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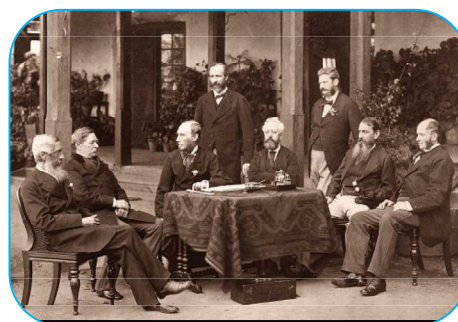
CIVIL SERVICES, GOVERNANCE AND THE RISE OF ENGLISH IN COLONIAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

English language and literature has been taught in India since the university education was introduced by the British government. The paper attempts to highlight the circumstances and the motifs that laid the foundation of teaching English language and literature. It also assesses how the introduction of English education was viewed from different perspectives by both the colonizers and the colonized.



KEYWORDS: Colonial, Colonized, Colonizer, Education, Empire, Enlightenment, Nationalism, Native, Renaissance

INTRODUCTION

"... the Government ought not to leave to private people the task of providing for the national defence, the Government ought not to leave to private people the task of providing for national education." - Macaulay (Young, 311)

Indian society had no tradition of formal education in pre-British times. Education was caught between inclusive-exclusive dichotomy. As the society was divided into *Varna* system, the people belonging to different *Varnas* and castes had to follow different set of rules. The first three *Varnas* only were entitled to education which was thought to be relevant to their caste duties and professions. The conventional sort of education was need-oriented and privileged

one caste over another. The Brahmins had monopoly over letters. A. R. Desai informs, 'Other castes were debarred by religious edicts enforced by the Hindu state from all higher studies. The Brahmins studied in separate seminaries started for the purpose, such as Tols, Vidyalayas and Chatuspatis (Desai, 137).' In informal education system the kind of education provided was in adherence to rules of *Varnas/Castes*. Even education was used as a tool to maintain social stratification. In the words of A. R. Desai, 'education was a means of making the individual accept and conform to the hierarchic structure of society and completely subordinate his individuality to it (Desai, 138).'

The introduction of modern education in India was a political necessity of the British colonizers. The East India Company needed a large number of Indians who could be the mediators, interpreters and translators for them, so that they could communicate with the masses. This urgency promoted the Company to teach the natives their language. In order to administer huge conquered territory they had to set up a machinery directed towards the spread of education. A large number of educated people were required to control the political rule. And, it was not possible to recruit the British in totality. Therefore, the Company had to start school and colleges to train the natives in administrative mode. Although, the prime motif

behind giving education to Indians was to create a class of clerks and officials, smoothly running the state machinery, at the back of the mind the British fancied presenting themselves as benevolent rulers and making the natives accept gladly the foreign rule.

It was Charter Act of 1813 according to which the East India Company agreed to set apart a sum for the promotion of education in its subjects. Then there came Wood's Dispatch of 1854 which is often called as the Magna Charta of Indian education. The Dispatch clearly stated that the medium of instruction would be English at the collegiate level and both regional language and English at the secondary level (Desai, 147).

First serious attempt to introduce compulsory education were made by Governor-General William Bentinck. Pramila V. Rao says that Bentinck was the supporter of expansion of education in rural areas (Rao, 152). However, some feudal landlords opposed the opening of schools in rural areas because they were afraid not to get cheap child labour to work on their farms. Next serious attempt to introduce free and compulsory education was made during 1870s which was supported by the social reformers like Mahadev Govind Ranade, Jotirao Phule, Kashinath Trimbak Telang, Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Ishwarchandra Vidyasgar. The attempt also faced opposition from some landlords and political leaders.

Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Raja Ram Mohan Roy were of the opinion that English education could cultivate rationalism among Indians. And, once they are introduced with modern values and humanism they will set themselves free from the shackles of socio-cultural and religious slavery. In 1881 Governor-General Ripon had appointed Education Commission headed by W. W. Hunter to investigate the possibility of support and opposition they would get to their attempt to introduce free education in India. Dadabhai Nauroji was the first individual to plead before the Commission for the introduction of free education for the entire nation. Phule and Bhandarkar pointed out that compulsory education only could be beneficial to the children of lower castes, especially that of the untouchables (Rao, 155).

Hunter Commission met strong opposition from upper caste elites who were dead against the idea of giving education to the poor and the lower castes. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the spoke person of such opposition. He vehemently opposed the spread of free and compulsory education and penned down a good number of articles in his *The Mahratta*. He thought it to be "irrational" and would have a denationalizing effect on the society (Rao, 157). He further argued that tax payers had the right to decide how to spend their money and spending money on the education of *Kunbi's* (peasants) children was a waste of money, and giving education to the untouchables was interference in religion (Rao, 157) since Brahminic Hindu religion has prohibited *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* from acquiring education. In his articles in *The Mahratta* he voiced his dissent against the education of non-Brahmins. Surprisingly, on the other hand, Tilak was an advocate of English education and held that 'before the English education was introduced into the country, we were as ignorant as could exist in the nineteenth century (Rao, 160)'. Considering the severe opposition from the native elites the British had to curb their endeavour to introduce free and compulsory education. Tilak supported education for the upper castes, especially Brahmins and opposed any indiscriminate compulsory education and uniform curriculum that could have been injurious to the children of peasants. Gopal Krishna Gokhale was the first individual to move a bill in the Imperial Council to make primary education compulsory and free for families earning less than Rs. 10 a month. However, the bill was rejected with official majority. Although, the British were ready to educate Indians some of the Indians were against the idea to see their fellow countrymen educated.

The first and the foremost advocate of modern education in general and English education in particular was Thomas Babington Macaulay. In a speech delivered in the House of Commons on the 19th of April 1847 while commenting on the future of education in India Macaulay asserted that it was the right and the duty of the State to provide means of education to the common people (Young, 302). Macaulay held that English could only be the medium of instruction in Indian educational system. He was of the opinion that vernacular languages in India had a dearth of knowledge. So, it was necessary to

teach natives a foreign language in which modern knowledge was produced and that language was English only.

In the (in)famous 'Minute on Education in India' he argued, 'We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language (Young, 349).' Macaulay also reminded that it was not just the government willing to introduce English education in India but there was also a clamour and cry from young Indians for modern English education which could give them means of livelihood. He also argued that the government had to civilize and uplift the modes and manners of the natives in a way the Romans had provided a model for the British people. Macaulay had in mind the classical role of the Roman and Greek knowledge and learning in bringing Renaissance and Enlightenment in Europe. Therefore, he wanted that the British should play a pivotal role to bring reform through education among Indian natives. Rama Mantena remarks about the role of Macaulay and Traveleyan, 'Both Macaulay and Traveleyan employed classical models of empire (particularly Rome) to elaborate a policy of 'Anglicization' of India, the idea being that the study of English in India would successfully disseminate highly refined knowledge of the Western World (just as Latin worked to refine English) to Indians (Mantena, 56).'

English as a subject was introduced in universities in India well before it was taught in English universities. Study of English got importance in English universities only after the introduction of Indian Civil Services (ICS) in 1853. There was a craze for ICS among English youth since it had offered power, perk and prestige. Those who qualified the competitive examination could become a Collector or Deputy Commissioner. The ICS also offered an experience of and encounter with mystical Orient. So, a large number of youth started striving for ICS. In 1875 the ICS offered career both in the judicial and administrative services (Parry, 12). A large number of students studying in the British universities especially in Oxford and Cambridge became ambitious to join the civil services. The officers in the Indian army were paid more than in the British army. This also attracted more students to go for ICS (Parry, 34).

As the British officers had to deal with the Indian masses, they had to be well acquainted with English language and literature because in India English was already made official language and the language of instruction in higher education. Being the link language between British officials and the masses in the curriculum of ICS examination English as a subject was given more weightage. The scheme of marks was - 1,500 for English and history, 1,500 for classics, 1,250 for mathematics, 500 for natural sciences, 500 for logic, moral and mental philosophy, and only 275 each for French, German and Italian, Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian (Harrison, 156). It means that English language and literature along with classics prioritized over other subjects. Chris Baldwick says that by allocating weightage to the study of English literature and history it was expected from the candidates to show the extent of their knowledge of poets, wits and philosophers. And, the committee also felt that literature would help the young administrators to resist the dangers of corruption and 'scandalous morality' to which their power might expose them (Baldwick, 70).

As discussed earlier that the British wanted to produce a class interpreters and translators from the natives, they decided to teach them their language. The extent to which teaching of English remained major thirst of the British government in starting universities in India becomes clear from the fact that Harrison provides, 'English was a central subject for examination in Calcutta university since its inception in 1857, that is before Oxford and Cambridge had a School of English at all. In Calcutta University, by the 1860s, B. A. Honours could be taken in English language and literature (Harrison, 163).'

In the beginning when English curriculum was introduced the professors teaching English different universities and colleges in India were all English and Americans. Such was the scene even in 1920s (Harrison, 181).

The expansion of English education not only helped the British for effective administration and governance but it also helped for colonial expansion and getting acceptance from the natives to the colonial rule. The image of benevolent colonizer was certainly created among the masses and this was all possible because of the dissemination of education among its subjects. Seeley praises Macaulay with

lofty words for his being the advocate of and instrumental in the emergence of modern education and rendering contribution to the empire. 'Never on this earth was a momentous question discussed. Under Lord William Bentinck in 1835 the discussion came to a head, and by a remarkable coincidence a famous man on the spot to give lustre to and take lustre from a memorable controversy. It was Macaulay's Minute that decided the question in favour of English (Seeley, 1999).'

Within a short period after its inception teaching of English became very common at all levels of education. The nativization of English took place during the colonial rule. It soon became a language of the native elites who led the nationalist movement. It cut across all the regional and linguistic barriers and became a connecting language in all the provinces in India. It became a kind of 'national language' as it promoted communication between people from different territories. It also became an influential for the spread of nationalism among young educated people because their acquaintance with European literature and history imbibed in them feeling of humanism. These young minds soon demanded for political change. Rumina Seth has summed up as how English proved to be instrumental in rationalization of the mind and rise of nationalism and how it became one of many languages in India:

The very institutionalization of English by the nationalist elite extended a 'national' character to the languages of state administration, enabling only works in English to assume the status of a national literature while the regional languages occupied a less regional character. The recognition of the position of English in India did not lead to the exclusion of regional languages. On the contrary, it allowed regional languages to exist side by side, and, in fact enabled the intelligentsia to be comfortably bilingual (Seth, 39).

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