



THE IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN 18TH C: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Introduction:

British came to India for the purpose of Trade and Commerce. However, in the process of conquering this vast land, they adopted an educational policy which aimed at cultural conquest and establishing ideological control over the states. All this contributed towards the political unification of the country. Once the East India Company transformed from a trading Company to a ruling in Bengal, after the famous battle of Plassey, it started to consolidate British power all over country. However, it did not interfere in social and educational matters. Its main concern was with the political power and administrative matters of immediate concern especially revenue matters of this country. When Warren Hastings became the Governor-General, he promoted oriental languages and knowledge to gain the support of Both the Hindus and Muslims of this nation.

Calcutta Madarasa :

Warren Hasting founded the Calcutta Madarasa in 1781, with the aim to “to qualify the sons of Mohammadan gentlemen for responsible and lucrative offices in the state.” It taught Muslim Law and other related subjects. The **Madarasa** was later taken into permanent control of the British Government. Another step was taken in the same direction of acquiring orient learning by establishment of the Banaras Sanskrit College. This college was established with the permission of Lord Cornwallis for the study of Hindu Law and philosophy. The main purpose of both these institutions was to provide

learned and qualified support to The British in administration of law in the courts of the Company. Hastings encouraged scholars like Sir Charles Wilkins, Sir William Jones and H.T. Colebrooke to study Sanskrit. In 1784, William Jones founded The Asiatic Society of Bengal to study and

enquire into the history and its antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of India.¹**Activities of Christian Missionaries:**

Prior to 1765, the East India Company favored activities of Christian Missionaries but later on it feared the proselytisation of missionaries and their undue interference in religious matters of Indians. However, towards the close of eighteenth century many missionaries strongly urged the Company to introduce Christianity and English Education in India. In this context the lead was taken by Charles Grant, William Wilberforce, Henry Thorton and Edmond Parry. But their efforts were discouraged by the Company. In 1783, the entry on missionaries in India was restricted except with a license. This resolution was further reinforced in 1793. The missionaries attempt to have a clause inserted in the Company's Charter of 1793 for permission to missionaries to serve as 'school masters, missionaries or otherwise met with an opposition from the group within the Court of Directors of the Company. It was argued that "the Hindus had 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 what they already possessed." Consequently,

Wilberforce's proposal was not accepted by the British Parliament and Jackson, a Member of Parliament remarked: "We have lost our colonies in America by imparting education there: we need not do so in India too."

Charles Grant prepared the first blue-print for language and education for India in 1792. It was titled 'Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals: and the means of improving it'. In this Grant argued in favour of English language, education and Christianity. He said that as The Great Mughals had imposed their language upon their subjects, similarly the British should introduce western style of education in English medium. Moreover, he suggested English to be adopted as the official language of the Government for easy communication between the rulers and the ruled. Grant's

¹Kopf, David. 1969. British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: the Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.10-11.

observation were published in the form of a booklet in 1797 and provided the basis for the opinion against Company's policy in favour of Orientalist education². Grant covered all aspects of imperialist education, religious-cultural, commercial and political. No British thinker on Indian education from Macaulay to Curzon and later could improve upon his blue-print.

What Grant failed to do through the Government, the Christian missionaries in India especially the Baptist missionaries like Carey, Marshman and Ward did through their private efforts.

They were, in fact, were mainly responsible for the spread of English education as well as Christianity among the Indian people. They believe that their attempt to convert Indians was a project to 'civilize' them. In the name of imparting modern education, missionary educational institutions also gave religious instructions in Christianity. The missionaries achieved success when 850 petitions were laid on the table of the House of Commons at the time of the renewal of the Charter of the Company in 1813. They were now permitted to carry on their proselytising and educational activities in the manner they liked³. Thus, 1813 saw a reversal of policy of 1783 and 1793 in this regard. Clause 43 of the East India Company's Act of 1813 provided that "persons desirous of going to and remaining in India for purpose of introducing useful knowledge are religious and moral improvement³. The Missionaries could seek permission for the same from the Court of Directors who in the event of refusal would refer it to the Board of Control for final disposal.

The Charter Act of 1813:

The Charter Act of 1813 marked a point of departure regarding the educational policy of East India Company towards its Indian subjects. Under it, the Company, for the first time, accepted state responsibility in the sphere of education. The Parliament by this act empowered the Governor General of India "to direct that out of any surplus (of revenues)..... a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British

² *ibid*, pp.13-17

Mayhew, A., Christianity and the Government of India (London, 1929) , p. 34

³ Sharp, H. ed., Selections from Educational Records, 1781-1839, Part 1. 1920, p.18.

territories in India⁴. In spite of the parliamentary sanction, there had been a lull in the educational activity and the money remained unspent. Nothing was done up to 1823 when a General Committee of Public

Instruction was appointed. The Committee reorganized the Calcutta Madrasa and the Banaras Sanskrit College.

In 1823 Lord Amherst founded the Sanskrit College at Calcutta. Two more oriental colleges at Agra and Delhi were also established. The Committee undertook the task of publishing Sanskrit and Arabic texts and translation of English books containing 'useful knowledge' into Oriental classical languages. The introduction of English education in India was primarily motivated by the political, administrative and economic needs of Britain in India. It was not a mere accident that by the middle of the nineteenth century, especially under lord Dalhousie, important beginnings of the inauguration of modern education in India were made. It was by that time that Britain brought under its rule a substantial portion of the Indian sub- continent. It was also then that the industrial products of Britain began to flow into India and the trade between Britain and India acquired huge proportions.

Conclusion:

The British government organized huge, extensive, state machinery to administer the conquered territory. A large number of educated individuals were required to staff this immense machinery of political control and it was not possible to secure this supply of educated people from Britain. It, therefore, became necessary to establish schools and colleges in India to educate and train people in English education to staff the administrative apparatus. Key posts in this state machinery were entrusted to the British and the subordinate posts went to educated Indians.

Further, clerks, managers and agents, who knew English, were also needed.

This political, administrative and economic necessity urged the British to establish schools and colleges in India, for imparting modern education. These educational institutions were to provide clerks for the government offices, lawyers versed in the structure and processes of the new legal system, doctors trained in the modern medical science, technicians and teachers, etc.

⁴ *ibid*, p.22

Some of the British statesmen endorsed the introduction of modern education in India with other motives. They were convinced that the British culture was the best and the most liberal in the world and that if India, South Africa and later on the entire world, were anglicized culturally it would pave the way for social and political unification of the world. Macaulay belonged to this group. As early as 1838 Trevelyan wrote in his brochure that English would provide a positive bond between rulers and ruled and lead to permanence and stability of the British raj⁵. Mountstuart Elphinstone held that English education 'would make the Indian people gladly accept the British rule'. It was hoped that 'the enlightenment due to education would reconcile the people to British rule and even engender a sense of attachment to it. Education in English according to Elphinstone was a political necessity'. Thus, the political and economic necessity of British in India, together with an almost fanatical belief in the role of Britain as the Messiah to civilize and unify the world by a world-scale dissemination of British culture, prompted the introduction of modern education in India.

⁵ George Macaulay Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century, 1782-1901, (Longmans, Green, 1930) Read Books Reprints, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 1 89-90