



STEPS FOR THE FORMATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of university education in Orissa during the colonial period reflects the broader trajectory of British educational policy in India, marked by gradual development, centralization, and limited regional access. Prior to British rule, Orissa lacked institutions of higher learning, with traditional systems like Sanskrit tols and madrasas serving educational needs. The introduction of Western education by the British, combined with missionary efforts and regional reform movements, slowly laid the foundation for formal higher education. Despite being under the administrative control of the Bengal Presidency, Orissa faced neglect in educational development for much of the colonial era. However, through persistent efforts by local leaders and intellectuals, the region witnessed significant milestones—most notably, the establishment of Ravenshaw College and later Utkal University. This historical journey can be traced through several key stages, each highlighting the socio-political and educational transformations that shaped university education in colonial Orissa.

KEYWORDS : *British educational policy , administrative control , socio-political and educational transformations.*

INTRODUCTION

The East India Company occupied the coastal tracts of Orissa in 1803 which constituted the nineteenth Division of the Bengal Province. For administrative convenience the area was divided into three districts Balasore, Cuttack and Puri In 1905 the district of Sarribalpur was amalgamated with the Orissa Division. The intervening territory between the coastal districts and Sambalpur consisted of several feudatory states administered by their respective Chiefs. The present districts of Ganjam and Koraput formed a part of the Madras Presidency since 1768 when the area was annexed by the East India Company, Thus, the region where the Oriya language was spoken by the inhabitants remained divided under three separate administrative units (Bengal, Madras and Feudatory States) till 1936 when the Orissa Province was created. Orissa was one of the most backward areas under the British rule. The children up to a particular age were educated in the village schools. But such education neither helped in their mental growth nor qualified them for any employment under the Company's Government

Even as late as 1821 the Magistrate of Cuttack regretfully noted “ Scarcely a single real Oriya received a salary of more than ten Rupees 'mensem,... I always give preference to the Oriyas, but at this moment I scarcely know a single Oriya possessing qualification to fit him for being a common scribe.”¹ The Oriyas were averse to English education upto 1838 and preferred to remain submerged in

ignorance and ... superstition.² The Christian Missionaries deserve much praise for their pioneering efforts to spread education in Orissa. They arrived on 12 February 1822 at Cuttack and within a month established the first English School to teach the European and English children.³ In 1804, the first block of Oriya letters was engraved in Wood. The missionaries prepared the Oriya letters and printed the first Oriya Bible in 1804. The New Testament was translated and printed in 1809 by PanditMrutyunjayVidyalankar, marking a key milestone in the development of Oriya literature. The New Oriya rules was printed in 1809 after its translation in to Oriya. This was the first printed Oriya book.⁴ The First Oriya Tract was published in 1811 by the Serampore Mission Press,. In 1807 Mohan Prasad Thakur, Assistant Librarian of Port William College, compiled the First Oriya English Vocabulary which was printed in 1811 to impart teaching in Oriya at the college.⁵

To facilitate the growth of education the missionaries established schools at Balasore, Puri, Berhampur and Sambalpur. But these schools could not bring any perceptible change in educational statistics since apprehending conversion people chose to be away from them.⁶On the eve of the transfer of power to the Crown in 1858, the education of Orissa was in an extremely backward condition, more backward than in any other Division of Bengal, The real fillip to the growth of education was provided by the famous 'Woods Despatch of 1854 which laid down the modern educational system in India, It was commonly known as 'the Intellectual Charter of India'. Sir Charles Wood was then the President of the Board of control of the East India Company.⁷

The famine of 1866 was another landmark in the growth of education in Orissa, One of the direct outcomes of the famine was the promotion of collegiate education in Orissa. Earlier to that the aspirants for higher education in Orissa had to go to Calcutta# where colleges had been setup by the Government and Won-government agencies. Calcutta was far away and living there was quite expensive. The situation prompted E, I, Burton# the Secretary of the School Committee to remarks, "The boys of Orissa -pabpur under peculiar disadvantages. They come up to Entrance examination and there is an end to their educational career. The want of a college tells severely on the boys1 subsequent career; such a want is prejudicial to the result of the Entrance examination also. The boys that read the Entrance course do not exhibit the same degree of seal in their studies as they should and Why? because they know fully well that it matters, not much, to them whether they pass or not, rather if they do not "fortunately" pass they shall be allowed to remain in the School and learn little by little every year...."⁸

The necessity of a College was keenly felt in the districts remote from Calcutta. Not only does no pupil from Orissa who fails in obtaining a scholarship even think of Joining a Calcutta College, but even those who do succeed# frequently resign in preference to Undergoing the expense and expatriation entailed by it.In case the Government entertained the idea of establishing a College for Orissa H,L. Harrison, the officiating Inspector of Schools suggested to the Director that Cuttack was the most suitable place for the same.⁹The Local Committee also demanded a College under the Calcutta University. The Committee sincerely believed that it would not be long before this promising institution could become the first institution in importance in Orissa and be converted into a College.

Thomas Eric Ravenshaw joined Orissa as its Commissioner in July 1865. Within two months of his assumption of office he recommended for the development of education and the establishment of a college. Though students from Cuttack and from Puri passed the Entrance examination, only three Bengali students proceeded to Calcutta for Higher studies.¹⁰ He pointed out that the Oriyas had hitherto derived little benefit from the Cuttack Government School as the School was occupied principally by naturalisedBengalees.

The little benefit which advanced students of the highest class attain after a prolonged period of study and by passing the University Entrance Examination is soon evaporated by their ommission to keep up reading. This is attributed to the unwillingness of their friends to send them to the Colleges of Bengal for prosecution of their studies. The remedy for this I have suggested in my last report Viz., the formation of a Collegiate class in connection with the Government school.¹¹

The Director of Public Instruction W.S. Aatkinson supported the views expressed by the Commissioner of the Cuttack Division regarding the establishment of a college class. In his letter NO,399

dated the 28 January 1867 to Government he stated," My present proposal exactly meets the suggestion of the Commissioner regarding the establishment of a college class in the existing school at Cuttack".¹² He, therefore, proposed that assignment of the existing Zilla School should be increased. The increased charges as a result of the increased assignment would be met from school fees and other sources of local income.¹³ Sir Cecil Beadon, the Lieutenant Governor, accepted the scheme and in February 1867 sent it for the sanction of the Government of India. With a view to placing the Cuttack School on the level of a College of lower classes for obtaining University education in Orissa a sanction was obtained for raising the existing assignment of the institution from Rs.3,616/- to Rs.12,000/- per annum.¹⁴ The provision of collegiate education in January 1868 was a significant land mark In the history of Orissa, The collegiate department consisted of two classes only in which the undergraduate students were prepared to appear at the first examination in Arts. The class was started with only six students who had passed the Entrance examination from the Zilla Schools in Orissa.¹⁵ The second year class was opened in January 1869. Ten students were admitted to the first year class during this year. So there were 16 students out of which six were second year students.¹⁶ The High School at Cuttack in 1869 consisted of three departments i. e. (a) College class (b) Law Department opened in March 1869 and (c) the usual classes of a Zillah School. There were 22 students in 1870-71, of whom 12 were Bengali, 8 Oriya, one Muhammedah and one was Christian.¹⁷ The first year students passed the examination satisfactorily and all the stipendiary students retained their scholarships. The total expenditure was Rs.5,723/- with each student costing Rs.21/- per month. The college classes were attended by 19 students in 1871-72, of whom two belonged to upper-class and rest 17 to 18 the middle class of the society.¹⁸

All the students studied English, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Mental Philosophy and History.¹⁹ The conditions prevailing in South Orissa were entirely different* The Madras Government did not feel the necessity of making any provision for higher education for the people of Ganjam. The Acting Director of public Instruction Lt.Col.Macdonald desired to solve the problem with the aid of scholarships in addition to sending annually one or two pupils who had passed the Matriculation Examination to complete their studies in the Presidency College. 20 In converting the Cuttack Zilla School to a full-fledged college the keen interest shown by T.E. Ravenshaw, the Commissioner, was commendable. He impressed upon Sir Richard Temple, the visiting Lieutenant Governor the necessity of having B.A. classes for the aspirants of higher education and to overcome the disadvantages of Oriya students who could not go to Calcutta for the purpose. The Lieutenant Governor expressed his willingness for the conversion of the Cuttack High School into a college, provided a certain sum 21- could be raised by private subscription.²¹

That did not pose any problem for Ravenshaw who had the Oriya Rajas and Zamindars for liberal contributions for such a noble cause. The subscription locally raised amounted to nearly Rs. 30,000/-, a sum sufficient to provide for half of the additional outlay for a period of at least five years. 22 During the first two years (1878 and 1879) this college sent 5 and 4 candidates respectively for B.A. examinations, but none was reported to pass the examination. In 1880 40 students were on roll.²⁴ In 1881-82 there were only 46 students in the college against 52 in the preceding year.²³ In 1882 the results of the college were very much satisfactory because 5 candidates came out successfully out of 8 examined for the first Arts examination. For B.A. one candidate was sent up and he too passed in the second division.²⁵ Hallward was appointed as the Principal of the college on retirement of Ager from the government service on 23 June 1892.²⁶

Due to the shortage of accommodation a new building was constructed for Science classes and in 1897 the Maharaja Sri. Ramehandra Banj donated Rs.20,000 for the additional construction of the science faculty. With additional accommodation available, M.A. classes in English were started in 1891.²⁷ By 1900 the expenditure for the Ravenshaw College reached up to Rs.32,675. Three students passed the M.A. examination in Sanskrit held in November 1899, Nilakantha Majumdar, M.A. was the Principal of the College. The college achieved good result (67%) in the First Arts Examination. Out of the 33 students appearing at the examination, 22 passed, The College was attended by 99 students. 28 The people became gradually aware of the necessity of professional education and demanded Medical, Lab; and Engineering Schools and Colleges, In 1881, the Law Department was attached to the college

which prepared the students for the B.L. examination. At that time the B.L. course was of two years after the First Arts degree. 29 In 1889-90 the department had 15 students on roll. A total of 8 candidates were sent for B.L. examination 30 of whom 2 passed in first division and 4 in second division.30 During the next five years there was no such increase of students. At the close of the century students became more and more interested in the study of Law. During 1897-98, there were 10 students in the B.L. class and 7 students in the leadership class. 31 The number increased to 23 at the end of the century(1900) of whom 10 were B.L. students. 32 Till 31 March 1905, there were 28 students in the Law department. 33

Another long felt want for imparting instruction in survey was removed when a Survey school was established at Cuttack in January 1876. The Cuttack School started with 12 students all of whom were Hindus. The students were not paying any tuition fees. 34 The Principal of Ravenshaw College was the supervisor of the school and it was accommodated in the college building. The Committee on Technical and Industrial Education strongly recommended for the raising of the status of the Cuttack Survey School to that of an Engineering School.35 This School was Converted in to an Engineering School in 1923.

Simultaneously, the necessity of medical education was felt by the people, T.E.Ravenshaw, the Commissioner of Orissa also pressed upon the Government to open a local medical college. In September 1875, Sir Richard Temple, the Lieutenant-Governor accorded his assent to the scheme. He agreed to give an annual grant of Rs.3,000 in support of the school.36 The Cuttack Medical School was opened on 15 February 1876, Dr W.D. Stewart, the Civil Surgeon of Cuttack willingly undertook the duties both of superintendence and instruction.37 On 31 March, 1900 the strength of the school was 98, The medium of instruction remained the vernacular as before. The college was supplied with a Lunatic Asylum, through which the important subject of mental diseases were practically studied by the senior students.38 The Cuttack Medical School progressed steadily, fit not only supplied doctors to the several hospitals and dispensaries in Orissa but also trained efficient nurses. Thus the foundation of the future Medical College was laid.

There, was a continual increase in the number of students at the Ravenshaw College. Two incentives to English education provided in the college were the increased prospects of lucrative employments and the chances of improving social standing by virtue of a University degree.

There were 158 students on the rolls of the college in 1907.- There was one principal and seven professors. No officer of the Indian Education Service was employed at the college. The total cost of the college during 1906-07 was Rs.31,914 with the cost borne by the Government being Rs. 23,766.39 Science (Physics, Chemistry and Botany) was taught in this college upto the Intermediate standard till 1912; The Commission for the inspection of Mafassial colleges inspected the Ravenshaw College in 1903 and found that the provision for teaching of science was defective. They were of the opinion that a considerable outlay would be necessary in order to provide properly constructed laboratories, apparatus for practical work and demonstrators for practical classes. The report of the Commission was not favourable for the opening of degree courses in science. They recommended that the college should discard the teaching of science altogether or be content with teaching one or two science subjects up to the Intermediate standard.40

The range of affiliation had to be extended considerably in 1912. The new subjects were Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics up to the B.Sc. pass standard. Political Economy and Political Philosophy up to the B.A. pass standard, and History and Persian up to B.A.(Hons.) standard. The staff of the Ravenshaw College had been sensibly increased to enable them to cope with the additional work. The sanctioned staff on 1 April 1912 consisted of one Principal from the Indian Education Service eight Professors from the Provincial Educational Service, five Lecturers and four demonstrators from the subordinate educational service. During 1913, an additional Professor of Economics was appointed from the Indian Educational Service, an additional Professor of History from the provincial education service and a lecturer in English from the sub-ordinate Educational Service.41

The number on the roll at the Ravenshaw College rose to 280 in 1912 and 375 in 1915. With numerical increase and affiliation of new subjects already mentioned, the need for the extension of the

buildings of the college was keenly felt. In 1916 a new site of 84% acres had been acquired on which a complete set of new buildings was to be erected at a cost of approximately ten lakhs of rupees.⁴² The new buildings of the Ravenshaw College were opened by the Governor on 5 April 1921. A munificent donation of Rupees one lakh from the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj enabled the college to be fitted with electricity and to be equipped with Honours in some Science subjects.

In July 1921 the Ravenshaw College was moved to new buildings at Chauliaganj, where, besides library and teaching accommodation, quarters had been provided for 18 members of the staff and hostels for 416 resident students. In 1922 the teaching staff in the Ravenshaw College had been strengthened. The sanctioned teaching staff in 1917 consisted of 27 members. In 1922 additional posts had been created in Mathematics, Logic, Physics and Chemistry taking the total 31. The direct expenditures of the college rose from Rs.1,13,796 in 1917 to Rs.1,55,987 in 1922 owing to the additions to the staff and to the revision of pay scales of the different services. One of the features of the new college buildings was the Library provided by the Raja of Kanika. This building provided a reading room and ample space for many more books than the 12000 which the college possessed. In recognition of the donation of Rs.50,000 for the library building by the Raja of Kanika, the Government had sanctioned a grant of Rs.25,000 for the purchase of books, so that in another year or two, the college should have a very fine library. The college held out the promise of a very bright future. The day appeared not too distant when the college would develop into a University of its own. Some such development was desirable not only because of differences of language, custom and tradition between Orissa and Bihar but also because of the distance between Cuttack and Patna.⁴³

The 'Patna university Act' after receiving the assent of the governor-general came into force on 1 October 1917. Henceforth the Patna University became the affiliating and examining body of the Ravenshaw College in place of Calcutta University. Some Postgraduate classes were added to Patna College and M.A. teaching in English was added to the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack in 1922 with the help of the Maharani Sabita Lady Parbati Pevinsonpur State Trust Fund.⁴⁴

In 1921, the non-cooperation movement was launched in Orissa. Many students of Ravenshaw College participated in it. Disciplinary action against some of them was taken by the authorities of the college.⁴⁵ During the year 1929-30 the Government accorded sanction to the experimental opening of Honours classes in Physics, Chemistry and Botany at the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack with effect from July, 1930.⁴⁶

During the five years spanning 1927 to 1932 the cost of the college had increased roughly by Rs. 2,31,000 of which Rs. 2,00,000 came from provincial revenues, and Rs.31,000 from fees.⁴⁷ A beginning had been made with co-education in Ravenshaw College in 1929-30. The number of girl students in this college was 4 in 1929-30 and 6 in 1930-31. The college was affiliated in Oriya as a principal subject up to the Intermediate standard in July 1933. It was decided that the experiment of teaching Honours in Physics, Chemistry and Botany was to be continued for another two years.⁴⁸ The number of students rose to 571 by 1936. The number of boarders rose to 259 in 1936 although the college hostels had accommodation for 348 boarders.⁴⁹ By 1936, the Ravenshaw College was the solitary governmental institution in Orissa to impart purely collegiate education to men and women. This sad state of affairs was mainly due to the fact that although the government depended mainly on private enterprise for expansion of higher education, it did not give required response in Orissa. The policy pursued by the Government of Bihar and Orissa in the sphere of higher education was clear from the resolution No.6235-E dated 26 November 1927.

It may not be out of place to emphasise the growing need of private generosity in the development and extension of this form of education. Existing colleges are continually pressing for additional teaching facilities. It was no longer possible for Government to finance such developments entirely from their own resources, nor would such a course be in the best interest of education since it was calculated to stifle and ultimately kill all private effort. A local demand for the extension of facilities for collegiate education should be backed by local financial support and Government will, always be ready to assist to the best of their ability a legitimate demand which receives such backing.⁵⁰

The Ravenshaw college was not yet a fully equipped institution as all the subjects included in the curriculum of the Patna University were not taught in it. The institution had 593 students including 4 girls in the year 1936-37. The college was managed by the Government at a cost of Rs.2#65,109 during the year of which Rs.54#000 was met from fees and other sources.⁵¹

The province of Orissa was created in 1936. Schools and colleges in South Orissa were affiliated to Andhra University while those of the North were affiliated to Patna University. The province had four collegiate institutions including the Ravenshaw College. This college was purely a collegiate institution the others consisting of college classes attached to high schools. The Ravenshaw Girls School was an anomalous institution in that it had not only ordinary high school classes, but the lower primary classes also. The I.A. classes were affiliated to Patna University in History, Logic and Mathematics in 1936-37.

The Maharaja's College, Parlakimedi was affiliated to Andhra University. Till, towards the end of quinquennium it remained a high school, with intermediate classes attached but in 1936 it applied for and secured affiliation to the B.A. standard in Mathematics and Economics and the B.A. classes were formerly inaugurated by the Governor of Orissa on the occasion of his first visit to Parlakimedi. This college was managed and financed by the Maharaja of Parlakimedi with Government grant. During 1936-37 there were 78 students in I.A. and 20 in the 1st year B.A. class. The college classes cost Rs.29,914 of which Rs.6,371 was paid by the Government as a grant-in-aid and Rs.7,185 was met by fees. The college had a fine block of buildings. The munificence of Maharaja of Parlakimedi, in bearing such a large share of the cost of a large and most useful institution called for special mention. The Khallikote college at Berhampur consisted of I.A. classes attached to a large high school. These classes were affiliated to Andhra University. This college was managed by a Governing Body and was financed from endowments, fees and Government grant. In I.A. classes 94 students were there during 1936-37. The expenditure on college classes in 1936-37 was Rs.15,307 of which Rs. 3,876 was met by a Government grant, 53 Rs.7,208 from fees and Rs.4,224 from endowments.⁵³

The year 1937-38 was not marked by any events or changes of outstanding importance. The Ravenshaw College was affiliated in Oriya as a principal subject up to B.A. standard and the post of a Professor in Class II senior branch of Orissa Educational service was created.⁵⁴ Towards the close of the year the Government appointed a Committee to examine and report on the various problems connected with the early formation of a separate University for Orissa.⁵⁵ The Orissa Government contributed Rs.2,000 per annum towards the cost of the Patna university during 1936-37. The Government continued to contribute the same amount year after year till the formation of the Utkal University. In addition to this Government bore the cost of travelling allowances of Government officers who attended the Senate and the Syndicate meetings of the Patna University and that of the D.P.I for attending the Senate meetings of the Andhra University from 1940-41.⁵⁶

During 1940-41 the number of Arts Colleges in the province remained at 5 but the roll number rose to 1159. The rise was again particularly noticeable in the Ravenshaw College, Cuttack. The increase in the number of students strengthened the general impression that the demand for higher education was increasing year after year.⁵⁷

The Female Education Committee of 1914 made recommendations regarding collegiate education of the girls. Intermediate classes should be opened in connection with the Girls High School at Cuttack. If the number of girls rose to 10, the question of seeking affiliation to the Intermediate standard should be considered. If it rose to 29, the establishment of a separate college should be taken up.⁵⁸ During the year 1915-16, a beginning was made in Orissa with the collegiate education of women when I.A. classes were opened in connection with the Ravenshaw Girls' School at Cuttack. The subjects taught were English, Logic, History, Sanskrit and the Vernacular. The number of pupils was 8 in 1916-17 and 2 girls were sent up for the Intermediate Examination, of whom one passed.⁵⁹

The number of girls attending the Intermediate classes in arts at the Girls' School continued to increase. By 1922 the number rose to 22.⁶⁰ There was no degree college exclusively for women. The paucity of women students had so far not warranted the establishment of such an institution. The limited number of women students in the I.A. classes, which had never exceeded a dozen till 1936

indicated that all, students who passed the Matriculation did not come up for collegiate education. A very small number of women who wished to take a degree course, were having co-education in colleges for men where they had greater choice of subjects, efficient staff and an academic atmosphere.⁶¹

It was interesting to note that during 1940-41 the number, of women students attending college classes rose from 27 to 43 of which 23 belonged to the I.A. classes attached to the Ravenshaw Girls' School and 14 to the Ravenshaw College. The staff in Ravenshaw Girls School, consisted of 3 Lecturers excluding a Lady Principal who was also the Inspector of Schools, Orissa. The transfer of the Principal to the inspectorate, for utilising it on a temporary basis, for the appointment of an Assistant Inspector of Schools newly created during 1940-41.⁶²

Hence, Orissa was ripe for the establishment of a University for higher education. The creation of Orissa as a separate province in 1936 expedited the demand. It was delayed for some time due to the Second World War in 1939. But as soon as the popular Ministry was allowed to function from 24 November, 1941 the Prime Minister decided to go ahead with the establishment of a separate University in fulfillment of a long cherished desire of the Oriya speaking people.

The development of university education in Orissa during the colonial period was a slow but significant journey marked by challenges, aspirations, and eventual progress. From a region with virtually no access to modern higher education in the early 19th century, Orissa gradually built its academic foundations through missionary efforts, colonial initiatives, and the tireless work of local reformers. The establishment of institutions like Ravenshaw College and the later formation of Utkal University in 1943 symbolized the culmination of decades of struggle for educational empowerment and regional identity. Though constrained by colonial policies and limited resources, these stages laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and independent system of higher education in post-independence Odisha. The colonial era, thus, played a complex yet foundational role in shaping the trajectory of university education in the region.

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