



# 15 CIVILISING THE "NATIVE" EDUCATING THE NATION

## HISTORY

The policy and system of education through which we study today evolved in the last two hundred years. Before that there were small institutions called pathshalas in almost each town and big village. These were set up by wealthy people or the local community. The number of learners was however very small. The system of education was flexible suited to local needs. One teacher taught all children sitting together in one place. The teacher interacted separately with groups of children with different levels of learning. For higher learning the students went to famous pandits or scholars of languages, ancient sciences, medicine and philosophies. The traders used to teach commercial mathematics to their sons at home.



*William Jones (a junior judge at Supreme court, Calcutta learning Persian*



*Henry Thomas Colebrooke*

### The British Idea of Education

The British scholars were divided into two groups having different opinions—the orientalists and the anglicists. Scholars like William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke who have studied Sanskrit and Persian texts, shared a deep respect for ancient cultures, both of India and the west. They felt, in order to understand India it was necessary to discover the sacred and legal texts that were produced in the ancient period. For only those texts could reveal the real ideas and laws of the native Indians. Influenced by such ideas, many Company officials argued that Hindus and Muslim ought to be taught what they valued and treasured, not subjects that were alien to them, only then, they believed, could the British hope to win a place in the hearts of the 'natives'; only then could the alien rulers expect to be respected by their subjects.

**Orientalists** were those with a scholarly knowledge of the language and culture of Asia. They wanted teaching of Sanskrit and Persian texts at schools and colleges. Company governor Warren Hastings and other orientalists needed Indian scholars to teach them the vernacular (local) languages, tell them about local customs and laws and help them translate and interpret ancient texts. Hastings believed that the ancient custom of the country and oriental learning ought to be the

basis of British rule in India. With this object in view a madarsa was set up in Calcutta in 1781 to promote the study of Arabic, Persian and Islamic law. Madarsa is an Arabic word for a place of learning : any type of school or college. Hindu College (Benaras Sanskrit College) was established in Benaras in 1791 to encourage the study of ancient Sanskrit texts on law, religion, politics, morality, etc. that would be useful for the administration of the country.

**The anglicists** were those who believed that knowledge of English would allow Indians to read some of the finest literature the world had produced; it would make them aware of the developments in western science and philosophy. They wanted teaching of English texts at schools and colleges. Teaching of English could thus be a way of **civilising native Indians**, changing their tastes, values and culture. The anglicists said that knowledge of the East was full of errors and unscientific thought, Eastern literature was non-serious and light-hearted. James Mill declared, the British effort should not be to teach what the natives wanted, or what they respected, in order to please them and 'win a place in their heart'. The aim of education ought to be to teach what was useful and practical.

Another anglicist, in the 1830s, Thomas Babington Macaulay saw India as an uncivilised country that needed to be civilised. He said, "We must..... do our best to form a class (of Indians) who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and in intellect."

#### **Native Dialects : Poor and Rude**

Emphasising the need to teach English, Macaulay declared :

..... the dialects commonly spoken among the natives..... of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them .....


#### **English Education in India**

The debate was resolved in favour of the Anglicists. Ultimately, the British government realised the need for the introduction of modern English education. They needed a regular supply of qualified Indians to help in the administration of law (civil/criminal) in the courts. The British also realised that if educated Indians were employed, it would bring down the administrative costs drastically and at the same time ensure loyalty of the Indians. They also hoped that modern education would reconcile the people of India to British rule, as it would glorify British conquerors and their administration.

Social reformers, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed that modern education was necessary for eradication of social evils from Indian society. The British commercial and mercantile class hoped to expand the market for British goods through a class of educated Indians.



*Lord Macaulay*



Finally, English Education Act of 1835 was introduced in India under the Governor-General William Bentinck. The decision was to make English the medium of instructions for higher education, and to stop promotion of oriental institutions like the Calcutta Madrasa and Benaras Sanskrit College. A law in 1844 stated that only those Indians who had Knowledge of English would be eligible for government jobs.

### Education for Commerce

In 1854, Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the East Indian Company in London sent an educational despatch to the Governor General of India Lord Dalhousie. It is known as Wood's Despatch in Indian history. It said that European learning would enable Indians to recognise the advantages that flow from the expansion of trade and commerce, and make them see the importance of developing the resources of the country. Introducing them to European ways of life, would change their tastes and desires, and create a demand for British goods, for Indians would begin to appreciate and buy things that were produced in Europe. The Wood's Despatch also argued that European learning would make Indians truthful and honest, and thus supply the company with civil servants who could be trusted and depended upon. The literature of the East was not only full of grave errors, it could also not instill in people a sense of duty and a commitment to work, nor could it develop the skills required for administration.


Through Wood's Despatch the intention of the government was creating a properly articulated system of education from primary to the university stage. Local languages alongwith English were to be made the medium of instruction at the school stage and the English at the college stage. Following the 1854 despatch, Education departments were set up in the provinces to control over all matters regarding education. Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established in 1857.

### New Routines, New Rules in Schools

Up to the mid-nineteenth century, the local schools, were held under a banyan tree, in other places in the corner of a village shop or temple, or at the teacher's house. Fee depended on the income of parents. Usually the rich paid for the most of the teacher's expenses. The poor paid as much as they could. Students were not separated out into different classes. Actually the total number of the students was not much. It was usually less than twenty. The parents believed that their sons will adopt their hereditary occupations. Daughters will ultimately go to their in-law's houses. However, the system of education was flexible. For example, classes were not held during harvest time when rural children often worked in the fields. By the nineteenth century many people from all castes had a plot of land, smaller or bigger. Most of them cultivated it themselves.



*Bombay University in the nineteenth century*



It was only after 1854 that the company decided to improve the system of vernacular education. It introduced order within the system, imposed routines, established rules and ensured regular inspections. Now the teacher in each pathshala was asked to teach based on text books according to a regular time table and learning was to be tested through a system of annual examination. Students were asked to pay a regular fee, attend regular classes, sit on fixed seats and obey the new rules of discipline. The company appointed a number of government pandits each in-charge of looking after four to five schools. The pandit visited the pathshalas and tried to improve the standard of teaching. Each teacher was asked to submit periodic reports. Regulated Pathshalas which accepted the new rules were supported through government grants. But the discipline of the new system demanded regular attendance, even during harvest time when children of poor families had to work in the fields.

The company opened at least one government school in every district.

### **Growth of National Education**


---

The British did pave the way for modern education in India to suit their own requirements. From the early nineteenth century many thinkers from different parts of India began to talk of the need for a wider spread of education. Impressed with the developments in Europe, some Indians felt that western education would help modernise India. They urged the British to open more schools, colleges and universities, and spend more money on education.

In 1881, Maharaja Sayajirao III of Baroda (now Vadodara, Gujarat) laid the foundation of the Baroda College. Bhartiya Sangeet Vidyalaya (1886) and Kalabhavan Technological Institute (1890) were other important institutions of Baroda. He became the first Indian ruler to introduce free and compulsory education in his state in 1892. In 1949, his grandson Pratap Singh Gaekwad established the Maharaja Sayajirao University. This university is known for the faculty of technology and engineering and it also has Fine Arts department.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a great Muslim leader realised the importance of receiving modern education if the Muslims wanted to progress socially and politically. With his initiative, the Mohammedan Anglo Oriental College was founded in Aligarh in 1875. This was done with a view to combine the western system of education with Islamic values. Soon, this college became Aligarh Muslim University. The first Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University was Sultan Jahan Begum. The university soon opened engineering and medical colleges.

In 1905, leaders of the freedom movement formed the National Council of Education as a revolt against the control of education by the British. It was to create an education system managed by the Indians. Soon, many national schools and colleges were set up. In its Calcutta session in 1906, the Indian National Congress also encouraged the opening



of indigeneous educational institutions throughout the country. Later many schools and colleges were established throughout India.

Many individuals and thinkers were thus thinking and acting about spreading education in their own ways. Some wanted that the system set up by the British should be extended to include wider sections of people. Others urged that alternative systems be created so that people were educated into a culture that was truly national. What should be the outlines of a national educational system is a matter of debate even today. But during British rule Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore reacted against Western education. Gandhiji was highly critical of western civilisation and its worship of machines and technology. Tagore wanted to combine elements of modern western civilisation (science and technology) with what he saw as the best within Indian tradition (traditional medicines, art, music, dance and literature).

### **Mahatma Gandhi's View of Education**

Gandhiji said that the colonial education made the Indians see western civilisation as superior and destroyed the pride they had in their own culture. They began appreciating everything that came from the west and admiring British rule. Thus, the colonial education enslaved them. Education in English distanced Indians from their own social surroundings. Mahatma Gandhi strongly felt that Indian languages ought to be the medium of teaching. He wanted an education that could help Indians recover their sense of dignity and self-respect. He argued that education ought to develop a person's mind and soul. Lived experience and practical experience should be valued more than text books. Literacy— simply learning to read and write— by itself is not education. People had to work with their hands, learn a useful craft and know how different things operated. They should be enabled to produce from the moment it begins its training. This, would develop their mind and their capacity to understand.

#### **Learning**

However, Gandhiji emphasized on learning the scientific aspect of the handicraft :

" Only every handicraft has to be taught not merely mechanically, as is done today but scientifically, i.e. the child should know the why and the wherefore of every process."

— The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vo. 72, p. 79



*Mahatma Gandhi, Kasturba Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and a group of girls at Shantiniketan, 1940*

### **Tagore's Shantiniketan (Abode of Peace)**

Rabindranath Tagore established Shantiniketan in 1901. He was of the view that creative learning could be encouraged only within a natural environment. So, he chose to set up his school 100 kilometres away from Calcutta in the rural surroundings of the trees and open spaces. He viewed it as an abode of peace (shantiniketan). Here, living in

harmony with nature, children could cultivate their natural creativity. It was outside the rigid and restricting discipline of the schooling system set up by the British. The existing schools killed the natural desire of the child to be creative and her sense of wonder. He himself found them suffocating and oppressive in his childhood.

Tagore felt that childhood ought to be a time of self-learning. His ideas of education was that in the school the child could be free and creative and she should be able to explore her own thoughts and desires. Teachers should understand the child and help the child to develop her curiosity. They needed to be imaginative just like the children.

### **Overall Effect of the English Education**

As nationalist sentiments spread, other thinkers also began thinking of a system of national education which would be radically different from that set up by the British.

The promoters of English education wanted to create a class of Indians who would be English in their thinking and habits. The vast masses still remained illiterate while spread of education was limited to the middle and the upper-middle classes. The British did not pay any attention to the education of women or promoting higher studies in science and technology. Only three medical colleges were established at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay with admission restricted to the Europeans.

However, English education did bring the Indians into contact with rational and scientific ideas and with developments in science and technology. English, emerged as the common language among educated Indians, helped to spread new ideas among people living in different parts of India and created bonds of unity among them. Indians became aware and enlightened by the writings of great philosophers such as Rousseau, Voltaire and Thomas Paine, which inspired the Indian National Movement.

### **In Other Parts of the World**

Thomas Arnold, a head master of the private school Rugby in England was one of the most important educational thinkers of the nineteenth century. Arnold felt that a study of the Greek and Roman classics written two thousand years earlier, disciplined the mind. In fact, most educators of the time believed that such a discipline was necessary because young people were naturally savage and needed to be controlled. To become civilised adults they needed to understand society's notion of right and wrong, proper and improper behaviour. Education, especially one which disciplined their minds, was meant to guide them on this path.



*A class in progress in Shantiniketan in the 1930s*

 **Key Words**

- » Madarsa : an Arabic word for a place of learning, any type of school or college.
- » Orientalists : those reformers who wanted teaching of Sanskrit and Persian texts in schools and colleges.
- » Vernacular : a local language or dialect of everyday use.
- » Anglicists : those reformers who wanted teaching of English texts in schools and colleges.
- » Pathshala : an informal small school.
- » National Education : The system of education and such institutions promoted by nationalist leaders in colonial period.
- » Nationalist : someone who wants to gain or keep political independence for their country and people; who believes that their country is the most important or the best.

## SUMMARY

- ▶ Before the modern system of education, there were small institutions called pathshalas in almost each town and big village.
- ▶ The orientalists were those with a scholarly knowledge of the language and culture of Asia. They wanted teaching of Sanskrit and Persian texts at schools and colleges.
- ▶ The anglicists were those who believed that knowledge of English would allow Indians to read some of the finest literature the world has produced; it would make them aware of the developments in Western science and philosophy. They wanted teaching of English texts at schools and colleges.
- ▶ British government needed a regular supply of qualified and loyal Indians to help in the administration of law in the court at low cost.
- ▶ English Education Act of 1835 made English the medium of instruction for higher education. A law in 1844 stated that only English knowing Indians would be eligible for government jobs.
- ▶ Following the Wood's Despatch of 1854, Education departments were set up in the provinces to control over all matters regarding education. Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established in 1857.
- ▶ Pathshalas were regulated by imposing new routines, establishing rules and ensuring regular inspections.
- ▶ From the early nineteenth century many thinkers from different parts of India began to talk of the need for a wider spread of education. New colleges were opened at several places by princes and leaders.
- ▶ Gandhiji said that the colonial education made the Indians see Western civilisation as superior and destroyed the pride they had in their own culture. They began appreciating everything that came from the west and admiring British rule.
- ▶ As nationalist sentiments spread, other thinkers also began thinking of a system of national education which would be radically different from that set up by the British.

## Exercise Time

### A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. \_\_\_\_\_ wanted teaching of English texts at schools and colleges.  
a. Orientalists      b. Philosophy      c. Anglicists      d. Pathshalas
2. In 1781, a madarsa was set up by the company at \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Madras      b. Calcutta      c. Delhi      d. Benaras
3. Thomas Macaulay saw India as \_\_\_\_\_ country.  
a. a civilised      b. an uncivilised      c. cultured      d. big

4. Mahatma Gandhi wanted \_\_\_\_\_ as medium of education.  
 a. Indian languages    b. English    c. \_\_\_\_\_    d. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Tagore established Shantiniketan \_\_\_\_\_ from Calcutta.  
 a. \_\_\_\_\_    b. in    c. away    d. \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Fill in the blanks :**

1. Tagore felt that childhood ought to be a time of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. British government needed a regular supply of \_\_\_\_\_ and loyal Indians.
3. Thomas Arnold felt that a study of the classics \_\_\_\_\_ the mind.
4. James Mill said that the aim of education ought to be to teach what was useful and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Macaulay said that teaching of English could be a way of \_\_\_\_\_ Indian people.

**C. Match the Following :**

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Rabindra Nath Tagore  | i. teaching of Sanskrit and Persian texts at colleges    |
| 2. Mahatma Gandhi        | ii. learning in a natural environment                    |
| 3. William Jones         | iii. teaching of English texts at colleges               |
| 4. Charles Wood<br>their | iv. education that could help Indians recover self-pride |
| 5. Thomas Macaulay       | v. introducing Indians with European ways of life        |

**D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :**

1. Wood's Despatch was about helping Indians to learn Sanskrit and Persian texts.
2. James Mill was a severe critic of orientalists.
3. Thomas Arnold felt that a study of the classics disciplined the mind.
4. Rabindranath Tagore felt that children ought to be subjected to strict discipline.
5. Mahatma Gandhi thought that promotion of literacy was the most important aim of education.

**E. Define the terms :**

1. Orientalist
2. Anglicist
3. Nationalist
4. Vernacular


**F. Answer in one word or one phrase :**

1. Which act or despatch was followed to establish universities ?
2. Who founded Sayajirao University at Baroda ?
3. Which Act passed by the British introduced English education in India ?
4. Which college later became the Aligarh Muslim University ?
5. Who was Sultan Jahan Begum ?

**G. Answer these question briefly :**

1. Why did William Jones feel the need to study Indian history, philosophy and law ?
2. Why did James Mill and Thomas Macaulay think that European Education was essential in India ?
3. Why did Mahatma Gandhi want to teach children handicrafts ?



- 
4. Why did Mahatma Gandhi think that English education had enslaved Indians ?
  5. Why did Rabindranath Tagore open his school in the natural environment ?
  6. Why did the British government feel the need to introduce English education in India ?
  7. What did the British mean by 'civilising the natives' ?
  8. How were the pathshalas regulated by the British government ?

**H. Answer these questions in detail :**

1. Discuss the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy.
2. What was Wood's Despatch of 1854 ? How did this despatch make a considerable impact on British education policy in India ?
3. British education in India was a 'mixed blessing'. Discuss.
4. What is meant by National Education ? Who were its advocates ? Mention some of their achievements.
5. Describe Mahatma Gandhi's view on English Education.

---

## PROJECT WORK

1. Find out about the history of your school or any other famous school in your area.
2. Find out from your grandparents or an old person about what they studied in school.