke legal terms such as "contract," "impingement," and "agreement," thereby firmly situating the issue in the legal rather than the political context, as it would be the only rhetoric acceptable to the government

[25] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 22.

even in a situation where Indians are almost being forced to give up the administrative privileges of an institution that they themselves founded for their own upliftment.[26]

Silence of the Students

Another important aspect of this document is the complete absence of students in the official archive. The student body in this context can be categorised into three groups: the upper-class Hindu students of Hindoo College; Muslim students from Mohammedan College who might be interested in English education; and lower-caste students who, again, might be interested in English education. The only mention of the upper-class Hindu students of Hindoo College in the document in question is quite approving and laudatory as the British officers refer to their service to the Empire through *chakri* or low level clerical jobs as service to the Empire itself. Another reference to the same can be found in a particular anecdote recorded in the document. In 1850, a student took admission in the college "representing" himself as the son of the late General Matabir Sing, and he brought in a letter of recommendation. He was duly admitted by the principal, who did not inquire into his parentage. However, Baboo Ausootosh Dey officially addressed a letter to the principal saying that he had reasons to believe that the boy was "unfit for admission" and suggested an inquiry.

An inquiry was duly made and, as the allegation was found to be true, the boy was expelled from the institution. This incident is preceded with the subheading: "Introduction of a Pupil from an Improper Class of Society."[27] Looking at this incident critically, one can rule out the chances of absolute forgery and falsehood, as it would have been quite impossible at a time when social connection among the elite was quite confined, and therefore any or all members of the elite group associated with the College would have known the person being mentioned personally, especially because of the fact that such utter forgery would have been explicitly mentioned in the official documents. Thus, the crux of the matter lies in the subheading under which it was classified: "Introduction of a Pupil from an Improper Class of Society." Analysing it critically in the social context of the time, it is highly probable that

[26] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 22-25.

[27] Mouat and Beadon, *Papers*, 28.

the boy in question, who does not have a name in the official archive, was perhaps truly the son of General Matabir Sing but an illegitimate one. Perhaps he had been the result of a union between the General and either a city prostitute or a lower-class woman in the city, as it would have been quite impossible for the boy to have gotten the educational background required to apply to Hindoo College if he had been brought up in the village. This would also explain the letter of recommendation that he was able to provide, no doubt written for him by some sympathetic colleague or friend of the General.

The death of the General, although we do not know if it was recent or not, must have thrust both mother (if she was still alive) and son into poverty and desperation, thereby necessitating deception for admission into the institution. Baboo Ausootosh Dey must have been acquainted with either the boy or the mother or, at the very least, must have known about his circumstances with surety, otherwise he could not have written the official letter in such forceful words. Thus, through this anecdote, considered to be trivial enough to "require no discussion in the report," one can find out the mentality and thought processes of the management of the College as well as of the upper-caste Hindu students in that institution, who would have shunned contact with a boy of such background. Although the upper-caste Hindu students of Hindoo College, unlike those of the Sanskrit College, considered themselves to be progressive and liberal, they must have definitely felt uncomfortable at the thought of mingling with fellow students from Muslim and lower-caste communities, not strictly for religious reasons but because that had not been the social norm. Although they advocated progressive politics for themselves and the society that they were living in, their progressive politics only went so far and challenged only a few established social, religious, and cultural norms.

Moreover, many of them belonged to zamindar (wealthy landlords) families from various parts of Bengal where caste laws and religious distance might be strictly regulated, thereby prejudicing the students. In spite of this, there was no serious protest orchestrated by the students, as newspapers of that period reported no such incident. Moreover, there was no legitimate platform for their protest other than popular newspapers of the time like the *Gazette,* as the University Magazine was started much later in 1875 and the vernacular press was still disorganized as it was in its infancy. It must also be noted that there was no real need for protests except during the immediate aftermath of the

complete government takeover of the Hindoo College. The small number of Ashraf Muslims in Calcutta continued to shun educational institutes associated with the colonial government and patronised traditional Arabic and Persian education. Working-class Muslims were never integrated into mainstream English education as there was very little space for their employment in the private and public enterprises owned by the British. Thus, it is of no surprise that these students would have felt alienated and isolated in the educational culture of Presidency College.

The myth of the caste-less *bhadralok* has been challenged, and scholars have demonstrated that students of lower-caste identities in Bengal had to cross many societal and political hurdles to gain access to education.[28] As various historical and literary sources of that period underline, it was almost impossible for an individual belonging to a lower caste to even obtain primary level of education in both rural and urban areas. Moreover, very few of them had the luxury to continue their studies, as most of them belonged to economically marginalised communities, including those of landless labourers, making it almost impossible to reach the point of university education, especially Western education.

Conclusion

The collection of official letters dealing with the creation of Presidency College is an important document as it is a product of the social, political, and economic context of the period. It becomes even more important to study this document, as there is no archive that can act as an alternative to the official one to either contradict or support official colonial claims. Therefore, the idea of native voices in this particular context must be gleaned from this particular document alone. A critical reading of the archive allows for a nuanced understanding of the policies of the colonial government not only in the sector of education in both public and private spheres, but also in the larger political arena. Reading it 'against the grain,' along with contextualising it in contemporary colonial politics, reveals interesting trends and attitudes that the state tries to obscure. Education has always been a sector closely controlled by the state to promote and popularise its ideologies. The grave importance of

[28] Surajit Sinha and Ranjit Banerjee, "Bhadralok and Chhotolok in a Rural Area of West Bengal," *Sociological Bulletin* 18, no. 1 (March 1969): 54.

the document lies in the fact that it portrays a phase of transition in the colonial government's educational politics from Orientalism to Anglicism, which was rooted in changing colonial perspectives of native educational policies ultimately used to sub serve the native rather than stemming from genuine concerns about the problems and struggles of the native student body.

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