

Colonial Experiments with Sanskrit Knowledge Traditions: A Case Study of Calcutta Sanskrit College

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The beginning of the Calcutta Sanskrit College can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century. In the course of time, it was transformed into an institution of eminence in the field of Sanskrit learning, manifested in the transformation of college into the Sanskrit College and University by the Government of West Bengal vide the Legislative Act XXXIII of 2015 and its functioning from 15 June 2016. This paper is an attempt to look at developments related to Sanskrit education in the colonial period and also highlight the utility of this education for indigenous stakeholders and the British administrators, and therefore, it is necessary to go into the details of its history. However, some of the present-day problems of Sanskrit education have their roots deep in the past, and cannot be properly understood without reference to the historical forces which brought them into existence. As, for instance, there is the unique phenomenon of the independent existence of an indigenous system of Sanskrit education existing along with Sanskrit teaching in the modern schools, colleges and universities. This has no parallel in Western countries where classical education is an integral part of the university education and, has no separate existence outside the universities. The available records are very sketchy regarding the character and extent of Sanskrit education as it existed at the time of the advent of the British, which spearheaded English education.

The college started to function from a rented house at locality called Bow bazar in the heart of Calcutta. The foundation stone of the new abode was laid on the 25 February 1824 and the college occupied the new building on the 1 May 1826.¹ The *Report on the Colleges and Schools for Native Education, under the Superintendence of the General Committee of Public Instruction in Bengal*, December 1831 sheds light on its foundation and initial funding. Some important parts of the Report

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¹ Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata Sanskrita Kaleger Itihas*, Part I, 1824-1858, (Calcutta, 1948), pp. 4-5; Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, Modern Book Agency Private Ltd., Calcutta, 1990, p. 150.

are:²

This institution was first planned in 1821, in lieu of colleges at *Nuddea* and *Tirhut*, it had been in the contemplation of government, in the year 1811, to endow at an annual charge of 25,618 rupees per annum. This sum, or 25,000 rupees a year, was accordingly appropriated to the maintenance of the Sanskrit College of Calcutta and a further sum of 5,000 rupees was subsequently added to the appropriation, from the General Education Fund.

The Course of instruction pursued at the Sanskrit College is divided into two branches. The first is intended to give a command of the language – the second, of such branches of Hindu Science as may be an object to the student, especially law. To the Medical Class also is attached a Lecturer on anatomy and medicine, as taught in Europe, and there are also an English Teacher and assistant for instruction in English.

In 1811, the government had promised to establish colleges for the advancement of Hindu literature in Nadia and Tirhut. However, the scheme failed, and the government decided to redeem its promise by the opening of a Hindu Sanskrit College at Calcutta, modelled after the one at Banaras.³ On 13 April 1822, the was notified:

‘With the kind support and financial aid of the Honourable Company, a Sanskrit College, surpassing any such place known before, will be opened in Calcutta, with the object of studying and teaching the grammatical and other *Shastras*. Only Brahmin boys of the age of 12 and over will be eligible for admission. The course of students included in addition to the

²Report on the Colleges and Schools for Native Education, under the Superintendence of the General Committee of Public Instruction in Bengal, December 1831, National Archives of India, (hereafter NAI), Home, Public, December, 1831, no. 20.

³“Colleges be established at Nuddea and at a Bhour near Bhowara in the district of Tirhut”. Lord Minto’s Minute on Sanskrit College in Tirhut and Nuddea, Fort William, 6th March 1811, J. Long (ed.), *Selections from Unpublished Records of Government*, Mahadevaprasad Saha, Appendix D, Calcutta, 1973, p. 734; Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 150.

various grammatical systems, instruction on Smriti, Alankar, Jyotish, Puranas, Sankhya, Vedanta, etc.'.⁴

On 1 January 1824 (in some sources it is mentioned that the foundation stone of the college was laid down on February 25, 1824⁵), the Calcutta Sanskrit College was established during the administration of William Pitt Amherst. The majority members of General Committee of Public Instruction⁶ favoured Oriental studies, and the logical outcome was the proposal for the establishment of Sanskrit College at Calcutta. The proposal of opening a Sanskrit College at Calcutta encountered a stiff opposition from enlightened Indians like Raja Rammohan Roy who expressed his reservations in a letter to Lord Amherst in 1823,

‘When this seminary of learning was proposed, we understood that the Government in England had ordered a considerable sum of money to be annually devoted to the instruction of its Indian subjects. We were filled with sanguine hopes that this sum would be laid out in employing European gentlemen of talent and education to instruct the natives of India in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, and other useful sciences. We find that the Government is establishing a Sanskrit school under Hindu *Pandits* to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary (similar in character to those which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon) can be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the possessors or to society. The Sanskrit language, so difficult that almost a lifetime is necessary for its acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check to the diffusion of knowledge, and the learning concealed under this almost impervious veil, is far from

⁴*SambadSakaler Katha*, A Selection of Extracts from Newspapers Published in Calcutta between 1818 and 1840, vol. I, (Calcutta, 1949), p. 20.

⁵See *Calcutta Sanskrit College 150th Anniversary Volume (1824-1974)*, Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series No. CXIX, (Calcutta, 1974).

⁶General Committee of Public Instruction was established on 17 July 1823 by a resolution adopted by the Governor General in Council, to look after the administration of educational activities. The Committee had ten members like H T Prinsep, T B Macaulay, and H H Wilson.

sufficient to reward the labour of acquiring it'.⁷

This letter did not succeed; but it does state clearly the points at issue between the two parties.⁸ Instead, Rammohan Roy suggested that Government should promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing Mathematics, natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy with other useful sciences by employing men of talents and learning educated in Europe and provide a college furnished with necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.

The immediate objective of the college was the cultivation of Hindu literature.⁹ It was ultimately deemed expedient to set up the institution in Calcutta. No change was however made in its character.¹⁰ The original intention of this college was to fulfil two objectives ¹¹: firstly, to start an institution through which Sanskrit learning would be preserved in its entirety, and secondly, to educate persons, qualified for certain appointments under the Government, such as in *Moonsiffs*, Principal Sadar *Ameens*, , for which a knowledge of the Hindu law, as embodied in the Sanskrit language, was deemed necessary. To serve this purpose, an English teacher and an English assistant

⁷J. C. Ghose (ed.), *The English Works of Raja Ram Mohan Ray*, vol. II, (Calcutta, 1901), p. 324.

⁸T. W. Clark , 'The Language of Calcutta, 1760-1840', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, vol. 18, no. 3, In Honour of J. R. Firth, 1956, pp. 466-67.

⁹H. Sharp, *Selection from Educational Records, (1781-1839)*, Part I, (Calcutta, 1920), p. 79.

¹⁰IOR, *Letter of Dr. H. H. Wilson from Oxford*, 5th December 1835, *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia*, vol. XIX, New Series, January-April 1836, p. 6.

¹¹ Charles Edward Trevelyan in his article 'Education of the People of India', (London, 1838), have tried to explain the exact reason for the establishment of Calcutta Sanskrit college. According to Trevelyan:

"The Sanskrit language, so difficult that almost a lifetime is necessary for its acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check on the diffusion of knowledge; and the learning concealed under this almost impervious veil is far from sufficient to reward the labour of acquiring it. But if it were thought necessary to perpetuate this language for the sake of the portion of valuable information it contains, this might be much more easily accomplished by other means than the establishment of a new Sanskrit college; for there have been always and are now numerous professors of Sanskrit in the different parts of the country engaged in teaching this language as well as other branches of literature which are to be object of the new seminary. Therefore, their more diligent cultivation, if desirable, would be effectually promoted by holding out premiums and granting certain allowances to their most eminent professors, who have already undertaken on their own account to teach them, and would by such rewards be stimulated to still grater exertions".

were appointed for the purpose of educating the Indian masses based on the fundamentals of European system. Such were the instructions given to the Committee of Management in a resolution of 21st August 1821. The passage read as follows:¹²

The Committee will bear in mind that the immediate object of the institution is the cultivation of Hindu literature. Yet it is in the judgment of His Lordship in Council, a purpose of much deeper interest to seek every practicable means of affecting the gradual diffusion of European knowledge. It seems, indeed, no unreasonable anticipation to hope that if the higher and the educated classes among the Hindus shall, through the medium of their sacred language, be imbued with a taste for the European Literature and Science, general acquaintance with these and with the language whence they are drawn, will be as surely and as extensively communicated as by any attempt at direct instruction by other and humbler seminaries.

The Calcutta Sanskrit College, since its foundation, had been conceived as an official institution for imparting indigenous Hindu learning. It had shown rigid adherence to tradition in its course of studies, its list of holidays and in its proud exclusion of all castes except the Brahmins and the Vaidyas. Provisions were made for translating works on natural Philosophy, Geography and History into Bengali. As to the method followed in teaching, for instance, in Anatomy, lectures were delivered on European medical principles accompanied by dissection of the softer parts of animals. In 1835, with the foundation of the Calcutta Medical College, this department was discontinued.¹³

The College had a staff of seven teachers on the day of opening, one each for Nyaya, Smriti, Alankar, and Kavya, and three for Vyakrana.¹⁴ The traditional nature of the instruction provided needs no comment; but it should be noted that no provision was made for the inclusion of English classes, though such had been the intention of the Government. English was introduced some four years later;

¹² Sharp, *Selections from Educational Records*, (Calcutta, 1920), p. 79.

¹³ http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Sanskrit_College,_Calcutta.

¹⁴ *SambadSekaler Katha*, vol. I, (Calcutta, 1949), pp. 25-28.

but it was not received with enthusiasm.¹⁵ The college buildings were intended to provide accommodation to the professors and students, besides lecture rooms, and an apartment for the reception of a valuable philosophical apparatus presented by the British Society to the Native Hindu College, but, and on the basis of an arrangement with the managers of that seminary, they were applied for both the institutions.¹⁶ During its initial years, the college was started with 14 Pandits, a European Secretary and 100 students. Babu Ramkamal Sen¹⁷ was appointed as the Secretary of the Sanskrit College at Calcutta, and he was invested with a visiting control of the institution, and a monthly sum of Rs. 100 was fixed as his salary. The General Committee considered his merit as an English and orientalist scholar, and his zeal to take forward the cause of education was one of the reasons for the consideration of his appointment.¹⁸ The classes that constituted the ordinary course of study pursued in the college were three classes of Grammar, one class of General Literature, one class of Rhetoric and Prosody, one class of Law and one of Logic. The following departments were a part of initial establishment:¹⁹

Three *Pandits* for Grammar

¹⁵T. W. Clark, 'The Language of Calcutta', 1760-1840', 1956, pp. 466-67.

¹⁶Charles Lushington, *The History, Design and Present State of the Religious, Benevolent and Charitable Institutions, founded by the British in Calcutta and its Vicinity*, (Calcutta, 1824), p. 126.

¹⁷ Ramkamal Sen (1783-1844) was one of the leading intellectuals of nineteenth century Bengal. He was active in quite a number of fields. He had deep connections with the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Hindu College, Calcutta, the Calcutta Sanskrit College, the Medical College, the Calcutta School Book society, the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India and so on. These made him eminent among the small band of enlightened Indians in the town of Calcutta. He was a "chartered member of Dharma Sabha". He was one of the Directors of the Hindu College who voted that it was "necessary" to dismiss controversial Derozio from that institution. He was one of the founders of the Landholders Society. Ramkamal Sen was associated with the Sanskrit College since its inception as its Accountant on a monthly pay of Rs. 40 per month. Subsequently he became the Acting Secretary to the college in the vacant place of Captain a. Troyer, who reigned on the 26th February 1835. Ramkamal Sen was appointed Secretary of the college on 11th June 1835 on a pay of Rs. 100 per month. He resigned his office on the 1st January 1839. Before he became the Secretary of the college Ramkamal had a significant role in the establishment of the hospital attached to the medical department of the institution. Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, (Calcutta, 1990), pp. i-ii.

¹⁸IOR, Bengal, General, IOR/F/4/1908/81576, May 1835-Sep 1835.

¹⁹IOR, IOR/F/4/2067/94920, (June 1840-Nov 1842).

One *Pandit* for *Sahitya* or Literature

One *Pandit* for *Alankar* or Rhetoric

One *Pandit* for Arithmetic and Algebra

One *Pandit* for *Nyaya*²⁰ or Logic

One *Pandit* for Law

One *Pandit* for Medicine

One *Pandit* for *Vedanta*²¹ or Theology

At the Calcutta Sanskrit College, the number of scholars in the foundational class was 81, out of which 5 students of the Anglo-Indian College came to study Sanskrit. The pupils were divided into two categories; the first received between Rs. 5 to Rs. 8 a month in their progress through the college, which required a period of 12 years of continuous study. The second consisted of free scholars who received no stipends during their course of study. The course of instruction pursued in the college was divided into two branches. The first was meant to ensure a command over the Sanskrit language, and the second included such branches of Hindu Sciences, as might have an object to the student to know, such as Legal studies. The Secretary held that the General Committee conducted the examinations once a year in the month of January and money prizes were distributed to those who performed well.²²

Students were not eligible to attend college until they reached the age of 12 years at least. They were supposed to remain in the lower classes, in which certain studies were prescribed for 6 years, after which (or even earlier if they qualified), they were at liberty to enter any other class or classes and remained at their wishes for a further term of 6 years, provided their diligence did not relax.

²⁰The *Pandit* A Monthly Journal of the Banaras Sanskrit College, Devoted to Sanskrit Literature, vol. I, no. 2, 1 July 1866, p. 22.

Nyaya is an attempt to account for the universe without the supposition of Deity at all. It keeps up for a long time a not very definite antithesis between Soul and Nature, and ends in a way which tasks all the ingenuity of its advocates to avoid the conclusion that the author of the system believed in the existence of neither the one nor the other.

²¹ Ibid., p. 22, *Vedanta* is an attempt to deduce a philosophical theory of the universe from the doctrines of the Vedas (precisely from Upanishads), its conclusion is, non-existence of anything besides God.

²² IOR, Bengal, Public, 24 August, 1831, draft 579/1830-31, IOR/E/4/733 pp. 341-69.

Provisions were made for attendance of pupils of the highest class on a course of lectures on natural and experimental philosophy, and this enabled them with the evince capability and desire of learning and merit to pursue that branch of study. A proficiency in the English language was an obvious requisite to enable the students to profit by that arrangement, and the knowledge of language was declared to be an indispensable qualification for admission to the highest class. The philosophy course was embraced with the following subjects: Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, Optics, Electricity, Astronomy, and Chemistry.²³

The many-sided importance of Sanskrit was also appreciated by a number of responsible Englishmen and other Europeans in India. Already the Dispatch of 1854 had emphasised that there were “in the Sanskrit language many excellent systems of ethics, with codes of laws and compendiums of duties”. And the Court of Directors had, therefore, decided that due encouragement should be given to the study of Sanskrit. In his report on the Sanskrit College, Calcutta, on 31 January 1835, A. Frazer pointed:

“The acquisition of Sanskrit is indispensable not only for the study of classical books composed in that language, but principally as the mother-language of a great number of Indian dialects... It is true and obvious that a true and radical reform of a nation in learning and morality (which is the object of a good Government) will begin and proceed with improvement of their own national language. In this respect the study of Sanskrit can be sufficiently encouraged”.²⁴

Curriculum: contents

Apart from the general subjects as discussed above a medical class was attached to the Sanskrit College in December 1826.²⁵ In 1827 John Tytler was appointed to lecture on Mathematics and Anatomy. The class started with only 7 students. Khudiram Bisharada was the Pandit of this class and he served the college upto April 1830. Madhusudan Gupta was appointed in his place in May 1830.

²³Charles Lushington, *The History, Design and Present State of the Religious, Benevolent and Charitable*, (Calcutta, 1824), pp. 127-28.

²⁴IOR, *Sanskrit Commission Report, 1956-57*, p. 18.

²⁵IOR, India, Public, *Letter from the Court of Directors*, 29 September 1830, no. 3.

The students belonging to the medical caste (Vaidya) of the Hindus had the choice instead of entering the class of Logic to attend the medical lectures in Sanskrit as well as the English lectures on medicine, and they did not study law.²⁶ A sum of Rs. 300 a month was also applied to the maintenance of a small Hospital for the sick, in connection with the Medical Class.²⁷ But the hospital did not last long. Troyer, Secretary to the college, reported to the General Committee on the 10th February 1834 that according to Tytler's²⁸ opinion a much greater success could be obtained if the students were aided in general by good books of science, English or translated into oriental languages and if in particular the acquirements of Anatomy, Surgery and Medicine were facilitated by human dissection and an opportunity of observing practice. The report spoke highly of Madhusudan Gupta by whom the Sanskrit instruction of the medical class was conducted.²⁹ Troyer wrote to Tytler on the 12 March 1834, desiring him to state his opinion whether it would be expedient to confine the medical instruction of the Sanskrit College to English lectures, and to adopt for class books solely English treatises upon Anatomy and Medicine discarding Sanskrit medical books altogether. Tytler wrote a

²⁶ Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata Sanskrita Kaleger Itihas*, Part I, 1824-1858, (Calcutta, 1948), pp. 35-36; Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 150.

²⁷ A hospital became necessary for the medical class and the authorities attached a little hospital to the Sanskrit College in 1832. J. Grant, the Superintendent, presented the first annual report for the year 1832 of the cases treated at the hospital to Major Troyer, the Secretary to the college on the 1st February 1833. He reported that the students of the medical class having attained a respectable knowledge of the elementary Anatomy and Physiology, the next point of importance was to give them some correct notions of European medical and surgical practices. Although the senior class had undergone a course of lectures in the practice of physic, it soon became obvious that mere dry details, without direct personal reference to the phenomena of disease at the bedside of the sick, could make but a very fleeting impression on the minds of the students. It was felt that a hospital of some kind was absolutely necessary for the proper instruction of the students. Accordingly, with the active assistance of Ramkamal Sen from whom J. Grant always derived the most valuable co-operation and who took a cordial interest in the welfare of the medical class, a hospital on the cheapest possible scale, was erected about the end of the year 1831 capable of accommodating thirty house patients. In his report for 1833, J. Grant stated that the number of house patients admitted during the year was 86 and the number of outward patients was 179.

Report of J. Grant to Major Troyer, Secretary, Sanskrit College, *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction*, NAI, Home, Misc., 1832, no. 471; Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 151.

²⁸ Tytler was the Superintendent of the Native Medical Institution and an able oriental. He once conducted a famous theological controversy with Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

²⁹ Troyer, Secretary to the Sanskrit College to General Committee of Public Instruction, *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction for the year 1833*, NAI, Home, Misc., no. 472; Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 152.

long letter on the 3rd April 1834 addressed to Troyer, the Secretary. This letter was highly interesting. He wrote that he was decidedly of the opinion that it would be inexpedient to abolish the Sanskrit medical class. Efforts should be directed to get translated and printed into English such a number of Sanskrit medical books as would enable the Government to judge fairly on their contents and to get translated into Sanskrit, complete system of European medicine and to take the most effectual means for enabling the Indians to comprehend and make use of it.³⁰ The Government abolished the Sanskrit medical class following the resolutions passed by the Governor General in Council in this respect on the 28th January 1835.³¹

Only Brahmins and Vaidya, that is the castes associated with the field of medicine, were admitted into the college. The pupils were expected to be able to read a little Sanskrit Grammar when admitted, and during the course of six years, they were allowed to progress through the Grammar, *Sahitya* and *Alankar* classes. After 5 years, the students were required to attend Arithmetic and Natural Philosophy classes on alternate days for two hours each. If an English class was available, the students were expected to enter it as soon as they were admitted into the college. A further period of 6 years was permitted to complete the course of instruction, during which they were free to attend the classes of their liking. Law was the most sought-after course, as most of the students preferred it.

In the early 1830s, a report by the General Committee of Public Instruction brought out the British Government's motives for laying out the educational schemes in such a way that, apart from focusing on the study of Hindu Sanskrit Literature and courses in the language of native Hindus, it also introduced, among young Indians, elementary knowledge of the English language, and other subjects such as medicine, which were to be taught along the lines of the European educational system. Scholarships were provided for the encouragement of education among native Indians. The courses taught in the Sanskrit College of Calcutta included courses like Sanskrit *Sahitya*, Arithmetic, and Logic, which were taught in the language of the natives (See Appendix C). However, the books for

³⁰ John Tytler's letter to Troyer, *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction for the year 1833*, NAI, Home, Misc., no. 472.

³¹ *Resolutions of the Governor General in Council*, no. 28 of 1835, 28th January 1835 quoted in IOR, *Friend of India*, 12th February 1835, p. 53; Pradyot Kumar Ray, *Dewan Ramcomul Sen and His Times*, (Calcutta, 1990), pp. 151-52.

subjects like Anatomy were in English, such as Hooper's Anatomy as well as Vade Mecum, which was indispensable for physicians and surgeons. Apart from the elementary English for learning how to read and spell, Universal History and Geography by Goldsmith was also part of the curriculum.

In traditional forms of knowledge, The Nyaya system of philosophy principally treats of logic and metaphysics, and occasionally touched on the subjects related to chemistry, optics, mechanics, etc. The same description applied more or less to the other systems except Mimansa and Patanjali(yoga), that treat the religious ceremonies and abstract contemplation of the deity respectively. The years of study in those classes were four years. The most important works which was part of the curriculum were, Bhashaparichechheda, by VishwanathaPanchanan, was an elementary treatise on all the department of Nyaya. SiddhantaMuktavali was a commentary on the Bhashaparichechheda by the author himself. Tattva Kaumudi by Vachaspati Mishra was a short but comprehensive treatise on the Sankhya system of philosophy. Khandana by Shriharsha had an object to refute all the then existing system on philosophy. The work of Manu was considered as the highest authority on the subjects in Hindu law and consisted of social, moral, political, religious and economical laws. It was believed as a manner an index of Hindu society during ancient times. Mitakshara by Vignaveshwara, was a commentary on Yajnavalkya's code. The second section treats of civil and criminal laws, the former included the law of inheritance. Mitakshara was acknowledged to be the highest authority in the North-Western Provinces. Vivada Chintamani by Vachaspati Mishra was a compilation of the civil and criminal laws. This work was the authority in the province of Bihar. Dayabhaga by Jimutavahana was a treatise on inheritance and was the authority in Bengal. Kavya Prakash was considered as a much more profound work than Sahitya Darpan and was acknowledged to be the highest authority on the subject.³²

The students of Sahitya and Alankar classes attended these classes and studied Lilavati and Vijaganita. Lilavati was a treatise on arithmetic and mensuration by Bhaskaracharya. Vijaganita was a treatise on algebra by the same author. Both of those works were very meagre. They were in a great measure without any method and did not contain all that was contained in similar English books.

³²IOR, *Report on Calcutta Sanskrit College*, 1851, pp. 8-12.

From a curious taste they had been rendered needlessly difficult. The rules and questions were all in verses. On account of that, the students took a great length of time as four years to study only those two books.³³ After Sahitya the students were supposed to attend Alankar or Rhetoric classes at least for two years. They were required to study Sahitya Darpan, Kavya Darpan, Kavya Prakash and Rasagangadhara as a part of their rhetoric curriculum. They also read these poetical works and besides these, for their exercise, they had translations and compositions. They also attended the mathematical classes. In the Sahitya class the students were supposed to read Raghu Vansha, Kumar Sambhava, Meghaduta, Shakuntala, Ratnavali, Uttara Charita, Mudrarakshasa etc. The duration of these classes was at least of two years. They also practiced translation from Bengali to Sanskrit and vice versa and attended the mathematical classes.³⁴

It was generally acknowledged that ‘this highly refused language’ had been fixed by the most accurate rules and was taught by the most ingenious methods, which might ‘with reason be censured for taxing the memory of the learner too severely’. They were not purposely calculated for very young disciples, for whom, the exercise of memory was a paramount requisite in all-future pursuits. The efficacy of the Hindu method of teaching Sanskrit grammar was evinced in the firmness and security, which the students, almost without exception, acquired in the knowledge and in the use of the mechanism of the language. It was perceived that ‘this almost general capacity of Hindu boys will astonish those, who amongst the European youth have witnessed the great difficulty and rare proficiency in mastering the much less obscure and complicated style of the Latin and Greek, and even of their own national poetry’. And therefore, no change in the method of teaching Sanskrit grammar in the Sanskrit college was recommended.

From grammar classes the students entered general literature (*Sahitya*) consisting mostly of poetical works, for which two years were allowed, and then rhetoric (*Alankar*) in which the theory of figurative language and literary composition was taught which further took another year. As among the

³³The chair of mathematics was first created in June 1826, down to 1835, the students of Sahitya and Alankar classes attended those class. In 1835 it was made a separate class, i.e. instead of Sahitya and Alankar class students attending those classes, and students of Alankar were promoted. IOR, *Report on Calcutta Sanskrit College*, 1851, p. 8.

³⁴IOR, *Report on Calcutta Sanskrit College*, 1851, pp. 4-9.

Hindus, the limits of poetry and rhetoric were not defined, the study of the two last classes were generally merged into one, and further, if the number of the students were not very great, one teacher was considered sufficient, and the period of time reduced from three to two years.

After the course of literature, the students were required to study mathematics according to the old Hindu method's which 'although very ingenious and more than adequate to the common exigencies of life, are less perfect than those derived amongst us from a much more improved condition of mathematical science than the Hindus ever attained'. As a part of this, Hutton's Mathematics, which had been translated into Sanskrit, was used as a textbook. A year was given to the mathematical pupils, who were at the same time obliged either to attend an English class or to apply Sanskrit logic (*Nyaya*).

Up till then, no treatise of the Western philosophy that had been translated into Sanskrit could be recommended as a textbook to the Hindu students in conjunction with their own philosophical works. The study of law (*smṛiti*), which commenced after the completion of the course of poetry, rhetoric, and mathematics, offered itself as the most important branch of Sanskrit learning, as much as it was connected with the manifold concerns of practical life. The students read a number of classical law books and qualified themselves to answer the various legal questions.

A period of six years was allowed to the youth who had passed through the classes of grammar, literature, rhetoric, and mathematics, to complete their studies of philosophy and law. It was recommended that the whole period of studies in the Sanskrit college which had hitherto been 12 years, might, through a proper distribution of time and matter, be reduced to eight, allowing five to grammar, literature, and mathematics and three to law and philosophy. The students belonging to the medical classes of the Hindus had the choice of attending the medical lectures of Sanskrit as well as of English, and they also had the option of not studying law, and attend the class of logic instead.

The study of the English language had hitherto been left optional to the pupils of the Sanskrit college, and the superintendent begged to express his conviction that it was expedient to leave it so. If the Sanskrit language was worth preserving, who would had better preserved it than those who were exclusively devoted to it. None, not even the Sanskrit students, nearly half of the 400 students in the two Sanskrit College of Calcutta and Banaras appeared too great from a population of some extent

contained in the Bengal Presidency. It was added that to render the acquisition of English imperative in the Sanskrit college would most likely induce a number of the non-paid students to leave it.

The 18th Annual Report of the Sanskrit College brought out by the General Committee of Public Instruction on 8 July 1840, was a detailed study of the vernacular educational institutions of India in the same period and went into the progress made by different classes during the year. The report shows satisfaction in the rhetoric, theology, and mathematics classes. However, the desired results were not there in the grammar classes, which therefore required re-modelling. The Annual Report read as follows:³⁵

At the end of December 1838, there were 129 students on the rolls of the College, of whom 40 were stipendiary and 80 were non-stipendiary students. This shows that 5 stipendiary scholars have left and 12 non-stipendiary students have joined the institution since the last examination.

The students were divided into seven classes, excluding the Mathematics and Philosophy classes. These consisted of two Grammar classes, one for Literature, another for Rhetoric, Logic, and Civil Law. The students were arranged as follows:

1 st Grammar class	31 students
2 nd Grammar class	27 students
3 rd Poetry class	27 students
4 th Rhetoric	15 students
5 th Logic	6 students
6 th Theology	8 students
7 th Law Class	15 students
7 Classes	129 students

³⁵ NAI, Home, Public, 8th July, 1840, no. 26/26A/ 27, *18th Annual Report of Sanskrit College*, Calcutta, pp. 29-31.

Captain Marshall examined the Junior Classes:

The performance of the 1st Grammar class did not equal the expectations of the Examiner and we directed the Secretary to inform the Pundit of the class that he is expected to exert himself in order that the students under his tuition may afford more satisfaction in this important branch of their studies, at the end of the present year, and Captain Marshall was directed to report upon the state of this class with reference to the admonition now conveyed to the Pundit in his next annual Report.

The acquirements of the 2nd class were highly satisfactory and reflected much credit on the teacher, who was found peculiarly well qualified by his patience and industry for this particular Department. In consequence of the number of applicants for admission into the Grammar Classes, a third were authorized to be open.

Captain Marshall found the Poetical class defective in their Grammatical knowledge of the language which will be guarded against in future by not allowing the students to advance to higher studies until a firm foundation in Grammar be laid; at the same time that the perusal of some easy composition be allowed to the more advanced students of the Grammar classes in order to vary their dry task by giving general ideas to prepare them for higher studies.

The acquirements of the Rhetoric and Theological classes were found in a very creditable state, in Logic the acquirements were extensive, and bear testimony to the zeal erudition of their teacher. The pupils of the Mathematical class, though elementary in their acquirements evinced a very considerable improvement since last year. They answered some Arithmetical questions quickly and correctly.

Mr I.C.C. Sutherland undertook the examination of the Law class and found it more advanced than at last year's examination. They were tried by a scheme of eleven questions, and their answers were found respectable and two were considered fit to receive Diplomas. Two evinced proficiency, two were found middling and three deficient.

Besides the prize to the 1st Grammar Class, two prizes were given to each of the other classes besides a prize for the best prose and poetical essay and five prizes for superior penmanship. All these prizes consisted of money and the whole amounted to Rs. 1,330.

To render the attainments of the students more useful, a Bengali Teacher has been appointed, on a monthly salary of Rs. 80, to impart instruction in Arithmetic, Natural Philosophy, Geography and History. The lectures are given in the Bengali language according to European principles.

If the criterion for judging the Oriental seminaries were not modernization but improvement of the traditional learning, it is still not possible to speak of “success”. The annual reports of the Calcutta Sanskrit College in the early 1850’s, speaking of an “influx” of pupils, are intended to permit an inference of flourishing condition, but “the increase has taken place at the wrong end”. Rather than an infant school growing into a college, as had been hoped, a college declined into a school.³⁶ As for the Benares Sanskrit College, the GCPI remarked in its 1839-40 Report,

It is singular, but I believe it is perfectly true, that the College, since its first institution in 1792, has not produced one eminent Sanskrit scholar.³⁷

Nor was it ever likely to, for it was in the nature of the case that good Sanskrit scholars could not be produced in the Sanskrit seminaries because they refused to go beyond what could be learned from the pundits teaching at home. James R. Ballantyne, Principal of Benares Sanskrit from 1846 to 1860, was perhaps the first Orientalist to admit it:

To whatever extent the system laid down for the college differs from the system followed by

³⁶“For years past the noise in the Sanskrit department has at times been so great, more especially at such times when quiet was most needed, as to drown the voice of teacher and students, and to put a stop to all work, in the senior classes of the neighbouring Anglo-Indian College”, wrote J. Kerr, in, *A Review of Public Instruction*, vol. II, 1853, pp. 64-65.

³⁷ Benares administrators sympathetic to the institution, Nicholls, Muir, and Ballantyne, tended to agree. G. Nicholls, *Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Benares Patshalla or Sanskrit College*, (Allahabad, 1907), written in 1848, pp. 89, 101.

the teachers in the city, to that extent does the college appear repulsive in the eyes of the applicant for admission, whose repugnance is overcome by the hope of a scholarship.³⁸

As per the Dispatch of 19 July 1854, general education would have to focus on the cultivation of vernacular languages of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. At the same time, the Dispatch also referred to other branches of useful learning. It was advised that the lectures should be read, and special degrees given in them, and that this would greatly encourage the cultivation of the vernacular languages of India if professorships were to be founded for those languages, as also for Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian. Knowledge of the Sanskrit language, the ‘root of the vernaculars of the greater part of India’, was more especially necessary to those who were engaged in the works of composition in those languages. Arabic, through Persian, was one of the component parts of the Urdu language, which extended over a large part of India and was important for the improvement of the spoken languages of the country. These were some of the points to which attention was directed. It was also pointed out that ‘there would have been an ample field for their labours unconnected with any instruction in the tenets of the Hindu or Muslim religions’. Therefore, the British refused to sanction any such teaching, which directly opposed the principle of religious neutrality, to which they emphasized on always having adhered to.³⁹

By the end of nineteenth century, 19 students were enrolled in the Arts classes of the Sanskrit College, out of which Sanskrit was taught to a much higher standard than the University required, and another 25 students were studying for the title examinations and 5 for acquiring an MA degree in Sanskrit. The College under the charge of Mahamahopadhyaya Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna⁴⁰,

³⁸ G. Nicholls, *Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Benares Patshalla*, (Allahabad, 1907), p. 103, on p. 256 of this work there is a “picturesque account” of the pupil’s obstructionist tactics, once the English class had begun.

³⁹ NAI, Home, Public, 19th July, 1854, no. 49.

⁴⁰ Mahamahopadhyaya Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna (22 February 1836-12 April 1906) was one of the distinguished intellectuals of Sanskrit learning and eminent Bengali of the nineteenth century Calcutta. He was also the Principal of Sanskrit College, Calcutta for almost 19 years between 1876-1895. He succeeded Prasanna Kumar Sarbadhikary as the principal of the Sanskrit College. During his tenure as principal of the college, he took the initiative of introducing the Sanskrit Title Examination, for the conferment of titles on meritorious students of special department of Sanskrit learning. He started a secondary Anglo-Sanskrit school at his native

C.I.E., was maintained at a cost (including the Arts department) of Rs. 21,458, of which Rs. 1058 were collected through fees. The Sanskrit Title Examinations, held in 1885-86, were conducted by a board of examiners comprising partly of professors of the college and of learned pandits from other places in Bengal, and in this examination, 72 students passed in various branches of literature, law, and philosophy, and received titles corresponding to their achievements.⁴¹

The period of study in the Sanskrit College was 15 years. The students were expected to have a perfect knowledge of Sanskrit learning in so long a period. But no one was considered to have such knowledge who was not familiar with all the systems of philosophy prevalent during those times in India. It was assumed to be true that most part of the Hindu system of philosophy did not tally with the advance ideas of modern times, yet it was undeniable that to a good Sanskrit scholar their knowledge was absolutely required.⁴²

Caste Composition

The privilege of studying in the institution, that was limited to the reach of only Brahmins and *Vaidya* caste till July 1851, was extended to the Kayasthas during the same year, but this extension of privilege could not materialize in consequence of the over-crowded state of the grammar classes.⁴³ As principal of the college Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar brought these reforms in the institution. The doors of the college were opened to the Kayasthas in January 1851 and to all respectable Hindus in December 1854.⁴⁴

Notable Intellectuals and their association with Calcutta Sanskrit College

A galaxy of eminent orientalists and servants, amongst whom are Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the first Indian Principal of the college, E. B. Cowell, Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna, Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Hariprasad Sastri, MM. Pandir Satish Chandra

village of Narit, that exists till date as Narit Nyayaratna Institution. He was a good friend and colleague of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and played an important role in the Bengal Renaissance.

⁴¹ Alfred Croft, *Review of Education in India in 1886*, (Calcutta, 1888), p. 160.

⁴² IOR, *Report on Calcutta Sanskrit College*, 1851, p. 11.

⁴³ IOR, *Report on Calcutta Sanskrit College*, 1851, p. 3.

⁴⁴ See Brojendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata Sanskrita Kaleger Itihas*, (Calcutta, 1948).

Vidyabhusan, Surendranath Dasgupta, to name only a few, were associated as Principals or as teachers or as alumni with this great institution.⁴⁵ A survey of the achievements of the Professors and alumni of this college not only illustrate the richness of their contributions to Bengali literature and Sanskrit, but also dispels the popular criticism that the college was steeped in reactionary ideas. Ramchandra Tarkabagish, who compiled the first Bengali dictionary, forestalled Vidyasagar in his advocacy of widow marriage, and the first to practise it was Srishchandra Vidyaratna. The first Bengali journal Samachar-Darpan owed much to the literary labours of Pundit JayagopalTarkalankar. A Sanskrit poet of repute, Prankrishna Vidyasagar edited with success the Samachar Chandrika, founded by BhabanicharanBandyopadhyay. Luminaries in the field of Nyaya like JaynarayanTarkapanchanan, litterateurs like BeharilalChakroborti, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, TaranathTarkabachaspati, social reformers like Srinath Shastri and a galaxy of such names did the portals of this institution proud.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The Muslim and Hindu experiences of indigenous education differed from each other despite the fact that both their religions essentially had one basic requirement. It was an Islamic obligation of every Muslim to read the Quran, whereas the exclusivity of Brahmins with regard to the religious scripture was core to their position in society. This is not to say that none of the non-Brahmin population had any knowledge of Sanskrit. Rather, it is pointed out that a large section of the society had no interest or requirement of the language. It is this basic difference that holds the key to understanding the course of change that the Sanskrit College of Calcutta had to go through in the 19th century. For British officials, the Brahmin community could serve as an easy tool to educate and subsequently turn into future teachers of English, the European brand of Science, Mathematics, Morals, and so on. However, for the pandits of Calcutta, barring few, learning modern knowledge was of little or no use. The result of such an attitude is reflected in the low enrolment numbers in foundation days of the Sanskrit College. It is important to mention here that the interest picked up gradually, and so did its

⁴⁵See *Calcutta Sanskrit College 150th Anniversary Volume (1824-1974)*, Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series No. CXIX, (Calcutta, 1974).

⁴⁶http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Sanskrit_College,_Calcutta.

popularity, towards latter part of the 19th Century. However, the economic relevance of English in Bengal and the direct and prolonged involvement of pandits in assisting their colonial masters had made an average Bengali pundit also aware of the benefits of learning English. It was for this reason that the enrolment in Sanskrit College, Banaras saw some students from Bengal, while establishment of the Sanskrit College in Calcutta was an instant hit and did not witness the struggle that the Banaras-based institution saw. This entire phenomenon highlights the fact that even though *kasha* and then Banaras were known as important centres of learning, the larger part of this popularity was restricted to religious knowledge and was under the purview of the Brahmins, and only registering few Rajputs and Kayasthas. Establishment of colonial centres of learning, nonetheless opened up the door to direct employability options as lawyers in the Colonial Legal System, and hence gained such a momentum over a period of time that it marred, if not completely killed, the relevance of the indigenous education system in India. The Sanskrit College was a key agent in the process of change that was visualized by the British. Sanskrit has to be understood in many ways literally, as a language through which the written form is communicated, metaphorically as a language, that is a code, a discourse, and a cultural system, and something that is both, reflective of a social structure and ideology. The Sanskrit College initiated change in all these areas. This was done by ‘improving’ the methods of scholarship in the language, as well as introducing historical-critical methods, using Western treatises as models, and carefully directing the studies through European professors.