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# An Analytical Study on the Education System in Murshidabad District (India) during Colonial Rule (1787-1947)

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## Abstract

*This study explores how the education system took shape in Murshidabad district during British colonial rule, spanning from 1787 to 1947. It follows the unfolding story of how schools and institutions were established, how colonial policies influenced local practices, and how education became a field of both control and opportunity. At the centre of this story are the local elites—Zamindars, Philanthropists, and social reformers—who played a key role in expanding access to education. They often had to walk a fine line, working within the framework of colonial policies while also trying to serve the needs of their communities. This study also uncovers the persistent inequalities of the time, especially those tied to religion and gender, which shaped who had access to learning and who was left out. Seen through this perspective, the history of colonial education in rural Bengal emerges as a complex mix of advancement and exclusion—a legacy marked by both meaningful progress and enduring barriers.*

**Keywords:** Murshidabad, Educational institution, colonial policies, local elite, gender.

## Introduction

The period between 1787 and 1947 marked a special era for the education system in Murshidabad under British colonial rule. Before colonial intervention, education in the district was primarily provided through traditional institutions such as madrasas and pathsalas, which were largely sponsored by local people. These educational centres provided classical education to the cultural and administrative elite of pre-colonial Bengal, particularly in Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit. With the advent of colonial rule, foreign missionary organisations and the landlord elite played a significant role in introducing Western-style education. Christian missionaries who were sympathetic to the British administration played a key role in promoting English education during colonial rule. At the same time, some forward-thinking landlords championed the use of local languages and supported modern education, seeing it as a pathway to social advancement and cultural renewal.

Over time, the British government became more involved in education with important policies like Wood's Despatch of 1854 and the Hunter Commission of 1882. These efforts set the stage for starting formal schools, teacher training programs, and a linked system with the University of Calcutta. This study follows the growth and development of these institutions in Murshidabad. It examines how schools were established, which subjects were taught, and how they became part of larger educational networks. It also closely analyses who had access to this new system, pointing out literacy trends and gaps among different caste, gender, and religious communities. It highlights both inequalities and the social and political factors behind them. By exploring the connections between traditional systems, colonial policies, and local agency, this study aims to offer a deeper understanding of how education in Murshidabad was influenced during the colonial era. Murshidabad became an official district in 1787 after changes in jurisdiction from the nearby Birbhum district. However, its final administrative boundaries were not established until 1879. Since then, the district's structure and boundaries have mostly stayed the same. According to the "3 June Plan", also known as the Mountbatten Plan, Murshidabad was first intended to be part of East Pakistan after the Partition of India on August 15, 1947. However, the Radcliffe Award reassigned Murshidabad to the Indian state of West Bengal. Interestingly, the district unofficially belonged to East Pakistan for three days before being formally included in Indian territory[1].

To grasp the educational thoughts of Bengali intellectuals in the 19th century, we first need to recognize the traditional indigenous education system that existed before Western influence. Buchanan Hamilton's surveys give important insights into the education infrastructure in Bengal at that time, including nearby districts like Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. These systems included institutions such as pathshalas, tolls, maktabs, and madrasas, while advanced learning took place in Chatushpathis or Chaubaris. Teachers, who came from both Hindu and Muslim communities, usually earned very little and did not have the high social status that religious leaders enjoyed. Even though they played a crucial role in spreading knowledge, these educators were often not appreciated[2].

Without further going into the background, the emphasis of this investigation is still on the colonial era. The Charter Act of 1813 was a milestone as it enshrined for the first time the idea that the government was the party responsible for public education. The Act further provided: "….it shall be lawful for the Governor-General in Council to direct that out of any surplus which may remain of the rents, revenues, and profits arising from the said territorial acquisitions... a sum not less than one lakh of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India." The money that was put aside under this clause was distributed by the General Committee of Public Instruction, which was set up by the Bengal Government in 1823. The committee was given the task of spreading knowledge, making education better and raising the moral character of the people[3].

During the period of British rule, the colonial administration definitely made efforts to set up vernacular schools all over Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa as is clear from official letters and reports. Good examples of those sources are the General Report on Public Instruction in Bengal along with the school inspectors' documents that give new perspectives into the education system development. William Adams's report on education in Bengal for the years 1835–1838 throws up a particularly relevant case. Adams claims that, in the year 1801, the population of the Murshidabad district, which included the city, was about 1,020,572, with a demographic ratio of one Muslim for every two Hindus. Although indigenous primary schools were available in the city as well as in the district, their number was very restricted. For instance, in 1801, there was only one school dedicated to Islamic law, and only 20 students were registered as the pupils of Hindu law and customs. Although this information is very scarce, there were a large number of educational institutions for both Hindus and Muslims operating informally[4].

According to Walsh, English tutors were additionally assigned for the Royal household's members. To give an example, Nawab Bahadur was taught by Mr. Cooper who had previously tutored Nawab Nazim Munsur Ali and was recognized for his good work in education and as the deputy guardian[5]. It is also important to note that alongside the British government, missionary societies, local landlords, and aristocratic families played a crucial role in advancing education in the Murshidabad district [5].

## The London Missionary Society in Berhampur and Murshidabad

The Berhampur branch of the London Missionary Society (LMS) was started in 1824 when Micaiah Hill, a missionary from Calcutta, came to the city. The Hills, Mr. and Mrs., introduced changes in the education system in the area and were the founders of seven schools for Hindu boys and two for Muslim (then called Mahomedan) boys. In a progressive move for the era, Mrs. Hill also established a girls' school. By 1827, six boys' schools remained in operation, enrolling approximately 280 students. That same year, Mrs. Hill founded a second girls' school, increasing female enrollment to forty. In addition to their educational initiatives, the Hills were actively involved in evangelical outreach. Mr. Hill established three native chapels and three preaching stations. Their efforts were bolstered in 1827 by the arrival of Mr. Gogerly, and culminated in the construction of a substantial new chapel, completed on January 7, 1829. The mission was given another boost in 1832 through the advent of Mr. T. Paterson, besides that Thomas Cussons also gave some support from Murshidabad. The LMS together with the Bengal Auxiliary Missionary Society set up an English school in Murshidabad[5].

In fact, the school was in bad shape because of the lack of interest of the locals and the shortage of teachers. A primary school under the same auspices fared somewhat better, with an enrollment of 60 students by the end of 1834. The curriculum for the upper classes included arithmetic, numeracy, geography, and related disciplines[4]. A Native Girls' School was also established in Murshidabad. Approximately 80 girls attended regularly. Older students demonstrated fluency in Gospel recitation, while younger pupils were taught using traditional indigenous pedagogical methods. The school day concluded with the recitation of a catechism and the Lord's Prayer, followed by the singing of Bengali hymns[6].

During the period from 1845 to 1849, the LMS initiated a series of determined struggles in order to broaden their educational base in the district of Murshidabad. Two schools were established in 1845 and 59 students were admitted. After this, 11 schools were opened up in 1846 with a number of 331 students, same number of schools in 1847 with 420 students, 13 in 1848 with 431 students, and 12 in 1849 with 407 students[7]. By the end of the 19$^{th}$ century, the LMS most certainly educational efforts had a splendid time burgeoning. Khagra School in 1899 announced a registration of 289 boys, of which 21 were Christians. Of the 16 Christian students who appeared for the Calcutta Entrance Examination, 13 were successful. A Boys' Boarding School for Christians, run by Miss Robinson, took in 20 boys. On the other hand, Jiaganj School had an enrollment of 150 students, and the total number of students at the Bokhara and Bhagwangola schools was 1125.

## The Role of Zamindar and Aristocratic Families in Education

Zamindar and aristocratic families were very influential in the spread and progress of education in the colonial era, especially in areas like Murshidabad. They not only helped to build schools and colleges but also gave scholarships and supported missionary and local language education projects, which were meant to increase the reading and learning of different social

groups. On October 31, 1844, Raja Krishnanath committed suicide. The day preceding his demise, he wrote his will in his mother tongue, in which he bequeathed the most part of his properties for education. Besides, he also decided to give his Rani, who was to be called Maharani Surnamoyi, a monthly allowance of Rs. 1,5005. Rao Jogendra Narain Roy founded a Middle English School and a Charitable Hospital in Lalgola[5]. Maharaja Jogodindra Banawarigovinda Dev Bahadur (1805–1886) founded the Higher English School in Banwaribad[5]. Babu Hari Krishna Majumdar was acutely aware of the educational backwardness in his birth place and made considerable efforts to promote both higher and primary education among the local population. He achieved this by establishing and maintaining a high school, as well as a school for girls, in his region of the district[5].

Babu Baikuntha Nath Sen (Born-1843) was a member of the Board of Trustees responsible for the management of Berhampore College. He was clearly very interested in education and he was also the Secretary of the "Hardinge Vernacular School" in Saidabad, where he started his educational career[5]. BabuSitab Chand (born April 17, 1847) was the man who established a few public institutions of high repute. He established a free English high school to commemorate the jubilee of the reign of his late Queen Victoria. Unfortunately, the school was closed due to an insufficient number of students and a lack of public support[5]. The members of the Dudhoriya family were known for their devout Jain faith and had long been involved in running a school for Bengali girls in Azimganj, as well as Jain Pathshalas for boys of their co-religionists in Azimganj, Palitana, and Dhoraji. The total value of their numerous donations and contributions to public and charitable causes was substantial[5].

## School Establishment and Affiliations

The following analysis presents the respective dates of establishment of various schools in Murshidabad District and their affiliations with University of Calcutta, which is based on entries from the Directory of High Schools during the colonial Period. The educational landscape of colonial Murshidabad indicates a slow therefore unevenly and broadly diversified extension of the secondary school sector in various parts of the district, mapped with the founding of high schools and the subsequent registration of these schools as affiliating branches of the University of Calcutta. Drawing from the Directory of High Schools in Murshidabad District, this analysis presents a subdivision- and police station-wise account of schools founded during British rule, focusing on their dates of origin and academic recognition through university affiliation. Sadar Subdivision: Berhampur Police Station has been the locality that goes down in the annals of the district's educational history as the scene of the earliest educational undertakings. Krishnanath Collegiate School, started in 1853, was swiftly, the very same year, affiliated, thus demonstrating that there was keen interest from the colonial administration in this urban centre.

In the same way, by 1916 and 1915, Khagra Boy's H.E. School (1868) and Manindra Chandra Vidyapith (1914) had respectively received their affiliation. The very fact that Maharani Kashiswari Girl's H.E. School (1928) had been registered by 1934 shows quite clearly that the education of women was becoming more and more emphasized. Beldanga Police Station was the place where notable institutions as Kumar Momin Chandra Institute (1905), affiliated in 1912, were set up. However, no data have been found about the affiliation of Beldanga Gobinda Sundari School (1890), so either it has not come to light or the affiliation was delayed. It is easy to see from the records of Dewan Gangalal Sarkar High School that Nawada Police Station was the scene of the most vibrant educational movement in the district during the interwar period. Amtala H.E. School (1919), for example, got affiliation in 1922. After the end of the war, schools such as Sarbagapur Jana Kalyan Sangha Adarsha Vidyapith and Patikabari H.E. School, which were both set up in the 1940s, came to receive affiliation immediately, as evidenced by the simplified nature of post-war administrative procedures. Jalangi and Domkal Police Stations witnessed early developments, with schools like Bhagirathpur H.E. School (1896) affiliated by 1897, and Domkal H.E. School (1900) by 1901—indicative of regional educational aspirations well before Indian independence.

Kandi Subdivision: The Kandi Police Station area housed the historically significant Kandi Raj H.E. School (1859), although affiliation details are unavailable. Other institutions, such as Gokarna P.M. H.E. School (1905), were affiliated by 1909, aligning with district-wide patterns. Khargram, Burwan, and Bharatpur Police Stations experienced substantial educational developments between the 1890s and 1940s. Particularly notable are Barwariabad Maharaja H.E. School (1864), affiliated in 1877, and SijgramHosenabad Mohsen Taiyeb H.E. School (1912), affiliated in 1926. The variety of dates and rapid affiliations in the 1940s suggest an accelerated drive for educational expansion in the final decades of British rule.

Lalbagh Subdivision: This area just goes to show that there was building of educational institutions during the early and mid-century. Nawaz Bahadur's Institution (1909), Raja Bejoy Singh Vidyamandir (1902), and Lalgola Mohesh Narayan Academy (1914) were affiliated just a few years ago. Besides, a good number of schools, for example, Katlamari H.E. School (1941), are still following the same trend of getting affiliation within 2-3 years. The schools in Bhagwangola and Raninagar Police Stations, along with Islampur H.E. School (1878, affiliated in 1882), reflect the district's educational culture which is deeply rooted and rich, still alive in the 19th century.

Jangipur Subdivision: Jangipur is a name synonymous with early education. Jangipur H.E. School (1872) was a notable example in this regard. It was affiliated in 1877. In addition, schools like Kanchantala T.D.T. Institution and Goursundar Dwarkanath Institution that were both founded in 1897, received affiliation in the early 20$^{th}$ century.

The 1940s were good times for the subdivision, as they witnessed a school-founding spree, with Mirzapur Dwijapada H.E. School (1948) at the forefront and Sagardighi S.N. H.E. School (1948), both of which were promptly affiliated. This trend correlates with the late-colonial policy emphasis on mass education. This chronological and spatial analysis of high school development in Murshidabad during the colonial period indicates the following key trends: i. Early Institutionalization: Certain urban centres like Berhampur and Jangipur had schools established and affiliated as early as the mid-19th century. ii. Regional Expansion: Rural police stations gradually caught up by the early 20th century, reflecting wider colonial administrative penetration. iii. Post-1930 Surge: The 1930s-1940s period was characterized by an enormous upsurge in the number of schools and a much shorter interval between origin and affiliation, probably resulting from education reforms of nationalist and post-Montagu-Chelmsford era. iv. Gender Inclusion: The establishment of girls' schools like Maharani Kashiswari Girl's H.E. School and Berhampore Girl's Mahakali Pathshala represents a slow but steady change to the idea of inclusive education, which has been driven by both the local community and the colonial administration.

These observations allow us to take note of the winding path that is the educational history of Murshidabad. For more than 100 years, British authorities had been pushing English education as their prime course of action, a strategy that was often welcomed and endorsed by some of the district's prominent families. Their patronage paved the way for an educational system that mainly catered to privileged boys while others, girls in particular, found themselves on the margins. The fight for recognition was uphill for the girls' schools, with some spending years before officially being recognized. This was no mere formality. It was a first hint at a deep-seated reluctance in society to consider girls worthy of the same educational facilities. Yet, the change approached in a low-key fashion. The gradient of older traditions, stubborn as they were, was beginning for new thoughts and fledgling hopes of being more inclusive. The Swadeshi movement gave rise to new musical compounds between local schools and the University of Calcutta. And it was in that tumultuous decade of the 1940s, with war, political unrest shaking the country, that the schools in the district continued on the path of expansion and of forging ahead with their relationship with the university. This relentless pursuit for affiliation was calling into being something bigger: a risin... Actually, the University of Calcutta was the oldest college-affiliating university and, holding that status for over a century and a half, kept Murshidabad academic institutions under a formalized colonial system of education that greatly contributed to the intellectual heritage of the district.

This study attempts to define the establishment and affiliation patterns of high schools in Murshidabad district during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, based on information drawn from the Directory of High Schools. Set up in chronological and geographical manner, the analysis spells out some institutional growth trends that adequately interface with the University of Calcutta. The pioneer stage began with the setting up of Krishnanath Collegiate School in 1853 and the aforementioned school being immediately granted affiliation; its existence was exactly in keeping with the colonial approach of propagating Western education in towns endowed with elite patronage.

In contrast, institutions founded away from the main arteries of trade and communication saw big time delays in achieving recognition. The Khagra Boys' H.E. School (1868) and MahakaliPathshala (1901) are excellent examples. These delays indicate the disparity and, also, slower development of female education. By the turn of the 20th century, an easy affiliation was granted to Manindra Chandra Vidyapith (1914) and Gorabazar Iswarchandra Institute (1916), representing better infrastructure and efficient regulations under nationalist educational reforms. The Pan-Indian nationalist educational reform initiatives in the late colonial period continued funding for formal accreditation for schools such as Berhampore J.N. Academy (1939) and Jhawbona D.N. Institute (1936), established amid political disturbances.

On an entirely geographical analysis basis and disaggregated by subdivision and station, a most layered pattern emerges: very old schools in semi-urban areas enjoyed rapid affiliations for the likes of Bhagirathpur H.E. School (1896) and Domkal H.E. School (1900), whereas many rural schools had to wait for decades before any recognition was given for the likes of Panchgram H.E. School (1916) and Alugram Union U.M. Vidyalaya (1909). Several schools, even worth mentioning, such as Kandi Raj H.E. School (1859) and Beldanga Gobinda Sundari School (1890), do not have proper records of affiliation, hinting at possible gaps in archival records or the schools functioning in some informal academic capacity.

The results throw light on several classical lines of patterning, which include: the colonial state's selective promoting of English education, elite-local collaboration, late formalization of girls' schools, and the accelerated institutional integration after the Swadeshi movement. By the 1940s, despite all the disturbances wrought by the war and nationalist movements, schools in different parts of Murshidabad kept spreading and aligning themselves with the University of Calcutta, as indeed there was a popular urge for modern education and involvement in practical civic life[8].

According to the Commissioner's Report for 1870-71, there were a total of 234 schools of various types in the district, with an average attendance of 5,626 boys and girls. The Inspector's report highlighted 22 aided English schools and 42 aided native schools, in addition to 52 Pathshalas. Notably, there were also several successful girls' schools in Murshidabad[9]. Meanwhile, the British government decided to establish schools in Murshidabad district of various types, which include Middle Class English Schools, Middle Class Vernacular Schools,

Lower Class Vernacular Schools, Normal Schools, Aided Girls' Schools, and all other known categories of schools beside those created or established by individuals, missionaries, and English speaking native administrators.

## Minor Scholarship Examination

There was an increase in the number of successful candidates in the Minor Scholarship Examination from the middle-class English schools from 24 in 1869–70 to 30 in 1870–71. In 1869–70, 24 middle-class English schools had at least one successful candidate passing from 25 schools, and in 1870–71, all 30 middle-class English schools had successful candidates. This reflects not just the numerical increase of 6 students over a 2-year period, but there appears to be greater access and greater incidence of success, which would have implied improved educational performance of the overall cohort of middle-class English schools.

## Vernacular Scholarship Examination

The number of candidates who succeeded in the Vernacular Scholarship Examination showed a decline between 1869–70 and 1870–71. In 1869–70, 47 students from 44 middle-class vernacular (language) schools passed the examination. In 1870–71, only 37 students from 43 schools passed. Altogether, that is a decline of 10 successful candidates over the two years. This decline could indicate challenges faced around changing examination standards, instruction quality, student preparedness, or institutional support for vernacular schools in these years[6].

There was a remarkable increase in education provision in Murshidabad district between 1900–01 and 1910–11. Educational institutions (referred to as 'schools' in census documents) rose from 585 to 911, while students increased from 22,430 to 119,513, a jump of more than fivefold in just ten years. This growth indicates a renewed focus of administration upon expanding basic education for Indian citizens in the early decades of the twentieth century[10].

## Literacy Statistics

The following discussion presents literacy statistics by community and age in Murshidabad district for the year 1941, a period marked by the late colonial administration in British India. According to the available demographic data, the total population across all communities within the district was 877,941, comprising 446,251 males and 431,690 females in the 0–21 age group. Within this cohort, the number of educated individuals totalled 60,897, of whom 44,394 were male and 16,503 were female. This data shows a clear gender difference in the access to education, with educated men outnumbering educated women by nearly a factor of three. In relative terms, 9.95% of males in the 0–21 age group were educated, while only 3.82% of females were educated.

Thus, the total education rate in this age group was approximately 6.93%. These numbers illustrate the extreme gender issues regarding educational access present in Murshidabad in the colonial period, showing that males and females still struggled to access education, albeit women and marginalized categories more than men. In addition to the younger population, literacy statistics for individuals aged 21 years and above in Murshidabad district during the 1941 colonial census offer further insight into educational disparities. The total population in this age group was 762,589, consisting of 378,232 males and 384,357 females. The total number of educated individuals was 96,846, including 82,338 males and 14,508 females. It indicates that, in the age bracket, among males, 21.77% were literate, compared to only 3.77% for females.

Thus, overall, the literacy rate for the adult population was about 12.70%. When we compare this literacy rate to the literacy rate of the 0-21 age group, we find that there is a small, but significant improvement in female literacy from the older cohort (3.77% from adults vs. 3.82% from younger population). Male literacy rates still were significantly higher in both age cohorts. The results also pointed to the mostly limited exposure to educational reform surrounding colonialism, but equally relevant is the continued systemic constraints arranged by colonial gender norms and customs that curtailed educational access for women. These patterns capture a historical snapshot of the broader colonial educational policy context that prioritized male education and the urban elite while (Murshidabad) rural communities and women had lacked configurably equal access to regularized formal education.

Age Group: 0—21 Years: There were a total of 344,992 Hindus aged 0 to 21 years in Murshidabad, including 174,248 males and 170,744 females. Of those, there were 39,015 educated people, with an overall literacy rate of 11.31 percent. When broken down by sex, the guaranteed further divided into 26,654 males and 12,361 females literate rates for males and in this age group the respective rates were 15.29 7.24 percent. The data show an apparent level of gender inequality, with male literacy being more than double female literacy. However, the comparatively higher rates of female literacy in younger cohorts compared to older cohorts indicates the progressive diffusion of formal education amongst Hindu girls, which of course remains at a modest rate.

Age Group: 21 Years Old and Above: For the 21-year-old and above cohort there was a total Hindu population of 339,995 with 171,925 males and 168,070 females. Of these, there were 64,398 educated people, including 52,521 males and 11,877 females. This represents an overall rate of 18.97 percent literacy, including 30.56 percent literacy for males and only 7.06 percent for females. In the context of this age cohort, we are more aware of the gender gap in literacy as being much greater than that in the 0—21 groups, and repeat also of the events of institutionalized and socio-cultural restrictions faced

historically especially by females. Female literacy among Hindus rose slightly from 7.06% in the 21+ group to 7.24% in the 0–21 group, and male literacy, though still considerably higher, dropped from 30.56% to 15.29%, suggesting both an increasing enrollment of girls in schools and perhaps the inclusion of broader segments of boys from rural or less privileged backgrounds who had yet to access formal education.

Overall, the data illustrates that while Hindu males in Murshidabad district had relatively better access to education under colonial rule, Hindu females—though lagging—had begun to show slow but meaningful signs of educational advancement by 1941. The 1941 census data of Murshidabad district offers valuable insight into the educational condition of the Muslim community, analysed here in terms of age and gender distribution.

Age Group: 0–21 Years: In this age bracket, the total Muslim population was 517,820, comprising 264,859 males and 252,961 females. Of this total population, only 21,323 were literate, providing a dismally low literacy rate of 4.12%. When broken down by gender, 17,341 males were educated and 3,982 females were literate. The rate of male literacy is 6.55%, while the rate of female literacy is only 1.57%. The data illustrates that not only is the Muslim population demonstrating very low educational attainment for both genders, there is also a fairly significant gender imbalance with the observed educational attainment. The relative lack of educational attainment among Muslims, especially as compared to Hindus in this age range, is alarming.

Age Group: 21 Years and Above: In this age group, the total Muslim population is 409,927, including 199,755 males and 210,172 females. The Muslim population is composed of 31,797 literate individuals, or a literacy rate of 7.76%. When disaggregating the male and female populations, there were 29,364 males educated and 2,433 females literate observed in this group. The male literacy rate is 14.7% and the female Muslim literacy remains shockingly low at a paltry 1.16%. The gross imbalance of gendered educational access among Muslims in colonial Murshidabad was apparent in the data, especially in relation to female education, which is virtually non-existent in the older age groups.

Comparative Observations: In comparing the two age groups, there is a general indication of a small advancement in the female literacy of Muslims - from 1.16% in the 21+ range to 1.57% in the 0–21 age group. While this does indicate some improvement, there is clearly an immense gap between the two age groups based on gender and overall educational outcomes.Moreover, male literacy also declined from 14.7% in the older cohort to 6.55% in the younger cohort, indicating that younger males from economically or socially backward circumstances may have been rendered less likely to be in school. Overall, the evidence suggests educational marginalisation, particularly of Muslim females, in the colonial setting. Prior literature suggested socio-economic backwardness, conservative social norms, and lack of institutional access contributed to this continuity. The 1941 census data notes, however, a small but important Christian population in Murshidabad district. Although they were numerically insignificant, the Christian community had an inconceivably higher literacy among both Hindus and Muslims and numerically in females.

Age Group: 0–21 years. In the 0–21 age group, there are moderate numbers of Christians: 234 total with 125 males and 109 females. Among those Christians, 87 were literate--31 males and 56 females. Therefore, the samples produce an impressive overall literacy rate of 37.18% (24.8% male and 51.37% female). The fact that there were more female literates than male literates in this age group is remarkable and exceedingly unusual in this younger colonial context. This may speak to some valuation of female education in Christian households or institutions, perhaps facilitated by the missionary-run schools that emphasized on female literacy/education.

Population: Age Group 21 Years and Above: The total population of adults aged 21 years and above was 198; 104 males and 94 females. Out of this population, 158 persons were literate, including 87 males and 71 females. The overall literacy rate was 79.8% with male literacy at 83.65% and female literacy at 75.53%. Such high rates of literacy among Christian adults (men and women) is unusual for rural Bengal in the 1940s. Not only are the figures testament to the long-standing impact of missionary education in the region, but they also exemplify the community's socio-religious tradition of formal education.

Comparative Observations: The small Christian community has the highest literacy rates across all groups documented in Murshidabad in 1941. Notably: Female literacy exceeds male literacy rates in the 0–21 year age group. Adult literacy is exceptionally high for both genders compared to Hindus and Muslims. The above patterns indicate that the Christian sector had effectively institutionalized education more regularly across the gender divide, and the Christian example stands in stark contrast to the gender inequality found in the larger Hindu and Muslim populations of the district. The 1941 census data of Murshidabad district indicates a relatively small tribal population which, as in much of colonial India, was also characterized by low levels of literacy and stark gender differentials.

Age Group: 0–21 Years: The tribal population in the age group 0–21 years was 14,253 comprised of 6,666 males and 7,587 females. Of these totals, only 213 were noted to be literate with 209 males and 4 females. The literacy rate overall was 1.49%, with: Male literacy 3.13% and Female literacy 0.05%. Consequently, with not even one literate female (4 out of 7,587) the pre-eminent educational disadvantage facing tribal women in the early 20th century (1930s-40s) is further demonstrated.

Age Group: 21 Years and Above: The total tribal population in the adult age group (21+) was 11,885 which comprised of 6,155 males and 5,730 females. Of these totals, only 123 were literate with 116 males and 7 females. The literacy rates overall were 1.03%, with: Male literacy 1.88% and Female literacy 0.12%. Once again, the figures reveal extremely limited educational access, especially for tribal women, which exposes the structural impediments they faced - for example, economic marginalization, social neglect, limited access to educational institutions, and colonial administrative indifference.

Comparative and Structural Comparisons: In comparison to Hindus, Muslims, and Christians populations in the district, the literacy levels of the tribal population were also the lowest in relation to those in both age groups: 0–21 and 21+ years. The "Other" population category in the 1941 census consists of small religious or social groups who did not fall into the primary categories of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Tribal. Although this group is small in terms of total people, it shows an unusual pattern of literacy achievements, compared to the remainder of the population. Age group 0-21 years, the total population of other with 0-21 years was 642 total, 359 male and 289 female. Of these, 259 had attained literacy; 159 males and 100 females, giving a very high literacy rate of 40.34%, separated by Male literacy = 45.04%, Female literacy = 34.60%. This approximately fourfold literacy level for the age group is significantly higher than the district average, and many tribes and even most major communities. The relative gender parity in educational achievement is particularly significant in the context of colonial rural Bengal in the 1940's.

Age group 21 Years and Over: In 21+ years welfare population, the total was 584 total, comprising 293 male and 291 female. There were 370 total literate: 250 male and 120 female. This indicated an overall literacy rate of 63.36%; separated by Male literacy = 85.32%; Female literacy = 41.24%. Again, a high adult literacy rate, male especially, suggests a community with either strong internal educational aspirations, or access. Although there was a gender gap, it was less significant compared to that of the Hindu, Muslim, or Tribal populations in Murshidabad. The size of the population was relatively small, which might show for the more prioritised access to education, potentially via private, religious institutions, or institutions of education more broadly. The "other" communities in Murshidabad were numerically marginal but exhibited a level of educational progress that was much larger than the district as a whole.

This counters aggregate colonial assessments of blindness to lumping the hideously low rates of literacy in rural Bengal to its poorest, and suggests micro-level social factors regarding function and access to missionary schooling or institutional schooling, or local reform movements must have playeda significant role in how education played out in such larger sections of otherwise marginalised communities[11].

## Higher Education in Murshidabad

Initial Stages: Old gazetteers reference a "British" college in Baharampur as early as 1826, but it cannot be unambiguously referred to a present institution. W. L. Melville, at the time, the Agent to the Governor-General in Murshidabad proposed a college and later a school which would be consistent with the government policies[4].

Early Admission Policy: Students belonging to the Nizamut's family were given priority; although since they showed no interest, it necessitated the opening of admissions to others, six students in the college and forty in the school.

Governmental Support: The colonial government sanctioned the initiative and tasked Melville to monitor the Academies progress and to report suggestions for its development.

Governmental Control (1842): On April 25, 1842, the Bengal Government took the decision to bring the Nizamut College under the Government of India, under the Educational Branch of the General Department.
Implementation of New Rules (1843): A revised code of management rules, prepared in consultation with the governing body of the college, came into force on January 1, 1843 [6].

Targeted Beneficiaries: The college was dedicated in part to educate members of the Nizam's family, who were both allowed and encouraged to use the college.

Establishment of Government College (1853): Higher education formally began in 1853 when the government college was founded in Baharampur in old military barracks.

New college building (1863 - 1869): A permanent building was established, the foundation stone was laid by Sir Cecil Beadon in 1863, and completed in 1869, financed partly by public contribution, in total only about half of the total cost.

Academic Development: A law department was established in 1864, and in 1869, it was a first-grade college for Arts. In 1872, it was degraded to second grade, and the law department was closed in 1875.

Study shift to local sponsorship (1885): The Government Navigator College managed the college before 1885. The Government declined in managing the college in 1885, and Maharani Swarnamayi Cossimbazar was responsible for finances. A Board of Trustees assumed management in 1887.

Revival and Expansion: The College regained first-grade status in 1888, and the law department was established again. When the Maharani died in 1897, her nephew Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandi became principal patron.

Board of Management (1905): In 1905, a formal Board of Management was established consisting of the Maharaja, District Judge, Magistrate, Inspector of Schools.

College Renaming: Previously Baharampur College, it was renamed after Raja Krishnanath, husband of Maharani Swarnamayi.

Women's Education (1945-46): The women's college was established in Baharampur. It later emerged as one of West Bengal's premier women's colleges with students from several districts. These events mark the gradual institutionalization and localization of higher education in Murshidabad in both the colonial and post-colonial eras[4].

The literary conference, called by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, took place on May 3rd, 1875 in Baharampur was a very significant cultural occasion for colonial Bengal. The conference was organized with a prospective publication date for Bangadarsan. Considered one of the best gatherings of contemporary intellectuals, administrators and writers, the meeting had a diverse array of people which emphasizes the literary enthusiasm of the time and indicates the intellectual setting and educational growth of the Murshidabad district during this time. The presence of such significant figures indicates that Murshidabad district held a valuable position in Bengal's cultural educational period in the 19th century[12].

## Comparative analysis of literacy in Murshidabad district as per Adams Report (1835-38) and 1941 Census

The pathway of educational growth in Murshidabad district during the early colonial period and before independence demonstrates the slowly growing institutionalization of literacy and formal schooling based on social and religious relations and colonial educational policy.

Literacy and Educated Population by Community: In William Adams' educational survey of Murshidabad district for 1835–38, literacy was nearly exclusively restricted to adult males who practiced standard hiking tasks. For the literate persons who were recorded and who employed as teachers, Hindus outnumbered Muslims overwhelmingly (24 versus 9), and this finding was similar among the literate persons who engaged as scholars, but had neither schools nor exercised any form of teaching, (58 Hindus versus 17 Muslims). Convenience lifted the literacy barrier for a substantial number (60 adult persons (42 Hindus, 15 Muslims)), whom need a formal course of study, but chose to teaching, illustrating local understandings of knowledge transmission had not ceased to exist as means of transmission[4]. The 1941 Census, on the other hand, provides a clearer and statistically-based understanding of literacy across communities. Overall literacy in Murshidabad is about 12.4%, and while literacy among Hindus (18-19%) was nearly three times greater than for Muslims (6-7%), this stark gap indicates persistent gaps in opportunities for education and socio-economic mobility. Moreover, the data show that female literacy remained shockingly low, with only 2% of Hindu women and around 0.3-0.5% of Muslim women literate, depicting ongoing gender disparities despite a century's worth of education reforms[11].

Education and Professional Participation: The Adams Report suggests that education in Murshidabad in the early 19th Century was largely informal, vocational, and fragmented. Literacy was typically a notion associated with utilitarian skills such as record-keeping, cross-cultural communication in multiple languages, and religious instruction. Most teachers were largely untrained and belong to indigenous pedagogic traditions that were outside formal institutionalized settings suggesting remnants of pre-modern education[4]. But by 1941 Census Report, Murshidabad evidenced a clear institutionalization of schooling, organized into primary, middle, and senior divisions, with most institutions the result of government policy. Education was more and more linked to bureaucratic employment, pathways for social mobility, and forms of nationalist consciousness, reflecting that modern education became entangled with the colonial state.The professionalization of education also mirrored the changing expectations and needs of the educated classes in both Hindu and Muslim communities.

Women's education: One of the most glaring contrasts between the two periods was the status of girl/women's education[11]. According to the Adams Report, there was a near-universal absence of girls'/women's literacy with only seven literate women being documented at all—2 Hindu, 3 Muslim, and 2 Christians. Such data marked and indicative of a politically entrenched patriarchal ideology that relegated girls and women to the domestic sphere leaving little room for their education[4]. By the time of the 1941 Census, there was arguably slight progress across India, but these gains were fairly fragmented. There are many examples of Hindu women in urban settings whose educational efforts were laterally linked to missions' schools or reformists' movements. However, Muslim women were largely left behind or simply were experiencing a very slow process of amelioration as men treaded socially conservative positions and institutional limited reach. These gendered aspects also highlight intersections of religion, patriarchy, and colonial education policy[11].

The analysis of the 1835-38 Adams Report and the 1941 Census highlights both consistency and change in the evolution of the education sector of Murshidabad district. Overall, while there was considerable improvement in literacy levels in Murshidabad and access to formal education in the century under review, ongoing community based inequalities, in particular gender inequalities, persisted as complex products of local agents, colonial governance and socio-cultural impediments. The movement towards greater institutionalization of education may be interpreted as a transition from informal learning or non-

institutional learning to a present institutionalized education sector that served the colonial interest, whilst also emerging as a site of nationalist aspirations. The analysis of the education situation in Murshidabad using comparative analysis of Adams early colonial data and the 1941 Census suggests that educational access in Murshidabad increased, albeit as an uneven process. The increase in literacy levels and access to a formalized education system was mainly from Hindu males, whilst Muslim communities, and women in particular, were affected at a much slower rate. These differences were less about individual agency and more about unequal colonial education policies that privileged some social groups over others, while perpetuating patterns of inequality. This long-range analysis of educational development under colonial rule in Murshidabad district has demonstrated both successes and failures from an educational perspective[11].

## Conclusion

The educational development in Murshidabad district during the British colonial period (1787–1947) was determined by a complex set of factors including colonial educational policies and educational aspirations of the indigenous communities, and local socio-religious conditions. Education in Murshidabad district originally developed within Islamic and Sanskritic institutions but gradually transformed into the colonial educational landscape that included English education through government schools and missionary initiatives. The establishment of high schools running upto secondary level and their subsequent affiliation with the University of Calcutta represented a significant point in educational change, which further embedded the educational institutions in Murshidabad into the broader colonial educational landscape. However, educational inequalities stemming from socio-economic factors benefited Hindu communities primarily upper caste Hindus who received more benefits from educational development while marginalising the Muslim population. The education of females received limited attention until the later colonial period so there would have been educational inequality persisting as a result of this also.

Consequently, while the colonial state pursued educational ends that were utilitarian, and frequently limited, it was explicitly through the investment and participation of local elites and local reformers, and community leaders over an extended period of time that the educational polices and opportunities would be determined in Murshidabad District. By 1947, Murshidabad district had developed a fragmented, and uneven yet diverse education infrastructure that can be further built on if we intended to reform education in the post-independence period. The socio-political nuances of this history is a major determinant of how young indigenous people, across gender, age or identity, will interact with, and benefit from the educational opportunities and experiences in colonial Murshidabad.

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