

## Education in Colonial India, 1700-1930

British educational policies in India were designed to control politically the Indian subcontinent and to keep its people economically dependent on Britain. In the early days of British rule, when conditions could turn against the conquerors at any time and the purpose of occupation was mercantile, educational policy centered on the pacification of native elites: the Orientalist phase gave native elites their native colleges under British control. When capitalists began to gain control of the British government at home and to change the role of India in its relation to the metropole, the educational system changed as well: for Indians to become consumers of British goods and to become more capitalistic required a reconstructed educational system based on British values and norms. The Anglicist policy was implemented in India: Indians were to be taught in English. There was resistance to this policy at first because of deep-seated traditions. But the British created a demand for English-language education by hiring English-trained Indians to serve as low-level bureaucrats in the colonial government. Once this new social structure was imposed, secondary and higher education expanded gradually and then rapidly. At the same time, however, primary schooling was neglected. To reach the "masses," education in the vernacular was used in primary school; nevertheless, funds were limited and relatively few children went to primary school.

The case of India illustrates clearly how changes in the educational system of a colonized country were made to suit the perceived needs of the colonizer. English rule did eventually break up the traditional structure and replace it with a European-oriented hierarchy. So there may have been some value in India's "Westernization." But the cost to her of British policies was apparently enormous. The British had to force a cultural transformation on part of the Indian population to develop loyalty to Britain and to serve as intermediaries to uneducated and unassimilated Indians. A top-heavy bureaucracy and educational

system was created to carry out this project. Cottage industry was destroyed without incorporating artisans with their skills into the new structure. For the British, "development" in India meant controlling Indian resources for British use, and education was structured to achieve that goal.

### *The Economic Context of British Conquest and Colonialism*

Indian society in the sixteenth century was headed by the Muslim absolute monarchy of the Mogul Empire. The most famous Mogul ruler was Akbar (1556–1605) followed by Jahangir (1605–27), Shah Jahan (1627–58), and Aurangzeb (1658–1707). The monarchy was followed in turn by Hindu persecution, warfare, chaos, and decline. The basis of the Mogul rule was a strict bureaucratically centralized system that did its best to inhibit the growth of a trading class and of independent centers of economic power. Peasant agriculture produced a large surplus that was appropriated directly by the state through the military apparatus, local revenue officials (Zamindari) and (in some areas) cooperative Hindu chiefs.<sup>3</sup> The nobles and tax gatherers had no stable and independent sources of revenue or property rights of any sort. Their entire income came either through cash payments from the royal treasury or by being assigned a certain percentage of the royal share of produce in a particular geographic area. They held their privileges at the uncertain whim of the state, and could be (literally) removed at any time. Worse still, they were absolutely forbidden to pass on their wealth through inheritance, and when they died, all they had accumulated went right back into the royal treasury.<sup>4</sup>

Under such circumstances, with all the wealth concentrated in the center and the officials denied any long-term responsibility for the productivity of the land, economic parasitism became rampant. Officials and nobles squandered all the money they would lose at death on conspicuous consumption (gambling and sport). The emperor also indulged in building useless but expensive monuments (Taj Mahal), but more importantly, the main part of the surplus (especially by the time of Aurangzeb) was eaten away through costly wars of conquest in an effort to try and extend the base of taxation by adding new lands.

As a result of this attitude, the officials were constantly squeezing the peasants out of ever higher amounts of produce, to the point of the devastation of the land or the flight of the peasant himself. By the seventeenth century this intolerable exploitation led to massive and bitter revolts, tempered only by the conservatism of the caste system.<sup>5</sup> Pressure from the Zamindar forced the peasants to resist and seek protection from the local chieftains, anxious to encourage a breakdown of central authority. The net result of the peasant revolts was just such a breakdown, and the West European trading companies (by the eighteenth century) were operating in somewhat of a political vacuum.

Economically, the time of Akbar was one of expanding market relations and commodity production. The textile industry was the best in the world; silk, spices, and indigo were prominent export items. Technology even to the point of metallurgy was developing. Artisans in the towns produced many items for luxury consumption. But the government did not look with favor on these activities, imposing restrictions on the trader to render ineffective any attempts to accumulate wealth and power. No contracts were enforced; besides, on the trader's death the whole concern's property was seized.<sup>6</sup>

The crucial obstacle, however, was one that even the emperor was powerless to overcome: a lack of seapower. India's peculiar land-base forced it to rely almost exclusively on sea trade, and yet the lack of invasion in the early centuries had led to a neglect of shipbuilding. Thus, the emperor had to rely on foreigners for transport, as they were powerful enough to pirate any ships he might set sail himself. Initially, the Portuguese monopolized this sphere, earning huge profits from the European trade while leaving the emperor with but a small portion of the revenue. The British had to fight their way through this monopoly, using competitive bargaining techniques as a means to win concessions from the emperor. During a war in 1687 an enraged Aurangzeb tried to expel them and cease all trade, but in the end he had to call them back and deal as "they were supreme at sea and . . . the loss of his custom revenue was serious."<sup>7</sup> By 1700 the British East India Company had its own military base and trading center at Fort William, which became known as the port city of Calcutta. Fifty-seven years later, the company's army had defeated both the French

Company (Battle of Plassey) and the Nawab of Bengal's legions to become undisputed ruler of Bengal.

The *initial* impetus for conquest in India did not come from manufacturers, but from the old-line aristocracy and from mercantile policies. Pursuit of monopoly profits through plundering India's goods and selling them in Europe was the original design of such policies. The trader would march or float into a village, steal what he could from artisan or peasant, and even force them to buy from him unneeded products at outrageous prices. The traders had the British flag behind them, and even organized their own police forces for the purpose. A collector in Dacca, 1762, describes the process:

In the first place, a number of merchants have made interest with the people of the factory, hoist English colours on their boats, and carry away their goods under the pretence of their being English property. Secondly, the Gomastahs of luckypoor and Dacca factories oblige the merchants [Indian] etc. to take tobacco, cotton, iron and sundry other things, at a price exceeding that of the bazaar, and then extort the money from them by force; besides which they take diet money from the peons, and make them pay a fine for breaking their agreement. By these proceedings the Aurngs and other places are ruined.<sup>8</sup>

Bengal, once the most prosperous province, soon became the most impoverished. The tax-assessing methods of the British were even more brutal and overbearing than what preceded, and the peasant was left with nothing to replenish his family or the land. Between 1765 and 1770 the company took out ten times what it put in.<sup>9</sup> In 1770 a bad harvest caused one of the most massive famines in world history, and one-third of the Bengali people (about 10 million) died. Despite this, the drain of resources flowing from India to the coffers of aristocrats and adventurers in Britain continued. After the famine the governor of Calcutta, Warren Hastings, wrote to the East India Company's directors (November 3, 1772):

Notwithstanding the loss of at least one-third of the inhabitants of the province, and the consequent decrease of the cultivation, the net collections of the year 1771 exceeded even those of 1768. . . . It was

naturally to be expected that the diminution of the revenue should have kept an equal pace with other consequences of so great a calamity. That it did not was owing to its being violently kept up to its former standard.<sup>10</sup>

The drain was enormous, and some have even argued that the Indian surplus, coming at the time it did, helped fuel the beginnings of the industrial revolution in England, through the expansion in shipping and infrastructure and the richer home market. But ultimately the power of the East India Company became an obstacle to industrialization.<sup>11</sup> The rising Lancashire capitalists did not want goods imported from India as luxury items for the profit of aristocratic traders; they wanted to be able to sell *their* finished products in India and get Indian raw materials. The native Indian industry had to be destroyed (which it was) and the monopoly powers of the company as well. This battle took place in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the industrialists eventually won. India became a free-trade area for British export. The East India Company was transformed from a commercial body to an administrative one; it became (under parliamentary supervision) *the* Government of India. The growth of official state-aided education arose from the changes that took place in this period.

In order to destroy the Indian textile industry the British Parliament had to impose a 70 to 80 percent duty on all cloth imported from India; at the same time the East India Company allowed Lancashire goods to come pouring into India with (at most) 3 percent charges.

It was stated in evidence (in 1813) that the cotton and silk goods of India up to this period could be sold for a profit in the British market, at a price from 50 to 60 percent lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70 and 80 percent on their value, or by positive prohibition. Had this not been the case, had not such prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and Manchester would have been stopped in their outset and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the powers of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of Indian manufacture. Had India been independent, she would have retaliated;

would have imposed preventive duties on British goods, and would thus have preserved her own productive industry from annihilation. This act of self-defence was not permitted her; she was at the mercy of a stranger. British goods were forced upon her without paying any duty; and the foreign manufacturer employed the arm of political injustice to keep down and ultimately strangle a competitor with whom he could not have contended on equal terms.<sup>12</sup>

This is the basic imperialist relationship that developed. From an exporting country India became an importing one; from a budding manufacturing potential she retreated into a pure agricultural nation, cities depopulated, peasants falling back on small plots with low productivity, barely above starvation. The surplus from all this was utilized to build "liberal" Britain. By 1850 the Indian market took up one-fourth of Britain's entire foreign cotton trade: the cotton industry employed one-eighth of England's population and contributed one-twelfth of the national revenue.<sup>13</sup>

### *Early Efforts at Western Education*

In the first stages of British involvement, prior to their accession to power, missionary work was actively encouraged. At this stage the East India Company was facing heavy competition from the Portuguese, Dutch, and French, all of whom had relatively more privileged positions as sea traders with the Mogul ruler. The British were trying to win concessions from the Mogul as a "fair-minded" alternative to Portuguese shipping and were just beginning to feel their way into the country. Under the military protection of the company, missionaries could get to know a geographic area more intimately and provide essential information about the social structure, culture, economic production, and trading habits of the people. They helped to legitimate foreign presence among the natives (demonstrating the superiority of Christianity). They were able to establish some point of contact with the land other than that of the Court, a procedure necessary in building a firm base. Missionaries were the first people to try to learn the vernacular languages and to try to communicate directly with the

people. They had the first printing presses, and set about translating the Bible and other books into the native tongues, attempting to introduce a Western perspective and religion to accompany their commercial counterpart. Much of the missionaries' work was done in the cities—instructing and serving the English community, getting to know the native Hindu and Moslem elites, and exchanging the printed and spoken word. In addition, they made direct attempts to convert natives to Christianity by working in the villages.<sup>14</sup> They would set up a house of worship and perhaps a hospital or school to try to relate to the poor, impoverished, and socially degraded lower castes (out-castes or depressed classes) who had the least to lose from putting on a coat and tie, reading the Bible, and accepting the tight discipline and self-denial of Protestantism in the hopes of improving their condition. The missionaries were very much concerned with social reforms, with eliminating the customs and habits that formed the basis of the caste system, and thus with "civilizing" India.

Aside from laying the basis for future efforts at Western education, the primary importance of missionary work in this period (and indeed throughout the history of British imperialism) was to *legitimate* the drive for expansion *within* the home country (Britain itself). Committing resources, manpower, and energy to seizing new lands and building huge trading operations overseas was not possible without the ideology of the "white man's burden," and it is missionaries and their reformist zeal most of all that confirmed this ideology.<sup>15</sup>

The missionaries were the only Europeans at this time who were setting up schools directly for Indian children, using their native languages and also teaching them English "to 'facilitate dealings.'" Up to 1770 the company was doing all it could to give protection to the missionaries and to assist them financially (help build and repair schools, provide personnel, etc.) and in other ways to advance their educational endeavors.

However, once the rule of the East India Company had been established on a more firm footing—once it had become a *political power*—Warren Hastings and the other leaders began to take a much more hostile attitude toward the work of the missionaries in English education, Christian proselytization, and social modernization. The

company was attempting to win cooperation from the native Moslem and Hindu elites in establishing its legal and governmental powers, and the missionaries' attacks on these religions and their customs offended these elites and made them fearful that foreign presence would cause them to lose standing and privilege within their own communities. Srinivas describes the effects of missionaries on the Hindu (Brahmin) elite:

For their part the missionary publications drew attention to the defects of Hinduism, the evils of the caste system, etc., and pointed out the truth of the Christian religion and the superiority of Western learning and science. Active missionary propaganda had now been in Northern India for over a quarter of a century, and Lord Minto had noticed in 1807 that its effect was not to convert but to alienate the followers of both Hinduism and Islam . . . resentment was roused by invective launched against the revered order of Brahmins. . . . Similarly, converts to Christianity from Hinduism did not exercise much influence in Indian society as a whole because, first, these also generally came from the *low castes*, and second, the act of conversion alienated them from the majority community of Hindus.<sup>16</sup>

The East India Company decided to ban missionary education entirely, and did everything possible to keep missionaries out of its territory in Bengal. Instead it introduced the policy of Orientalism, a policy designed to strengthen and pacify the traditional Indian elites.

It was under this political opposition that the famed Serampore Trio had to operate. Dr. Carey of the Baptist Missionary Society in England arrived in Calcutta in 1793 hoping to preach but was driven out. He then began working in North Bengal (Malda) as a superintendent of an indigo factory, and in his spare time translating the Bible into Bengali, holding religious services for the servants on the estate, setting up a school, and so forth. In 1799 two others, Marshman and Ward, arrived in Calcutta to join him. When the government ordered them to leave, they persuaded Carey to go with them to the Dutch settlement of Serampore—fifteen miles from Calcutta—where they would be under the jurisdiction and protection of the Dutch

government. (Many missionaries took refuge at Dutch settlements.) At Serampore, Carey, Marshman, and Ward set up a printing press, and between 1800 and 1810—together with colleagues in various parts of India—they translated extracts from the Bible into thirty-one different native dialects, and printed tracts and pamphlets in twenty languages, and even schoolbooks for children and for colleges.<sup>17</sup> Later, they established their own college for boys, and in 1818 founded the first daily English-language paper, *Friend of India*, which was very influential. (It provided moral justifications for government policy and was widely quoted in the vernacular press.)

During the early days there was much conflict with the East India Company. In 1808, for example, a pamphlet of theirs was prohibited in company territory because it was a religious tract which offended Moslems and Hindus. In fact, the company tried to have them removed from Serampore, but to no avail. But it was more than Christianity that was in dispute. English or Western education itself was under attack by the authorities. There was plenty of opposition from native chieftains to the British rule: wars were fought, and even within the company native-soldier ranks there was a mutiny. The British were afraid of revolt, as Marshman, in his 1852 testimony before Parliament, records:

For a considerable time after the British Government had been established in India, there was great opposition to any system of instruction for the Natives. The feelings of the public authorities in this country were first tested upon the subject in the year 1792, when Mr. Wilberforce proposed to add two clauses to the Charter Act of that year, for sending out school masters to India; this encountered the greatest opposition in the Court of Directors, and it was found necessary to withdraw the clauses. . . . On that occasion one of the Directors stated that we had just lost America from our folly, in having allowed the establishment of schools and colleges, and that it would not do for us to repeat the same act of folly in regard to India; and that if the Natives required anything in the way of education, they must come to England for it. For 20 years after that period, down to the year 1813, the same feeling of opposition to the education of Natives continued to prevail among the ruling authorities.<sup>18</sup>

In this period the British were not attempting to make any major economic transformations in the countryside, in the development of markets, or in new forms of production. Rather, using trade and military power they had seized control of a new territory but had not yet established a firm basis for their rule, not even to the extent of securing minimal cooperation from the landowners, privileged classes, and religious leaders. Neither did they have any means of communication with the people through language or tradition or law. Thus, English education and Western reform seemed an unnecessarily energetic and antagonistic undertaking. Ultimately, education was what the colonialists would like, but for the time being they were content to be cautious and distant in their approach, falling back on their superior armies as a last resort.

The (British) Government of Bombay, which was established in the early part of the nineteenth century, faced the same conflicts as did the Bengal rulers in the first days of their rule. This caution of the British approach was very well characterized by a statement of a member of the Bombay government in 1838, J. Farish:

We are here in India, in a very extraordinary position—a small band of aliens totally unconnected by colour, religion, feelings, manners, or any one single tie—have established their despotic rule over a vast people, whose affections must be with their Native Princes, and all whose prejudices are arrayed against their conquerors. This supremacy can only be maintained by arms, or by opinion. The Natives of India must be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could have. If well directed, the progress of Education would undoubtedly increase our moral hold over India, but, by leading the Natives to a consciousness of their own strength, it will as surely weaken our physical means of keeping them in subjection.<sup>19</sup>

A second view of this same phenomenon is the following:

. . . [I]n order to understand their attitude, we must realize that their only object was trade, and that it was purely for the safeguarding of

their trade that they had interfered with the politics of the land. . . . They had won their territory by means of an Indian army composed mainly of high-caste Hindus, who were exceedingly strict in keeping all the rules of caste and religious practice. . . . In consequence, the government believed it necessary, for the stability of their position, not merely to recognize the religions of India but to support and patronize them as fully as the Native Rulers had done, and to protect their soldiers from any attempt to make them Christians. . . . They were convinced that rebellion, civil war, and universal unrest would certainly accompany every attempt to promote missionary enterprise, and, above all, that the conversion of a high-caste native soldier would inevitably mean the disbanding of the army and the overthrow of British rule in India.<sup>20</sup>

### *Orientalism: The Initial Phase*

The purpose of the Orientalist policy, which strengthened and pacified traditional elites in British controlled areas of India, was to perpetuate British political power at a time when it was still weak. Education was provided for native elites in their own language and largely under their control.

In 1772 Warren Hastings took over as governor of Bengal and endeavored to make it a full-fledged government. Two years later he was made the first governor-general of the East India Company's entire dominion in India. His first act in his new capacity was to establish a Supreme Court in Calcutta and to begin to codify Indian law for British administrative use. In accord with solidifying British rule, he saw that British power had to be based on Indian compliance. He began enlisting traditional Brahmin and Moslem scholars to codify and translate laws based on the most extreme religious separatism and orthodoxy (thus to a certain extent setting back the secularization and liberalization that had been taking place under Akbar and for the previous three hundred years). The Hindus got the Gentoo Code in 1776. Later came a separate Mohammedan code. In 1781 the Act of Settlement proclaimed the legitimacy of the two codes in all family and religious matters (inheritance, succession, contract) as enforced by

Hastings (a provision which meant that there were always many "exceptions"). Hastings actively encouraged Brahminism as a means of breaking Mogul power (although he later courted Moslems), and Brahminism even spread into areas which had been previously casteless.<sup>21</sup> The Gentoo Code endorsed polygamy, widow-burning (*sati*), and child marriage, banned widow remarriage and divorce, and generally upheld all of the most reactionary customs. Not only were missionaries banned from the territory, but native Christians were actively discriminated against: for example, they were not allowed in the army, a source of good pay and status. The Brahmins and Zamindars became landlords, an act which simultaneously reinforced hierarchical stability and created a base of support for British imperialism that lasted right up to the mid-twentieth century.

In 1780 Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrassah with his own private capital in order "to conciliate the Mahommedans of Calcutta . . . to qualify the sons of Mahommedan gentlemen for responsible and lucrative offices in the State, and to produce competent officers for Courts of Justice."<sup>22</sup> He was incurring hostility from the Moslem community, and this was one way of conciliating them. In fact, the effect was very favorable and the college got such a wide response that he immediately had to expand the institution and ask the Court of Directors for funding. This was granted (by assigning land revenue annually) and so it became the first state-supported school in India.<sup>23</sup>

Soon to follow was the Benares Sanskrit College in 1791, also with an annual financial grant and a European director. Jonathan Duncan, the founder, explained its purpose:

Two important advantages seemed derivable from such an establishment, the first to the British name and nation in its tendency towards endearing our government to the Native Hindus; by our exceeding in our attention towards them and their systems, the care shown even by their own native princes. . . . The second principal advantage that may be derived from this institution will be felt in its effect upon the natives . . . by preserving and disseminating a knowledge of the Hindu law, and providing a nursery of future doctors and expounders thereof, to assist European judges in the due, regular and uniform administration of its genuine letter and spirit to the body of the people.<sup>24</sup>

Once again Bombay followed in the footsteps of its sister, Bengal. The British first conquered Bombay in 1818, and Mountstuart Elphinstone's first act was to adopt the Orientalist policy in education (he later also encouraged the vernacularist policy). He translated the law into a Hindu code and won the assistance of the educated classes in its enforcement through dispensing economic privilege and by training their sons to work in the government bureaucracy. Later, the government could take more positive steps in the direction of the law and in shaping the sons' education, but the first task was to establish solid political control. (Once the Indian resistance was totally crushed, the Orientalist policy was doomed to wither away.) Elphinstone founded a Hindu college at the city of Poona in the Bombay Presidency in 1820. Its first commissioner was William Chaplin, installed on November 24, 1820;

The immediate motive with which the College was founded was more a political than an educational one—namely, to conciliate the learned Brahmin class who had suffered severely by the change of government on the overthrow of the Peshwa by the British in 1818. . . . To ensure its popularity with the Hindu community, stated Mr. Chaplin, he had provided for instruction in the college in "almost all their branches of learning," though he considered many of them worse than useless. The college in its inception was intended to be a purely Sanskrit one, and no measures were taken to introduce any sort of European learning. "I have however endeavoured," said Mr. Chaplin, "to direct the attention of the college principally to such parts of their own Shasters, as are not only most useful in themselves, but will best prepare their minds for the gradual reception of more valuable instruction at a future time. *When we have once secured their confidence, but not till then*, will be the time to attempt the cautious and judicious introduction of those improvements in the education of our Hindoo subjects, by which alone, joined with good Government, we can hope to ameliorate their moral condition."<sup>25</sup> (Italics added.)

### *Toward Anglicism*

But the missionaries were not quite as patient as Mr. Chaplin, and neither was the new generation of townsmen in England, growing up

in the industrial revolution and full of the reforming spirit. The industrialists wanted to smash the East India Company's trade monopoly and open up India as a market for selling goods; the British Protestant nation (or at least those small sectors of it that were concerned with these distant problems at all) wanted to see India educated and morally cleansed from its own religious decadence and from the company's corruption as its "just" reward for British rule. Together the industrialists and the Protestants initiated far-reaching changes in India policy.

In 1784 Pitt passed in the House of Commons an India Act which purported to regulate the East India Company's activities. (He was forced to pass the India Act under threat of more radical bills.) A year later Warren Hastings resigned as governor-general, and three years after that he was impeached and put on trial for corruption and scandal. It was these political stirrings within England and hostility to the company's regime which afforded the missionaries the protection they needed and gave a general spur to educational activities. In 1800 the Marquis Wellesley founded the Fort William College in Calcutta, despite bitter protests from the Court of Directors who attempted to halt its operations but were finally overruled by Pitt himself. This school was merely for the training of European youth and company officials in Indian languages, history, and law. Wilberforce's attempt to introduce an education clause into the charter in 1792 was mentioned earlier, but despite that failure, he kept on struggling. This religious leader of the "Clapham sect" finally succeeded in 1813, when the new Charter Act directed the East India Company to set aside a minimum of one lakh of rupees annually for Indian education. Also, missionaries were to be allowed free movement and activity throughout the territories. The charter abolished the company's trading monopoly and gave British industrialists free access to Indian markets. The provision to set aside the lakh of rupees is noted in every history of Indian education as heralding a major advance in educational policy, but *none* of the money was spent on any education until 1820.<sup>26</sup>

Yet the entrance of the colonial government into native education was the culmination of a long struggle: Charles Grant had written as early as 1792 that education should be used to improve native morals.

Grant, a Scotsman and member of the "Clapham sect," who later became a company director (1797-1818), member of Parliament (1802-18), and founder of the Church Missionary Society in 1799, argued strongly for education in *the English language*, thus foreshadowing Macaulay by forty-three years. He wanted English to be the language of administration, courts, and revenue and the basis for the teaching of European culture and science and the Christian religion. He wanted printing presses, and he wanted free schools to be set up throughout the Presidencies to teach reading and writing, using native Hindu instructors trained in the English language.

Grant understood both sides of imperialism (the cultural and the economic) very clearly:

To introduce the language of the conquerors, seems to be an obvious means of assimilating a conquered people to them. The Mahomedans from the beginning of their power employed the Persian language in the affairs of government, and in the public departments. This practice aided them in maintaining their superiority, and enabled them, instead of depending blindly on native agents, to look into the conduct and details of public business as well as to keep intelligible registers of the income and expenditure of the State. Natives readily learnt the language of Government, finding that it was necessary in every concern of Revenue and Justice; they next became teachers of it; and in all the provinces over which the Mogul Empire extended, it is still understood and taught by numbers of Hindoos. *It would have been in our interest to have followed their example.*<sup>27</sup> (Italics added.)

In every progressive step of this work, we shall also serve the original design with which we visited India, that design still so important to this country—the extension of our commerce. Why is it that so few of our manufactures and commodities are vended there? Not merely because the taste of the people is not generally formed to the use of them, but because they have not the means of purchasing them. The proposed improvements would introduce both. As it is, our woollens, our manufactures in iron, copper, and steel; our clocks, watches and toys of different kinds; our glass-ware, and various other articles are admired there, and would sell in great quantities if the people were rich enough to buy them. . . . How greatly will our country be thus aided



in rising still superior to all her difficulties; and how stable, as well as unrivalled, may we hope her commerce will be. . . . This is the noblest species of conquest, and wherever, we may venture to say, our principles and language are introduced, our commerce will follow.<sup>28</sup>

Grant's pamphlet projected the basic logic of subsequent events quite well, although, as with all political manifestos, it was too ambitious. Expenditures on education were to remain very small up to the twentieth century. By 1847, there were less than 10,000 students enrolled in government-sponsored English-speaking schools: in 1845 there were 2,186 students in the Northwest provinces; 7,036 in all (36) institutions of Bengal Assam and Orissa; 8,138 in Bombay; and 156 in Madras. Not all of these were English-speaking. There were also 92 English schools run by missionaries with 13,000 students.<sup>29</sup>

Important educational changes occurred in the early nineteenth century, as the English felt their way toward absolute political power. In order to get schools established and accepted at all, the Orientalist policy continued in a modified form after 1813. The Anglo-Indian Vidyala College was founded in Calcutta in 1816, followed by a Sanskrit College (for translations of literature and law) in 1823, and a college at Agra studying Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Hindu in 1823 (about 100 students). But the British soon took over these colleges. The government took control of Vidyala in 1824 by paying rent and appointing a European Professor brought from London to teach mechanics, hydrostatics, pneumatics, optics, electricity, astronomy and chemistry. The Sanskrit College got an English class in 1827, and Bentinck even ruled that they must have a course in human anatomy at the Medical College and dissect cadavers. This constituted a violation of Hindu religious custom and was the object of great controversy among the students. Agra College also got an English class in 1827.

In Bombay, the story is similar. Elphinstone's early years in power were on very precarious footing and as a result he wisely took a very active role in promoting vernacular education. He helped pioneer the Bombay Native Education Society, a private group of native leaders who cooperated with Elphinstone in setting up primary and secondary schools and colleges to teach law and literature, translate books, and

hopefully introduce some Western concepts in the vernacular. Besides Poona, Elphinstone set up an Engineering Institute in Bombay. There European boys were trained to be surveyors and natives were trained in mechanical arts and lower sciences to help European engineers supervise public works. Natives were taught in the vernacular at the Engineering Institute with translation work done by its director, Lieutenant George Jervis.

But by the time Macaulay was causing a stir in Calcutta, the pressure was on for changes in the Bombay Presidency as well. Sir John Malcolm, who took over from Elphinstone in 1829, pushed very hard for English education, both as part of the ideology of the successful dominance of imperial rule and (in his case) more importantly as a source of civil servants for the government. There weren't enough Europeans to go around, especially outside the major cities, and the cost of importing them plus the huge salaries and special privileges they commanded were an enormous drain on the budget.<sup>30</sup> It seemed much simpler and politically wiser to create a class of cheaply paid but loyal Indian *low-level* bureaucrats to help staff the provincial offices and act as a buffer or intermediary class to stand between the government and the masses. Malcolm's successor, Lord Clare, set up an English college in Boodwar Palace (Poona) in 1833 and called it Elphinstone College (63 students). In addition Lord Clare abolished the Engineering Institute in 1832 as a waste of money,<sup>31</sup> and in 1843 all that was left of it was one professor at Poona. The Native Medical School of the 1820s was also abolished in 1832, and a decision made to teach in English. And, finally, the Poona Sanskrit College was abolished as a vernacular institution and some of its curriculum was merged into the English school (Elphinstone) in 1851.

By the 1820s, the policy of cultural conquest was already bearing fruit in the person of Raja Rammahon Roy. Nurullah and Naik describe him as "The Father of Modern India."<sup>32</sup> Roy, a beef-eating Brahmin, was the first leader of a movement of Hindu religious reformers (Brahmo Samaj) who accepted British rule as a good thing and the British as an ally in an attempt to reform the Hindu traditions in a more secular and Western direction. He fought for Western schools,<sup>33</sup> for the abolishment of customs like widow-burning, for

property rights for women, and for the use of English in the law courts. Roy originally started out as a civil servant and revenue officer for the East India Company and spoke English fluently. He died in 1833, and one gets the sense that had he lived longer he would have been knighted by Queen Victoria.

In 1832 the first Reform Bill was passed in Parliament and the middle classes with their laissez faire capitalism had seized political power. A year later, when the Charter of the East India Company came up for renewal, its trading powers were abolished and it was constituted as a purely administrative body (the government of India). Provision was made in the charter that natives by religion, birthplace, descent, or color could not be barred from holding offices in the company. The stage was set for hiring Indians to work (cheaply) and become loyal to British administrators on a governmental level. For this, English education was required, and Macaulay came to India in 1834 to push for it.<sup>34</sup> Macaulay's Minute stated:

In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the South of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian Empire. . . . 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 tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.<sup>35</sup>

This is the key: more than the need to have a cheaper, more extensive, and more efficient (English law) administration, more than the desire to have a greater body of consumers through economic development, the primary purpose was to build a cultural dependency among the educated and ruling classes so that revolutionary overthrow would never be a likely alternative. As Sir Charles Trevelyan, Macaulay's brother-in-law, wrote in his book *On the Education of The People of India* (1838),

No effort of policy can prevent the nations from ultimately regaining their independence. English education will achieve by gradual reform what any other method will do by revolution. The nations will not rise against us because we shall stoop to raise them. . . . We shall exchange profitable subjects for still more profitable allies . . . and establish a strict commercial union between the first manufacturing and the first producing country in the world.<sup>36</sup>

What is crucial here is the *form* that the education took for the elite. The British did not try to instill in the natives a deep grasp of the fundamental principles of economics, technology, science, and politics; rather they were content to force their pupils to ape and recite English literature, philosophy, and metaphysics in the most slavish imitative fashion. The purpose of this kind of training was for them to get some sense of vocabulary as used in law and administration. More importantly it instilled in them a respect and awe for the aristocratic virtues of the majestic English language and culture, and a corresponding contempt and disdain for their own background. Even today it is very difficult for educated Indians to break this pattern. They feel much closer bonds with British professors than with Hindu peasants, to whom they are unable even to speak. The students, for example, would read an Oxford text and do a recitation on some fine point of historical debate concerning King Alfred and the Norman Conquest. Of their own background they learned nothing, and by the time they were educated, they knew English as a first language, unable even to translate it into vernacular sentences or vice versa.

As Governor-General Lord Hardinge wrote to Queen Victoria in 1844:

The literature of the West is the most favourite study among the Hindoos in their schools and colleges. They will discuss with accuracy the most important events in British history. Boys of 15 years of age, black in colour, will recite the most favourite passages from Shakespeare, ably quoting the notes of the English and German commentators.<sup>37</sup>

Historian H. N. Brailsford also takes this view:

In short, the Brahman intellectual and the classical scholar of the I.C.S., bred in Public School, were equally indifferent to science and technology. The result was that Indians rushed into the legal profession and neglected the studies and careers which might have ended Indian poverty by the development of scientific agriculture and modern industry. This land was cursed with an unemployed proletariat of intellectuals.<sup>38</sup>

There was a split in policy directions over the Macaulay issue between Bengal and Bombay. There also was much discussion over Macaulay's celebrated "downward filtration theory." The "theory" was simply an elaborate rationalization for the fact that at this stage education involved very little in the way of financial expenditures and was confined almost exclusively to the instruction of a tiny elite group of future civil servants. Macaulay therefore argued that rather than the government taking direct responsibility for the education of the mass of the people, if it did a good enough job imparting Western values and concepts to this Indian elite, then *they* would in turn share their knowledge with their own people and somehow eventually it would all "filter down." K. C. Vyas, in the following quote mistakes the stated goals for the actual goals, but otherwise accurately describes the final outcome:

The theory of "filtering down" was an evident example of wishful thinking on the part of the Government. After intense English education, the educated were practically cut off from their surroundings. For all practical purposes, in manners, clothes, language and tastes they became English-minded and developed a dislike for those who, unlike themselves, had not taken to an English education. *Obviously, such persons would never return to the illiterate masses.*<sup>39</sup> (Italics added.)

On November 23, 1844, Lord Hardinge informed Queen Victoria:

In order to reward native talent and render it practically useful to the state, Sir Henry Hardinge, after due deliberation, has issued a Resolution, by which the most meritorious students will be appointed to fill the public offices which fall vacant throughout Bengal.

It is impossible throughout Your Majesty's immense Empire to employ the number of highly paid European civil servants which the Public Service requires. This deficiency is the great evil of British administration. By dispensing annually a proportion of well-educated natives, throughout the provinces, under British superintendence, well-founded hopes are entertained, that prejudices may gradually disappear, the public service be improved and attachment to British institutions increased.<sup>40</sup>

The key to the whole Anglicist policy was contained in Hardinge's memo. The growth of English education had been very slow, and there was no clear way to impose it on the population. Hardinge found the way. He made them want it, because it was the only way that they could get any sort of a job with the government. These were lucrative jobs by Indian standards. The net result was that almost the whole system of education, particularly in Bengal, became geared toward training for government service.<sup>41</sup> As there were not enough jobs to go around, many of these educated Indians became mere clerks ("Babus"), unable to use their literary and legal skills for any business, industrial, or scientific pursuits. This kind of bias still exists in the Indian educational system today, which is probably the main reason why India has such a huge state bureaucracy and patronage system and why there are so many Indian students attending foreign universities. Government schools provided a veneer of English and a good job that certainly helped "increase their attachment to British institutions." H. Woodrow, a school inspector in East Bengal, complains in an 1856 report that students in governmental schools value education

solely as a means of getting money. People have gradually forced themselves to acknowledge the English school as a necessity; not that they have at present any value for our learning, but they consider the acquisition of our language as necessary for the advancement of their children in this life."<sup>42</sup>

### *Vernacular Education*

If "downward filtration" achieved its purpose in coopting the elite, Vyas was still correct in pointing out its absurdity. At some point the

government had to assume responsibility for the education of the entire population, both for political and economic reasons. Economically, the changes came during the 1850s and '60s, when England was coming to rely much more heavily on India as a source of cotton and other essential raw materials due to the losses in trade caused by America's Civil War. This was a period when the colonial government was beginning to feel its substantial power and to make major reforms in the countryside: to try to break down the caste system, to establish a labor market, and to increase trade; to conquer and annex new land and expand agricultural productivity and tax revenues; to build railways, telegraphs, organize a postal system and generally carve out an infrastructure that would help unify the country's communications and trade and strengthen Britain's military and political power. Vernacular education came very slowly; much was undertaken under formal guidelines such as the Wood Despatch, but some (as with all previous policies) was undertaken informally, and the impetus for it came primarily from the newly settled provinces (Bombay and the Northwest) which were concerned with expanding the production of raw cotton for export to Britain. They attempted to construct much more efficient systems of land settlement and taxation than the Bengali Permanent Settlement and its parasitic Zamindari. They had to deal directly with the peasantry (Ryotwari), and (at least in the Northwest) used this as an opportunity to build up an indigenous system of education which would teach the peasants accounting and farming techniques and (hopefully) win more political support from the colonial government at the same time.<sup>43</sup>

In 1853, when the East India Company's Charter was up for renewal, a select committee of the House of Commons held a thorough inquiry into educational developments in India. The result of that inquiry, called the Wood Education Despatch, formed the theoretical basis for British educational policy in India over the next seventy years. In summary, the Despatch declared that

... our object is to extend European knowledge throughout all classes of the people. We have shown that this object must be effected by means of the English language in the higher branches of instruction,

and by that of the vernacular languages of India to the great mass of the people. . . .

The higher classes will now be gradually called upon to depend upon themselves; and your attention has been more especially directed to the education of the middle and lower classes, both by establishment of fitting schools for this purpose and by means of a careful encouragement of the native schools which exist, and have existed from time immemorial, in every village.<sup>44</sup>

The inquiry created an education department in each province of British India, but the Wood Despatch and all that happened subsequently did nothing to alter qualitatively the Anglicist policy. Teacher-training colleges were established and it introduced the system of grant-in-aid. It also gave an impetus to secondary education and to some extent, primary schooling. But the plans of mass education visualized by the Despatch were not realized, nor were the high schools imparting education through native languages for more than seven decades afterwards. Higher education was taken more seriously and expanded, although the three universities established in 1857 at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were simply aggregations under British administrative control of *already existing* colleges and schools. The purpose of the reform was to *rationalize* the system of selecting educated youth for civil service appointments, not to change it. The universities simply standardized and made more selective the examination procedures, so that the number and types of labor available could be more centrally controlled. It was only during the time of Lord Curzon that the universities (then five) became actual teaching institutions. In 1857, also, a policy was formulated for mass education. Mass education had to be carried out in the spoken native languages. English would be impossible to administer in terms of time, books, and personnel available.

Thus, a two-tiered approach evolved: English for the elite, vernacular for the masses. Lord Falkland of Bombay as early as 1849 (five years before the Wood Despatch) laid out the essential four points of this policy:

a. Provision for superior education through the medium of English strictly limited, however, to the education of the wealthy who can

afford to pay for it, the highly intelligent among the native youth who can establish their claims to admission into the English schools by a standard of acquirements, and the class of young men who are trained up as masters of the vernacular schools (the upper 10,000).

b. The production through the same medium of a superior class of district school masters and the providing for them of an adequate scale of salaries.

c. The education of the people under these masters in vernacular schools.

d. The systematic encouragement of translations into the vernacular from works of science and general literature.<sup>45</sup>

The provinces that were conquered by the British after Bengal tended to place more emphasis on vernacular education and primary education. Aside from being much more unsure of their position than Bengal, they were also making direct land settlements (tax assessing the peasants directly). Thus, by 1852, Bombay had 233 vernacular schools with over 11,000 pupils and 14 government colleges and English schools with 2,000 pupils. Bengal, on the other hand, had 30 colleges with 5,000 pupils but only 33 primary schools.<sup>46</sup> Elphinstone himself had been in favor of elementary education:

... the dangers to which we are exposed from the sensitive character of the religion of the Natives, and the slippery foundations of our Government, owing to the total separation between us and our objects, require the adoption of some measures to counteract them, and the only one is to remove their prejudices, and to communicate our own principles and opinions by the diffusion of a rational education.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, James Thomason had developed a system of indigenous primary education in the Northwest (Agra Province) based on the existing village schools. He did this in the process of arranging revenue collection, and was even able to appear as the people's friend by getting them to agree to pay a portion of their tax directly for education, which he then levied as a grant-in-aid. The schools were organized in geographic bunches (Circles, or *Halkabandi*) with one traveling teacher-overseer among them. It should be noted that this

scheme was set up *after* a scheme for higher and English education had failed to win the support of the people,<sup>48</sup> so there must have been great hostility.<sup>49</sup> Bombay, it seems, was also able to set up a direct tax (*cess*) for education. In Bengal, because of the Permanent Settlement and the fact that Indians already had established their own education system, the colonial government had a much harder time getting the people to pay for primary education.<sup>50</sup> It seems that the mode of agricultural production and what was produced—like cotton and other export crops—brought different responses to vernacular primary education in the various provinces.

Table 1  
India: Enrollment by Level of Education,  
1881–82 to 1936–37 (thousands)

Years	Primary <sup>a</sup>	Secondary	College/ University
1881–82	2,061,541	214,077	—
1901–2	3,076,671	590,129	23,009
1911–12	4,806,736	—	—
1921–22	6,109,000	1,106,803	66,258
1936–37	10,224,288	2,287,872	126,228

<sup>a</sup> Includes recognized primary schools only.

Source: Syed Nurullah and J. P. Naik, *A History of Education in India* (London: Macmillan, 1951).

Very little was actually done in mass education. In 1881–82 there were about 2 million pupils in primary schools incorporated into the departmental system in British India (see table 1). This represented about 7 percent of the school-age population (taking school-age population as 15 percent of the total population). About 14 percent of male children were in primary school, and less than one percent of female children. By 1921–22, the number of children in primary school had increased to 6 million, which represented about 17 percent of the school-age population. So, seventy years after the Wood Despatch,

only one in six Indian children was in primary school (learning in the vernacular) in British-administered India. Although most native-Indian-administered states had very few children in school, two states, Travencore and Baroda, had almost 60 percent of school-age children in primary school by the 1920s.<sup>51</sup> These two were governed by "progressive" rulers who put a great deal of emphasis on education, more than the British. Total government expenditures on education in British India in 1921-22 were 13.2 rupees per pupil (about \$4 *per pupil*). Since only one-sixth of school-age children were in school, this meant an expenditure of about 67¢ *per school-age child*.<sup>52</sup> Educational expenditures did climb from 6 percent of military expenditures in 1882 to about 9 percent in 1920.<sup>53</sup> The result of this policy was an almost stable literacy rate of the population between 1835-38 and 1931:<sup>54</sup>

	1835-38	1911	1921	1931
Percent of adult literates	4.4	4.4	5.2	6.0
Percent literates > 5 years old	5.8	5.3	6.3	7.0

The British government simply did not like to spend money on Indians.

In these days of centralization, the sanction of the Government of Bengal was necessary for all new items of expenditure. Consequently, when the Government of Bombay put up proposals for the expansion of primary education, they were generally not sanctioned by the Government of Bengal on the grounds of heaviness of their cost and sometimes even advised the Government of Bombay to concentrate on English education because it was less costly to the government.<sup>55</sup>

A key provision of the Wood Despatch was that grants-in-aid would be given only to primary schools which charged a monthly fee to all their students,<sup>56</sup> and that the local community had to help pay part of

the costs of the school. This was in part a reflection of capitalist ideology (British influence) that the state should not take the whole responsibility for education. It was believed that education should be left largely to private enterprise, and, conveniently, with such a policy the British government did not have to spend very much on education. As a result, only the more affluent were able to organize and pay for their children's schooling. By adopting grants-in-aid the government also bypassed thousands of indigenous informal village schools already in existence, most of which disappeared in subsequent years. By 1902, almost no village schools were left in British India. Instead, the British insisted on training their own teachers and having the schools be strict about class schedules and charging fees. The government tended to deemphasize the Halkabandi system of roving instruction in favor of using certified teachers from normal schools.

The school system was therefore organized to keep a tight *control* over whatever education existed. This once again confirms the political goals of British educational policies as practiced in India. The old social, economic, and educational system was broken down, and a very tightly controlled and not very extensive new system was put in to replace it. Education was developed to provide Indian subadministrators and clerks for the British government service—thus, the higher secondary and university system developed after 1854. Indians trained as subadministrators were thoroughly anglicized by the curriculum and selection process of the higher levels of schooling. At the same time, a primary school system was installed which was limited in the number of children it reached and was controlled to prevent an independent base of power and ideas to develop. Because of the fees charged, only families from higher-income brackets could afford to send their children to school. As late as the 1920s and '30s, few girls went to school at all.

In 1857, concurrent with the educational reform, and in the last year of rule of the East India Company, an attempt was made to reform the tariff structure through higher import duties and elimination of export duties. But the Indian Mutiny of that year raised revenue requirements, and under the newly imposed direct rule of the Crown, proposals were made to raise import duties without eliminating export duties. This

reform was met with stiff resistance from both British manufacturers and British merchants in India, and they succeeded in reducing import duties and abolishing export duties. Yet, revenue needs continued to press administrators, and by 1871, they had reestablished higher tariffs on both exports and imports.

The main objection to raising tariffs was based on the competition of Indian manufactures with British imports. Even the slightest sign of manufacturing in India created pressure by British producers on the House of Commons.

There is this difficulty that the interests of India and of England on that point [import duty on cotton piece goods] seem rather at variance. No doubt some considerable increase of revenue might be realized by increasing the import duties, say upon piece goods and yarns, but the direct result of that would be too diminish consumption and to stimulate production on the spot.<sup>57</sup>

I say they are protective duties [5 percent on cotton piece goods]. I do not advocate their abolition solely for that reason. I do not know whether you are aware that, for instance, in the Bombay Presidency there are 12 cotton mills, employing . . . 319,394 spindles, 4,199 looms, and 8,170 hands, consuming, I think, 62,000 bales of cotton of 400 lbs. each annually.<sup>58</sup>

The struggle between British administrators in India—joined later by manufacturers in India—and British manufacturers and merchants went on until the 1920s. Until World War I, the Lancashire manufacturers won this battle, keeping tariffs low. In 1896, for example, when a duty of 3.5 percent was placed on cotton textile for revenue purposes, the government laid an equivalent excise tax on all cotton textiles manufactured in Indian mills. This remained in force until 1925.<sup>59</sup> The low tariffs imposed on India not only stifled manufacturing but reduced the revenue available for public works, including education. An increased part of the revenue had to be raised from land taxes.

Nevertheless, there was limited industrial growth between 1871 and the 1920s. From the 12 cotton and textile mills employing 8,200

workers in 1871, the number grew to 94 mills in the Bombay Presidency and 137 in all India, employing 110,000 workers in 1890. Another 60,000 worked in jute mills principally in Bengal, and 30,000 more in coal mines. Total factory workers increased from 317,000 in 1892 to 1.4 million in 1922 and stayed almost constant until 1931.<sup>60</sup> Even so, this represented less than one percent of the labor force in 1922. In 1890 there were more workers on tea plantations than in all factories combined.<sup>61</sup>

There seems to be little relation between this industrial expansion and the expansion of primary schooling, except that at the beginning of the twentieth century the lack of primary schooling among factory workers was identified as a major problem of low labor productivity.<sup>62</sup> Apparently, factory workers came from the lowest castes in the villages—largely landless untouchables:

In 1916, in a large mill in the Central Provinces, 51 percent of the hands were *Mahars* alone. At other times this figure had been higher. This caste, along with the *Holis* and the *Dheds*, make up the principal "untouchable" group in Bombay Presidency and the Central Provinces. . . . At Sholapur, Ahmedabad and Bombay, it is always the lowest section of the village community that is shaken off to try its fortunes in the factory.<sup>63</sup>

The literacy of factory workers was therefore much lower than even the low literacy rate among the Indian population as a whole. Among the *Mahar*, *Holis*, and *Dheds* in the Bombay Presidency, for example, the literacy rate in 1921 was 1.5 percent (as compared to 6.3 percent in the population as a whole).<sup>64</sup>

Limited industrial growth plus small-holding plantation agriculture combined to limit the demand for primary-school-trained labor. The percentage of Indians living in urban areas remained almost constant between 1872 (8.5) and 1921 (10.2). The factory system did not get large enough to attract Indians outside the lowest castes into working in industry. Since British policy was one of limiting the growth of industries, duties, and therefore public revenue, were kept low. Since the British also had a policy of limiting the expansion of primary

education, most of these revenues were spent on the military (to keep internal stability), and within the small education sector, on higher levels of schooling.

Consequently, the opportunities for educated Indians were almost entirely as bureaucrats in the colonial government. This is the sector that the British wanted to expand. Thus, at the same time that primary schools were limited in accessibility, secondary schools, largely private and primarily preparatory to college education, were expanding rapidly, doubling the number of pupils every twenty years. Once the taste for English education had been developed as a result of the anglicist policy, the demand for secondary education increased rapidly. As secondary education grew, the demand for university training grew also, and the number of universities increased. Both at the secondary and university levels, English was used almost exclusively as the language of instruction. For those who reached these levels, the separation from Indian culture and people was almost complete.<sup>65</sup> In 1919, when it was proposed that the Department of Education be transferred to the control of Indian ministers, a great controversy arose over the control of secondary and higher education. The government of India felt that

. . . there is a compelling case for the transfer of primary education.  
. . . We may say that in our minds there is an equally compelling case for retaining secondary and university education in the hands of the official and more experienced half of the Provincial Governments. India stands today in a critical position; and her immediate future, apart from her slower political growth, depends on the solution of social, economic, and industrial problems to which a good system of secondary education is the chief key.<sup>66</sup>

All but a few colleges and the education of Anglo-Indians and Europeans were turned over. However, the resistance to giving Indians control of secondary and higher education shows again that the British considered these levels far more important to their colonization policy than the disregarded primary schools.