
UNIT 7: THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit attempts to introduce you to experiments that the British government made in the field of education in India during 1757-1857. In this Unit you will learn about:

- the changing relationship between colonialism and education,
- the characteristics of the indigenous system of education,
- the debate over the education policy,
- the spread of Western education, and
- the significance of the new education system in modern India.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The establishment of British territorial control over India brought changes in different spheres of life. Education was one of such areas where lot of changes came with the transfer of power to the British. Why and how did the change come? What was the impact of this change? These are some of the major questions that have been discussed in this Unit.

7.2 COLONIAL EDUCATION

It is essential to understand the dynamics of relationship between education and colonialism in order to understand the development of education under colonial rule. Authors like Martin Carnoy and others have argued that education in a colonial country is designed by the colonial rulers to legitimise their domination and to serve their own economic needs.

Economic and political control over the colonial country is essential for the survival of colonial rule and education a new set of values and justification of the colonial rule. Thus education loses its independent identity and becomes subordinate to political power. Colonial education no doubt brings changes and cultural transformation in a colonial country. New ideas and experiments undoubtedly enrich the existing knowledge. But the colonial country has to pay a heavy price for it. The real beneficiaries of colonial education are a selected few who had a specific role assigned by the colonial rulers in the continuation of the colonial rule. Colonial education is meant for better control of the colonial country rather than its development. The ultimate outcome of this policy might be different but the desired objective is to 'control' not to 'change' the colonial country.

In the background of this view of many social historians regarding the dynamics of relationship between colonial rule and education we shall look at the development of English education in India. However, before we come to the beginnings of English education, let us take a look at the indigenous system of education in the early 19th century.

7.3 INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

The information that we gather from early British records gives us a very rough idea about indigenous system of education in late 18th and early 19th century India. There were '*Madrasas*' and '*Maktabs*' for the Muslims and '*Tols*' and '*Patshalas*' for the Hindus. These ranged from the centres for higher learning in Arabic and Sanskrit to lower levels of institution for schooling people in Persian and Vernacular languages. Lack of scientific and secular learning was one of the major limitations of the centres for higher learning in those days. However, many Hindus attended Persian schools because Persian schools. Whether it was a '*Tol*' or a '*Madrasa*' there were certain common features in the indigenous system of education.

- Schools were generally run with the help of contribution from Zamindars or from local rich men.
- In the curriculum the main emphasis was on classical language like Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian and subjects of classical Hindu or Islamic tradition like Grammar, Logic, Law, Metaphysics, Medicines, etc.
- Though Sanskrit learning was the exclusive domain of the Brahmins, from the reports available of the early 19th century we find that the non-upper castes and the scheduled castes had also representation in the lower level schools.
- Women were generally debarred from the formal education system.
- In the absence of printing press till 19th century oral tradition and memory of the teachers formed the basis of knowledge and information, supplemented with handwritten manuscripts.
- The state had little or not role in school education though kings would patronize people famous for their learning.

Besides the centres for higher learning which were basically the domain of upper castes there was a large number of elementary schools. Most of the villages in India had this kind of elementary schools. These were each run by an individual teacher with the monetary help of the village Zamindars of local elite. These schools used to teach the students elementary arithmetic and basic literacy to meet the needs of day-to-day life. Students from different sections of society, except the very backward disprivileged castes, attended these schools.

Thus, the education system that existed in India in the early 19th century had its own merits and demerits. The elementary schools provided the opportunity for basic education to rural people and its curriculum was secular in approach and responsive to practical needs. Probably in the higher centres of learning (*Tols* and *Madrasas*) too much emphasis on niceties of grammar, philosophy and religion narrowed down the scope of expansion of secular and scientific knowledge. The colonial rulers discarded the indigenous system and replaced it by a system of education of their own. The potentiality that the indigenous system had as a means of mass education was destroyed. In the following section new would see how controversies started among different group about what should be the role of the East India Company in the development of education in India.

7.4 DEBATE OVER EDUCATION POLICY

Till the second half on 18th century the English East India Company did not face any dilemma about its role in the promotion of education in India. It was basically a commercial corporation, so its basic objective was trade and profit. Before acquisition of territorial power the Company had no role in education, however, there were attempts by the missionaries to establish charity schools and to promote learning. But things began to change with the British occupation of Eastern India in the second-half of 18th century about what should be the role of the company in the promotion of learning in India.

Immediately after the acquisition of political power in India the company officials wanted to maintain neutrality or non-intervention in the sphere of religion and culture of the indigenous society. The reason behind it was partly it was partly the fear of adverse reaction and opposition to their role by the local people. However, constant pressure from different quarters, the Missionaries, the Liberals, the Orientalists, the Utilitarians compelled the company to give up its policy of neutrality and to take the responsibility of promotion of learning.

The second important point around which the opinions were sharply divided was whether the company should promote western or oriental learning. In the Initial stage the company officials patronised oriental learning. It cannot be denied that some of the Englishmen had the genuine desire to acquire and promote oriental learning.

In this context we may mention the establishment of the 'Calcutta Madrasa' by Warren Hastings (1781), the 'Benares Sanskrit College' by Jonathan Duncan (1791) and the "Asiatic Society of Bengal" by William Jones (1784). Those who were in of Indian classical tradition were called "Orientalists". The argument put

forward by the Orientalists was the generally there was a prejudice among Indians against European Knowledge and science, so there might to complete rejection of western knowledge. Some of them were also interested to explore the classical tradition and culture of this ancient civilization. But even if we acknowledge the genuine desire of some of the Englishmen for the promotion of oriental culture, there is no doubt that the Orientalists were guided by some practical considerations. They wanted to teach the British officials the local language and culture so that they would be better at their job. This was the prime objective behind the foundation of the Port William College at Calcutta in 1800. The other motive was to develop friendly relations with the elites of the indigenous society and to understand their culture. This was the main reason behind the establishment of the 'Calcutta Madras and the 'Benares Sanskrit College'.

Extracts from the Diary of H.T. Prinsep Concerning the Dispute between Orientalists and Anglicists

When the subject came under consideration in Council, there was a very hot argument between myself and Mr. Macaulay. The issue was the resolution that was published not abolishing existing colleges, but requiring them to teach English as well as native literature and making the former obligatory, also giving some encouragement to vernacular studies, but declaring that all Government pecuniary aid in future should be given exclusively to promote the study of European science through the medium of English Language. Lord W Bentick would not even allow my memorandum to be placed on record. He said it was quite an abuse that Secretaries should take upon themselves to write memorandums: that it was enough for the Court of Directors to see what the Members of Council chose to place on record... Thus ended this matter for the time. The Resolution passed on this occasion was modified afterwards and made a little more favourable for the old native institutions by Lord Auckland, but English has ever since been the study preferentially encouraged by Government in connection with vernacular literature. The study of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian is, in consequence, less cultivated than heretofore, but none of the old institutions have been altogether abolished" (emphasis added).

Extracts from the Minute of the Hon'ble T.B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835

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We now come to the gist of the matter. We have a fund to be employed as Government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of this country. The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it?

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

What then shall that language be? One half of the committee maintains that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommends the Arabic and Sanscrit. The whole question seems to me to be-which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education.

There was a strong opposition to this Orientalist approach by different groups in England- the Evangelicals, the Liberals and the Utilitarians. The new cultural ethos that developed in England with the Industrial Revolution was highly critical of the company's monopoly trade. Post-industrial Revolution saw little of value beyond modern western culture. The Evangelicals had a firm conviction in the superiority of Christian idea and western institutions. Two great exponents of the Evangelical view were Charles Grant and William Wilberforce.

Other who did not share Evangelical faith also were convinced of the superiority of western knowledge and one of the chief promoters of this idea was Thomas Babington Macaulay. He recommended that western learning should be promoted in India through English language and this should be the objective of

education policy in India. James Mill, the chief advocate of Utilitarianism in India, was highly critical of India religion and culture. Instead of support to oriental institutions, he had emphasised Western education. But he believed that education alone was not sufficient to bring desired transformation in India; legislative and administrative reforms were also essential for this purpose.

In brief, all off these groups who may be called ‘Anglicists’, in general believed that Indians were in a backward stage and Western education given through English language alone was the remedy. But education was expensive. Therefore it was better to educate a group of people who would gradually educate the rest of the society. Education would filter down from the elites to the messes. In this way it would help to develop new cultural values and knowledge in India. This was after called the ‘filtration’ theory.

The missionaries had a completely different logic for supporting the introduction of English education in India. The motive of the missionaries was to get access to the indigenous society through education and to propagate new cultural values which would help them in conversion of people to Christianity.

The response of Indians to this debate over education policy was a mixed one. Ram Mohan Roy and other favoured introduction of Western education with the belief that it would help Indians to assimilate the knowledge of western science, rationalism, new ideas and literature. This would help in the regeneration of the country. Some other people believed that knowledge of Western education, specially the knowledge of English, would help them in getting jobs and coming close to the ruling elite. So they were in support of Western education. In opposition to this there were many conservatives who were staunch supporters of Indian classical language and culture. They had the apprehension that introduction of Western education would lead to the collapse of indigenous society and culture.

Thus, there were different shades of opinion among the Europeans as well as Indians about the role of the company in the development of education in India. Let us see in the next section what major developments took place in the Indian education during 1757-1857.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Make an assessment of the indigenous system of education in 100 words.

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- 2) Write in 50 words about the attitude of Indians to the promotion of western learning.

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3) Read the following sentences and mark right (✓) or wrong(×):

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- i) In the indigenous system of education mass education was neglected.
- ii) Women in general were deprived of education in the indigenous system.
- iii) In the beginning the company officials avoided any intervention in indigenous education.
- iv) The Anglicists wanted to promote western education because they wanted to modernise India.

7.5 DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

As we have seen in the earlier section, the beginning of English education can be traced only to the early 19th century. Before that the efforts made by the missionaries or by individuals were very limited in nature. We may mention in this connection Schwartzs schools in Tanjore, Rammad and Shivganga, the Baptist Missionaries in Serampore, the London Mission Society, the American Methodists in Bombay, etc. they had pioneering contribution in modern education. These missionary activities and the mounting pressure by some Englishmen like Charles Grant and William Wilberforce compelled the Company to give up its policy of nonintervention in education. For the first time the British Parliament included in the Company's charter a clause that the Governor-General in Council is bound to keep a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees per year for education. But the Company used this fund mainly to promote and encourage Indian language and literature. The importance of the Charter Act of 1813 was that the Company for the first time acknowledged state responsibility for the promotion of education in India.

In 1823, a General Committee of Public Institution was set up to look after the development of education in India. Most of the members of this committee belonged to the Orientalist group and they strongly advocated the promotion of oriental learning rather than the promotion of Western education. However, as we have discussed in the earlier section, different sections both in England and in India created mounting pressure on the Company to encourage Western education. Macaulay, the President of the General Committee of Public Instruction and Lord Bentinck, the Governor General, took the side of the Anglicists and Bentinck gave the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; and that all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone."

Some of the important points of the resolution that Bentinck announced in 1835 were as follows:

- Persian was abolished as the court language and was substituted by English.
- Printing and publication of English books were made free and available at a comparatively low price.

- More funds were provided to support the English education, while there was curtailment in the fund for the promotion of oriental learning.

Auckland who came after Bentinck as the Governor-General also believed in the need for the promotion of English education in India. He recommended the opening of more English colleges in Dacca, Patna, Benares, Allahabad, Agra, Delhi and Barreilly. The General Committee of Public Instruction was abolished in 1841 and its place was taken by a Council of Education. The next major landmark in the development of English education in this period was the Wood's Despatch of 1854. Sir Charles Wood, the president of the Board of Control, in 1854 laid down the policy which became the guiding principle of the education programme of the government of India. The Despatch categorically declared:

“The education that we desire to see extended in India is that which has for its object the diffusion of the improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe, in short of European knowledge.”

The major recommendations of the Despatch were as follow:

- the creation of a department of public instruction in each of the five provinces of the company's territory,
- the establishment of university at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras,
- the establishment of a network of graded schools-high schools, middle schools and the elementary schools,
- the establishment of teachers training institutions,
- the promotion of vernacular schools,
- the introduction of a system of grants-in-aid for financial help to the schools, etc.

In 1857 three universities were established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The establishment of universities and the opening of education departments in the provinces provided a basic structure to modern education in India, in fact Wood's Despatch provided the model for the further development in education in India.

Along with this official initiative to promote western learning in India, there was initiative by the missionaries and some individuals to promote Western education. In these missionary institutions did play a role in spreading western knowledge, though their basic object was to attract people to Christianity. Besides the missionaries some individuals played a significant role to promote English education in Calcutta. The Native School and Book Society of Calcutta was established to open schools in Calcutta and to train up the teachers for the indigenous schools. The establishment of Hindu College (later Presidency College) in Calcutta by David Hare and a group of local Hindu notables facilitated the promoted of secular education among Indians. David Hare was against the teaching of religious ideas and Sanskrit and Arabic languages. J.E.D. Bethune who was as ardent advocate of women's education founded a girls' school in Calcutta. Among the Bengalis, Vidyasagar supported the promotion of women's education. All these institutions obtained a positive response from the

local people who strongly pleaded to the British for further expansion of educational opportunities.

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Similarly in Bombay and Madras also missionary schools were established. In Bombay notable developments were the Native Education Society and the Elphinstone Institution which played a role similar to the Hindu College of Calcutta. In Madras the Christian College was founded in 1837 and the Presidency College in 1853. In Uttar Pradesh the first English-medium College was founded at Agra in 1823. Thus by 1850s we find that in most of the provinces in India the basis of modern education was laid down by the British.

7.6 AN APPRAISAL

The above discussion shows how gradually the English education developed. The government promoted this system while neglecting the indigenous system of education in the 19th century. The spread of English education in India was a long process and before 1857 its spread and depth were limited. Nonetheless the changes that came in education up to 1857 deserve a close scrutiny. There was no doubt that the new education broadened the horizon of knowledge. Specially the establishment of printing press and easy availability of books removed the traditional barriers and made education accessible to more people. The ideas of the western thinkers influenced the younger generation of the indigenous society and they began to question the existing traditional values. A new spirit of rationalism development.

However, these positive contributions have to be balanced against the grave limitations of the education system that developed under colonial sponsorship. The English education system totally ignored the importance of mass education. In the indigenous system the elementary schools provided basic education to a wide section of society. But in the new education the emphasis was to educate a selected few. The Anglicists idea of filtering down education from elites to masses did not work in practice. This system did not provide equal access to education to all and this led to the perpetuation of the backwardness of socially backward castes and communities. The existing divisions in the society widened.

Secondly, in spite of advocacy of western science and technology, in the curriculum of schools and colleges the emphasis was on western literature, philosophy and humanities. Technology and natural science were neglected and without such knowledge the intellectual advancement as well as economic development of a country was hampered.

Another aspect of this new education was the subordination of education of political power. Whether it was Orientalist or Anglicist the basic object of their education policy was to strengthen colonial rule. The Orientalists wanted to do it through indigenisation and the Anglicists wanted to do it through westernization. The basic purpose of the education policy was inseparable from the political interests of the colonial government.

Thus we have seen that education became an issue of debate among various schools of thought. Thus education policy in the first of 19th century was a product of this clash of opinions. On the whole, the colonial administration was keen to promote an education policy which served its own interests.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the official policy of education between 1835 and 1857. Answer in 100 words.

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- 2) Write a critical note on the effect of English education in India. Answer in 100 words.

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7.7 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have seen how gradually the indigenous system of education was replaced by the British with a new system of education. There were many Englishmen who tried to promote oriental learning but the Anglicists prevailed over such Orientalists. New schools and colleges were established to promote learning. New social, political and economic ideas came through the channel of western education. But the education policy ignored scientific and technical education. Moreover, the beneficiary this education was mainly the upper crust of society. So the transformation that came with the English education was very limited in nature.

7.8 KEY WORDS

Anglicists: The Company officials who were in favour of promotion of western education in India were called Anglicists.

Evangelicals: There was a group of Protestants in English who believed in the supremacy of the Christ and individual initiative. They visualised the progress of human being only through faith in Christ and the Christian culture.

Liberals: In 19th century England a new political party emerged called Liberal party. Members of this party who were called liberals believed in toleration and advocated freedom of thought and expression.

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Orientalists: The company officials who advocated for the promotion of Indian culture, tradition and languages were called Orientalists.

Utilitarians: A school of thought in Britain that believed in the moral and material improvement of people through legislation.

7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should focus on the major features of the indigenous system of education, its merits and demerits, see Sec. 7.3
- 2) There was a mixed reaction, some favoured western education, some were very critical of it. See Sec. 7.4
- 3) i)× ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv)×

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include Bentinck's resolution policy of Auckland, Wood's Despatch, etc. See Sec. 7.5.
- 2) Here you have to make assessment of the positive contribution of English education and the limitations of the English education, See. Sec. 7.6.