

Promotion of Education in Orissa by Ravenshaw

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Thomas Eric Ravenshaw's memory is perpetuated in Orissa by the College which bears his name. He was an eminent commissioner-cum-educationist par excellence. Mr. Ravenshaw was a pioneer in the field of education in Orissa. Ravenshaw College, indeed, is a continuous process of synthesis between tradition and individual talent, between the poise of culture and vigour of adventure. Sir Jadhunath Sarkar, the doyen of Indian historians who taught in this esteemed college during 1919-1923, thus spoke nostalgically in 1958. "I passed some happy years in the College. It must be prospering as the epitome of all that was good and bright of Orissa". Ravenshaw, indeed, is all wisdom and happiness the institution that combines a Centurian's wisdom and the ardours of springtime youth.

Before 1840, the Government of Bengal neglected education in Orissa.¹ In May 1822, the Missionaries started an Anglo-Vernacular School at Cuttack for the education of the local converts. The Baptist mission at Cuttack could not manage the school because of financial difficulties, and handed over to the Government in 1841. William Wilkinson, Collector of Puri, started 'Puri Free Academy in 1835.

The Orthodox people, specially the Brahmans did not like English education, which, in their opinion, instilled hatred against the Hindu religion. The Cuttack School was made a Zilla School in 1851. Zilla Schools were also opened

at Puri and Balasore in 1853. The Zilla Schools taught up to the entrance standard.

The progress of education in Orissa was very slow due to the apathy of the people and of the Government. Active interest in vernacular education was taken by the Government only from 1844, when vernacular Schools were established at Hariharpore, Mahanga, Bhadrak, Remuna, Balasore and Kendrapara.

Poverty, caste prejudice and conservatism² stood on the way of the progress of education. Few copies of Oriya books were printed as there was not much demand and this accounted for high prices of the books.³ At Bhadrak, 'respectable natives were 'sullenly determined not to pay one anna per mensem as School fee.⁴

The introduction of the grant-in-aid system gave incentive to the establishment of the vernacular Schools the number of which multiplied. A 'Training Class' was established in 1863.

In July 1865, T.E. Ravenshaw, Commissioner for the Suppression of Dacoity, was appointed Commissioner of the Cuttack Division. Unlike his predecessor, R.N. Shore, he had no previous knowledge of Orissa for 12 years. With a short break, No other Commissioner had such a length of Service in Orissa.

Beames who worked in the districts of Balasore and Cuttack as Magistrate, described

Ravenshaw as a man of mediocre personality. "I had no great respect for his abilities" he wrote, "nor had any one else, but he had much experience and he knew his Orissa and his Ooryas thoroughly⁵".

In his first Report on Education in Orissa to the Government of Bengal. Ravenshaw observed, "The great desideratum in this Division is the establishment of the collegiate class in which young men who have successfully completed the entrance examination may prosecute their studies of the 19 passed candidates, 10 from the Cuttack School and 1 from Pooree, only three - and these are Bengallees - have gone to Calcutta to prosecute their studies. Ooryas as a race have an indefinable fear of sending their sons to Calcutta, the climate they say being inimical to the health of the natives of this province. But the real cause appears to me to be their unwillingness to incur the expense that would attend to support their sons at a distance from home. I would most strongly urge the necessity of establishing a collegiate class in connection with Cuttack Government school. This would involve merely the salary of a fully competent master, an experience small in comparison with the benefit, I feel convinced, will result. The class may form the nucleus of a future Cuttack College.

I would lastly call attention of the Education Department to the almost entire neglect of the Oriya language. This may have originated in the want of proper Oorya text-books but many since have been printed.

The Oorya language possesses the same capacity as the Bengallee language being derived from the same source, and spoken over a tract extending from Midnapore to Ganjam.

In conclusion, he remarked "To this neglect of the Oorya vernacular, I attribute the small

success obtained by the native Ooryas. Moreover were the Oorya language exclusively used in Orissa Schools education would have found more favour with the people than at present. Measures should be taken for introducing wherever possible, Oorya books to the entire exclusion of the 'Bengallee'⁶.

In his next Report to the Government of Bengal, in 1866, Ravenshaw informed that there were 61 Anglo-Vernacular and vernacular schools in the Cuttack Division. There was also a School for the European and Eurasian boys. Ravenshaw again reminded the Government: "The little benefit which advanced students of the highest class attained after a prolonged period of study by passing the University examination is soon evaporated by their omission to keep up their reading. This is attributable to the unwillingness of their friends to send them to the colleges of Bengal for prosecution of higher studies. To remedy this I have suggested in my letter, the formation of a Collegiate class in connection with the Government School⁷.

There were 16 Anglo - Vernacular Schools including one unaided Anglo-Urduo School which was closed after a few years. In 1867, the number of vernacular schools of all grades increased to 64. But four of the Anglo-Vernacular schools were closed. Sixty-nine schools received aid from the Government.⁸

After the great Famine, some schools were going to be closed owing to the failure of local subscription. Consequently, the Government aid to these schools were withdrawn. Ravenshaw strongly protested in his letter to the inspector of Schools "I consider it necessary that the Government grants to all schools in Orissa should at any rate for the present be continued irrespective of local subscription, owing to famine conditions⁹.

He succeeded in keeping the schools open by securing local subscriptions with the help of officers¹⁰.

R.L. Martin, Inspector of Schools, South West Division, wrote to the DPI. : "Had this officer not shown so much interested, as he has been in the spread of education in his division, I would hardly feel myself justified in recommending a modification of the Grant-in-aid rules in Orissa."¹¹

The Joint Secretary to Government in his letter "dated the 26th January 1868, intimated the D.P.I. that the grants to the Orissa Schools should continue as 'a special case'".

At that time both Oriya and Bengali text-books were used in the Schools in Orissa. Ravenshaw suggested the exclusion of Bengali. R.L. Martin, Inspector of Schools agreed to the teaching of Oriya exclusively in the lower Classes. He proposed that the teaching through the medium of either Oriya or Bengali be continued in the Zilla School classes, on the ground that all the text-books are not available in Oriya. "It would require at least 20 years" he observed "with a Vidyasagar to develop Oriya". Ravenshaw did not agree with him. In his letter to the Government, he pointed out that almost all the teachers in the schools in Orissa were Bengalis. "There will be, if option permitted, a constant leaning towards the Bengallee language, which will be detrimental to the fundamental point to be kept in view, viz., the education of the Ooryas". He argued "So long as Oorya is not recognized as the language of all and every grade of Orissa Schools, it is not to be expected that very material improvement be made in Oorya literature and efficient or earnest efforts be made to put in hands vigorously and completely the work of preparing good translation of all the best Bengallee works for immediate adoption in Orissa Schools. This being once decided on,

books will be translated from Bengallee and new works in Oorya prepared, and time need not be long before the language be as rich in literature as Bengallee. I would leave Bengallee as an extra language, if preferred to be taken up in addition to Oorya, but in no case in supercession of it. Very few Ooryas, as a rule leave their Country to obtain. Public employment in Bengal but a very great many Bengallees are employed in Orissa and may be said to have usurped the best and most lucrative employments in the country which would fallen to the indigenous Ooryas, had they been afforded an opportunity of advanced education in their own language. So far, the Ooryas have not received fair play and have been kept in the background.

I believe nothing is likely to encourage the progress of education in Orissa, as the adoption of its national language in all classes of the Schools¹². Ravenshaw also advocated for a separate Inspector of Schools for Orissa. At that time the Office of the Inspector of Schools, South-West Division, was located at Midnapore. He pointed out that the Inspector of Schools, if posted in Orissa, would be "able to devote his whole time and attention towards the province, introducing Oorya as the medium of instruction. He concluded his long letter, referred to above with the remarks that "Oriya literature is not so deficient as supposed" and that the Government should give assistance to print good text-books in Oriya. W.S. Atkinson, the D.P.I of Bengal, supported W.L Martin. He pointed out for the present Oriya text-books, which were few in number and more costly than the Bengali, books, cannot be exclusively used.¹³

Rivers Thompson, Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, forwarded the minute of the Lieutenant Governor to the D.P.I. His Honour praised the Commissioner for drawing

the attention of the Government, to the almost entire neglect of Oorya in the advanced classes of the schools in the districts within his jurisdiction." The minute added that the Commissioner of Orissa was exclusively in favour of establishing Oriya as the recognized language of all the schools. To secure the object, he suggested the appointment of separate inspector of schools, preference to the natives of Orissa in all educational appointments, and Government aid for approved translations in Oriya. But the D.P.I advised the Government to allow the present system to continue and to wait for further development of higher literature in Oriya.

The Lieutenant Governor in his minute pointed out that the object of the Government was promotion and advancement of Oriya education in Orissa, though it might not be possible to all that the commissioner wanted, due to the scarcity of Oriya text-books.¹⁴

Ravenshaw did not give up the attempt. After four years, he again wrote to the Lieutenant Governor suggesting that the adoption to the Oriya language as the only medium of instruction in Orissa.¹⁵

The assistant secretary to Government intimated him:

"The Lieutenant Governor accepts your view in regard to the adoption of the Oriya language in the schools in Orissa. His honour authorises you to use your discretion about the exclusion of Bengallee.¹⁶

Ravenshaw wrote to the magistrates of the districts of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri stating that persistent and potent exclusion of the Bengallee language and of teachers who are not familiar with the Oorya vernacular is expected for the popularity and progress of education in Orissa".¹⁷

In 1871, the system of payment by results was introduced to encourage vernacular education. In 1875, Nandikishor Das, Deputy Magistrate, was appointed joint inspector of schools. But as he asked for reversion, Radhanath Rai was appointed to that post in December 1877. Ravenshaw established a number of vernacular schools in moffussil places¹⁸.

We will now refer to higher education. In January 1867 the DPI., Bengal, recommended addition of collegiate class to the existing zilla school at Cuttack.¹⁹

The Government accorded sanction to the proposal to start collegiate class at the Cuttack Zilla school, to be named as Cuttack High school. On the 20th January 1868, the collegiate class was started with six students. Radhanath Rai was one of them. In January 1870, Jadumani Ghosh alone and in 1871, January, Gopimohan Sen alone passed the F.A examination. In 1872, Chaturbhuj Patnaik, Samson Raut, Balaram Das, Madhusudan Rao and two Bengali students passed the F.A. examination. A law class was opened in January 1869. The class was held in one hour each day in the morning. It was closed after a few years but was started again in 1880.

In the beginning of 1875, Sir Richard Temple, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, visited Orissa. Representation was made to him to convert the high school into a college. The Lieutenant Governor agreed to raise the high school to the status of a degree college. But he was not prepared to meet the entire nonrecurring expenditure as the number of students would be few. In his minute, dated 27th April 1875, His honour asked for a contribution of Rs.30,000 from the public.

Ravenshaw immediately took up the matter. He wrote to the Secretary, Government of

Bengal. As matters now stand, I am in a position to guarantee that a sum of Rs.30,000 shall be forthcoming, and claim the fulfillment of the government promise to assign Rs.500 per month for five years". He pointed out that eleven students were reading in the second year class out of which six were reasonably expected to join the new third year class. Ravenshaw concluded: "The establishment of a college at Cuttack is an object of personal interest to myself and also of greatest importance to the spread of higher education in Orissa. The Bengal Educational Department, located in Calcutta, is incapable of affording immediate supervision and is alien, if not antagonistic, to local peculiarities. If, therefore, Government will assign Rs.500 per month and place the organization of the new college in my hands, I am prepared to submit a definite scheme for approval."²⁰

Ravenshaw recommended Samuel Ager, 'a man of exceptional character' for the post of the Principal.²¹ He submitted a scheme to the DPI for a Grant-in-aid College.

The Secretary to the Government informed the DPI that the Lieutenant Governor entertained some doubts as to Mr. Ager's qualification for the post of the principal, and suggested nomination of some better man, either European or Native. It was pointed out that Lieutenant Governor's Minute conveyed no pledge that Government would give Rs.500 a month for the maintenance of the college. What was said that the additional cost would be about Rs.1,000 a month and that if the people would give half of this, the Lieutenant Governor would endeavour to convert the High School into a college. He added, "The Commissioner appears to suggest to make the institution a kind of grant-in-aid College, interference of Government being limited to the payment of a contribution of Rs.500 per month

and it being apparently intended that the college fees should be credited in aid of the college funds. But this would not be, the Lieutenant Governor thinks, be practicable to engraft a grant-in-aid college upon a Government High School. It was Sir Richard Temple's intention that the college should be in every respect a Government institution, the fees as in other Government Colleges, being credited to Government."²²

Ravenshaw wrote to the DPI in support of the appointment of Ager: "The appointment of any native of Bengal as principal of the Orissa College would be exceedingly undesirable and I earnestly hope that such a course may not be thought of."²³

H. Woodrow, the new D.P.I. wrote to the Government: 'As the college is due to Mr. Ravenshaw's indefatigable efforts, I would recommend that the nomination of Mr. Ager for the post of the principal be accepted on a salary of Rs.350 a month, to be increased to Rs.400 at the end of two years if the college is successful. An Assistant Professor on Rs.250 and a science teacher on Rs.200 will be immediately necessary."²⁴

H. Woodrow again wrote to the Government: "The Commissioner of Cuttack wishes to start at once the College. The success of this year was slight. Four only passed the First Arts but this is the very number that had passed in Duff's great Calcutta College."²⁵

In 1875, J.J. Reynolds, Secretary, Government of Bengal wrote to the Government of India to sanction the creation of the post of the principal of the College on a salary not exceeding Rs.450. It was explained that the scheme of the Lieutenant Governor provided that half the additional charge should be raised by subscription. That had been done "to provide one

half of the additional outlay for a period of at least 5 years."²⁶

The College was opened in January 1876.²⁷ Ravenshaw wrote to the Government on 25th February 1876 seeking a grant of Rs.3,000 for the purchase of books on Botany and chemical apparatus. The expenditure was sanctioned - "The Government of Bengal having acceded to the wish of the commissioner of Cuttack to change the High School into a college."²⁸

Ager was appointed principal with effect from the 23rd February 1876 on probation. The selection of Ager was unfortunate. He proved to be a failure as a teacher.²⁹

In 1878, five students and in 1879, four students were sent up. They went to Calcutta to appear in the B.A. Examination. But they all failed. In 1880, Durga Charan Sahu alone passed the B.A. Examination, and was placed in the Third Class.³⁰ In 1881, Janaki Ballabh Ghosh alone passed the B.A. Examination, securing third class. In 1882 Janaki Ballabh Bose passed the B.A. examinations. He was placed in the second class.³¹ In 1883, Brahmananda Das, Gokulananda Chaudhury, Gopal Ballabh Das and two Bengali students passed the B.A. Examination from Ravenshaw college.

In July 1870, Dr. W.D. Stewart became Civil Surgeon of Cuttack. Towards the end of 1874, Stewart submitted a scheme to start a Medical School 'for training Oriya youths into native doctors in their own languages'. Ravenshaw forwarded the scheme to Government. "I long had in view the desirability of establishing a class for training a few young men of Orissa in surgery and medicine" he wrote. In conclusion of his letter he observed : "The school itself will form a subject of deep interest in the success of which, my best endeavours shall not be wanting".

The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in his minute remarked: "The foundation of a local Medical School is a matter in which the Commissioner has frequently pressed upon the attention of Government and he has much pleasure in according his sanction to a scheme, which is likely, in Mr. Ravenshaw's opinion, to contribute materially to the benefit of Orissa."³²

The Medical School was opened on the 15th February 1875. When the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj visited Cuttack to attend the proclamation Durbar, Ravenshaw persuaded him to place at the disposal of the Commissioner an endowment of Rs.5,000 for Scholarships in the Cuttack College and the Medical School³³. In March 1877, Rai Bahadur Syamananda De of Balasore offered to found two Scholarships to be called the Princes of Wales Scholarships, amounting to Rs.100 each, tenable in the Cuttack College. Ravenshaw accepted the offer and cordially thanked the donor.

A Survey School was established at Cuttack in 1876. A normal (Training) School was established there in March 1869. In 1876, the Government decided to reduce the grants to the Normal Schools in Bengal and Orissa to the extent of Rs.38,000 and Rs.3,000 respectively. Ravenshaw wrote to the D.P.I., Bengal : "I must strongly and earnestly deprecate the reduction which strikes at the root of all prospects of improved primary education."³⁴ He rather wanted to increase the Government grant.

Ravenshaw left Orissa on the 5th April 1878. One of his last official functions was to preside over the prize distribution ceremony of the Medical School. He worked as the Commissioner of the Burdwan Division till 1881, when he retired.

In December 1878, the Government decided to construct a permanent building for the

Cuttack College. In February 1879, the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj made a donation of Rs.20,000 to the Cuttack College, which was renamed Ravenshaw College at his suggestion by the Government³⁵. The College was made permanent in 1881. In March 1886, Ravenshaw wrote a letter to Charles Metcalfe, Commissioner, regarding affairs of Orissa. He had spent the best part of his life in Orissa, he wrote, and he tried for the welfare of the people, the memory of whom he still cherished in his old age.

Madhusudan Das met Ravenshaw in England. Ravenshaw talked with him in Oriya and said "I am very fond of your people". Ravenshaw died in August 1899.

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