

Exploring English Education in India in the Pre-Macaulayan Period

Hitesh D. Raviya & Tahenaz Parvin Biva

Abstract

In the background of the story of English education in India, there is a substantial interplay of pride and prejudice, resistance and persuasion, and counter-narratives. It is a truth universally acknowledged and even promoted by education policies of India, textbooks of State and Central Government, reference books of ELT published in the last four decades, eminent educators and policy makers and other stakeholders that English education in India came into existence holding the hands of Lord Macaulay with his Minutes on Indian Education in 1835 (though English education was quite evident in India far before Lord Macaulay came to India and introduced it in India). So, the discourse of English education in India is multi-dimensional and calls for approaches from several angles. This article will critically analyse the 'Macaulayan Myth' and relocate those historical evidence of English education in India which were already prevalent in India much before Macaulay.

Keywords: Pre-Macaulayan English education in India, ELT, education policies

An Overview: Initiation of English and English Education in India

The history of English Education in India starts with the arrival of the British in India. English forayed in the Indian subcontinent as a trade language in 1600, when Queen Elizabeth signed the charter granting trading rights to a trading body, the British East India Company, founded by a group of enterprising merchants, in the city of London. After the

arrival of the British, for 200 years the use of English language was out of question. They did not try to introduce English Education and no one in India showed any serious interest to learn English.

Before 1800, education in India was imparted through vernacular languages by the madrasas, the 'maktabs'. Persian schools imparted 'English education' only to children of European employees; they did not pay attention to educating the Indians. It was only at the end of the 18th century that the British started thinking about educating the 'natives' for two reasons: (i) To create awe and respect towards the Europeans and (ii) to spread Christianity in India.

According to Kochhar (2021, p. 2), a three-stage model can be used to analyse the emergence and development of English education in India: (i) Half-caste stage (Madras 1715); (ii) Missionary stage (Bengal mofussil 1800); and (iii) Secular stage (Calcutta 1817). The author uses the term "half-caste period" to refer to the early 18th century introduction of English education in India, which was based more on genetic factors than any administrative necessity. These factors related to children of Protestant European fathers from Indian mothers who were either Roman Catholics of Portuguese descent or low-class Hindus and Muslims.

The First Blueprint on English Education in India

The first blueprint of English education in India was made in 1792. It was Charles Grant, the then director of the East India Company, who wanted to introduce modern education in India through the teaching of English to advance Indian society. He is considered as the father of modern education in India. There was a controversy in early India which arose between the Orientalists and the Anglicists about the language of education. During that time, Charles Grant was the earliest and the most extreme supporter of the Anglicist view and was strongly in favour of English education. In his opinion, the social evils, the moral degeneration, and the gross ignorance of the people could be eliminated only through education in English. He wrote his treatise called *Observations on the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving it* in 1792 which was presented to the Company's directors in 1797 and to the House of Commons in 1813 (the Commons ordered its printing in 1813 within the context of the Charter Renewal). In this treatise, he proposes using the

English language, Western education, and Christianity to effect moral, social, and mental transformation in Indian culture.

Grant again renewed his efforts in 1797 when he was elected to the Court of Directors. He pleads for “the establishment by Government of free schools for teaching English in various parts of the province and the substitution of English for Persian in judicial proceedings in the administration of the revenue and other business” (Rapson, 1922, p. 98) and this was to spread the religion and culture of the Englishman all over India. The proposals which he put forward in this text were, in reality, far beyond everything that was urged by Macaulay in his *Minute*, or perhaps they have subsequently been adopted by Macaulay (Sharp, 1920, p. 77). Hence, the concept of imparting English education in India started much before Macaulay put it forward in the country.

In short, with full conviction, Grant’s *Observations* recommended:

- The introduction of English as the medium of instruction, in a Western system of education that included literature, natural sciences, mechanical inventions etc. to remove the superstitious beliefs prevalent among the heathens of India.
- The adoption of English as the official language of the Company and the Government for easy communication between the rulers and the ruled. He very clearly stated in *Observations* that the Christian faith, through the medium of English, is the only remedy for all the evils in Hindu society and for the liberation of the Hindu mind.

The Charter Act of 1813

The Charter Act of 1813 has far-reaching educational implications in India. It constitutes a landmark in the educational history of British India. The Act’s first implication is that the Company would take on the Indian people’s educational responsibilities and duties. With this goal in mind, the Company would spend Rupees one lakh every year. The Company would set up its own agency to carry out the provisions of Section 43 of the Act which runs as follows:

A sum of not less than one lac of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literate and the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among

the inhabitants of the British territories in India. (as cited in Kumar and Rekha, 2019, p. 111)

When the amount of one lac rupees provided was renewed by the Charter Act of 1813, the story of English in India took a new turn. Several English journals were published between 1780 and 1795 encouraging Indians to write in English. Furthermore, in 1830, employment opportunities for English-educated Indians became available, prompting them to learn English. However, the Charter Act ended the era of agitation started by Charles Grant, Wilberforce and others—"It allowed the missionaries to land in India in large numbers and establish modern English schools and thereby they laid the foundation of the well-organised modern educational system" (Sharp, 1920, p. 3). As a result, many schools and colleges were set up before 1835 imparting English education in India, such as—

- Hindu College, Calcutta was established in 1817 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy with David Hare and other enlightened Bengalis.
- The Calcutta School-Book Society, also known as the Calcutta Book Society, was established in 1817 with the coming of Western methods in education to India and henceforth, the rising demand for textbooks and dictionaries.
- Serampore Missionary College, Serampore was established in 1818 by Baptist missionaries William Carey, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward with a view to impart religious teaching and higher education to the local people.
- Hare School, one of the oldest schools in Kolkata was established in 1818 by David Hare, a Scottish philanthropist, for the education of poor children.
- Bishop's College was founded by the first Anglican Bishop of Calcutta, Bishop Thomas Middleton in 1820 at Sibpur.
- Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli was established in 1825 by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G).
- Doveton College, Madras was established in 1823 by the Church of England for the education of European and Indian children.
- General Assembly's Institution, Calcutta, now known as the Scottish Church College, was established in 1830 by Alexander Duff.

- The Wilson College, Mumbai was established in 1832 by Scottish missionary Rev. John Wilson, beginning as Ambroli English School in Girgaum, Mumbai.

Overall, these schools and institutions played a significant role in the development of education before 1835 and were effective in turning the tide for the future of English education in India.

Formation of the General Committee of Public Instruction (G.C.P.I.)

A decade before Lord Macaulay arrived in India, the General Committee of Public Instruction was formed in 1823 which was to guide the company on the matter of education. The Orientalists dominated the committee and advocated the promotion of Oriental learning rather than the Anglican one. The G.C.P.I. consisted of members with an Orientalist attitude till 1824. However, when new members, imbued with the growing liberal influences were recruited, the importance of imparting English education came to place. In a letter dated October 6, 1823, from the General Committee of Public Instruction, it is mentioned "The lads of the native college should not be permitted to attend the philosophical class, until they are well grounded in the English language" (Sharp, 1920, p. 88). Again, in a letter dated 18th August 1824, from the General Committee of Public Instruction to the Governor-General, it can be quoted that "A knowledge of English, for the purpose of gaining a livelihood, is, to a certain extent, a popular attainment, and a few of the natives employed by Europeans, accustomed to an intimate intercourse with their masters, may perceive that their countrymen have something in the way of practical science to learn" (Sharp, 1920, p. 95). Sharp (1920) continued that though the introduction of English has beneficial consequences for the natives, their prejudices against European interference might lead to destruction. It also marked doubt regarding the application of the "knowledge of the English language" due to lack of "future preceptors and translators" (p. 96). However, it finally ends with urging the introduction of English without offending the feelings of the natives because "the value of those exceptions which may be made from European science and literature" would undoubtedly have been immense (p. 98).

Raja Ram Mohan Roy's Contribution to English Education in India

Even before Macaulay, the great Indian thinker Raja Ram Mohan Roy

made remarkable contributions towards English education in India. He “advocated various changes in the Indian society by popularising the study of English” (Mandal & Behera, 2015, pp. 91-95) bolstering the use of English as a language of instruction in Indian universities. English, he believed, was required to modernise Indian minds, feed the evolution of Indian intellect and broaden the scope of Indian vision. It suggests that there was an unspoken need for English as a medium of instruction and propagation of Western ideals and values. The government’s method for allocating funding to assist English education altered as a result of the demand for English education.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy urged his subjects to learn English and Western sciences. The demand for western knowledge was conveniently transformed into a demand for English as a medium of instruction, as well as the dissemination of Western morals and values. Even he “supported English as a medium of teaching through the English language was superior to the traditional Indian education system” (Mandal & Behera, 2015, pp. 91-95). He wrote his famous letter, dated December 11, 1823, to the Governor-General of India which evidenced his educational reforms in India. Unlike Macaulay who solely focused on English as the only medium of instruction, Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s attitude was like a synthesis of both English and vernaculars side by side in this regard. He greatly emphasised on the study of the English language. Even in place of official business, which was conducted in Persian, he advocated introducing English. He paved the way for Macaulay by his encouragement of the study of English language and literature, as well as Western science. In fact, he was the first Indian to see the importance of introducing Western science and education to India. In 1822, he founded a contemporary Anglo-Hindu School and also assisted Sir Edward Hyde East and David Hare in establishing the Hindu College. He wanted to familiarise Western science and literature through the medium of English. He concluded his letter by promoting a modern education system in India:

The Sangsrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British Legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction. (Sharp, 1920, p. 101)

Educational Reforms of Lord William Bentinck

In 1828, Lord William Bentinck was sworn in as Governor-General who ushered in a new age of growth and change. Bentinck's intellectual reform was his crowning achievement. As noted earlier, the Charter Act 1813 set aside Rs one lakh per year for the rehabilitation and advancement of education in India. But, because there was no formal system in place, the money accumulated: it was Bentinck who decided that the education funds should be utilised to teach local Indians English literature and science through the English language. There was vehement argument among G.C.P.I. members over the language of medium of instruction before Macaulay's *Minute* came into force. Lord Macaulay was recruited by William Bentinck to prepare his Manifesto of English Education in India in order to tackle this problem. The Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, dated August 16, 1832, says:

It is on all hands allowed that the general cultivation of the English Language is most highly desirable, both with a view to the introduction of the Natives into Places of Trust, and as a powerful means of operating favourably on their Habits and Character; and that moreover, a great partiality in favour of the English Language and Literature, in both of which many Natives have made considerable progress exists; but that the subject has not hitherto met with that consideration and encouragement from the Government which its importance seems to merit. (p. 30)

This shows that much before Macaulay wrote his famous *Minute* in 1835, the Orientalists had begun to lose ground, and the consensus of opinion was in favour of English. Not only the missionaries, for their own ends, but progressive Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy also supported the policy of popularising the Western system of education. It was, however, Macaulay's *Minute* that closed the fierce controversy between the Orientalists and the Anglicists and gave an impetus to the progress of English education in India.

Early Literature Promoting English Education

Aside from the broad passion for English education, bright men were eager to try their hand at creative writing in the English language. In this regard, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Kashiprosad Ghose, and

K.M. Banerji should be mentioned. Henry Derozio might be considered the first Indian echo of Western ideals that had begun to take root in Indian soil. His poetry contains the flavor of English and Irish romantic writers, but they also demonstrate his elevated sense of patriotism and serve as the first articulation of Indian nationalist philosophy. In 1830, Kashiprosad Ghose released *The Shair and Other Poems*, a regular collection of poems which was well received by various critics at the time. K.M. Banerji authored a drama in English called 'The Persecuted' (1832). "Banerji was the first Indian to write a play in the Western style, the subject-matter of this drama was his own personal problem confronting young English educated recipients, that is, the growing and seemingly irreconcilable conflict of the English educated modern mind with the orthodox society's stolid conservatism" (Sen, 1960, p. 185). However, the cardinal point here is that Indians had begun to use English as a medium of creative expression even before the days of Macaulay.

Conclusion

The arrival of the English as rulers in Bengal meant the arrival of English ideas and literature, and it was only via imitation and emulation that the more forward-thinking Indians were able to get a better understanding of Europe and breathe the freer air of European thought. James argues that men like Sir Thomas Munro and Mountstuart Elphinstone truly portray the spirit of the movement for the development of present-day education as "it is they, and not Macaulay, who were the true initiators of English education" (1911, p. 30). Moreover,

It is important to note that the leaven of English education was already working in Bengali society in Calcutta long before Macaulay's minute of 1835, in a college which began with voluntary effort, but which, as Presidency College, has continued to exert a powerful influence on Indian thought to the present day. (Ali, 1976, p. 114)

Nonetheless, Macaulay's effect as a decisive element in the fortunes of English education is undeniable, and the role he is credited with is mostly warranted. However, the story of English education in early India should not be reduced to the 'Macaulayan myth,' and rather than granting Macaulay exclusive credit for introducing English education to India, other significant people and historical evidence must be evaluated. Moreover, it can be said from the above discussion that though Lord

Macaulay was certainly an important figure in the development of English education in India, it would be incorrect to solely attribute the popularity of English education in India to his efforts. The spread of English education in India was a result of a complex interplay of various factors, including British colonial policies, the efforts of Indian reformers, and the recognition of the importance of English education by Indians themselves.

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Hitesh D. Raviya is a Professor and Head of the Department of English and Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. hitesh.raviya-eng@msubaroda.ac.in

Tahenaz Parvin Biva is currently pursuing her PhD in English at The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda under the supervision of Professor Raviya and under government scholarship of India. tahenaz.b-engphd@msubaroda.ac.in