



## Education, educational policies and 'the raj' (1792-1854A.D)

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### Abstract

This piece of writing takes a thorough look into the evolution of education in colonial India during the days of the Raj. By 'Raj' the research paper wraps up till the coming of the Magna Carter looking into the educational policies of the English East India Company i.e. In the second half of the Eighteenth century to the first half of the Nineteenth Century. The education development in India was pupated only after tussles in the British Parliament between the Parliamentarians over deciding the fate of the colonies. Thus India was just a laboratory for experiments of ideas which saw its genesis in England.

**Keywords:** legislature, bill, colonies, missions, madrassa, universities

### Introduction

In 1792 Charles Grant, wrote a small treatise entitled, '*Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*', in this booklet he observed: "the true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The *Hindoos* err because they are ignorant" <sup>[i]</sup>. His observation was that Great Britain should reinforce India through the obligation of Christianity, English language and literature, and by means of western mechanical sciences, including "the skilful application of fire, of water, and of steam" <sup>[ii]</sup>. for the improvement of agriculture. He also considered it necessary that the Company should encourage educational and missionary work for achieving that end. However in 1793 the Charter of the Company was to be renewed, and Grant urged Wilberforce, the famous philanthropist, to move the following resolution in British Parliament:

"That it is peculiar bounden duty of the British Legislature to promote by all just and prudent means the interest and happiness of the 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 their improvement" <sup>[iii]</sup>. It was further proposed to introduce a specific measure into the Bill, which could have empowered the Court of Directors to send out from time to time to India's sufficient number of skilled and suitable persons who shall attain the aforesaid object by serving as school masters, missionaries <sup>[iv]</sup>.

The resolution was opposed tooth and nail by the Court of Directors as they were against any type of missionary activity and were not eager to educate Indians on political and financial grounds. They urged that the Hindus had as good a system of faith and of 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. Wilberforce's resolution, was negated, when Randle Jackson, a member of Parliament, remarked, "We have when lost our colonies in America by

imparting our education there, we need not do so in India, ". But this failure did not cool Grant's zeal in the least. It may be noted that he was the first Englishman who anticipated Macaulay. He even went far beyond him, by stressing the importance of science and instruction in agriculture and mechanics. Had his suggestions been carried out, as James says, "the public organization of education in Bengal would have been antedated by nearly half a century" <sup>[v]</sup>.

Meanwhile Lord Minto, the Governor-General, wrote a minute on March 6, 1811 to the Court of Directors, wherein he described the lamentable decay of education in this country. He observed: "It is a common remark that science and literature are in a progressive state of decay among the natives of India... The number of the learned is not only diminished but the circle of learning even among those who still devote themselves to it appears to be considerably contracted" <sup>[vi]</sup>. He further submitted proposals reforming the Calcutta Madrassa and the Benares Sanskrit College. He also approached the Court of Directors for the sanction of an additional grant for starting two more Sanskrit Colleges (one at Nadia and the other at Bhour) and some new madrassas (at Bhagalpur, Jaunpur and a few more important towns) <sup>[vii]</sup>. His main aim was to preserve a high standard of Hindu and Islamic culture through the establishment of these institutions.

### The Charter Act of 1813

In 1813 the Company's Charter came once again for renewal, and the House of Commons resolved itself into a committee for that purpose. Sir Thomas Munro, while giving his evidence before the House of Commons, declared: "If civilization were to become an article of trade between the two countries, I am convinced that England will greatly benefit by the import of cargo" <sup>[viii]</sup>.

The missionaries had already prepared their ground in England by raising an agitation in the country. They were carrying on a virulent propaganda against the Company. They succeeded in convincing the people that education of Indians

was neglected and that the Company was following an anti-missionary policy, which was opposed to the teaching of Christ. No less than 850 petitions were laid on the table of the House of Common by hem. They were also supported strongly by Lord Wellesley, and their agitation created a favourable impression on the English people. At this point Lord Minto's Minute was received, and the party for giving state recognition to education, headed once again by Grant and Wiberforce, emerged successful in the teeth of a bitter opposition. The following clause (Clause 43, EIG Act, 1813) was inserted in the Charter shall be lawful for the Governor-General in Council to direct that out of any surplus which may remain of the rents, revenues, and profits arising from the said territorial act acquisitions, after defraying the expenses of the military, civil, and commercial establishments and paying the interest of the debt, in manner hereinafter provided, a sum of not less than one lac 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 territories in India" [ix].

Raja Rammohan Roy in 1823, wrote a very distressful letter to the then Governor General on Government's decision to support a new Sanskrit school in Calcutta. He believed that there was no dearth of institutions in India imparting Sanskrit knowledge and he urged that the Government should promote, instead, a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sums proposed, by employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning, educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with necessary books instruments and other apparatus [x].

### **The Macaulay Minutes** [xi]

To remove all doubt, however, Macaulay produced and circulated a Minute on the subject. Macaulay argued that support for the publication of books in Sanskrit and Arabic should be withdrawn, support for traditional education should be reduced to funding for the Madrassa at Delhi and the Hindu College at Benares, but students should no longer be paid to study at these establishments. The money released by these steps should instead go to fund education in Western subjects, with English as the language of instruction. He summarised his argument:

"To sum up what I have said, I think it is clear that we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1813; that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied; that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanskrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law, nor as the languages of religion, have the Sanskrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our engagement; that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed." Macaulay's comparison of Arabic and Sanskrit literature to what was available in English is forceful, colourful, and nowadays often quoted against him.

"I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. Honours might be roughly even in works of the imagination, such as poetry, but when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable."

### **He returned to the comparison later:**

"Whoever knows [English] has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may be safely said, that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages, by which, by universal confession, there are not books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronise sound Philosophy and true History, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines, which would disgrace an English farrier, --Astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school,-- History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long,--and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter."

Mass education would be (in the fullness of time) by the class of Anglicised Indians the new policy should produce, and by the means of vernacular dialects:

"In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, 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 [xii].

### **The Education Despatch of 1854**

The Education Despatch of 1854 is divided into 100 paragraphs and occupies in print some 29 pages in J. Richey's Selections from Educational Records 1840-59 (Part 2) first brought out in 1922.

The woods dispatch tends to answer some of the questions like: What are the factors that led the East India House or the Court of Directors to frame a comprehensive education policy for the whole of British India?

The introductory paragraphs of the Despatch provide the answer: "Among many subjects of importance, none can have a stronger claim to our attention than that of education. It is

one of our most sacred duties, to be the means, as far as in us lies, of conferring upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge, and which India may, under Providence, derive from her connexion with England. We have, moreover, always looked upon the encouragement of education peculiarly important, because calculated not only to produce a higher degree of intellectual fitness, but to raise the moral character to those who partake of its advantages, and so to supply you with servants to whose probity you may with increased confidence commit offices of trust.

Nor, while the character of England is deeply concerned in the success of our efforts for the promotion of education, are her material interests altogether unaffected by the advance of European knowledge in India. This knowledge will teach the natives of India the marvellous results of the employment of labour and capital, rouse them to emulate us in the development of the vast resources of their country, guide them in their efforts, and gradually, but certainly, confer upon them all the advantages which accompany the healthy increase of wealth and commerce; and at the same time secure to us a large and more certain supply of many articles necessary for our manufacturers and extensively consumed by all classes of our population as well as an almost inexhaustible demand for the produce of British labour."

The Wood's Despatch, for the first time, recommended the creation of a Department of Public Instruction in each of the five provinces of Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the Punjab and the North Western provinces. The head of the Department would be called the Director and he was to be assisted by a number of inspectors. The D.P.T. had to submit an annual report to the government about the educational progress in his province. Another major recommendation of the Despatch was expansion of mass education. It was observed that the common people were deprived of educational opportunities and therefore much emphasis was given on the increase of setting up primary, middle and high schools. The Downward Filtration Theory as proposed earlier was discarded and in its place importance to primary education was given. Elementary education was considered to be the foundation of the education system. The Despatch recommended the establishment of universities in the three Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The universities were to be modeled after the London University and these were to have a senate comprising of a Chancellor, a Vice-Chancellor, and fellows who were nominated by the Government. The Universities would confer degrees to the successful candidates after passing the examinations, (of Science or Arts Streams) conducted by the Senate. The universities were to organize departments not only of English but also of Arabic, Sanskrit and Persian, as well as law and civil engineering. The Wood's Despatch recommended the sanction of a grant-in-aid system in the Indian educational system. Grants were given to the schools for increasing the salaries teachers, construction of school buildings, granting scholarships to students, improving conditions of literaries, opening of science department etc. The Wood's Despatch gave importance to teaching of English, but at the same time, it also stressed on the teaching of Indian languages. The Despatch realised that any acquaintance of European knowledge could be communicated to the common

people and that could be conveyed to them only through learning their own mother tongue. Therefore the Despatch clearly stated that Indian languages as well as English should be used as media of instruction. The Despatch recommended that the government should always support education for women. The Wood's Despatch stated, "The importance of female education in India cannot be over rated; and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of many of the natives of India to give a good education to their daughters. By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men". The Despatch also encouraged the private enterprises to promote women education. The schools for girls were to be included among those to which grants-in-aid would be given. The Wood's Despatch recommended the establishment of teacher training schools in each of the provinces. There should be training schools for teachers of engineering, medicine and law. The qualified teachers should be given better pay scales. The Despatch further emphasized on the provision of scholarships to the teachers during their training period. The Wood's Despatch recommended the establishment of teacher training schools in each of the provinces. There should be training schools for teachers of engineering, medicine and law. The qualified teachers should be given better pay scales. The Despatch further emphasized on the provision of scholarships to the teachers during their training period. The Wood's Despatch recommended the establishment of a network of graded schools all over the country. At one end were the universities and the colleges, then the high schools followed by the middle schools and the bottom of the middle schools and at the bottom of the network were the primary schools, both government and indigenous. Both the Anglo-vernacular and vernacular schools were to be included in the same class. This system was recommended in order to enable an individual to receive higher education after completing the different levels of schools education.

### **A Critique of the Despatch**

Richter has described the Education Despatch of 1854 as the "Magna Carta of Indian education" in his, 'A History of Missions in India'. It is true that the Despatch did not bestow on the Indian people certain rights and privileges in education, but some of the concepts of the Despatch like cultivation of Indian languages, use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction at the school stage, institution of university professorships in some subjects including vernaculars and classical languages, Law and Civil Engineering, concept of mass education and that of secular education in a plural society like India were the concepts which are significantly valid in an independent India. The Despatch realized that the goal of education was primarily employment and as such vocational education as well as absorption of qualified Indians in government services was emphasised. It hoped that Indian private enterprise would gradually replace the government in education through grants-in-aid and would help develop an education rooted in Indian soil. It is not the fault of the framers of the Education Despatch that some of the provisions were never carried out and that some were given effect to in a mutilated form, while some others, like the institution of

teaching posts in universities, were implemented after a considerable lapse of time. It is however too much to expect that the Despatch, meant for the education of a colonialized people by an imperial power, would visualise concepts in education which are the products of recent changes in the socio-econon and political structure in the world <sup>[xiii]</sup>.

M.R. Paranjpehas observed in his *Progress of Education in 1941* which has received wide endorsement from educationists like J.r Naik and S. Nurullah: "The Despatch does not even refer to the eal of universal literacy althoughit expects education to spread over a wider field through the grants-in-aid system: it does not recognise the obligation of the state to educate every child belowa certain age; it does not declare that poverty shall be no bar to the education of deserving students; and while it may be admitted that employment in government offices was not the object of English education as visualised in the Despatch, the authors did not aim at education for leadership, education for the industrial regeneration of India, required by the people of a self- government nation."

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<sup>i</sup> Sharp, H. (ed), '*Grant's Observations*', *Selections from Educational Records*, Part I; Calcutta, 1920, p 81.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p 82.

<sup>iii</sup> 3 Ibid, p 17.

<sup>iv</sup> Ritcher, J. A., *A History of Missions in India*, London, 1908, p 128.

<sup>v</sup> James, H.R., *Education and Statesmanship in India*, Bombay, 1917, p 17.

<sup>vi</sup> Sharp (ed.), *Minto's Minute*, op cit, p 190.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid, pp 21-22

<sup>viii</sup> Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, vol XXVI, pp 1, 51.

<sup>ix</sup> Sharp (ed), "*East India Act of 1813*", op cit, p 22.

<sup>x</sup> *Selections from Educational Records*, Vol 1, p. 101, quoted in Syed Nurullah and J.P.Naik, *A Student's History of Education in India*, Macmillan and company ltd., 1962, p 48.

<sup>xi</sup> <http://www.mssu.edu/projectsouthasia/history/primarydocs/education/Macaulay001.htm>

<sup>xii</sup> Sharp (ed),op.cit.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ghosh. C. S., *The History of Education in Modern India 1757-2012*, orient Black swan Publication, Delhi, pp81-82.