



## Educational Structure and the Process of Colonization in Colonial India

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**Abstract:** Right from the beginning of their relationship with India the British, who had come as traders and slowly and steadily became rulers, had enormously influenced the socio-economic and political fabrication of India. Although India was among the largest colonies of the British Empire, however, governmental initiatives and investments on human capital were among the lowest in the world. In exclusive reference to educational scenario in India, the East India Company was generally apathetic to the provision of schooling until the early nineteenth century. In the beginning of their regime they reserved public funds for centers of classical learning and the promotion of western sciences. Moreover, it was also kept in mind by the British administrators that the company has to promote English language in India. It was done with the expectation that this mechanism would produce an elite group of educated Indians who could serve the demands of administrative offices. The education system based on the doctrine of Macaulay (1835) became a means of colonization. Essentially, it wiped off the faith of Indians in their own culture and changed the basic philosophy of Indian people against the Indian nature and outlook. Education could have played a major role in encouraging social mobility, eliminating superstition from socio-cultural sphere, increasing productivity and uplifting the status of women and tribal segment of India. However, the British rule used education as an instrument of colonization and converting the Indian intelligentsia into government clerks.

**Keywords:** Charter Act; Imperialism; Macaulay's Minute; Vernacular language; Wood's Despatch

**Objectives of the Study:** The paper focuses on the socio-cultural outlook of British imperial rule in India. Evaluating different experiments made in the procedure of educational structure, this paper compares the condition of learning and learner, both in terms of quality and quantity, in pre-colonial period and colonial period. It also underlines the basic design of newly introduced experiments in education system and their consequences in India.

**Methodology:** This paper studies the provision of education/learning in India under the authority of the East India Company and the British Crown. The analysis combines qualitative data from primary and secondary sources from the district gazetteers and colonial censuses related with population and educational data.

### I. Introduction

In nineteenth century, the East India Company, later known as the British Crown, introduced a novel structure of education in British India.<sup>1</sup> In this phase, the East India Company followed a policy of non-interference in the social and cultural life of the Indians. The reason behind this was that they did not think that it was their duty to impart education to Indian masses (Basu, 1974; Gounden, 1967). Therefore, they followed the Indian traditional infrastructure of education. Up-to the first decade of nineteenth century Pathsals (small primary schools) continued to impart education in rural and urban regions. In this structure the importance of Sanskrit remained intact. Muslims attended Madrasas. Higher education was confined primarily to upper castes/classes (Ambedkar, 1946). It is quite mention worthy that Christian missionary, who were interested in spreading Christianity through education, had already established several educational institutions which were attached to their respective churches.

<sup>1</sup> After conquering the mighty empire of Bengal, Marataha, Mysore and Punjab the administrators of English Company bifurcated whole India in two entities as British India and the Princely States. British India refers to roughly two-thirds of the India that was under direct control of British rule. The remaining one-third of the territories were under the hegemony of various native or local princes who had the autonomy to manage their local affairs including education. These territories were known as Princely States or Native States.

After the revolt of 1857, the Crown started controlling education policy until 1919 when education was transferred to the control of Indian ministers in the provinces.<sup>2</sup> After the declaration of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms (Government of India Act, 1919) several regulations and recommendations were made to expand and improve the public education system (Syed & Naik, 1951). In this endeavor both public and private funds were used for the expansion of education infrastructure in India. However, this initiative was unable to achieve mass literacy. Statistical data narrates that there were three primary schools for every 10 villages and less than 10% of the population was able to read and write.

Although the British rule made numerous recommendations to develop mass primary schooling and to create a new public system of schooling, however, colonial policy was unsuccessful in substantially increasing literacy (Chaudhary, 2009). The public human capital expenditure in British India was very low in comparison to other colonies dependent on British Empire. It compelled India to lag far behind in socio-cultural sphere. Table 1 presents estimates of literacy rates, based on the Census of 1911, by gender for different castes and religions. Various studies and data portray that in British period the average literacy was extremely low and female literacy was almost absent (Census of India, 1911). According to a contemporary report on education, on average less than 1 in a 100 woman was literate, with the exception of Jains and Christians.

**Table 1: Literacy in India (Census of 1911)**

Social Group	Bombay		Madras		Bengal		United Province	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Hindu	12	01	40	01	21	02	06	0.4
Muslim	7	01	17	01	08	0.2	06	01
Christian	41	24	23	11	52	40	35	23
Buddhist	-	-	75	31	17	01	17	05
Jain	53	07	46	03	77	11	47	05
Sikh	-	-	-	-	53	08	37	07
Tribes	-	-	0.4	0.0	01	0.0	-	-

It is ironical that percentage of literacy varied extremely between different caste and religious groups among Hindus. Literacy among Hinduism reflects the social hierarchy of the caste system. For example, male Brahman literacy ranged from 22% in UP (United Province) to 64% in Bengal. Similarly, lower caste males had below average literacy that varied from 0.5% in UP (United Province) to 6% in Bengal. Literacy among aboriginal tribes was even lower in comparison to lower castes. Data reveals that 1% of the tribes were literate in any province (Chaudhary, 2009; Heyneman, 1980). The tribes were found in large numbers in Assam, remote regions of Bengal, and in Central India. In these interior regions Christian missionaries were the chief organization that worked for educational improvement. Muslims who were the dominant religious minority (approximately 22% of the population in 1911) had higher literacy rates than the lower castes and tribes.

After the rebellion of 1857, three universities were set up in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.<sup>3</sup> However, these institutions played no role in promoting rational outlook or independent thinking and merely produced dozens of graduates sufficiently Westernized to be alienated from their own culture and tradition (Mukherji, 1966). It was the second decade of twentieth century that Indian universities provided teaching facilities. But, till this time education was of a predominantly literacy character and the provision for technical training was very less. Education for girls, lower classes and tribes was almost totally ignored (Whitehead, 2005; Shahidullah, 1987). Because higher education was in English, there was no official effort to translate western literature into the vernacular, nor was there any standardization of Indian scripts. From the second half of nineteenth century there was growth in educational institutions in India, however, these units stressed over Western value based education. Table 2 reflects the huge data describing the above-mentioned narration (Chaudhary, 2009).

**Table 2: Educational Institutions In India (1886-1917)**

Institutions	1886-87	1891-92	1896-97	1901-02	1906-07	1911-12	1916-17
Primary Schools	40.65	41.77	44.70	40.70	46.81	48.39	58.27
Secondary Schools	2.06	2.10	2.27	2.28	2.44	2.49	3.15
Colleges	0.052	0.061	0.069	0.079	0.075	0.073	0.080

<sup>2</sup> The East India Company controlled the Indian administration, both internal and external, until the uprising of 1857. Henceforth, the British Crown took over control from the Company with the Government of India Act of 1858. Accordingly, the office of India Minister was created in London which was known as India Office. India Minister or The Minister for India acted as a mediator between the Crown and the Government of India.

<sup>3</sup> However, these institutions remained merely examining bodies and nothing was done to cater the phenomenon of teaching or learning. Higher education was carried out by the affiliated colleges which gave a two-year B.A. course with heavy emphasis on rote learning and examinations. At this time, due to the self oriented attitude of the British rule, drop-out rate remained always very high.

However, the education system based on English language influenced Indian society in a way that the British administrators could never have imagined. Concepts and theories of philosophers like Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Locke, Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith, etc. instilled in the Indian mind the importance of equality, liberty, freedom, parliament and democracy (Basu, 1974; Chandra, 1966). As a result of the exposure to such ideas, Indians began to recognize the need for change. The imposition of English in the education system was a blessing in disguise. It infused the idea of nationalism in India. Indians from varied regions speaking different languages could now communicate with each other through the medium of English. English thus united the educated Indians and brought about a feeling of commonness among them. A spirit of nationalism gradually emerged.

## II. Macaulay's Minute (1835): The beginning of colonization through education

In the second decade of nineteenth century, the English Company became aware of the need for introducing Western education in India. This need was catered by Governor-General Lord William Bentinck (1828-35). He initiated English as the official language of administration or language of court in India (Sharp & Richey, 1920). The English East India Company, in this reference, had clear vision which can be verified by letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> July, 1830 by the Court of Directors to William Bentinck. The letter narrates, "*From the meditated change in the language of public business including judicial proceedings, you anticipate several collateral advantages, the principal of which is, that the judge or other European officer being thoroughly acquainted with the language in which the proceedings are held (English), will be, and appear to be, less dependent upon the natives by whom he is surrounded and those natives will in consequence, enjoy fewer opportunities.*" Thus, the interests of millions of Indians were sacrificed for the convenience of English rule. The appearance of British superiority became more important than reality. The major lacuna of this policy was that it refused the importance of vernacular languages and imposed the superiority of English language in India (Naoroji, 1901).

Thomas Macaulay was nominated as the first law member in the Governor General's Council. He was the first administrator who profoundly promoted the English language, as the medium of instruction, for educating the people in Western thought and ideals (Kumar, 1991; Mukherji, 1966). William Bentinck supported Macaulay's views. In 1835, Macaulay recommended the Government a scheme of education in India.<sup>4</sup> He emphasized on the introduction of western education and English language as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. On July 31, 1837, Lord Macaulay explained his point of view by stating that, "*The purpose of the Company was only to educate the elite group which would educate the general public later, and thus fulfilling the goal of educating the masses in general.*" He explained the same by observing that, "*the aim of education in India was to anglicize the Indians through English education and to make black-colored Indian English in their way of living, behaviour, thought, culture, traditions and morality. Such persons were likely to serve as the connecting link between the British Government and the general public.*"

It must be remembered that employing Englishmen at all levels of the administration was both expensive and difficult. Therefore, the need for low ranked English knowing Indian clerks was one of the foremost reasons that prompted the government to take steps to spread English education. Moreover, employing educated Indians was necessary because of the need to expand and consolidate the British Empire (Gounden, 1967). Above all, the idea was to create a class which was supposed to be Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect. Besides, Western education was expected to reconcile the people of India to British rule particularly as it glorified British rule.

In-order to establish their hegemony, the Charter Act of 1813 directed the Company to spend one lakh rupees on education. It is ironically even this amount could not be utilized because of a raging debate over the medium of instruction (Cohn, 1966). The difference in ideologies regarding the language/medium of instruction created two groups, namely the Orientalist and the Anglicists. The Orientalists promoted the study of indigenous literature through vernacular languages. They gave importance to Sanskrit and Arabic languages and thought that Indian culture can only be preserved by this system of education. According to their opinion, "*Indian culture was of a higher order and as such England was to learn much from it.*" On the contrary, the Anglicists highlighted that English was a better language and western literature should be taught in educational curriculum (Mehta, 1929; Datta, 1964; Chand, 1926). Amidst this controversy, Lord Macaulay gave his historical 'Minute'. He opined that, "*the education system was the key for the benefit of trade and easy communication with the natives.*" According to him, the mind of the Indians could be only colonized only through imparting English based education. Despite being ignorant of the importance and moral value of Indian literature and languages he daringly made a proclamation in

<sup>4</sup> In 1835, the government passed an Act declaring that educational funds by the East India Company would be utilized for imparting Western education through the medium of English.

his 'Minute' that, "*Who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arab world. All the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England.*" He found English to be a language superior even to the other European languages. It was thought that it will teach the Indians about mechanism of administration and prepared them for future.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the new educational policy, a Medical College was established in Calcutta in 1835 (Schultz, 1963).

Macaulay's Minute on Education had an influential impact on educational policy and is a classic example of a Western approach to Indian civilization. Before the establishment of British rule in India, the official language of the Mughals was Persian. More to it major portion of Indian population used Urdu as their medium of instruction and communication. At that time education was usually imparted with the knowledge of Arabic and Sanskrit. With an attempt to learn the administrative mechanism of India, the British Company had given some financial support to a Calcutta Madrassa and a Sanskrit college at Banaras in 1781 and 1792 respectively (Paul, 1974). Governor-General Warren Hastings (1775-82) had himself learned Sanskrit and Persian and several other Company officials were keenly interested to learn and document the vernacular heritage of India.

In order to rule India effectively, an understanding of her past traditions and culture was required. As a result, the Archaeological Survey of India was set by the untiring efforts of Alexander Cunningham and Sir John Marshall. James Prinsep deciphered the Ashokan inscriptions which were written in Brahmi. Many European scholars took keen interest in Indian languages (Berce, 1982; Kenneth, 1994). Among them the most worth was Sir William Jones. In 1785, he founded the Asiatic Society for the study and preservation of Indian literature and her heritage. Jones himself was a great scholar of Sanskrit. He translated Manu Smriti in English language which was known as 'A code of Gentoo Laws.'<sup>6</sup> Macaulay was immensely opposed to this orientalism. Once he said that, "*I believe that the present system tends, not to accelerate the progress of truth, but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology ... I have no knowledge of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value.*"

Macaulay had no uncertainty in deciding the English language as a medium of instruction in educational system in India. It is an important fact that under this scheme the theory of Downward Filtration was implemented. i.e., it favoured to educate an elite portion of population which would further transfer education to lower social classes (Beer, 1962; Indian Education Commission Report, 1883-84). Macaulay himself quoted that, "*It is impossible for us with our limited means to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.*"

The literary meaning of filtration is moving of something from the top to bottom. Hence, the filtration theory in education simply reflects the idea of moving down of education or knowledge from the top to the bottom, i.e., from the higher class people to the lower classes or the general population. The British rule implanted this policy because they wanted to create an elite group which would be given posts in the administration and in turn this educated and employed Indian group would influence the general public for accepting the British rule in the country (Hutton, 1963). However, in view of some historians, the main reason for adopting this policy was the meager financial resources with the Company for educational purposes. Therefore, the Government economized the cost of administration by employing educated Indians in subordinate posts in offices. Similarly, some others narrates that when the higher class people would receive English education their culture would be improved and the general public would accept them as their role model. As a result, the lower class people would also be educated after being influenced by the higher class people.

This policy came under severe criticism for various reasons. Firstly, this policy was intended to create a class of interpreters between the ruler and the ruled. In reality, it created clerks who were Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect, as put forward by Macaulay (Desai, 2000). As per the expectation of Macaulay, these educated persons were supposed to filter downwards the education/knowledge from

<sup>5</sup> He advocated education for a selected class and wanted to create eminent clerks to serve the lower cadres in British administration. This 'Minute' passed by William Bentinck swept off the Indian system of education and tried to uproot the Indian culture through English based education. Thus, the only aim behind the Macaulay Minute was to create "Brown Englishmen" with English thought and opinions.

<sup>6</sup> Many of Jones' scholarly articles on Sanskrit and Indian past were published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Inspired by him, Charles Wilkins and Max Mueller translated the Bhagavad Gita and Rig Veda respectively into English language.

the upper classes to the masses. But these few Indians could not serve as connecting link between the British government and the general people. This English educated Indian class improved their own ways of living, but they drifted themselves from the general population. Thus, the general public was ignored, both by the British rule and the educated Indian elite group. Secondly, after implementation of this theory in practice too many English educated Indians came out in the field and it was not possible for the British government to absorb them according to their expectations. This situation led to unemployment on a vast scale throughout the country. For ending their unemployment, this learned group opened some schools on the Western pattern. Thus, a number of new English schools sprang up.

The educational policy drawn as per Macaulay Minute was credited with certain advantages. Firstly, it gave common language to the Indians and offered to unite them and facilitated for mutual interaction. Henceforth, political consciousness among the Indians raised much above from the fronts of region and religion (Mukhopadhyay, 1984). Secondly, it provided an opportunity to acquire knowledge about modern science & technology, political and economic ideas, etc. It also broadened the outlook of educated Indians and helped in rescuing the society from superstitions and other socio-cultural malaises. Thirdly, this new scheme opened the scope for educated Indians for employment in governmental services. However, it was also a truth that the educational institutions emerged as the factories to supply clerks cheaply (Psacha, 1973). Lastly, the scheme of education based on the thoughts of Macaulay proved blessing in disguise for the Indians in long run.<sup>7</sup>

### III. Wood's Despatch (1854)

In 1844, English became the official language in India. It was declared that people having knowledge of English would be preferred for public employment. This immensely helped in the extension of English education in India. In 1854, Charles Wood, the President of the Company's Board of Control, carved out a plan for educational reorganization. Eminent scholar, Bipan Chandra, pointed out that, "*Through the Wood's Despatch the Government proclaimed its intention of creating a properly articulated system of education from the primary school to the university level.*" In accordance with the Wood's Despatch Universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857 (Schultz, 1963). It is remarkable that the above mentioned three cities were regarded as presidencies in that period. In 1858 Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the famous Bengali writer, became one of the first two graduates of Calcutta University.

Wood's Education Despatch was the first official document that made an attempt to describe the education policy of East India Company (Viswanathan, 2000). This document outlined the Company's vision in reference to the provision of schooling, both primary and higher, in India.<sup>8</sup> Through Macaulay Minute (1835), the British company promoted a very high degree of education for a small number of natives, while the English Company now emphasized the importance of expanding the whole education machinery for the rural masses. At the same time Macaulay tried to make English language as medium of instruction in India, but Wood's endeavor also recognized the importance of vernacular languages of India (Pani & Pattnaik, 2006). The Despatch introduced public subsidies known as 'grant-in-aids' to directly support schools under private management that were termed as aided schools. It is a matter of fact that by promoting grant-in-aids, the East India Company created an important role for private enterprises in educational scenario. Consequently, private funds became a significant force in the expansion and development of the public school structure.

### IV. Education Commission Report (1883)

After the implementation of Wood's Despatch another remarkable provisions were introduced by the Indian Education Commission Report of 1883. This Report made primary education a subject of critical importance with a declaration that, "*Elementary education of the masses, its provision, extension, and improvements, to be that part of the educational system to which the strenuous efforts of the State should now be directed in a still larger measure than heretofore.*" This provision of primary education was decentralized to rural and urban boards and they were encouraged to boost the number of primary schools by either through building new schools or by offering public grants to privately managed schools. At the same time, several schemes were outlined to uplift the status of education among Muslims, aboriginal tribes, lower castes and women (Jean & Sen, 1988; Mitchell, 1969). These social groups were identified as below average literacy segment. Consequently, the enrollment rate in educational institutions was geared up. Table 3 portrays the data numerically.

<sup>7</sup> It created a feeling of self-respect and national honour in the English educated Indians. These re-awakened persons could not be tempted by government services and they took a vow to fight for national independence.

<sup>8</sup> This novel initiative created a detailed mechanism of provincial education and established guidelines for the development of schools at primary, secondary and collegiate level.

**Table 3: Enrollment Rate in Educational Institutions in India (1886-1917)**

Institutions	1886-87	1891-92	1896-97	1901-02	1906-07	1911-12	1916-17
Primary Schools	7.64	8.14	9.20	8.88	10.88	13.02	15.90
Secondary Schools	1.30	1.36	1.53	1.73	1.97	2.41	3.24
Colleges	0.035	0.047	0.054	0.064	0.070	0.095	0.160

It is quite interesting to know that while nineteenth century colonial policy focused on quantitative improvements in education system, Governor-General Lord Curzon (1898-1905) switched the gravity of concentration towards quality improvements.<sup>9</sup> Henceforth, former policies of promoting aided secondary schools and colleges were discarded in favour of promoting publicly managed government schools as role models for privately managed schools.

In the beginning of twentieth century, the British administrators began to identify the centers of education, schools, colleges and Universities, as breeding grounds for political unrest and for rising nationalism among educated masses (Desai, 2000). Therefore, numerous acts were passed both to increase control over public institutions. Basu (1974) elaborately discusses the association between the increase in education centers and the rise of political consciousness among Indian masses.

## V. Conclusion

It is quite clear that the British policies and regulations tried to make education or learning a mechanical procedure. Stuffing figures in the mind and memorizing formulae was all they had done. There was no creativity on the part of teachers; neither had it encouraged the students. In comparison to British regime, a better and broad comprehensive system of education was encouraged by the Indian elites which had a blend of both East and West. Swami Vivekananda advocated the training of the mind through concentration. He remarked, “*Getting by heart the thought of others in a foreign language and stuffing your brain with them and taking some university degrees, you consider yourself educated. Is this education?*” Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore emphasized on aesthetic education. Shantiniketan was an example where he made arrangements for such a versatile system of education.

Similar to higher education, primary education was also not taken seriously as a governmental obligation. Even various schools located in urban areas were financed largely by the weak local authorities. As a result, the vast segment of native population had no access to education and it is ironical to narrate that at the time of independence in 1947, 88 percent of the Indian was illiterate. However, India’s rich and glorious history, as revealed by western scholars, helped Indian population to regain their lost pride and confidence and contributed to the development of nationalism.

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<sup>9</sup> Through numerous instruments, he was successful in creating greater state control over the educational institutions, especially centers of higher education, in the early twentieth century.

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