

The british colonialism and education in india history essay



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The British came to an India with a noble mission in hand – the mission of civilization. In Charles Grant’s words, “ What is offered, is no more than a proposal for the further civilization of a people” (Grant, 1792, as cited in Mann 2004, p. 3). Yet, the same declaration reverberated among all European powers during this period. All claimed that the occupation of the colonies stemmed from a desire to civilize the “ natives” and “ savages”. To the British, the proclaimed intent of colonizing India started out as a call for “ improvement” of the South Asian nation, then to “ betterment and “ material progress” which was thereafter subsumed under the phrase “ civilizing mission” (Mann 2004). Said (1993) found this assertion problematic and hypocritical and attributed this as blatant cultural imperialism since the idea of a “ civilizing mission” rested upon the superiority of one culture and the inferiority of the “ Other”. More importantly, it implied that the Indians were too backward for self-rule and had to be taught how to govern themselves, without taking the history of India as a self-functioning nation well before British rule.

The British colonial rule in India is generally divided into three stages: first stage (1757-1813), second stage (1813-1860) and third stage (1860 onwards) (Reddy 2003). The upper- and middle-class Indians soon acknowledged that in Britain’s standards, their country was indeed backward economically and socially. Many of its leaders conformed to western models of economic modernity while others went for its reconciliation with eastern concepts, hence the Anglicanist-Orientalist debate (Deutschmann 2008). The famous Mahatma Gandhi however was critical of how “ backwardness” was defined and contextualized because of its cultural implications and favored

an Indian interpretation of the term (Mann 2004). One of the most powerful calls for reform arose out of protest against the practice of sati or wife immolation which, although rarely practiced, captured the British imagination. In view of its civilizing mission, the British introduced an education system to tame India's savage and brutish practices and eradicated superstitions and religious beliefs which were deemed barbaric.

While it may be acknowledged that this civilizing mission was first and foremost a self-legitimation of colonial rule, the effects of such a mission deserve to be acknowledged. Much of what India enjoys now in terms of literacy and education was a byproduct of that civilizing mission. The process of civilizing the "savage Indians" however took a long and arduous path. This paper explores the development of educational policy under British rule, the experiences of British colonial educators, as well as the impact of British colonial education

Introduction

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of a “civilizing mission” rested upon the superiority of one culture and the inferiority of the “Other”. More importantly, it implied that the Indians were too backward for self-rule and had to be taught how to govern themselves, without taking the history of India as a self-functioning nation well before British rule.

British Colonialism

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Intellectually, the British found the native mind “dull” and “inferior” (Visnawathan 2003). Before any literary instruction could be had, the British considered it crucial to raise the intellectual level of the Indians. Hence, the push for education taught using English as a medium of instruction became a

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significant aspect of reform. Kachru (1986) believed that the use of English was the greatest symbol of British colonial power (as cited in Visnawathan 2003). English was not only a linguistic instrument; it was also an instrument of political power. It was adopted as the official language of the legal system, the education system, and commerce as well. English was the only language convenient for teaching the science due to the lack of appropriate terms equivalent in the indigenous languages. In addition, it became associated with elitism and prestige. English was a language that characterized the upper class. It also became a representation of British efforts to modernize India and to propel her advancement to material progress. In other words, English became a prominent measure used in the civilizing mission (Honenthal 2003).

While it may be acknowledged that this civilizing mission was first and foremost a self-legitimation of colonial rule, the effects of such a mission deserve to be acknowledged. Much of what India enjoys now in terms of literacy and education was a byproduct of that civilizing mission. The process of civilizing the “savage Indians” however took a long and arduous path. This paper explores the development of educational policy under British rule, the experiences of British colonial educators, as well as the impact of British colonial education. Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What educational policies were introduced in India during British occupation?
2. What were the experiences of British colonial educators during this time?
3. What was the impact of British education on India?

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Educational Policies During British Colonial Rule

In ancient times, education was provided on the basis of the caste system and under the guidance of a guru. Ancient scholars educated Brahmans, Vaishyas, and Kshatriyas on different areas of knowledge but denied it to the Shudras, who occupy the lowest caste. Soon, the form of education became writing and ancient literature was engraved in barks of trees and palm leaves. The spread of Buddhism made education accessible to everyone in India and the religion's influence made possible the establishment of several excellent schools such as Nalanda University. In the 11th century, the Muslim conquerors built elementary and secondary schools and spread learning through universities in key cities such as Allahabad, Delhi, and Lucknow. Islamic institutes focused on sciences and the humanities. During the medieval period, the interaction of Islamic and Indian traditions contributed to the flourishing of all fields of knowledge such as the arts, philosophy, painting, sciences, medicine, and astronomy. English education was solidified in India with the arrival of European missions circa 1920s. Several educational policies were introduced to integrate more people into the education system, orient Indians with western science, and transform English into the medium of instruction.

Discussing the educational policies that took effect in India under the British would entail subdividing its rich history to seven significant periods: Phase 1 (1758-1812), Phase 2 (1813-1853), Phase 3 (1854-1900), Phase 4 (1901-1920), Phase 5 (1921-1947), Hartog Committee (1929), and Sargeant Plan of Education (1944).

Phase 1 (1758-1812)

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The British East India Company was less interested in Indian education between 1758 and 1812 except for the Calcutta Madrasah founded in 1781 by Warren Hastings in the study of Islamic law and related subjects as well as the Sanskrit College at Varanasi set up by Jonathan Duncan in the year 1792 which focused on Hindu philosophy and law. The British East India Company saw these schools as their source of qualified manpower in helping the company in the administration of law and order (Hunter 2001).

Phase 2 (1813-1853)

Because the British East India Company was greatly pressured by Christian missionaries and humanitarians to promote and encourage a modern educational system in India, the Charter Act of 1813 had a provision requiring the Company to spend 1 lakh rupees every year encouraging well-educated Indians and promoting knowledge in the modern sciences in India. There arose two controversies that would later shape the educational system of the period. These were: whether the emphasis would be on promoting modern western studies or enriching the traditional Indian way of learning and whether adopting English or mother languages as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges that spread western learning. It was Lord William Bentinck with the aid of R. M. Roy who settled these controversies in 1835 putting forward the application of English as the medium of instruction (Sharma 2005).

In the year 1844, Lord Hardinge made the decision to employ English-educated Indians in government positions. This move was proven to be successful and good progress resulted in the three presidencies of Bengals

Bombay and Madras where there is a burgeoning number of schools and colleges. There were three other outcomes: an upsurge of missionary actions spreading knowledge of modern fields of education; establishment of law, engineering, and medical schools, marking the start of professional education; and the accordance of official sanction to educating Indian girls with the effort of Lord Dalhousie.

The policy of the government opening few English colleges and schools rather than primary schools deprived the masses of education. In order to hide this policy flaw, the British resorted to the 'Downward Filtration Theory' which means that modern ideas and education were means of filtering or radiating downward from upper class society. The policy persisted until the end of British domination, though abandoned officially in 1854.

Phase 3 (1854 - 1900)

The Educational Dispatch of 1854 also Wood's Dispatch was named after Sir Charles Wood, the former President of Board of Control and the very first Secretary of State for India. This is known all over India as the Magna Carta of English Education and therefore is a landmark policy in the early beginnings of modern education in the Indian subcontinent. In this policy, the 'filtration theory' is rejected and underscored female education, mass education, promoted secularism, and improvement of vernaculars. This dispatch recognized that the government is responsible for providing elementary education in vernacular. Wood's dispatch greatly impacted the secondary and tertiary levels of education, reaffirming the recommendation of Macaulay (1965) 20 years before that education beyond sixth grade must

be delivered in English, be western in orientation in literature and science, and produce ‘ a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ (Macaulay, 1965 as cited in Little 2010, p. 5). Despite this commitment being written on paper towards the utilization of vernacular in elementary education, the policy of the British government focused in the urbanized middle and upper classes. The professional classes ‘ who belonged to certain higher castes among the Hindus, were more than eager to get English education for themselves to enable them to get comfortable jobs, but showed little enthusiasm for spreading education to the masses’ (Basu, 1978, p. 58 as cited in Altbach & Kelly 1978). At any rate, the idea on this government’s responsibility of providing mass education was in practice not among the topmost priority in most countries during this time in history.

Lord Ripon appointed Sir WW Hunter to head a commission. Although the number of colleges and schools has increased, educational standards were dismal due to shortage of funds. Institutions of education did not have the appropriate buildings, extensive library collection, and other facilities. Teachers did not receive the needed training as well. Because there was an overemphasis on bookish knowledge, students were not provided practical experiences where they could apply theory to everyday life. Education of the youth that time could be described one-sided. The report of the Hunter Commission stated, “ the purpose of education in India is not to receive education but to pass examination” (Sharma and Sharma 2004, p. 125). The Indian masses were not aware of this flaw. However, two groups of individuals thought differently regarding education. One advocated the

expansion of education while the other was upset over the declining standard of education. A staunch supporter identified with the first group is Gopal Krishna Gokhale who insisted the education should be expanded. He shared the belief that young Indians should be education of the western ways as it would be beneficial whether the standard was high or low. Therefore he emphasized on quantity rather than quality. In some respects, he is right because it is from quantity that quality will emerge (Sharma and Sharma 2004)

Phase 4 (1901-1920)

Lord Curzon called for a Universities Commission in 1902 under the leadership of Thomas Raleigh, a law member of the Executive Council of the Viceroy. After the approval of the Commission's recommendations, comes the passage of the Indian Universities Act of 1904. The Indian Universities Act of 1904 said that:

the University shall be..... deemed to have been incorporated for the purpose (among others) of making provision for the instruction of students, with power to appoint University professors and lecturers, to hold and manage educational endowments, to erect, equip and maintain University libraries, laboratories and museums, to make regulations relating to the residence and conduct of students, and to do all acts, consistent with this Act, which lead to the promotion of study and research (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1990, p. 5).

The Act likewise proposed changes in the organizational structure of Universities. There should be statutory recognition given to the Syndicate in <https://assignbuster.com/the-british-colonialism-and-education-in-india-history-essay/>

which teachers should be adequately represented and University affiliation terms of and conditions are clearly laid out. The Act also mentioned that the government has a certain limitation in its power in regulations, which will be drafted by members of the Senate, and it is the Governor General-in-Council who holds the power in delineating the Universities' territorial limits (Ministry of Human Resource Development 1990).

Another commission was appointed called the Saddler Commission. Appointment was under the direction of Lord Chelmsford. Like other commissions, stress was on the significance of educating Indians using the mother tongue while reiterating the principle governing educational economy. As pointed out, the Commission identified that a mismatch exists between the government's intentions and the actual implementation of mother tongue education and development of Indian vernacular languages. It also emphasized that a rigorous training in the mother language is not only indispensable for training the mind but a necessary preliminary step in the study of the English language. Thus, Indian vernaculars and English complement each other and not mutually exclusive. It is the same Commission clearly stating that irregularities in the educational system leave a young man after finishing his course unable to write or speak his native tongue correctly and fluently (Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy 2006).

Phase 5 (1921 - 1947)

Almost all Indian provinces have passed the Act regarding compulsory primary education in 1930. The Acts suggest that local institutions are entrusted this responsibility. The said institutions are charged with imposing

education so that educational expenditures incurred will be met. The provincial governments also promised to extend financial aid. Only boys and girls could benefit the provision providing compulsory education ordinarily between the ages of six and seven (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

Consequently the Compulsory Education Acts and renewed nationalism, compulsory education expansion received impetus. Under the direction of Mahatma Gandhi, women likewise demanded for their educational rights. Other developments were further expansion, increase in the number of universities, improvement in the quality of tertiary education, institution of an inter – University Board, and the start of inter-collegiate and university activities (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

Hartog Committee (1929)

In 1919, the Indian people found the Government of India Act to be insufficient in satisfying their clamour for social reform and in order to appease the masses it was necessary to appoint a commission under the leadership of Simon. Likewise it was the aim to address pressing issues confronting the educational system in the Indian subcontinent. Armed with a strong determination to implement educational reforms, the Simon Commission asked the chairmanship of Sir Philip Hartog in the Auxiliary Committee (Jayapalan 2005).

Sir Philip Hartog served as a Sadler Commission member then in 1921 became the Vice Chancellor of Dacca University. Because he was at the forefront of this commission, the commission came to be known as the

Hartog Committee. The task at hand is to inquire into all facets of the Indian
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educational system and present the results in September 1929 (Jayapalan 2005).

The Committee identified numerous gaps and challenges in primary education and they are the following: majority of Indians are villagers, poverty, illiteracy, conservativeness, poor health of villagers, lack of teacher training, adoption of stereotype-laden and unscientific teaching methods, and lack of regulatory measures in schools. The Committee jointly recommended appointment of well-trained and highly qualified teachers and provision of security of teacher service (Jayapalan 2005).

In the area of higher education, the most glaring problems faced were: low educational standard, unhealthy competition among universities, wastage, defeat of purpose, low standards of English proficiency, overpopulation, lack of well-organised Honours degree programs, and ill-equipped libraries. As remediation efforts, the Committee has put forward the following measures: Department examinations to be implemented in the recruitment of administrative services graduates, spreading political and social science to the common Indian, provision of employment opportunities for tertiary level graduates, promotion of efforts in raising higher education standards, building of extensive libraries, and establishment of affiliated, unitary residential and teaching universities (Jayapalan 2005).

Due to the heavy demand on occupational, industrial, and technological development among the Indian populace, the Hartog Committee has been advancing the improvement in these fields (Jayapalan 2005).

Sargeant Plan of Education (1944)

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After World War II, the attention of the Indian government was on rebuilding every aspect of Indian life and that includes restructuring the Indian system of education. So that this objective is met, the Reconstruction Committee of the Executive Council appointed John Sargeant, a former educational adviser of the Indian government, to draft plans of action for the development of the Indian educational system during the reconstruction phase of post-World War II. His memorandum was submitted to the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in the year 1944. CABE accepted the said report in toto and recommended the enforcement of its provisions. The grand scheme was more popularly known as the “ Sargeant Scheme of Education”; it was also known as “ Report by the Central Advisory Board of Education, 1944” and “ Post-War Education Development in India”. This report is of historical significance as it comprehensively presented the treatise of the flaws and future organisation of the Indian education from primary to tertiary or university levels (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

According to the Sargeant Plan of Education, education at the nursery level should target providing social experience and educating general behaviour on infants. These individuals should not be burdened with the general education curriculum. At the pre-primary level, the scheme suggested that the start of nursery schools holds the key to the success of the scheme. Children ages three to six should attend these schools. In the rural areas, nurseries could be attached to junior basic schools while in urbanised regions in India, nursery and junior basic schools should be separate and independent from each other. Education of pre-primary school children should be free of charge (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

For basic or primary education, the Committee considered making it compulsory and free and should cater children belonging to the 6-14 age bracket. The curriculum should offer courses focusing on a number of fundamental crafts. In connection with this, the Committee agree with the basic education scheme; however, there were disagreement s on whether the crafts made by the students should meet educational expenses. Basic schools were categorised into two, namely: junior basic schools and senior basic schools. In the former, six to eleven-year old boys shall study and eleven- to fourteen-year old boys in the latter. While education in junior basic schools is compulsory, only boys who cannot continue their secondary education should be enrolled in senior basic schools. English has not been taught in junior basic schools; however the education departments of provincial governments have the final say regarding the teaching of English in senior basic schools. The Committee also recommended that the teacher-student ration should be 1: 30 and 1: 25 in junior and senior basic schools, respectively. Rather than external examination, internal examinations must be administered and certificates must be issue after completion of studies (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

The objective of secondary education is to teach boys to be independent and acquire skills so they are able to stand on their own. In secondary schools, lessons are taught using the Mother tongue; however, English is taught as a compulsory subject. In secondary education, the following recommendations were suggested: i. Exceptional students should attend secondary school which is open to 11- and 16-year olds, ii. Younger students (below 16 years old) should not be permitted to attends secondary schools; when admitting

students, the school administration should take into account their interests, aptitudes, abilities, and many others; iii. Secondary school students shall study at least until the age of 14; these schools should not allow students to leave before this age; and iv. Fifty percent of the school fees shall be paid for by the students for obtaining secondary school education, thus 50% is free; scholarships should be granted to deserving, underprivileged students so they will not be deprived of education at this stage (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

In accordance to the type of curriculum offered, secondary schools may be divided into academic or technical. Core courses shall be offered in these schools: Physical Education, Music, Art, Agriculture, Economics, Science, Mathematics, Geography, History, Modern Language, English, and Mother Tongue. Physical education in academic high schools shall teach Civics and classical languages together with other subjects; for the females, Home Science should be taught. In technical secondary schools, certain provisions govern Home Science for female students and they are allowed to take Business Method, Book-keeping, Typewriting, Shorthand, Commerce, Drawing, Elementary Engineering, Mental Craft, and Wood Craft (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

In higher education, the Sargeant education scheme suggested degree courses that can be completed within three years. The Committee implied that intermediate classes may be done away, with the 11th class added to basic secondary school education and 12th class to tertiary education.

Admission rules for students wanting to pursue tertiary education should be strictly imposed. Of the 15 secondary school graduates, only one should be

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permitted to continue on with university education. To upgrade the standards of university education, the scheme recommended appointing competent and proficient teachers, improving teacher salary grades, and reforming service conditions. The Committee also recommended a closer teacher-student relationship. Likewise, the scheme suggested appointing University Grants Commission, introducing a tutorial system and improving teaching methods (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

Like Hartog, Sargeant also stressed the importance of vocational and industrial education. The Committee suggested full- and part-time instructions in fulfilling the requirements of different classes of skilled workers. Those belonging in the higher category for instance research workers, chief executives and the like should pursue education along these fields at the Technological Department of universities or technological institutes, after graduating from a technical high school. Because admission rules are strict, very few shall be admitted to these programs. For lower category workers, for example change-hands, ordinary administrative and executive officers, or foremen, they should be adequately trained in a technical high school and be provided facilities for training in the higher classes. Because skilled craftsmen are necessary workforce in the execution of occupation and industrial schemes, applicants should be at least a graduate of a technical high school. To be eligible for further training in these fields, senior basic school graduates may receive training from a junior technical education. For the semi- and unskilled workers, students who completed their education at senior basic middle schools possessing skills in basic craft are eligible for admission (Sharma and Sharma 2004).

Experiences of British Educators in India

The mandate of British educators in India did not come easy. Education became an alternative strategy to physical subjugation of the vast and diverse country. Essentially, its introduction to Indian natives was inextricably linked to goals of colonialism. Unfortunately, education policy was clearly enunciated in colonial terms as well. In the words of Thomas Macaulay, “ We must 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, words and intellect” (as cited in Jayapalan 2007, 32).

As pointed out earlier, British education was first introduced by European missionaries who felt that education was a powerful instrument in exposing idolatry among Indian natives. To the missionaries, education became not merely a philanthropic cause; it was spread in order to uproot Hinduism (Doss 2009). Therefore, it was not surprising that the Evangelical Christians made the natives uneasy. The missionaries had little or no respect for the ancient traditions and considered Hinduism as “ evil”. Other accounts described the attitudes of the missionaries as “ extremely aggressive” toward the natives. They preached that only Christianity was right and that all other religions were false because they believed in more than one God. Some even preached that Hinduism was a religion of the “ devil”. Although this was not the case with all missionaries, the general attitude was one of superiority and the word that they brought to the indigenous villages was aimed primarily at condemning ancient practices, views, and rituals. Because

of their belief that the European missionaries wanted to convert them, the natives were sometimes hostile to them.

As time passed, contact with European missionaries and the lower-caste peoples contributed to more or less harmonious relations. In addition to philanthropic work and education, laws were passed that eventually favored conversion among the natives. In 1850, the Act XXII was passed allowing converted natives to own ancestral property. Little by little, Indians and Muslims became pacified although hostility against British did not end entirely.