

INDIA'S RESPONSE TO COLONIAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of western education was an event of great historical significance for the emergence of an education policy in India. Before the introduction of modern education, opportunities for learning were generally confined to a very small portion of the population. Those from castes and classes placed lower down in the social hierarchy had hardly any access to education. The pioneering work in the field of education under the British was done by missionaries. They did make efforts to spread education but often it was motivated by the desire for the spread of Christianity among the natives of India. One important result of the great efforts by missionaries was to stir up governments both in England and in India to realise that it was their duty to do something for the education of the people under their rule (Keay 1972). The Charter of 1698 clearly stated that it was the duty of English ministers of religion to give education along with their primary duty of spreading the Gospel. But the East India Company had realised the political significance of a policy of religious neutrality and therefore refrained from carrying out the directions of the Charter of 1698. However, the Company encouraged educational activity by establishing schools with liberal grants-in-aid. Thus the St. Mary's School was established in Madras in 1715, followed by the establishment of two more charity schools in 1717 by the Danish missionaries. In 1718 a charity school in Bombay and another in 1731 in Calcutta were opened. In 1787 two charity schools for boys and girls separately were established in Madras (Singh 2005). But their curriculum was mostly limited to the acquisition of the 3R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) and Christian teachings. In 1781, Sir Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, established the Calcutta Madrasa for the cultivation of Arabic and Persian studies and he also founded the Benares Sanskrit College in 1791 to promote classical studies in Sanskrit. One of the

prominent motives of establishing these institutions was to train Indian assistants to English Judges, in order to explain the principles of Hindu and Muslim laws (Basu 1982). The Christian missionaries started providing education to Indian masses in the beginning of 18th century. But, they were allowed to preach and teach in India only after the passage of the Charter Act of 1813, which actually committed the East India Company to allow Christian missionaries to carry on their educational activities in India. The Company was initially reluctant to allow the missionaries to carry on their educational activities because of the resistance that might be put up by Indians who had an apprehension about proselytization. Hence, the missionaries and their supporters in England began an agitation with a view to protesting the anti-missionary policy of the East India Company. Their agitation received considerable support and ultimately led to the formation of the Charter Act of 1813. The Act laid down the condition that the British Government shall set apart a total amount of 1 lakh of rupees for the education of Indians (Basu 1979). This was the first time in India that a formal educational policy was put in place for directing the course of education in the country. As the objectives of the Charter Act of 1813 were not clearly defined, the clause relating to the promotion of the education of Indians led to differences of opinion between the Classicists and Anglicists. While the Classicists were keen on promoting education through Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, the Anglicists wanted that English education be given. It must be mentioned that in this conflict the potential of the mother tongue as medium of education was neglected and even to this day the impact of this move is being felt in Indian education. Indian reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others felt the need for a new type of education and were of the view that the introduction of English education in India would lead the country towards an age of renaissance. In 1823 the Committee of Public Instruction was set up

to give a shape to the new educational policy of the government and initiate steps for its implementation. The Committee was guided by two major principles: a) win the confidence of the educated and influential classes, by encouraging the learning and literature they respected, b) use the limited funds that were available for promoting higher education of the upper classes with the thrust being on appeasement. The Anglicist and Orientalist controversy had already taken deep roots by the middle of the 19th century. The Orientalists who had a genuine love for oriental culture wanted that education must be imparted through the medium of classical languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian. On the contrary, the Anglicists opined that education had to be imparted in through the medium of English, since they believed that modern knowledge, which the Indians desired could be imparted only through the medium of English. This controversy dragged on till the end of 1834. In fact, no educational policy could be implemented during this period. It was at this juncture that Lord T.B. Macaulay came to India as the President of the Committee of Public Instruction. He was a pro-Anglicist and supported the education of the classes. He made a vigorous plea for spreading western education through the medium of English (Gosh 2007). Macaulay in his Minutes stated that the aim of promoting knowledge of the sciences could only be accomplished by the adoption of English as the medium of instruction. He brushed aside the claims of the mother-tongue on the ground that Indian languages were not equipped to serve as media of this knowledge transmission. He rejected the claims of Arabic and Sanskrit as against English.

In 1835 the minutes were endorsed by Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor General. The result of this action was that in future teaching in high-schools and colleges under government control would be in English. This momentous decision has had its effect on educational policy in India right down to the present time. The rulers of those days had foreseen that the introduction of western education would bring Indians into closer contact with western ideas of government and democracy and lead to the rise of Indian nationalism.

The British government was the main agency for deciding the course that education system in India took in the pre-independence period. It helped to establish, throughout the country, a number of schools and colleges which turned out tens and thousands of educated Indians well versed in modern subjects. Though the main purpose was to produce clerks for their administrative machinery, the fact remains that the British, by spreading modern education in India (liberal and technical) played a progressive role.

This article discusses some of the responses of nationalists towards the intervention of colonial masters in the field of education in India. It is pertinent to note at the outset that the formation of the very ideology of nationalism aimed at national unity of the Indian subcontinent as a whole is one of the latent consequences of the introduction of modern education by the European rulers. While analysing the history of the rise of nationalism in India, Desai (1976) had argued that it was a product of the action and interaction of various objectives and subjective social forces and factors which evolved in the historical processes during the British period. The economic environment and socio-cultural climate of pre-British India could not give birth to national consciousness of the modern type. The economic transformation of the Indian subcontinent during the British period along with such other factors as modern transport, new education and the press contributed towards the unification of the Indian people and emergence of nationalist consciousness among them (Ibid: 432). The idea of building nation-states for governance on the basis of several commonalities was a novel political development of modernity and it entered India through colonial education. Introduction of modern education by the colonial rulers in India evoked varieties of responses which we will attempt to analyse Colonial Education and Emergence of Indian Nationalism In his historical materialist analysis of the emergence and development of Indian nationalism, Desai (1976: 432-441) conceives five chief phases of its development. As and when it advanced its social base broadened. Though the widening of the social base of Indian nationalism during the later phases of freedom struggle was due to a number of other factors and forces, its narrow social base during the first phase consisted of the intelligentsia who were the product of modern

education imparted in the new educational institutions established by the British in India during the first decades of the 19th century. This phase extended till 1885 and culminated in the rise of the Indian National Congress (INA) in that year. The emergence and growth of western type of nationalism itself is one of the latent consequences of the introduction of modern western education by the colonisers. The introduction of modern education in India was primarily motivated by the political-administrative and economic needs of Britain in India. The expanding Empire in India and the expanding trade in India necessitated a large pool of educated manpower well versed in English. Considered as ‘instrumentalist version’ by later analysts like Kumar (2005: 26), we also find such views in Desai’s analysis of the reasons for the introduction of English education for Indians. “These educational institutions provided clerks for the government and commercial offices, lawyers versed in the structure and processes of the new legal system, doctors trained in modern medical science, technicians, and teachers”. Desai (1976: 140-141) recognises another motive for the introduction of English education in India which is the “anglicising” programme suggested by some enlightened Britishers. As against those who advocated education in oriental knowledge in Sanskrit and Persian, the Anglicists were convinced that the British culture was the best and the most liberal in the world and if and when India and other colonies and later on the entire world were “anglicised” culturally it would pave for the political unification of the world. To get an idea of such a sentiment we may refer to the views of Macaulay in his famous ‘Minutes dated 2nd February 1835 “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 tastes, 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.”

NATIONALIST RESPONSES TO COLONIAL EDUCATION

During the vast span of colonial rule in India, there were multiple responses by nationalists to

colonial education. Different types of nationalisms emerged and developed during this period. Nationalist attempt to politically unite the Indian people to demand for independence was just the latest version of nationalism. Soon after the introduction of colonial education, various leaders attempted to unite Indians and build a new India on the basis of their conceptions of the essence of Indian culture and requirements of their time. Reform, revival, social wellbeing, and achieving political freedom from colonial rule were some of the ideologies that guided formation of associations and activities of national leaders from time to time. Let us discuss the responses of various nationalist leaders to colonial education. We will discern their critic of colonial education and programmes of action

REVIVALIST-NATIONALIST RESPONSES TO COLONIAL EDUCATION

During the later decades of the 19th century western educated Indians became a separate category of Indians who started to gather together and discuss the reasons for backwardness of India which they started to conceive as one national entity. The formation of the Indian National Congress by these educated Indians was a major historical event in the history of Indian nationalism. The first phase of the growth of Indian nationalism corresponds to this event. The period from 1885 to 1905 constitutes the second phase which saw the expansion of the social base of Indian nationalism with the inclusion of the educated middle class which had grown in size due to the expansion of educational facilities. These initial nationalists were not against the colonial rule but facilitated the educated Indians to form a class by themselves to urge the rulers to introduce reforms in governance. They voiced such demands as Indianisation of services, associating the Indians in administration, and stopping economic drain. According to Kumar (1989 and 2005) the views of early Indian nationalists on the role of colonial education show some homonymy between the early nationalist and the colonial perspective. Except Gandhi who rejected English education, even Swamy Dayanand Saraswati who founded the revivalist movement Arya Samaj and B. G. Tilak who represented the extremist nationalist group

in their earlier career accepted the need for English education in India. In the schools started by the Arya Samaj English education was included in the curriculum. Referring to the biographies of Dayanand Saraswati and Tilak, Kumar (2005: 160) observes that "In the case of Dayanand and Tilak, the initial acknowledgement of the advantages of English education later turned into a radical opposition to it. In the first edition of Dayanand's *Satyartha Prakash*, English education was appreciated for the opportunities it offered for employment." Similar views were held by Tilak in the initial years of his political career. He preferred secular English education to religious education imparted in traditional schools. He was instrumental in naming a famous school in Pune as "New English School". His views underwent a drastic change in his later career. Later on, he adopted an extremely critical stand against English education. Following the efforts of Madan Mohan Malaviya to establish a Hindu university at Banaras, Tilak's vision of education as an agency for cultural revival became an important ingredient of his political aims (Kumar 2005: 160)".

RESPONSES OF TAGORE AND GANDHI TO COLONIAL EDUCATION

The views and pedagogic programmes of Tagore and Gandhi were in consonance with their contrasting positions in response to advancement of science and technology in modern Europe. Tagore was fascinated by the epistemology of science and achievements of science and technology in solving the problems of mankind. This view he continued almost till the fag end of his life and he only changed it after witnessing the devastating effects of World War II (Kumar 2005: 168- 175). Both his Shanti Niketan and Shri Niketan experiments need to be looked at from Tagore's orientation to the western liberal scientific education. Tagore criticised and rejected the western educational model only towards the end of his life. But Gandhi's rejection was more pronounced and consistent throughout. Gandhi's rejection of colonial education was much stronger than that of Tagore. Gandhi rejected not only western education but the western civilisation in its entirety. Quoting Gandhi, Kumar (2005: 175) writes: "The fact that western men had spent 'all their energy, industry and enterprise in

plundering and destroying other races' was evidence enough for Gandhi that western civilization was in a state of 'sorry mess'. Therefore, it could not possibly be a symbol of 'progress', or something worth imitating or transplanting in India." Analysing further Kumar (2005: 175-176) states that such a reaction is neither a type of xenophobia nor a symptom of a revivalist dogma. Both anti-westernism and a version of militant nationalism are missing in Gandhi's educational ideology and programme. Gandhi wanted India to move away from the western concept of progress. He wanted an education that would lead India on an alternate path of development more suitable to its geography and culture. In *Hind Swaraj* he developed dialectic between 'man' versus 'machine'. Here 'man' represented the whole of mankind and the 'machine' represented the industrial system of production. The scathing criticism of modernity which Gandhi explicated in *Hind Swaraj*, was a commentary on the 'tragic affliction' (Kumar (2005: 177). The idea of 'Basic Education' which Gandhi attempted to experiment in later decades of his life stems from his idea of making the whole of humanity less dependent on machines.

CONCLUSION

Desai (1976) has succinctly articulated the nationalist critique of colonial education. He has also analysed why attempts made by nationalists at organising a parallel education system on nationalist lines were unsuccessful. Since modern education was introduced in India to primarily meet the needs of the colonial administration, its scope and effectiveness, from the standpoint of Indian masses, had been extremely limited. The focus of the colonial education policy has been more towards providing the British with English speaking and modern educated personnel. Given this agenda, mass education was severely neglected. Even as late as 1931, 92 percent of the Indian population remained illiterate. The number of students studying in higher education in 1942 was just 0.5 percent of the population. The shortage was even more acute in the area of technical education.

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