

Colonial Policy towards Education in India
(An Analysis of Aims and Objectives
during Company India)

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Abstract:

The article under review adopts a critical approach to analyze the aims and methods of English Education System established in India by East India Company. Although educational policies and aims in the views of British administrators have been varied from time to time during Company Rule but nature of the aims remained unchanged. The essential object of the English Education system was to produce a class of obedient servants who would conform to authority of colonial Regime and never think of challenging it.

1- Introduction

The core object of East India Company, founded in 31 December 1600, was trade with eastern countries. Within one and a half century, it developed its powers and established Fort William in Calcutta, Fort George in Bombay and other strategic pints in India. The charter of 1698 led the company to appoint the ministers of religion at their factories in India to teach the servants. The charter also directed the company to establish schools in all its garrisons and factories. The first part of this direction indicates that the Company intended to preach Christ teachings among all its employees at least, if not among the masses of India as a whole. However, the schools

established by the Company during 18th century mostly worked on liberal bases.

In the mid of 18th century Company started to take some measures which clearly seem intended to help the spread of Christianity. It sent out Priests to India, primarily to fulfil the spiritual necessities of its Christian employees. At the same time Priests tried to train Indian Christians for attaining further converts to Christianity.

One of the major disputed issues, among the Company officials during first half of the 19th century, was how to manage the educational system of the country. A schism emerged amongst the administrators of East India Company, politicians, orientalist and scholars regarding how to administer Education System in India. Some of them opposed the interference of the Government in educational affairs. Besides, they were against the introducing of English Education System for Indians. In their viewpoint, such activities shall prove detrimental to the interests of English Rule in India. While others believed that for the betterment of Indians, they should be familiarized with English language and modern western Sciences. Despite conflicts, eventually they decided to import modern education system to India and eliminate the local and traditional system. Resultantly, many schools, colleges and universities were established in the country.

However, this paper argues that no single strategy and aim has been involved in the establishment of English education System, but actually, there have been a number of aims before the 'educational policy makers' that varied from time to time, although nature of the

aims remained invariable and it was to strengthen domination and ascendancy on India for a long time.

2- Early Opinions about Education:

In 1659 the Court of Directors of the Company stated that “It was their earnest desire by all possible means to spread Christianity among the people of India.”¹ For this purpose, they allowed missionaries to embark on their ships for some time, however this policy was not implemented extensively and company tried to maintain its religious neutrality for several years.

At the end of the 18th century British Authorities like Charles Grant and William Wilberforce forced upon the East India Company to send out missionaries and teachers to acquaint Indian natives with Christianity. When the Company’s charter was about to be renewed in 1793, Mr Grant tried his best to introduce two clauses into the Act of Parliament. In the first clause of the charter we observe: “That is the peculiar and bounden duty of the Legislature to promote the interests and happiness of the inhabitants of British dominions in India; and that for these ends, such measures ought to be adopted, as may gradually tend to their advancement in useful knowledge, and to their religious and moral improvement.”²

In the second clause, it was proposed that the religious instruction will be provided to Protectant community in the service and to the Indians natives. For this purpose, proper ministers from time to time will be sent out from Great Britain. Company’s administrators severely opposed the proposal by remarking: “The

Hindus has as good a system of faith and morals as most people, and that it would be madness to attempt their conversion or to give them any more learning or any other description of learning than that which they already possessed.”³

As acknowledged in the above statement, not only Hindus but Muslims of India too, had a strong system of moral and social instruction for themselves. The existence of sufficient number of Schools for both Hindu and Muslim community in India, before the establishment of English education System by Raj, is confirmed in William Adam’s famous report titled “Adam’s Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar.”

Lots of documental evidences show that at the early stage of Company-India Company’s officers strictly opposed every step taken for the Education of natives and this is nature of colonialism. In Kaye's 'Life of Metcalfe' it is stated that: “It was our policy in those days to keep the natives of India in the profoundest state of barbarism and darkness, and every attempt to diffuse the light of knowledge among the people, either of our own or of the independent states, was vehemently opposed and resented.”⁴

Infect, Company did not recognize the promotion of education among the Indian natives, as part of its moral or political duty. John Clarke Marshman, in his statement before a Select Committee of the House of Lords, on the 15th June, 1853, gave the following sketch of the early policy of English education in India: “For a considerable time after the British Government had been established in India, there was

great opposition to any system of instruction for the Natives. The feelings of the public authorities in this country were first tested upon the subject in the year 1792, when Mr. Wilberforce proposed to add two clauses to the Charter Act of that year, for sending out school masters to India; this encountered the greatest opposition in the Court of Proprietors, and it was found necessary to withdraw the clauses.”⁵

A company Administrator remarked that at the time when, even, British Government doesn't accept the educational responsibility of its own subjects, for what purpose East India Company invest for the education of Indians. No doubt, most of them considered Education of natives against their colonial interests. One of the Company Directors stated that:

“We had just lost America from our folly, in having allowed the establishment of schools and colleges, and that it would not do for us to repeat the same act of folly in regard to India.”⁶

Missionary societies, originally, played a vital role in introducing English education in India and then some Individual Englishmen, educationists, orientalist and enlightened Indians too, took initiatives in bringing western education to India. These groups in their attempts to do so often came into conflict with their own Government. The Company Rule, actually, feared the consequences of the spread of modern education and put many obstacles in its way. Although a few important institutions like 'Calcutta Madrasa', 'Sanskrit College' (in Benares) and 'Fort William College' were established by the Company's officials

but the overall, anti-educational, policy of the colonial regime continued till 1813.

3- Formulation of Aims

First and the foremost step for the education of masses of India was taken by British House of Commons in 1813. The Resolution passed by the House declared that it was duty of England to promote the interests and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dominions in India. In the Act of Parliament, section 43, a clause pertaining to education of natives of India was added in which sum of one lac Rupees, per year, was set apart for: 'the revival and improvement of literature and encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and improvement of knowledge of the Sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories'.⁷

In the clause, first, the 'revival and improvement of literature' is declared as the main purpose of the amount allotted and, secondly, 'the propagation of sciences'. It contains nothing about the particular languages or sciences which are to be studied. It also means nothing is mentioned about the religious and moral instruction of the natives. It also shows that Wilberforce and his comrades could not attain significant sop for the diffusion of religious education. The term 'revival' is also important here because it, absolutely, indicates the revival of Indigenous literature instead of English literature. Accordingly, it can be realized that Company's education policy, in the very beginning, was to acquaint its Indian subjects with indigenous literature and liberal sciences.

Whatever about introduction and promotion of knowledge of the sciences was stated, knowledge of Science might be of western sciences or eastern. In short, it is clear that religious instruction in favor of Christianity had not been proposed in the Act of Parliament.

However, this early policy of improving oriental literature and sciences was completely reversed when a Triangle of Bentinck, Macaulay and Trevelyan engineered a new educational strategy in March 1835 that will be discussed in forthcoming pages. They detained the oriental policy by: withdrawal of stipends from the students of oriental courses; in showing the breach of trust involved in depriving the oriental colleges of the funds originally committed by the government itself to the furtherance of their specific educational objects; in remarking passant how it was the British themselves who by their conquests had weakened traditional national sources of patronage for Indian scholarship; and spending the revenues collected from the Indian people on the cultivation of their own learning and literature.⁸

Ultimately, the Company officials took considerable steps for education in the years between 1823 and 1833. The unwillingness of the Directors to invest on the education of their Indian subjects now gave place to a desire to spend on the issue. In 1824 they wrote the Governor General, as under: 'We wish you to be fully apprised of our zeal for the progress and improvement of education among the natives of India, and of our willingness to make considerable sacrifices

to that important end, if proper means for the attainment of it could be pointed out to us.’⁹

4- Oriental-Occidental Controversy:

The period of two decades, 1813-1833, is often considered as the period of experiments in the field of education and educational Controversy between different groups. There have been three main Schools of thought among Britons connected to education system of India.

The first School of thought, consisted of the old officials of Company in Calcutta and usually named as orientalist, were of the view that Education system of India must be based on Native and Oriental languages like Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. They proposed that western sciences should also be educated through the medium of foresaid languages. Actually, they were followers of Warren Hastings’ policy in this regard. Company Administrators like Elphinstone and Munro shaped the second School of thought. They, less successfully, wished the Modern Indian Languages as the medium of Instruction to teach western sciences. The third School, often named as Anglicist, consisted of Charles Grant and his comrades. They strictly advocated the spread of western Sciences through English Language.¹⁰ The strong controversy emerged between the first and the third Group.

Moreover, in such circumstances, the educational clause of section 43 of the Charter Act-1813 remained inoperative and sum of one lac allotted was not spent on education till 1823. The policy of Some Officials about not giving education to Indian natives was in

continuity. They, still, believed that Indians may demand freedom if they were educated in western knowledge. However, people like Lord Moira and Charles Metcalf strongly argued in favor of Education and enforced Company to spend the allocated amount in establishing basic institutions and schools.

In 1823 a General Committee of Publish Instruction was established to decide how allotment of one lac rupees will be spent. From the early years of its working, five members of committee, out of ten, supported the policy of delivering oriental literature in India. They were often known as Orientalist party. The rest of the members of General Committee, named Anglicist Party, wanted to promote western literature through English medium of instruction.

However, the committee continued spreading oriental sciences throughout the controversy period, as it is explained in the following extract from their report of December 1831 “The committee has therefore continued to encourage the acquirement of the native literature of both Mohammedans and Hindus, in the institutions which they found established, for these purposes, as the Madrassa of Calcutta and Sanskrit college of Benares. They have also endeavoured to promote the activity of similar establishments, as the Sanskrit college of Calcutta and the college of Agra and Delhi.”¹¹

Aim of English education proposed by Macaulay in his famous minute of 1835 was: “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, Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and intellect.”¹²

Such type of vision continued throughout the British period. Basic purpose of English education was to produce a class of obedient servants or in the other words a group of Bengali Babus who would always accept the supremacy of colonialists. The politics of education and language can be seen at its best in the Minute by Macaulay. It is important to analyze the vision of education proposed by a British representative for the colonized.

With this vision, a new education system came into being, which is still in vogue in mainstream schools of India and Pakistan. The essential purpose of this system was to produce a class of obedient servants who would conform to authority and never think of challenging it. Charles Trevelyan a company officer writes that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science... that all funds appropriated to purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone."¹³

5- Trio of Macaulay, Trevelyan and Bentinck:

When, in 1834, T.B. Macaulay was appointed as the President of the Committee of Public Instruction, difference of opinion in the committee divided the members, five against five, on either side of Orientalist-Anglicist controversy. Half of the members were in favour of oriental learning (Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic) and the other half intended to spread western sciences in India by adopting English as the

medium of instruction. On 2nd of February 1835 Macaulay produced a minute in which he adopted and defended the views of Anglicist section of committee.

Macaulay, being a law member of Governor-General's Council in India, strongly articulated aims and strategies for a new system of education in his famous minute. Trevelyan, Macaulay's brother-in-law and another company officer, supported Macaulay's views by promoting 'Downwards Filtration Theory'¹⁴ in education. According to this theory, purpose of Company was only to educate the elite group which would educate the general masses of India. When the subject of education came under consideration in council, a hot augmented debate started between Macaulay and Prinsep. Prinsep strongly defended eastern system of education while Macaulay proposed to abolish institutions of oriental studies even the Calcutta Madrasa and Sanskrit College.

William Bentinck, as a Governor General of India, finally accepted the Macaulay's recommendations by ignoring the views of opposite group specially H.T. Prinsep's minute on education. On March 7, 1835, Bentinck agreed with Macaulay's minute and wrote: "His lordship in council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and that all the funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone."¹⁵

Macaulay, in his letter to his father in 1836, was of the view that: No Hindu, who was received an English education, ever remains sincerely attached to his

religion... It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any effort to proselytise; without the smallest interference in their religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection.¹⁶

John Lawrence had also, proudly, stated that: We are here by our own moral superiority, by the force of circumstances and by the will of providence. These alone constitute our charter of Government, and in doing the best we can for the people, we are bound by our conscience and not by theirs.¹⁷

These views were characteristic of the period in which the Government system of education in India was just being shaped. This type of feelings and remarks perhaps inspired Bentinck, in 1835, when he was taking final decision for the educational course of the country. Actually, he had fed-up by the unending controversy between the Orientalists and Anglicists, as he had held office for nearly seven years before he was called on to decide the future of education policy in India. Moreover, he had made up his mind to abolish Persian, official language of Mughal courts, so for him the rapid extension of English Language was very attractive.

Charles Edward Trevelyan goes step by step with his brother-in-law and close friend T.B. Macaulay to prove that Indigenous system of learning was unable to fulfil the needs of Indian people. In his viewpoint, Indian education system had been skilfully contrived for arresting the progress of human mind: "The Hindu

system of learning contains...so much of error as to have prevented it from making any sensible advance. Under this system history is made up of fables, its medicine is quackery, its geography and astronomy are monstrous absurdity, its law is composed of loose contradictory maxims, its religion is idolatry. Suttee, Thunggee, human sacrifices, Ghaut murder, religious suicides and other such excrescences of Hinduism are either expressly enjoined by it or are directly deduced from the principles inculcated by this system."¹⁸ Having the system adopted officially by Macaulay and Bentinck in 1835, General Committee of Public Instruction (Calcutta) also insisted upon the education of presidency through the medium of English during Lord Auckland's Governorship.

6- Winning India for Christ

Some historians are of the view that it was Missionaries who surfaced the way for English education in India and not the East India Company or British Government. As Zellner writes:"The idea that it was duty of the English Government to communicate her intellectual and moral conceptions by the channel of education came from missionaries rather than from statesmen and administrators."¹⁹ Roman Catholic Missions came to India during the wake up of Portuguese political power. Their keen desire to win India for Christ by Missionary activities, aroused opposition from Indians which resulted in the downfall of Portuguese power in India.

Later Missionary work was started by Baptist Missionaries in the dawn of East India Rule. Among the earlier were Carey, Marshman and William Ward

who began their work in Serampore in 1793. The Serampore Trio made their excellent contribution in the field of press and schools to win young Indian minds for Christianity by education. Carey learnt Sanskrit, Bengali, Urdu and Marathi and translated Bible into these languages. In 1818 a Baptist Mission College was opened in Serampore.

It was Serampore press that published first Bengali newspaper Samachar Darpan in 1818. Carey and his comrades failed to obtain encouragement from Company during the first two decades of their work, because the Company stressed upon the religious neutrality those days.²⁰

Henry Martyn who was associated with Anglican Mission reached Calcutta in 1806 and started his educational activities there. The American board of Foreign Missions sent their Missionaries to India in 1812. Alexander Duff, who worked on vast scale in India, had associated with Established Church of Scotland. In 1830, Duff established elementary and higher educational institutions and insisted upon the English as medium of learning.

During East India Company's rule Missionaries established their schools in all mega cities and even at rural areas to educate Indians. They wanted to win Indian minds for Christ by their religious education. They were of the opinion that if they succeeded in converting some higher class Indians to Christianity, the converted people would preach their faith among the lower class masses.

Conclusion:

The main aim of educational policy of company in India, as stated by Macaulay, was to anglicize the Indians through English education and to make them English in their way of living, behaviour, thought, culture, traditions and morality. As such educated persons were likely to serve as the connecting link between the Colonial Regime and the general public. Aim of Missionary education was also to acquaint the children of higher-class Indians, with religious and moral aspects of Christianity.

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 - ⁷ Trevelyan, Charles, On the Education of the People of India, London, Printed by A. Spottiswood, 1838, p.97
 - ⁸ Martin Moir, Lynn Zastoupil, The Great Indian Education Debate, Curson Press, Richmond London, 1999, p.205
 - ⁹ Nurullah and Naik, p.74
 - ¹⁰ Nurullah and Naik, p.68-69
 - ¹¹ Trevelyan, p.4-5
 - ¹² Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education".
 - ¹³ Trevelyan, p.13
 - ¹⁴ Downwards Filtration Theory was prevailed for some time in India. It was a strategy of East India Company to spread education gradually from carefully trained Intelligentsia to the masses of India. This theory had the three chief characteristics: 1- To educate only the high-class people in order to give them higher posts in the administration with a view to strengthening the roots of British Empire in India. 2- When the higher-class people would receive English education, their culture would be improved and the general public would accept them as their models. 3- To educate the higher-class people who might

undertake the responsibility of educating the general people.

¹⁵ Trevelyan, p.13

¹⁶ Mayhew, p.15-16

¹⁷ Mayhew, p.17

¹⁸ Trevelyan, p.83

¹⁹ Zellner, Aubrey Albert, *Education in India*, New York, bookman Associates, 1951, p.48

²⁰ Nurullah and Naik, p.52-53