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Punjab University Lahore: History of Development (1882-1932)

The Background: After the annexation of Punjab in 1849, the British Indian government started planning for introduction of modern European system of education in Punjab. Sikh Sardars were generally as innocent of letters as the medieval English barons of England. Persian was the court language of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It was replaced by Urdu as the *lingua franca* after annexation and also adopted as the medium of instruction. The Punjab Administration Report of 1851-52 states: “Punjabi is falling into desuetude, losing its currency as a spoken language, and degenerating into a provincial and rustic dialect whereas Urdu is gaining ground among the upper and middle classes in Punjab”.

Sir Charles Wood’s famous dispatch of 1854 proved to be a landmark in the history of education in India. As a follow up, three universities were opened at the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras during 1857. Department of Public Instruction was established in the Punjab in January 1856. An education cess of 1% was imposed upon Land Tax and the income generated was used to open 456 Schools in Punjab villages within two years. The number of village schools reached 700 by end of 1858. School education for girls was also encouraged by opening separate schools. The need for an institution of higher education was felt and the necessary sanction was granted in 1863. Government College Lahore was established in 1864. Dr GW Leitner, Professor of Arabic and Mohammedan Law at King’s College London, was appointed its first Principal, who served this college for 22 years (1864-86).

Dr Leitner was the force behind the idea of setting up a university in Punjab. He founded *Anjuman-i-Punjab* in 1865, a propagandist literary society for promotion of education and himself became its

Secretary. Dr Leitner prepared a plan for setting up “Oriental University” for promoting the study of vernacular literature and to impart knowledge of all sorts, including Science, in the vernacular. The proposal was not approved at the Govt. of India level due to shortage of funds. Appeals were made to collect funds from public and Chiefs of States who contributed liberally to set up the University. Ultimately, it was decided that an Oriental College be established instead of Oriental University to serve the same purpose. The idea of Punjab University was postponed for the future.

The notification for establishment of Punjab University College was issued on 8th December 1869. The special objects were stated to be as follows:

- (i) To promote the diffusion of European Science, as far as possible, through the medium of vernacular languages of Punjab;
- (ii) To afford encouragement to the enlightened study of Eastern classical languages and literature; and
- (iii) To associate the learned and influential classes of the Province with the officers of the Government in the promotion and supervision of popular education.

In 1870, Punjab University College and its twin, Oriental College Lahore were born. The objective of setting up an Oriental University was to be achieved through this college. It was called Oriental School till March 1872, when its title was changed to Oriental College. Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit were taught as major languages in Oriental College along with study of Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, the History of India and Geography. After a few years, Hindi and Punjabi, in the Gurmukhi script, were also introduced in its curriculum.

Punjab University College was established as a forerunner of Punjab University. It was to perform a three-fold function of a teaching body, an examining body and a learned society. It started functioning in one of the rooms of the Govt. College Lahore. The first examinations were held in October 1871 for the award of certificates of Matriculation, FA in Arts, Maulvi, Munshi and

Pundit. All the students were getting Stipends or Scholarships offered by the donors. Dr Leitner was the chief executive officer of this college. Punjab University College was run like a mini-University by the Senate and Syndicate. However, it has no power to issue degrees which was a big handicap for students. They had to appear in two examinations; for Scholarships, Punjab University College examination was obligatory, and for other jobs, degrees of Calcutta University were necessary. All Colleges in Punjab were affiliated to Calcutta University. The system of dual examinations entailed great hardship for both the students and faculty as the courses for study were not the same in Calcutta and Punjab.

Creation of Punjab University: An educational conference was held in Lahore in 1871 and the question of raising the Punjab University College to a full-fledged University was vociferously put forward. However, the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Henry Durand, was not impressed by their pleadings. He constituted a Committee to examine all aspects of the proposal. The general impression was that the examinations of Punjab University College were not of the same severity as that of the Calcutta University, which was considered its role model. The committee provided guidelines to improve the examination system and English was made the *sine qua non* for all BA and MA examinations. Despite all efforts of Dr Leitner to push up the proposal in the both Houses of Parliament in England, it was not approved by the Government of India. The decision evoked great disappointment and there was complete lull for three years.

Queen Victoria was declared *Kaiser-e-Hind* at the great Darbar held at Delhi in 1877. Watching the atmosphere of seeking favours from Governor-General of India, the Senate of Punjab University College submitted a memorandum to raise the status of Punjab University College to that of Punjab University. The Senate's request was approved by the Lieutenant Governor and forwarded to the Governor-General of India with his remarks that people of Punjab be gifted a University on this happy occasion for a celebration. On 27 January, 1877, Mr A. Howell, officiating Secretary to Govt. of India and a former critic of the University

proposal, started the process of creating the University. Punjab Govt. prepared a draft proposal for creating the University and Lord Salisbury got its approval from the Council of India. Punjab University act was based on the Act of Calcutta University. It was submitted by Lieutenant Governor of Punjab to Govt. of India on 12 June, 1879. The bill was made an Act of Govt. of India after Secretary of State (Viscount Cranbrook) was fully satisfied with the reports of progress made by the Punjab University College. The condition imposed was that the students of Punjab University College must attain the same level of proficiency as that of Calcutta University.

The Dream was fulfilled: It took almost fifteen years to realize the dream of having a full-fledged University of Punjab by the end of 1979 but there were some more hurdles to be crossed. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Robert Egerton, drew the attention of Registrar, Punjab University College to the Secretary of State’s apprehensions about the Schools of Medicine and Law which were not competent enough to award degrees. The same situation existed for engineering education in Punjab. So it was decided that Punjab University will not issue degrees in these disciplines until the levels of education and examination are improved.

On 13th November, 1880, Viceroy, Lord Ripon visited Lahore. Lieutenant Governor, Robert Egerton and Maharaja of Kashmir waited upon him and presented an address reminding him of Lord Lytton’s promise to provide a University of national importance to Punjab. The deputation impressed upon him the progress made by the Punjab University College during its existence. Lord Ripon expressed his personal approval for creating the University to promote Vernacular languages and literature and to have a mix of Oriental and English education in Punjab. He was shown the large endowment fund of Rs. 3,75,000 created for setting up the University to which Maharajas of Patiala, Kashmir, Jind, Nabha, and Nawab of Bahawalpur had contributed large sums. Lord Ripon appreciated the public funding of higher education in Punjab.

On 1st September, 1881, Govt. of India informed the Govt. of Punjab (Lieutenant Governor) that Secretary of State has informed that the proposed legislation to raise the status of Punjab University College to Punjab University and to give it power to confer degrees has been sanctioned. On 14th June 1882, the Bill was introduced in the Council of Governor General, Lord Ripon. It was referred to the high powered Select Committee, which suggested some amendments, and got the assent of Governor General on 5th October, 1882. The Punjab University Act (No. XIX of 1882) was notified in the Gazette of India on 7th October, 1882, and Punjab University was formally called into existence on 14th October, 1882, by a Notification issued by Sir Charles Aitchison, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab. On the same day, the Senate meeting was held in Simla and Sir Charles Aitchison conferred the Honorary Doctorate in Oriental Learning on him, without whose "help, advocacy and originating power the Panjab, in all probability, would have had no University of its own for many years to come".

In the University Calendar of 1884-85, there is a comprehensive report about the movement for achieving its target: “An Oriental University has been combined with an English University. It is thus a national University in the truest sense”. Mr. Baden Powell was appointed as the first Honorary Vice Chancellor, Dr. Leitner as the first Registrar and Sir Denzil Ibetson, Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, as the ex-officio Chancellor. The University suffered financial difficulties from its very start. Dr Leitner had been working as Registrar of Punjab University College since 1870 and he continued in this post till 1885. He was blamed for bringing the University to the state of chaos and insolvency. The Chancellor appointed a committee to take stock of the situation. It was found that the maintenance of Oriental Faculty proved to be a big burden on the finances of the University.

The situation started improving after Dr WH Rattigan joined as the VC. Punjab University was primarily an examining and administrative board. In 1902, only 27% was spent on teaching, less than one half of one percent on its libraries, and nothing was spent on encouragement of literature. The University reputation

was low in the eyes of public. Maharaja of Patiala donated Rs. 50,000 for establishment of Scholarships in 1890.

Indian Universities were created following the model of London University. However, in the Oriental College training was given by the traditional methods and Titles were conferred upon who qualified in various grades. These were, in descending order, as follows: In Arabic, Maulvi Fazal, Maulvi Alim, Maulvi Qazi; In Persian, Munshi Fazal, Munshi Alim, Munshi; In Sanskrit, Shastri, Visharad, Pragya, Pradvivaka; in Gurmukhi, Bhai; In indigenous Medicine, Hakim and Vaidya. Lala Ganga Ram continued to teach Civil Engineering in Oriental College in the vernacular. During the first six years of the University, the functioning of Oriental College was subjected to severe criticism but it was improved after Dr. Aurel Stein was appointed Principal, who improved the teaching standards and overhauled its finances. In 1899, Sheikh (later on Sir) Mohammed Iqbal was appointed as McLeod Reader in Arabic. He started producing works in Philosophy and Poetry which brought him high reputation in academic circles.

In 1887, the Syndicate was reconstituted as a real executive committee of the Senate and given the power of quick and effective dispatch of business; Faculties were organized and a Board of Studies was established in each subject area in the University. In 1889, Punjab University was granted affiliation by Oxford University and in 1896, Cambridge University followed suit. It raised its prestige. Govt. College, Lahore was older than Punjab University. It was preparing students for MA examination in English, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, History, Political Economy, Mathematics, Philosophy and Physical Science. It possessed a highly competent teaching faculty. In 1886, Forman Christian College was established in Lahore. In 1889, DAV College was opened by Arya Samaj, and in 1892, Islamia College started functioning in Lahore. Gordon College, Rawalpindi was recognized in 1895 and Randhir College, Kapurthala in 1898.

A Sikh school was established in Amritsar in 1893 which was raised to High School in 1896. Intermediate classes were added

next year and BA classes started in 1899. In the Punjab University Calendar, its purpose was defined as follows: *“to impart to Sikh youths an education that will tend to raise the status of the Sikh people, to maintain the Sikh religion, to promote morality and sobriety of life, to develop active habits and physical strength, and to produce intelligent and useful citizens and loyal subjects of the British Crown”*. It became the most prominent college affiliated to the Punjab University.

Teaching of Science was confined to Govt. College which was affiliated to Calcutta University. The first Entrance examination for the degree course in Science was held by Punjab University in 1897, when five candidates appeared and all failed. Teaching of Science was still in its infancy and in 1902, only two students passed in B.Sc. examination. There was an outcry against the inhumanly high standard of examination of the University. It was soon realized the degree of BA did not provide an avenue to the wide range of means of livelihood. In 1894, University introduced a Clerical and Commercial Examination to make high school students eligible for administrative jobs.

Indian Universities Commission visited Lahore in 1902. On 24th April, 1904, Indian Universities Act received the assent of Lord Curzon, the Governor General of India. It was emphasized, “The University should exist for instruction of students, the regulation of their conduct, and promotion of the study and research”. This Act required the Indian Universities to follow the pattern of Oxford and Cambridge instead of London University. A general overhaul of the University was done after the Constitutional changes made by the Indian Universities Act of 1904. In 1912, Punjab University had 21 affiliated Colleges. Provision was made to invite prominent Scholars from abroad to teach courses and deliver special lectures to inculcate interest and arouse the curiosity of students. Out of ten Arts Colleges, seven, with 80% student strength of the Province, were located in close proximity in Lahore. Intercollegiate teaching became a reality as in Oxford and Cambridge.

Science departments started growing in the beginning of 20th century. Physical Sciences were followed by Life Sciences. During 1922-23, a University Chemical Laboratory was constructed and in 1924, Dr SS Bhatnagar was appointed as Professor of Physical chemistry and Director of Chemical Laboratory. In 1927, the Syndicate appointed a committee for creating a University Department of Physics and organization of an Honours School. Honours Schools were also started in Botany, Zoology, Oriental Languages, English, History and Mathematics.

Sir Malcolm Halley, Chancellor of Punjab University, delivered his convocation address on 23rd December 1926. He started his address with exhortation to faculty: “Historically a University is a free association of Scholars; if it is to occupy its proper position, it must have academic autonomy. Every effort should be made to extend professional rather than general Arts courses..... The University has a few signs of a common life; it is still in the tribal stage; it needs to become a nation”.

Punjab University was conceived as an Oriental University but it got metamorphosed into a Western University. The opinion in support was: “Higher education in India must be, and must remain, bilingual”. Mr A.Yusuf Ali wrote a striking note to the University Enquiry Committee: “Indeed, the use of English is perhaps the greatest bond which has linked together Indians of all provinces and communities. Without this bond, the federation of India will be an idle dream”.

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