

# THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF BRITISH RULE ON INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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## ABSTRACT

The British rule has been seen to be really oppressive on the Indians and it has been looked down upon by most liberal thinkers. The British did loot India of its wealth but they also did bring various technical advancements to the Indian society. The education system before the British was more religion based and the society was full of evils and superstitions. The British brought a rather modern and logic based education system that led to the evolution in the thinking of the people and helped ban a lot of social evils in India. This paper deals with the change in the education system and how it was not as bad as it was thought to be by many Indian leaders. These changes have helped shape the modern Indian education system and this paper tries to justify this evolution brought by the British. In the end, this paper tries to answer a very important question i.e. Was the British rule as oppressive and tyrant as it was thought by the Indians or there were certain positive impacts (like education) that helped India in the longer run?

## INTRODUCTION

The British had come to India originally in late 1600, and the British company rule effectively began in 1757. The British ruled India for 200 years and during these years there have been many revolutions, wars, fights and revolts that damaged the Indian civilization to its core. Though there were negative impacts, they have also benefited India through their education system. The education system they provided has made a major impact.

The credits for formulating English education in India goes to Thomas Babington Macaulay by officially introducing the English education in India through necessary orders subjected by Lord Bentinck. Lord Macaulay, came to India in 1834, as a law member of governor general's executive council and was appointed as the president of the Committee of public interest. Lord Macaulay, the founder of the English education system here, said, "*In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. Those Indians of the high class who are in government also speak it... We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern. A class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, words and intellect.*" He was given the responsibility of settling the disputes between the orientalist and Anglicises in 1835. Lord Macaulay submitted his famous minutes in February 1835 to the council which was approved by Lord Bentinck and a resolution was passed in March 1835. According to Macaulay, the sole purpose of introduction of English education in India would not be merely an indoctrination of Indians through textbooks and curricula for subordinate positions in establishments of East India Company but to achieve cultural transmission among Indians.<sup>1</sup>

Access to liberal thoughts of western philosophers as was thought, modern education offered to Indian people access to the thoughts of many liberal thinkers, like John Locke, John Stuart mill, jean jack Rousseau, Herbert Spencer, and Burke. The western philosophy widened the mental horizon and knowledge of Indians. Modern education by British has served a double

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<sup>1</sup> Suresh Chandra Ghosh (1995) Bentinck, Macaulay and the introduction of English education in India, History of Education, 24:1, 17-24, DOI: 10.1080/0046760950240102

purpose, they got credit for making better societies in India. Also at the same time, they devised a unique method of distribution of power.<sup>2</sup>

When we look at the at the Indian history we can see a lot of changes and also the improvements that have taken place till this date. Before the English education, the education was purely religious and quite boldly speaking not social at all, focused on the conservation of one's religion, not social at all, zero administrative skills, no social unity and all of that. But not all were horrible in nature few were exceptional, like Ashoka, he made Indian history look better by his achievements, the Rajputs, the Rastrakutas and other dynasties who were rich in art and culture.<sup>3</sup> Karl Heinz Gruber gives a view on the British ideology, Gruber propositions English primary education as being “highly attractive” because there is a subtle balance of national and local powers and trust in the professional competence of teachers, he also says the local education system is portrayed as “predominately dull and un-upraising”<sup>4</sup>. The Britishers were well developed than Indians, the industrialisation was delayed and that made the Indians grow slower and is a developing country, modern education gave India lawyers, doctors and other important professions and most importantly we got a well organised administrative machinery.

Though we were never wished to be ruled by the British, we must thank them, their rule removed some of the most gruesome practices like Sati (where a widow jumps into her husband's cremation fire). Sati was tolerated by the Britishers but eventually when Sati practice was doubled in Bengal and other places, there was a general ban for the whole of India was issued by Queen Victoria in 1861. According to *Sati, the blessing the curse*.<sup>5</sup>, the practice has stopped ever since, if this practice had still continued the rights of people would have been

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ghadar.in>, system of education in per-British India, October 10, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Asian Journal of Social Science, vol.37, No.3, SPECIAL FOCUS, Beyond society (2009), pp.247-451, [www.jstore.org](http://www.jstore.org).

<sup>4</sup> Comparative education, Volume 25, No.3, Special number 12, Cross National attraction in education (1989), pp. 365-367, [www.jstore.org](http://www.jstore.org).

<sup>5</sup> An article review, Werner Menski, Bulletin of the school of oriental and African studies, University of London, Vol.61, No.1, pp. 74-81, [www.jstore.org](http://www.jstore.org).

violated, the right to life<sup>6</sup>, hence, here the British rule did prove its liberal ideas led to better governance.

Untouchability, which was another problem faced by the people in India, the British took the advantage of this weakness of India but had also eradicated it, by education. Education by the British was equally provided without any discrimination, even Dalits were educated this made the Dalits revolt and fight for their rights. Also the rights for the widows were given. Elimination of Evils like Sati and untouchability can be seen as step towards a more liberal and modern society. The Education system has actually helped the Indians understand the idea of looking to find a reason for why things are supposed to be done rather than just blindly following the myths that have been prevalent in the society. The teaching of modern science and mathematics led to more development in education quality as compared to the religion based teaching done before. There was more preference to logic and thought rather than religion or myths which helped better the condition of the way the Indians thought and dealt with situations. Having a modern education system also helped people look above such evils and thus the whole idea of modernisation of the society can be seen to happen.

The British replaced the wasteful warlord ‘aristocracy’ by a ‘bureaucratic-military’ establishment, which was carefully designed by utilitarian technocrats and was very efficient in maintaining law and order. The greater efficiency of government permitted a substantial reduction in the fiscal burden, and a bigger share of the national product was available for the landlords, the capitalists and the new professional classes.<sup>7</sup> Some of this upper-class income was syphoned off to the UK, but the bulk was spent in India. However, the pattern of consumption changed as the new upper class no longer kept harems and palaces, they did not wear fine muslins and damascened swords. This caused some painful readjustments to the people who were in traditional handicraft sector. It seems likely that there was some increase in productive investment which must have been near zero in Moghul India, the government itself carried out productive investment in railways and irrigation and as a result, there was a growth in both agricultural and industrial output. New towns and urban amenities were created

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<sup>6</sup> Constitution of India, Article 21

<sup>7</sup> Incorporation of Indian Subcontinent into Capitalist World-Economy, The journal of economic history, Vol. 70, No.2 (june 2010), pp. 351-377, [www.jstore.org](http://www.jstore.org).

with segregated suburbs and housing for the people. Their western habits were copied by the new professional elite of lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists and businessmen, within this group, old caste barriers were eased and social mobility increased.<sup>8</sup>

One of the most significant things the British did to westernise India was introducing a modified version of English education. Macaulay's 1835 *Minute on Education* had a decisive impact on British educational Policy, a classic example of the Western rationalist approach to Indian civilisation<sup>9</sup>. Before the British took over, the Court language, Persian and the Muslim population used Urdu, a mixture of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, was used by the Moghul. Higher education was largely religious and was forced to learn Arabic and Sanskrit. The Company gave some financial support to a Calcutta Madrassa, and a Sanskrit college at Benares, Warren Hastings, as governor-general from 1782 to 1795 had himself learned Sanskrit and Persian and several other Company officials were oriental scholars and had great influence. But Macaulay strongly opposed this orientalism "*I believe that the present system tends not to accelerate the progress of truth but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are less valuable than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank for giving artificial encouragement to illogical history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology ... I have no knowledge of Sanskrit or Arabic ... But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value ... Who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia ... all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England.*"<sup>10</sup>

The Education system brought in by the Britishers can be seen to have a certain positive impact on the Indian society. The advancements brought helped modernise the mind set and helped bring reason to the way of thinking of the people. The newer education also helped Indians

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<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Economic and political weekly*, Vol.21, No.4 (jan 25, 1986), pp, [www.jstore.org](http://www.jstore.org).

<sup>9</sup> Is Macaulay Still Our Guru? ,*Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 22 (May 28, 1988), pp. 1124-1130, [www.jstore.org](http://www.jstore.org).

<sup>10</sup> Class Structure and Economic Growth: India and Pakistan since the Moghuls by Angus Maddison, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 7, No. 28 (Jul. 8, 1972), p. 1313

question the situations they faced and to find better and more rational solutions. The learning of international revolutions and thinking of various philosophers led to the Indians question the whole idea of the British oppression and helped bring up opposition against the whole idea of British rule and thus fight for a free India. The British rule has been called oppressive and tyrant over the years but they did bring a number of advancements to the Indian society. Thus, it can be clearly seen, the advancements in education brought by the British have actually led to the shaping of the current education system in place and also has helped change the approach and outlook of Indians over the years.

