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of Geography:
Learning to Read in Benares,
c. 1870

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A Good General Knowledge of Geography: Learning to Read in Benares, c. 1870

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Abstract: In 1867 an unusual experiment in female education took root in Benares city when the Maharaja of Vizianagram decided to sponsor schools for girls from poor upper caste families. He drew upon the experience of a range of people – a Welsh entrepreneur, a Sanskrit pandit, and a Baptist schoolmistress. Their collaboration was a studied response to instructional traditions within Benares. The Maharaja also commissioned a series of distinctive Hindi textbooks that introduced geography, history, science and mathematics to their readers. These books were far in advance of what was usually considered an appropriately gendered curriculum for young girls. The Maharaja's schools grew into one of the most successful projects of their time. The paper examines the premises of the project and the character and conditions of its success. The lens of “geography” in its various connotations - urban, print and as a school discipline - offers a perspective on questions of institutional autonomy, textbook culture and pedagogy in relation to women in colonial Benares.

Key words: Benares, Hindi print culture, Education

A Good General Knowledge of Geography: Learning to Read in Benares, c. 1870

On one of her regular tours to Benares, Mrs. Graves, an inspector of schools in the North Western Provinces, approvingly noted, “the women are well advanced in Arithmetic and have a good general knowledge of Geography . . . the arrangements generally are excellent”.¹ She was visiting schools richly endowed by Vijayarama Gajapati, the Maharaja of Vizianagram. He opened four schools in 1867-68 for girls from poor upper caste families. Under the Maharaja’s patronage a diverse group of people - a Welsh printer, Sanskrit pandit and Baptist missionary schoolmistress - helped foster the project. This alliance across race, class, caste and gender created a unique pedagogic environment, with each member of the team contributing a distinctive strain of influence, often at variance with others in the group. Among the group was Pandit Ramjasan, commissioned by the Maharaja to craft a graduated series of Hindi textbooks, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* (1869-70).² The title page of each book is inscribed with a ship in full sail – a sign of the new frontiers crossed. The books are unusual as they introduce “new knowledge” (*nayi vidya*) through geography, history, science and mathematics, subjects that constituted the standard curriculum for boys in the region. The Maharaja’s schools are an example of prescience in institutional autonomy, collaborative enterprise and instructional print culture in colonial north India. As such they enable an understanding of the patrons as well as the beneficiaries of education reform.

In the first years of their existence, the Maharaja’s schools were unanimously hailed as the most successful experiment of their time, with hundreds of girls on the roll.³ This composite and assured initiative presents a completely overlooked prehistory to schooling experiments that were to follow in later decades - Agarwal Samaj School (1918), Durga Charan School (1918), Arya Mahila Vidyalaya (1926). The most sustained analysis of the later examples erroneously suggests that there was no significant indigenous effort towards female education in the city until the first decades of the twentieth century. The occasion for establishing the Maharaja’s schools, along with the pedagogic choices and patronage structures devised to draw girls to them, present a corrective to established narratives on education history.⁴

A case study of the Maharaja’s schools is also shaped by an interest in evaluating indigenous responses to crucial policy shifts instituted by the colonial government in the 1870s, like grants-in-aid (analysed in detail below). The Maharaja’s schools grew in response to reduced and carefully monitored spending by the colonial government on female education. Within this context the remarkable success of these schools assumes greater

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¹ *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces*, 1869-70, p. 89.

² Pandit Ramjasan, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, Part I, Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1869; Pandit Ramjasan, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, Part II, Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1869; Pandit Ramjasan, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, Part III, Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1869; Pandit Ramjasan, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, Part IV, Benares: Medical Hall Press, 1870.

³ In the first year 167 girls were enrolled in the schools. This number grew to 619 by 1875. *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces*, 1867-1868, p. 60; Mrs. Etherington, “Female Education in Benares”, *The Baptist Magazine*, August - September 1874, 486-492, 537-543.

⁴ Nita Kumar, *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras*, Delhi: Sage, 2000.

significance. As attendance figures in other schools remained stagnant or dropped, girls flocked to these new schools. Why were students choosing the new schools over other options? Were girls drawn to the Maharaja's schools on account of the investment made in institutional and curriculum design? Were they drawn by some "inducement" offered to them? The answers to these questions suggest that the Maharaja and his collaborators carefully selected institutional features and pedagogic practices from missionary and government schools in order to create a viable, successful and autonomous school system. Therefore, the Maharaja's schools present an instance where autonomy was exercised by the patrons, and to a certain extent, even the beneficiaries of education reform.

Mrs. Graves's observation about students well schooled in geography is a productive lens from which to organize this analysis. The students at the Maharaja's schools were trained to proceed through subjects like geography, history and mathematics to a fairly advanced level. The textbooks prepared by Pandit Ramjasan counter a more generally held perception that a wide-ranging, secular and ungendered curriculum was seldom designed for girls by conscious intent. Why was a curriculum of study that drew substantially from current patterns of "useful knowledge" in schools for boys perceived as the ideal template for these schools? How did textbook authors rationalize the emphasis on useful subjects with their own traditions of pedagogic practice? Recent scholarship on the transmission of disciplines (particularly geography and science) has enabled us to assess the alternative paradigms, intellectual traditions and pedagogic practices within which imperial knowledge was transmitted and received.⁵ Pandit Ramjasan brought his experience as a student and teacher at the Benares Sanskrit College to pluralize the content of his textbooks as a balance between *nayi vidya* and "traditional" pedagogic practices.⁶ *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* presents his inventive and self-reflexive recourse to "new knowledge".

By 1870, barely three years since their opening, the schools in the Maidagin, Chowk, Karanghanta and Ramapura neighbourhoods grew to significance in the very heart of Benares city. The first school was opened in a house the Maharaja owned, while the second found a home close to the Vishwanath temple, the permanent abode of the patron deity of Benares. The conceptual lens of "geography" serves us here as well – it draws into itself an interest in locating this case study quite firmly within the urban landscape of colonial Benares, by foregrounding its distinctive intellectual milieu, its significance within print geographies and its preeminence as a locus of education reform. The principal collaborators in this schooling project came from vastly different professional and personal contexts. They brought with them plural ways of belonging to colonial Benares - as an intellectual centre, print capital and education locus.

The institutional and pedagogic choices exercised by Vijayarama Gajapati, as an aristocratic patron, were inspired by several locally specific factors that created very particular conditions for learning in the city. The cross cultural and interracial patronage of the Benares Institute as well as debates over pedagogy and state patronage of learning,

⁵ On geography see Sumathi Ramaswamy, "Conceit of the Globe in Mughal Visual Practice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 49, No. 4 (2007): 751-782. On science see Pratik Chakrabarti, *Western Science in Modern India: Metropolitan Methods, Colonial Practices*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

⁶ See Ramaswamy's similar assessment of "plural" practices in relation to the globe, "Conceit of the Globe", p. 753.

unfolding at Benares Sanskrit College, contributed different strains to the Maharaja's project. In a parallel vein, a congruent set of circumstances led to the publication of *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* at the Medical Hall Press, one of the leading presses in Benares established by a Welsh doctor, E. J. Lazarus. Although textbooks for girls were being printed in many other cities during the 1860s and 1870s, Benares occupies a unique position in print history. Textbook publishing became one of the largest sources of revenue for native presses in Benares in the late colonial period. Pandit Ramjasan was closely allied with this intellectual community and its distinctive print culture. He grew into his professional and scholarly identity at Benares Sanskrit College, during a period when the institution was undergoing sweeping changes in relation to "traditional" Sanskrit knowledge. His textbooks for the Maharaja's schools may be seen as a response to this closely experienced transformation. Benares is also singular in the early start it afforded to missionary schools. Mrs. Etherington, the schoolmistress who eventually took over the management of the Maharaja's schools, had wide experience and a considerable reputation within Benares as a Baptist schoolmistress by the time she was enlisted by the Maharaja. She pruned and streamlined some of the institutional features she noticed at his schools.

However, despite the growing enrollment figures in the Maharaja's schools, there is scarcely any mention of them in education records after 1876. The short period of this case study (1867-1875) is to some extent determined by this silence in the archive. It is quite possible that the schools closed shortly after 1876 owing to the death of their principal patron, the Maharaja. The school project explored here is distinctive for its dynamism, as well as fragility. How may we understand the tenuousness of the project while acknowledging its strengths?

Learning to Read in Benares

Benares constitutes an important case study on the question of female education – it conforms to trends noticed across the region, but also deviates from the norm in numerous ways. In the late nineteenth century, girls' schools across the North Western Provinces relied on three different sources of patronage, initiative and investment – missionary groups, the colonial government and the local elite. Their efforts in some instances overlapped and drew strength from each other, and in other circumstances were competitive, even antagonistic. The Maharaja's schools are a distinctive example within this landscape – they involved philanthropists and educators from across a wide and differentiated spectrum. As such, they suggest to us what became possible through collaborative enterprise.

Missionary organizations opened the earliest schools for girls in Benares. Christian, Hindu and Muslim girls, usually from the poorest families, attended the city schools. The London Mission in 1840 and the Church Missionary Society in 1850 established the first schools. Women and girls in these schools learned to read English, Hindi and Bengali. The Church Missionary Society followed this up with a female normal school to train teachers in 1861 and an industrial female school in 1864. In instances where women observed purdah, missionary groups sent young missionary workers and Bible women to expand their network through zenana education. Zenana education occurred for the most part in upper caste

Hindu families. The Church Missionary Society was responsible for almost twenty zenana schools by 1867.⁷

The earliest government schools for girls in Benares date to 1865. Hindu and Muslim girls, again usually from the most vulnerable families, attended these schools. They learned to read Urdu, Hindi and Bengali. Inspectors and colonial officials associated with government schools were often eager to enroll girls from poor upper caste families. Their upper caste status lent “respectability” to government schools, and their economic vulnerability was addressed to some extent through prizes and free books.⁸ However, the colonial government’s investment in girls’ schools in Benares city lagged far behind other cities like Agra, Aligarh and Bareilly in the 1860s. The tardy beginnings in Benares have been attributed to the strong and established presence of the Church Missionary Society in the city. It has also been suggested that the slow investment in schools for girls was because most of the colonial government’s focus and energies were taken up by the changing dynamics within Benares Sanskrit College.⁹ The number and quality of government schools for girls in the Benares district remained middling for several years.

Year	Schools	Students
1865-66	9	157
1866-67	11	174
1871-72	7	131
1872-73	7	142
1873-74	7	114
1874-75	7	138

Source: *Reports on Progress of Education, 1865-1875*

Despite the slow start in Benares the government was keen to appear committed to its “civilizational ideal” to educate Indian women. It kept its promise by extending financial aid to schools committed to a secular education. In the years leading up to the Maharaja’s experiment in schooling, the most significant transregional education policy aggressively instituted by the colonial government was the grants-in-aid system. Inaugurated in 1863-64, this system created a new category of “aided schools” for boys and girls. They were distinct from schools managed and financed entirely by the government or by local groups, in that they received financial aid from the government. The government’s grants-in-aid policy was motivated by great caution in expenditure. Several local groups and individuals (zamindars, caste associations and teachers) had continued to demonstrate steadfast initiative towards female education. The government’s new policy extended financial support towards these groups, enabling it to appear sincere in its rhetoric on education generally, and the amelioration of women in particular. In the case of female education, “aided” schools were a particularly shrewd strategy – the colonial government could refrain from investing in a

⁷ *Report on the Progress of Education, 1859-1860*, p. 50; H. R. Nevill, *Benares: A Gazetteer*, Volume 26, *District Gazetteers of Agra and Oudh*, Allahabad: Government Press, 1909, p. 170; Mrs. Etherington, “Female Education in Benares”.

⁸ H. R. Nevill, *Benares: A Gazetteer*, p. 171.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 170. “[The Sanskrit College] seems to have absorbed the attention of the authorities, for no other Government school, except that in Jagatganj, was founded till 1856.”

future that did not have sure returns, while also asserting that it did not wish to interfere in the social and cultural expectations placed on women (early marriage, *pardah*, domesticity).

“Aided” schools formally acknowledged and reinforced a template of collaboration and assistance that had already been in existence for several years. This collaboration, until the grants-in-aid system, had been implicit, unofficial and largely unremarked. For instance, several men who demonstrated great initiative towards female schooling within their communities were routinely appointed to official posts as school inspectors. Sometimes while serving as school inspectors these appointees continued to encourage private initiative, along with furthering attendance figures in government schools. They convinced their *biradari* about the benefits of schooling, opened up their homes to serve as private neighbourhood schools and assigned the work of daily mentoring to the members of their families. In the case of Benares, considerable credit for this ground level work seems to have rested on the able shoulders of the Joint Inspector of the Benares district, Babu Shivaprasad. In the 1860s, Shivaprasad “donated” a house he owned to be used as a school, valiantly tried to draw more girls to schools, ensured that some of them graduated to becoming teachers and assisted his superiors in appointing female school inspectors for the region. Girls learning Hindi in the higher classes in government and aided schools across the province were taught to read Shivaprasad’s classic textbook on the lives of great women, *Vamamanranjan* (1856).¹⁰ The spirit of collaborative enterprise demonstrated by Shivaprasad was duly acknowledged by those in power: “his experience of the wants and wishes of the community is unrivalled, and . . . [his] views are remarkably catholic and many-sided”.¹¹

The grants-in-aid system attempted to formalize and create incentives for collaboration between private initiative and the colonial government. However, despite its surface rhetoric, several elements of the grants-in-aid system proved to be a disincentive for female education. The design of the policy revealed the cynicism with which British officials regarded indigenous initiative. British educators frequently commented on the ignorance of the Indian people, and their resistance to female education. In instances where private schools were opened, their syllabi and pedagogy were roundly dismissed as inferior. Aided schools, jointly financed by the government and local groups, were forced to follow syllabi instituted in government schools. Although these schools received some money from the colonial government, continued funding depended on routine and careful inspection of the school premises, teachers and students. Schools in far-flung rural areas had to make an extraordinary effort to ensure they survived. In many instances teachers, with a few of their best girl students in tow, were forced to travel long distances to reach the campsite of school inspectors. Upon arrival, the girls were “submitted” for inspection of their reading skills. Where this extraordinary initiative flagged, government funding dried up, and the schools shut down. Discounting several other factors that already weighed against female education, the grants-in-aid system in particular was viewed as a “restriction” reflecting “the virtual disapproval of female education by the Supreme Government”.¹² Often school inspectors themselves outlined the problems they witnessed. Take for instance the case of Mr. Lloyd

¹⁰ See Ulrike Stark, “Towards a New Hindu Woman: Educational Ideals and Female Role Models in Shivaprasad’s *Vamamanranjan* (1856)” in Ulrike Roesler and Jayandra Soni (eds.), *Aspects of the Female in Indian Culture*, Marburg, 2004, pp. 157-169.

¹¹ *Report on Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces, 1869-70*, p. 86.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

whose statement on the system is characteristic of the disdain with which the visible and energetic effort of local communities “voluntaryism”) was assessed. However, he also outlines in unambiguous detail the disservice of the grants-in-aid policy. His assessment was communicated to the highest authorities in the education department in 1869:

There can be little doubt that, if Government were willing to give Girls’ Schools free of cost, the village communities would willingly enough accept them, but I do not think we shall make much progress if part of the cost is to be locally prescribed. Grants-in-aid and voluntaryism generally have not been found to answer in England. To expect then to do so here seems to me to be indulging a hope which neither Native character nor British experience warrants.¹³

Despite these ground-level criticisms, the die was cast. The moral and political pressure on the local elite increased. This was not just in terms of the financial outlay that was expected of them. The real challenge that emerged as a result of the grants-in-aid system was the infrastructure of government scrutiny it institutionalized. Educators within the changing system routinely complained about this “indirect” support by the government for private schools, which along with being woefully inadequate was circumscribed by such “stringent conditions” that the managers of schools preferred to do without it.¹⁴ From the mid-1860s all schools created through indigenous initiative, but sustained by government “aid”, were assessed critically, often harshly by inspectors. As a consequence, school closures were a constant, overwhelming and imminent threat. A negative report resulted in the withdrawal of government funds, and fledgling efforts to sustain girls’ schools by local communities were doomed to an early death.

The Maharaja’s schools suggest an important intervention in multiple respects – a reassertion of indigenous initiative in education reform, an attempt to carry forward patterns of collaboration across race, class, caste and gender and an attempt to rethink structures of patronage. The Maharaja’s schools began independent of government support, and are a robust example of “voluntaryism” within Indian education history. The Maharaja exercised independence and foresight at many levels - from the choice of collaborators, to the textbooks used in the schools. There was already a history of similar institutions for boys. Several private schools for boys were sponsored independently of the government and missionary organizations. Labeled “indigenous schools”, they drew upon long-standing local traditions of instructing boys in Persian, Arabic, Hindi, Sanskrit and Kaithi. They were subjected to consistent and often virulent prejudice from British school inspectors. Everything about the schools was contrary to expectations – the unscheduled and irregular class timings, the pandits and maulvis who served as teachers, the pedagogic methods and the manner in which local communities paid teachers. The most strident criticism was reserved for the “objectionable” books that formed part of the syllabus. Despite these objections the government was compelled to accede that indigenous schools, “small and imperfect as they are, are the result of the desire of the people for education supported at their own expense”.¹⁵ Given this proclivity towards indigenous schools for boys, the Maharaja’s ability to create an autonomous environment of learning for young girls may be

¹³ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁴ Mrs. Etherington, “Female Education in Benares”, *The Baptist Magazine*, August 1874, p. 487.

¹⁵ *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces, 1869-1870*, pp. 87-131.

assessed as an instance when the efforts of the local elite not only met the “standards” instituted by the colonial government but far exceeded them. The schools in the Maidagin, Chowk, Karanghanta and Ramapura were upheld as an example of what could be achieved through princely “liberality” and favourable “public opinion”: “With a popular system of girls’ schools . . . entirely independent of State aid, Benares may well claim to be the best educated town in the province”.¹⁶

The four-part *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* crucially provides the only direct statement about the student demographic identified by the Maharaja – textbooks for girls from poor upper caste families. Colonial records and other accounts by those working at the schools never make the same assertion regarding the demographic. If only poor upper caste girls were admitted to the schools, why do we not see any specific commentary on this fact in colonial records and other documents that are fairly scrupulous in this regard? The ambiguous and insubstantial articulation of the student profile is an indication of how categories of “deserving” students were identified by potential patrons, at the Maharaja’s schools, but also more widely in educational institutions in the region. This problematic and uneven assertion regarding the class and caste identity of the students attending the Maharaja’s schools could imply three possibilities. First, as the textbooks state, it could very well mean that the Maharaja’s patronage extended only to girls from poor upper caste families (and not others). The direct address to upper caste students is continuous with some other schooling projects the Maharaja invested in (described below). Second, it could imply that although girls from different communities attended the schools, the Maharaja chose to draw attention to students from poor upper caste families in order to create a schooling environment endorsed by cultural notions of upper caste “respectability” – a concern shared with government schools in the region. Third, the fact that the class and caste identity of the students at the new schools is not commented upon or corroborated at any other level could also imply that the Maharaja’s schools shared in the same pool of students who were attending government schools in the region. In other words, poor girls from upper caste families were the main constituency of students. In each of the above scenarios the crafting of a specific demographic - dominant caste groups that are economically vulnerable – appears framed within very different narratives – patronage, respectability, the perceived vulnerability of upper caste girls.

By 1874 the Maharaja’s schools had acquired a considerable reputation among educators. The sharp and consistent rise in attendance figures in a short period was recorded along with the fact that attendance figures in government schools remained stagnant or fell. There could be two reasons for this – conditions at government schools worsened and students dropped out or students were choosing to leave government schools for the new schools opened by the Maharaja. It is likely that the schooling environment created by the Maharaja was attractive to these students and their parents. In some sense therefore, it is probable that girls from the poorest families, previously attending government schools in Benares, were the *de facto* constituency of students at the Maharaja’s schools, rather than the

¹⁶ *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces, 1870-1871*, p. 97.

intended. More importantly, students were choosing the new schools. The figures below are for 1874 and indicate the success of the Maharaja's schooling experiment in Benares.¹⁷

Organization	Number of Schools	Number of Students
Government	8	124
Missionary	14	738
Maharaja's	3	619
Aided	3	71

Source: Mrs. Etherington, "Female Education in Benares"

The last mention of the Maharaja's schools occurs in a *Report on the Progress of Education* for 1874-75. It is quite likely that the schools, despite their phenomenal success, did not survive beyond that year. By 1876-77 government schools for girls in Benares also recorded a sharp decline, and only three survived. The Maharaja passed away a few years later, and was succeeded by his son in 1879. Anand Gajapati carried forward his father's legacy, and achieved even greater renown for his liberal sponsorship of progressive causes. However, his domain of influence was exerted more substantially within Vizianagram and its neighbouring region.

The Maharaja's Schools

The Maharaja of Vizianagram, Vijayarama Gajapati, was a generous patron of learning. His father left Vizianagram, a demilitarized princely state, and retired to Benares on a pension. Vijayarama Gajapati grew to maturity in Benares, deeply influenced by the learning traditions of the city. He was intimate with an elite circle which included the aristocracy, merchant elite and high-ranking British officials. He became a member of the Viceroy's Council, was honoured by the British with the personal title of Maharaja, and eventually with the title K.C.S.I.

The Maharaja rose to great visibility in many cities - Vizianagram, Madras, Rajahmundry and Benares - through his acts of patronage, especially his sponsorship of educational projects. On his return to Vizianagram, a few years after his father's death, in keeping with the atmosphere of Sanskrit learning he witnessed in Benares, Vijayarama Gajapati established a Sanskrit College in Vizianagram in 1860. In 1868-69 he sponsored a boarding school for Brahmin and Rajput girls in Vizianagram. However, his investment and visible presence in Benares continued unabated. Besides schools for girls, the Maharaja provided assistance to Municipal Free Schools for boys in Benares and extended financial support to similar institutions in Allahabad. He also sponsored rituals and charities. His mother, the Rani Dowager of Vizianagram, moved to his palace in the Bhelupur area of Benares, and was known to be a generous sponsor on festive occasions.¹⁸ Their palace is a distinctive landmark in the city even today.

¹⁷ The school in Ramapura was at the greatest distance from the other schools and was difficult to monitor. It was shut down, but its students were accommodated in the remaining schools. Mrs. Etherington, "Female Education in Benares".

¹⁸ Madhuri Desai, *Resurrecting Benares: Urban Space, Architecture and Religious Boundaries*, ProQuest Dissertations, 2007, p. 212; V. V. B. Rama Rao, *Poosapati Ananda Gajapati Raju*, Hyderabad: International Telugu Institute, 1985, pp. 1-4, 26-27; Sukhendra Reddy, *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteers: Vizianagaram*, Hyderabad: Map

The Maharaja fashioned his identity as a patron of educational projects in a charged political climate, intensely aware of the inevitable scrutiny and assessment each gesture occasioned. In the absence of real power, rulers of princely states asserted “symbolic capital” through their patronage of progressive causes and the arts. British commentators sometimes viewed this assertion of authority with cynicism:

The other special function of these [Rajput] tribes, that of ruling, has, with the spread of British power in India, nearly passed away . . . A few make themselves conspicuous by their liberality and public spirit, in laying out vast sums of money on colleges, schools, hospitals, asylums, and the like. Yet their secret personal ambition is mostly directed to very inferior objects. To secure a higher place in the Govern-General’s Durbar, or more frequent salutes, or a greater number of guns at each salute, some will devote years of time, and lacs of rupees, and will engage in a course of intrigues of the most intricate character.¹⁹

The same commentator goes on to describe the Maharaja of Vizianagram’s philanthropy and support of numerous social causes with unstinting admiration.²⁰

In the 1860s the Maharaja of Vizianagram’s elite circle within Benares had begun debating the issue of female education. Several of these discussions took place under the aegis of the Benares Institute, an important forum for the aristocracy, merchant elite, British civil servants, the pandits of Benares Sanskrit College and missionaries. Similar reformist and progressive associations across the North Western Provinces were especially mobilized to take charge of the education of girls within their communities. They petitioned the colonial government, and were keen to be part of local education committees, with the power to decide what their girls would read and where they would read.²¹ The Maharajas of Benares and Vizianagram were important patrons of the Benares Institute, and often jointly presided over the meetings. Each member of the Institute was encouraged to write an essay on an area of interest, and subsequently deliver a speech before the other members. Along with discussing the antiquities of Benares, the Nagari character and Chunar pottery, the progressive cause of female education occupied the intellectual energy of many of its members. Some like Babu Shivaprasad, the Deputy Inspector of Schools of the Benares region, brought their experience to the table. Others, like Bhartendu Harishchandra, would subsequently open schools for girls and launch the Hindi journal, *Balabodhini* (1874-77), for women.²² The members of the Benares Institute decided upon a Female School Book Society in 1862. It is through voluntary associations like the Benares Institute that the local

Printing Press, p. 299; *Report on the Progress of Education, 1868-69*. For a general discussion on patronage and education in Benares see Nita Kumar, *Lessons from Schools: The History of Education in Banaras*, Delhi: Sage, 2000, pp. 17, 41.

¹⁹ M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes as Represented in Benares*, 1872, Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2008, p. 118.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

²¹ On associational culture in Lucknow see Ulrike Stark, “Associational Culture and Civic Engagement in Colonial Lucknow: The *Jalsa-e-Tabzib*,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 48.1, 2011, pp. 1-33; and for Bareilly see Smita Gandotra, “What did Sundaria Read? Hindi Books from Bareilly, c. 1870,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53.2, 2016, pp. 1-23.

²² For an overview of this journal see Vasudha Dalmia, “*Balabodhini va Naye Gharelu Adarshon ki Rachna*”, Introduction to *Balabodhini*, ed By Vasudha Dalmia and Sanjeev Kumar, Delhi, 2014, pp. v-xiv.

elite collaborated on education projects, sponsored schools and commissioned or authored textbooks.²³

The Maharaja of Vizianagram naturally turned to his Benares compatriots and Institute fellows to help develop his school project. The project grew out of the same social and political conditions of collaborative enterprise that resulted in the grants-in-aid policy. However, in contrast to the colonial government's policy, the success of the Maharaja's schools was built on an attentive scrutiny of instructional practices within Benares. The schools therefore grew in response to, if not as an improvement upon, extant pedagogical patterns. He and each of his collaborators were keenly aware of the traditions of learning as well as new pedagogic experiments they witnessed around them. They brought with them an awareness of education paradigms, textbook culture and pedagogy. At certain times their experiences coalesced and agreed, at other times they seem to have had clear differences in pedagogic practice. Despite this divergence, the success of the schools at different stages of their development accrued to their distinctive initiatives. In each instance, the autonomy of the individual collaborators seems to have been assured and fostered.

When the Maharaja opened his first school in Benares he decided that each girl must be paid a handsome stipend of one rupee every month. In colonial records of the period it is often suggested that students flocked to the Maharaja's schools because of the generous one rupee stipend that he instituted for them. The stipends must necessarily be explained with reference to the changing economy of patronage within Benares. Small "inducements" in the form of money and clothes were routinely handed out to little girls attending missionary schools in Benares. Government schools distributed books, sweets and sometimes jewellery as "prizes". However, the Maharaja's one rupee stipend was far in excess of anything paid in other schools. Generous stipend amounts implied that the patrons of educational institutions understood their responsibility to be far in excess of providing schoolrooms and textbooks. During the years the Maharaja initiated his schooling project the economy of patronage within which stipends were instituted came under severe scrutiny and critical reassessment. Stipends were cynically understood to be a shrewd ploy to draw students to formal schools in the region. However, these gestures were a considered response to the needs and economic vulnerability of the student community they were addressing.

The Maharaja's initiative may have been inspired in part by the generous model of patronage instituted in Benares Sanskrit College during its early decades (1790-1830). At the Benares Sanskrit College the vocabulary of patronage within which students were paid small sums of money, was understood variously as "stipend", "maintenance allowance" and "scholarship". The variance in these terms is indicative of the changing perception of patronage, and the different parameters within which the relationship between the patron and recipient was viewed. When student stipends were first instituted, the pandit teachers of Benares Sanskrit College pocketed their students' stipends, understanding the money in traditional terms as *guru dakshina*. They were roundly chastised by the administration for this – and it was pointed out to them that since they received salaries from the administration, they should desist from claiming the student stipends. By 1835 student stipends at Benares Sanskrit College were entirely abolished. Student enrollment dropped substantially and the

²³ Michael Dodson and Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhatendru Harishchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 114-116.

pandits employed as teachers urged the administration to reinstate the stipends in order to prevent poor Brahmin boys from being forced to beg for “alms”. The stipends were cautiously re-introduced as “allowances” that deserving students earned by performing well.²⁴ The Maharaja’s one rupee stipend to his girl students repeated in small measure the model of patronage instituted at Benares Sanskrit College.

The Maharaja’s principal collaborator, and able manager of his Benares schools, Dr. E. J. Lazarus, was also a member of the Benares Institute. The Maharaja’s choice of school manager was studied and well designed. He chose a man who had honed his entrepreneurial intuition in Benares for decades. Lazarus was a Welshman who had opened a pharmacy in the city. He then established the Medical Hall Press in 1857 to print labels for his pharmacy. The location of the Press in the heart of the city, and Lazarus’s entrepreneurial skills helped him develop several mutually beneficial professional and intellectual relationships. Prior to his role at the Maharaja’s schools, Dr. Lazarus had witnessed first-hand and contributed in some measure to the success of other education initiatives in the city, in particular the Benares Sanskrit College. Dr. Lazarus was confronted with the same problems that most other schools grappled with – a scarcity of teachers, and parents reluctant to send girls away from home. His management of the Maharaja’s schools was notable for the personal attention he extended to the schools’ daily routines, and the energy with which he turned them around from their initial tentative beginnings into a recognized success.²⁵

Quite naturally, Dr. Lazarus’s Medical Hall Press was also commissioned by the Maharaja to print the four-part *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*. Dr. Lazarus’s experience in publishing, his entrepreneurial leanings and his network of associations with other educational institutions likely proved valuable for the Maharaja’s schools. Prior to his collaboration with the Maharaja, Dr. Lazarus’s printing press had successfully fulfilled its commitments to some of the most important centres of educational initiative within Benares city. Its first printing assignments were for the Baptist Mission and included evangelical literature and Christian tracts in Hindi and Urdu. Subsequently, Dr. Lazarus entered into a long and productive collaboration with James Ballantyne, Principal of the Benares Sanskrit College, to print works on Western knowledge and Christian philosophy. Ballantyne later commissioned the Press to print textbooks intended specifically for the pandits of Benares Sanskrit College. Several pandits of the College also published independently with the Medical Hall Press. Given the nature and breadth of its printing projects, the Medical Hall Press quickly rose to prominence, and was particularly noticed for its publications in Sanskrit and Hindi. By the time it closed in 1927 it had established itself as a leading press in the region.²⁶

In the 1870s the print culture of Benares city was robustly multilingual, although it was dominated by two kinds of publications – religious and educational. *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* was designed and printed within a thriving print culture dominated by pedagogical material in the vernacular (missionary tracts, textbooks, dictionaries) and classical texts in

²⁴ George Nicholls, *Sketch of the Rise and Progress of The Benaras Pathshala*, Allahabad: Government Press, 1907, pp. 82-89.

²⁵ Ulrike Stark, “Benares Beginnings: Print Modernity, Book Entrepreneurs, and Cross-Cultural Ventures in a Colonial Metropolis” in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty (eds.) *Founts of Knowledge*, Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2016, pp. 48-60; Mrs. Etherington, “Female Education in Benares”.

²⁶ Ulrike Stark, “Benares Beginnings”, pp. 48-60.

Sanskrit. Previous to *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, Lazarus had printed James Ballantyne's *Lagbukaumudi* (1867) at the behest of the Maharaja. Their collaboration continued almost to the end of the Maharaja's life, when he commissioned Lazarus to print a Persian dictionary, *Majmu'ah-e mutaradifat* (1877).²⁷ The printing of *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, in the same press as a Sanskrit grammar and a Persian dictionary suggests the overwhelming focus on pedagogical books printed in Benares. Although textbooks for girls' schools were being printed in many other cities during the 1860s and 1870s, a very particular set of circumstances led to the scripting and publication of Pandit Ramjasan's textbooks. Educational initiatives by local elite groups, voluntary associations and the colonial government created direct and indirect conduits of patronage for the publication of textbooks in Benares. Textbooks generated the most substantial and consistent revenue for the numerous printers working in the city.²⁸ Therefore, the Medical Hall Press's commitment to the four-part *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* was shrewdly judged, and built on the strength of a fairly robust publishing and distribution network. There is no indication of how, or even if, the books were priced. It is likely they were distributed for free - which may also explain why philanthropy extended only to the first edition of these books, since there is no evidence of a second print run.

Although the Maharaja engaged Dr. Lazarus to help manage his schools, they wrestled over the content of the textbooks. The Maharaja was adamant that Christianity should not be taught in his schools, and Lazarus was keen that "heathen books" were not allowed to become part of the syllabus.²⁹ Clearly, the structures and ideological intent of pedagogy were far from settled, and the Maharaja and Dr. Lazarus had to arrive at a consensus. The Maharaja's reservations were in response to a "Christian" paradigm followed at the numerous missionary schools in Benares. On the other hand, Dr. Lazarus prevents the Maharaja from instituting what he perceives as a "regressive" curriculum. It is not entirely clear what he considered "heathen books" although there is an unmistakable echo of the argument made against "objectionable" books in indigenous schools for boys – books of Persian poetry and fantastical stories. Lazarus may have also been anticipating, and preventing, a curriculum preoccupied with schooling girls in *stri dharma*, their religiously defined duties, a common and widely documented strain in instructional print culture of the period. As a consequence, the girls at the Maharaja's schools were initiated into a course of study that was distinctive in many respects.

The Maharaja and Lazarus were in search of someone with intellectual autonomy and an insider's understanding of textbook culture to craft textbooks that were not "Christian" or "heathen". The man of the moment turned out to be Pandit Ramjasan, of the Benares Sanskrit College - with whom Dr. Lazarus had built a professional relationship dating back to 1858. This was fortuitous, since the plan for female education devised by the Maharaja, and implemented by Dr. Lazarus, drew inspiration from one particular pedagogical experiment that had long dominated the intellectual and political history of the city - the Benares Sanskrit College. Pandit Ramjasan designed *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* while serving as a teacher at the College. The shifting dynamic within the College forced many

²⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁸ Ibid.; Francesca Orsini, "Pandits, Printers and Others: Publishing in Nineteenth Century Benares", in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravarty (eds.), *Print Areas: Book History in India*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004, pp.103-138.

²⁹ Ulrike Stark, "Benares Beginnings", p. 58.

pandits trained in the traditional curriculum of Sanskrit studies to re-inscribe their authority through a range of engagements that had perhaps not been possible earlier.³⁰ Pandit Ramjagan nurtured alliances independent of the College. The four-part *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* suggests enterprise and pedagogic confidence in engaging with a wider public through Dr. Lazarus's publishing network.

A short review of Benares Sanskrit College is in order so that we may better appreciate the professional and intellectual circumstances of Pandit Ramjagan at the point at which he drafted *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*. The history of this institution can be roughly divided into two broad phases. In its early decades (1791 to 1830) the Benares Sanskrit College's pedagogic agenda reflected an Orientalist interest in Sanskrit studies. It began with an explicit commitment towards "the preservation and cultivation of the law, literature and religion of the Hindus". The British had hoped to seamlessly transfer the authority vested in the private seminaries of pandits to a public institution. The colonial government recruited the most renowned Benares pandits to serve as teachers. The pandits devised their own curricula and taught the traditional branches of Sanskrit literature that included philosophy, grammar and astrology.³¹ By the 1830s, the debate between the Anglicists and Orientalists cast its shadow over government patronage of Sanskrit learning. The Benares Sanskrit College proceeded into a distinct phase of Anglicisation. The Anglicists hoped to "modernise" the pandits by training them in the "new learning" (*nayi vidya*). The most striking change was in the curriculum - while retaining the traditional Sanskrit-based curriculum an attempt was made to introduce Western science and "useful knowledge".³²

Through the paradigm instituted at Benares Sanskrit College, the pandits of Benares were encouraged to become the principal means of disseminating "useful knowledge". By 1839, the "most eminent professors" of Sanskrit were redirected to teach useful knowledge in the vernaculars. The changes resulted in the institution of the Anglo-Sanskrit programme under the stewardship of James Ballantyne. The programme encouraged Sanskrit scholars to learn English, read science and literature in English, and eventually graduate to becoming teachers in the Anglo-Sanskrit Department. The Anglo-Sanskrit Department created a new generation of Sanskrit scholars who were equally comfortable in Sanskrit and English and creatively translated the "new knowledge" (*nayi vidya*) of Europe into the vernaculars.³³

It was during this dramatic reconfiguration of Sanskrit learning in aid of imparting Western knowledge that Pandit Ramjagan was appointed as the Anglo-Sanskrit teacher in the institution.³⁴ Parallel to his appointment at the College, Pandit Ramjagan deepened his association with the colonial government's Education Department. He assessed exam

³⁰ Vasudha Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, pp.94-107; Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture: India 1770-1880*, Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 51-60, 71-86, 144-183.

³¹ The pedagogy of the pandits, controlled in a nominal way by the British, was meant to train native assistants with knowledge of "Sanskrit law" in the courts. It was also intended to enable the collection and copying of Sanskrit manuscripts. Vasudha Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, pp.94-107; Michael Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture*, pp. 51-60, 71-86, 144-183.

³² Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture*, pp.71-79.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-86, H. R. Nevill, Benares, pp. 173-175. Vasudha Dalmia, *Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*, pp. 99-100.

³⁴ *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1850-51*, Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1852.

papers, translated, edited and provided annotations for texts that became part of school and college curricula across the region. In 1871, shortly after completing *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, he successfully completed an abridged version of Professor Wilson's Sanskrit and English Dictionary.³⁵ These publishing and teaching opportunities came at a certain cost for Pandit Ramjagan. Men like him were under constant, and often hostile scrutiny. When Pandit Ramjagan's Hindi translation of the *Hitopdesa* was printed in 1866, it was praised in a review for being "easy and idiomatic, yet closely literal". The guarded praise is further qualified when he is accused of "tampering with the text", of "not having understood the text" and in one instance "partaking of the ludicrous."³⁶ In another example, although his edition of Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* (1883) was praised as the best "bazar edition", his attempts to "modernise" the Avadhi in keeping with current trends were criticized as "misleading".³⁷ In complete contrast, the textbooks he wrote at the behest of the Maharaja of Vizianagram earned him a reward from both centres of patronage – the Maharaja as well as the colonial government.³⁸

When Pandit Ramjagan turned his attention to teaching young girls, he felt emboldened to engineer two substantial interventions. First, he reduced the gap between the rudimentary expectations of girls and more advanced curricula of male students. In fact, except for some details, he completely eschewed any overt or extended attempt to teach Hindu girls about their "religiously ordained" roles as wives and mothers.³⁹ Pandit Ramajagan's departure from the norm is in evidence if we compare his textbooks to Babu Shivaprasad's *Vamamanoranjan* (1875), the textbook prescribed in government schools for girls across the Benares region. Shivaprasad's work introduces girls to real and mythological women from the subcontinent (Damayanti, Ahalya bai, Draupadi) and more broadly.⁴⁰ Despite its breadth of references it remains preoccupied with the social expectations placed on women. This strain within instructional discourse reaches its apogee in later decades with publications issued by Hanumanprasad Poddar's Gita Press in Gorakhpur.⁴¹ More often than not, our understanding of the period has been shaped by analyses of instructional books that perpetuated a rigorously gendered (and religious) education. In instances where a broader frame for instruction is admitted, it is invariably assumed to be incidental, not intended. This despite substantial evidence that a wide range of instructional (and related) reading material

³⁵ H. H. Wilson was a celebrated orientalist who put together the first Sanskrit-English Dictionary in 1819. He was a member of a committee of Europeans assessing the progress of Benares Sanskrit College in the 1820s. He had served as the Secretary to the Asiatic Society from 1811. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture*, pp.73-74. Trubner's *American and Oriental Literary Record: A Monthly Register*, No. 76, Nov. 30, 1871, p. 81.

³⁶ "Pandit Ram Jagan's *Hitopdesa*", *The Pandit*, August 1, 1866, p. 40.

³⁷ George A. Grierson, *The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1888. p. 50.

³⁸ See *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces*, 1870-71.

³⁹ There are two instances where Pandit Ramjagan directly addresses the expectations of Hindu girls – in the model letters in Part 2 and Part 3, and in Tulsidas's representation of Sita.

⁴⁰ Babu Shivaprasad, *Vamamanoranjan*, Allahabad: Government Press, 1875.

⁴¹ Monika Freier, "Cultivating Emotions: The Gita Press and its Agenda of Social and Spiritual Reform", *South Asian History and Culture*, 3, (2012), pp. 397-413. For a critical analysis of the patriarchal and exclusivist underpinnings of instructional books see Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Delhi, 2001. For an analysis of Hindi journals see Shobna Nijhawan, *Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India*, Delhi, 2012; Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940, Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Delhi, 2002.

was widely circulated.⁴² Pandit Ramjasan's textbooks are a reminder that Hindi print culture for women during this period drew upon diverse sources; and that pedagogic expectations and structures were exploratory rather than narrow and predetermined.

As a second intervention, more crucially, Pandit Ramjasan established equivalence between Western knowledge and "traditional" knowledge. As a first step, he devised a course of study closely allied with the evolving paradigm of *nayi vidya*. The Pandit's textbooks seem to be drafted in response to a series of seminal lectures by the Principal of Benares Sanskrit College, James Ballantyne. The lectures were published as *Sub-Divisions of Knowledge and their Mutual Relations* (1848). Pandit Ramjasan did not follow Ballantyne to the letter, but *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* certainly mimics Ballantyne's work in tone and breadth, and in its epistemological understanding of "useful knowledge" as comprised of multiple elements. Ballantyne had been deeply invested in devising a "comprehensive" and "systematic" syllabus for the Sanskrit pandits of Benares Sanskrit College. It was designed explicitly as a "rational" riposte to counter the self-referential and internally composite Sanskrit *dharmashastras*. The design was meant to convince the pandits of the "unity" of all the sciences, such that a study of physical geography would appear incomplete without an understanding of zoology, botany and geology, which in turn depended on chemistry, physics and logic. It is widely believed that the concurrent academic and intellectual interest in Sanskrit and Western knowledge at Benares Sanskrit College was enforced to impress upon the pandits the inherent superiority of Western knowledge systems. Ballantyne's design in *Sub-Divisions* was ultimately intended to convince "speculative Pandits" of the "rational" basis of Christianity. While any direct proselytisation was expressly forbidden, the principles of natural philosophy and history were often employed to present a case for Christianity on "rational" and "scientific" evidence.⁴³

The predominance of *nayi vidya* is clearly evident in *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* through its focus on geography, history, science and mathematics. Pandit Ramjasan's textbooks present a curriculum that would have trained young women to effortlessly teach boys and girls, at home or in schools. The initiative to introduce secular knowledge to young girls was not entirely unusual. Officials of the colonial government often cited the requirements of "useful knowledge", but in practice this was limited to basic science and mathematics. The following assessment by a school inspector demonstrates the parameters and limits to useful instruction:

The schools are elementary, and the girls do not remain long enough at school to become skillful writers or arithmeticians, but they display a very pleasing intelligence, and besides being able to read, write, and cypher, learn needle and bead work.⁴⁴

In contrast, Pandit Ramjasan, naturally drew upon his training in the Anglo-Sanskrit Department to reinterpret "useful knowledge" to include fairly advanced lessons in

⁴² For a detailed discussion of the range of instructional books for women during the colonial period see Smita Gandotra, "What did Sundaria Read? Hindi Books from Bareilly". For a discussion of genres of "pleasure" rather than "instruction" see Francesca Orsini, *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*, Delhi, 2009.

⁴³ Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture*, pp. 94-117.

⁴⁴ *Report on the Progress of Education in the North Western Provinces, 1869-1870*, p. 50.

geography, science and mathematics. Each discipline is introduced with an attention to detail, carefully calibrated to progress from a basic understanding to advanced knowledge. The gradation is reminiscent of Ballantyne’s “method” in *Sub-Divisions*. The very first book progresses rapidly from teaching readers the alphabet and sentence construction to short descriptions of “the old world” (Asia, Europe, Africa) and “the new world” (America). The third book includes a pullout map of India. Geography is traced through regional rivers and mountain ranges, pilgrimage centres (Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jain) as well as climate and merchandise (Murshidabad silk, Maldah mangoes, Kashmiri pashmina) – a method Ballantyne would have approved.⁴⁵ The fourth book presents short descriptions of Burma, Tibet, China, Japan, Russia, England, France, Rome, Europe, Africa and America.⁴⁶ A similar system of gradation is introduced in mathematics, with simple addition and subtraction followed by complex fractions. The fourth book provides the clearest insight into the expansive and unique curriculum at the Maharaja’s schools. Its lessons teach some astronomy, describe constellations, stars and comets, introduce the functions of the microscope and describe the possibilities of travel and observation in a hot air balloon. In other words, although Pandit Ramjasan followed Ballantyne’s lead in understanding the scope and relevance of the new learning, he extended its purview by introducing girls to the new systems of knowledge.

While remaining for the most part factual in the geographical details of continents and countries, Pandit Ramjasan also decided to include some commentarial gloss. His statements reinforce the structures of imperial knowledge within which an interest in “geography” may be located. Simultaneously, they subtly expose the premises of imperial knowledge. The commentarial asides undergird and provide an unmistakably political subtext to the presentation of geography. The British, he tells us, are known for their truthfulness, confidence, hard work and independence. Consequently British colonial rule over India is glossed as Queen Victoria’s “righteous rule” (*dharmaraj*). Power, he educates his readers, is shared between the monarch (*badshah lath*) and the common people (*samanya log*), both of whom determine the purview of the parliament through consent (*sanmati*). Pandit Ramjasan also draws attention to Britain’s canny supremacy in trade.⁴⁷ In these few statements Ramjasan juxtaposes Britain’s assumption of moral and political supremacy (*dharmaraj*), and its potentially exploitative relationship (through trade) with other geographical regions. In the commentarial gloss the balance between moral supremacy and trade is a delicate one and suggests how his textbooks persistently question political authority.

Once political authority is questioned, the knowledge regimes it authorizes and institutes are also suspect. Ramjasan’s inventiveness in presenting as well as unsettling “useful knowledge” becomes less subtle in other sections of the textbooks. While following Ballantyne’s lead in exploring *nayi vidya*, Pandit Ramjasan also drew attention to alternative sources of knowledge that questioned the very circumstances within which “new knowledge” is scripted and learned. In other words, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* also presents a structured counter to the rationality of *nayi vidya*. A substantial portion of his syllabus draws upon fables from the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopdesa*, as well as the Avadhi poetry of Tulsidas and

⁴⁵ See Pandit Ramjasan, *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*, part 3, pp. 20-40.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, part 4, pp. 22-48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, part 4, pp. 26-28.

Surdas. The simultaneous use of Indian and Western pedagogic and learning traditions is inventively executed. Fables were a commonplace of school primers. However, their selection is critical to the message the compiler intends to emphasize. It is tempting to read political allegory in Pandit Ramjasan's choice of fables. The synchronic presentation of *nayi vidya* with the fables allows him to suggest the deeply unstable and politically volatile context within which knowledge is produced. While his readers are encouraged to view the world through the "rational" lens of useful knowledge, they are also tutored to recognize the fickleness of political authority.

Take for instance the presentation of history in *Stri Shiksha Subodhini*. The fables share a deliberate continuum with the history lessons in the textbooks. Whereas the history lessons lay out in excruciating and monotonous detail how one dynasty replaced another in the subcontinent, the fables are a lesson in *real politik* *Realpolitik?* encouraging readers to see a world that is arbitrary, violent, unpredictable, undeserving of merit and consistently ungodly. The aphoristic wisdom of the first primer (He who descends into water must know how to swim, or else he will drown; Human beings should never make an enemy of the powerful) matures greatly by the second book.⁴⁸ A predominant number of short tales in the second book introduce us to human or animal characters in conflict with each other. In each instance an authority figure (*qazi*, *kotwal*, king, tiger, guru) intervenes or pronounces judgement. The short tales rarely end without violence. The juridical and arbitration powers of authority figures are largely suspect. They dole out advice or punishment in a manner that appears capricious. The fables continue in the third book. Here the central motif that links many of the animal fables is a meditation on the waning physical and political strength of erstwhile "kings". Old tigers, solitary elephants and feeble vultures are outwitted by tomcats and jackals who exploit their vulnerability. The choice of fables seems studied, and enabled Pandit Ramjasan to introduce to his readers two very different paradigms within which to understand history's victors and vanquished.

Pandit Ramjasan's *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* can be interpreted at numerous levels. It reworks Ballantyne's method into Hindi for the purpose of enabling young girls to learn what boys were allowed to learn. This advanced curriculum would certainly have equipped the girls studying at the Maharaja's schools to graduate to teaching positions in the region - a detail that is not steadfastly documented in colonial reports, but mentioned in passing. At the same time the books partially fulfilled the preoccupations of the Maharaja, Dr. Lazarus and Pandit Ramjasan. They presented useful knowledge, without establishing the link with "rational" Christianity. The books drew upon indigenous traditions approved by the British (*Panchatantra*, bhakti poetry), without being "heathen". They also allowed the writer to present his own version of a "comprehensive" syllabus that substantially undermined the political authority of his superiors at Benares Sanskrit College.

The closest we come to seeing the girls who studied from *Stri Shiksha Subodhini* is through Mrs. Etherington, who took over some of Dr. Lazarus' work in managing the schools. Mrs. Etherington and Dr. Lazarus probably grew to know each other through their shared association with the Baptist Missionary Church. She states that the students in the Maharaja's schools were far better educated than those in government schools. She self-importantly assumes that this has more to do with Dr. Lazarus's "European

⁴⁸ Ibid., part 1, pp. 10-18.

superintendence”. However, her observations may also indicate that the Maharaja’s schools drew more committed students, or that the curriculum of study instituted for them was exceptional:

As a rule, greater intelligence is displayed by the pupils in the Mission and Vizianagram schools, than is seen in the girls in those schools that have not been under European superintendence. . . . In the Mission and Vizianagram schools, the ideas of the children regarding things in general are far more extensive and correct than those of children in government schools; their thinking faculties are brought more into exercise . . .⁴⁹

There are stray accounts of the girls enjoying geography and mathematics in particular, along with indications that several girls trained at these schools went on to accept positions as teachers in other parts of the province.

In the Maharaja’s schools the vocabulary, symbolism and gestures of patronage brushed up against the demands of efficiency, rationality and economy. The Maharaja was compelled to review his arrangement when he involved Mrs. Etherington. She reduced the stipend amounts and made their payment conditional on performance and regular attendance. She noted the Maharaja’s “liberality” in “sparing no expense”. Her exertions on this issue suggest the conflict between very different understandings of the structures and intent of educational institutions. Mrs. Etherington assessed the early success of the schools by cynically implying that students were drawn to the schools only because of generous stipends. “[M]oney in India” she commented archly, “is mightier even than caste or custom.” The stipend money she believed acted like “magic” in helping parents overcome their “prejudice”.⁵⁰

Mrs. Etherington reduced the stipends, but there was no visible or comparable drop in attendance figures - which does imply that girls continued to attend the schools despite the changes she instituted. In other words, she completely countenanced the possibility that parents may be choosing to send their daughters to the Maharaja’s schools because of numerous reasons - they were efficiently managed, taught their daughters an advanced curriculum and also helped allay maintenance costs. Her statements and gestures overlook the deeply involved, intimate and typically Benarasi geography of patronage within which the Maharaja’s schools grew.

Conclusion

The urban geography of colonial Benares created very particular conditions for learning and print culture (Benares Institute, Benares Sanskrit College, the early presence of missionary schools and the Medical Hall Press). It is within this environment that we encounter an autonomous initiative to school girls in subjects central to a “new learning”, usually directed at boys – geography, science and mathematics. The case study of the Maharaja’s schools has enabled us to address very specific questions related to the conditions of their making - why were students drawn to the schools, why were poor upper caste girls specifically addressed, why were the textbooks commissioned for these schools so

⁴⁹ Mrs. Etherington, “Female Education in Benares”, August 1874, p. 491.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

distinctive? The archival reticence on these and related questions has been offset by paying attention to those who conceptualized the school project. Each of the principal actors in this case study arrived at the precise moment of their influence in the schools through disparate intellectual, professional and political commitments. Their particular motivation was determined by numerous factors.

The Maharaja's schools present us with an example of indigenous initiative that was conceived along multiple axes of class, caste, race and gender. This plurality of influence was at times developed in consonance, and at times appears dissonant on crucial matters (stipends and curriculum). The Maharaja, as principal patron, resignified the role played by the colonial government and church missions as principal patrons of female education, under the terms of patronage he understood. His schools offered a much needed counterpoint to the colonial government's aggressively instituted, but ineffectual and misdirected schemes like grants-in-aid. His project was built on an understanding of his role as a patron, it showcased the intellectual and pedagogic talent of Benares, astutely drew upon the most contested traditions of learning within the city, and evolved in concert with the perceptions of its principal collaborators. Although the Maharaja encountered resistance to the generous stipends he instituted even from within his circle of collaborators, his largesse and the specific address to girls from poor upper caste families appear in a different light at the end of this analysis. Given the quick response to the schools and their expanding attendance figures, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Maharaja's schools were opened for upper caste girls from poor families, who otherwise may have attended government schools in the city. They may have been drawn to the schools for numerous reasons – generous stipendiaries, institutional efficiency and innovative curricula.

Our attention is drawn in particular to the lively textbooks printed by Dr. Lazarus at the Medical Hall Press. They were commissioned and distributed within a cultural environment that proved particularly responsive to the print requirements of educational institutions. Pandit Ramjagan scripted his textbooks as a response to a longer dialogue within Benares Sanskrit College on the question of *nayi vidya*. The particular character of the textbooks allayed the concerns of the Maharaja and Dr. Lazarus on the political subtext of instructional material. However, Pandit Ramjagan was also successful in introducing a subtle but consistent critique of political authority within his textbooks. The fullest potential of what these books made possible is suggested in Mrs. Etherington's assessment of the girls she met, some of whom likely graduated to teaching positions in the region. The textbooks were premised on an understanding that the "thinking faculties" of the girls had to be honed in "ideas" that were "more extensive".

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