

The Beautiful Tree: A Critical Study of Indigenous Education Of India

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Abstract

Shri Dharampal's "*The Beautiful tree: Indigenous Indian education in the 18th century*" uplifted and motivated to delve deeper into the captivating fabric of the Indigenous Indian education during the 18th century. The endeavour of this research paper circumambulates the travel of the world of Gurukuls. The research objectives also englobe the legacy of colonialism on the ancient Indian educational paradigm, the spreading of the English language and the transformative wave which hit the shore of the education that developed the challenge to shape the modern education system as well. Furthermore, this research elucidates the concept of 'Macaulayism', examining 'Lord Macaulay's Minutes on education. Through the examination of articles, journals and websites, this research paper tries to paint a scintillating portray of the flourishing 'beautiful tree'.

Keywords: Gurukuls, Macaulayism, Westernization, Indigenous education, Beautiful tree.

Introduction

Published in 1983, "*The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*" is the last but the best known of the three of the major works on the British Indian archives done by Dharampal in the mid-nineteen-sixties. Dharampal, born in 1922, was an historian, scholar, philosopher, Gandhian thinker and the author of several books that showed different aspects of Indian society. He had always been influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and intensely involved himself in the Satyagraha and Quit India movement. Britishers, when ruled over India, used to generate documentaries which would get transported to the United Kingdom for various research and administrative purposes. These generated documents involved wealthy information about India such

as social structure, government, education, culture, religion and economic aspects. Shri Dharampal dedicated two decades of his life studying and exploring these records and documents and has published books which included the sight of the pre-British Indian society.

Some of his works include:

1. Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century (1971).
2. Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition (1971).
3. The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century (1983).

According to Shri Dharampal, India had an indigenous education system during the pre-British era. Education was not confined to any caste, class or gender. Instead, people from any walk of life could enjoy learning with the focus on the local language, tradition and culture. Education had importance in the pre-British rule era due to many reasons such as cultural and spiritual growth, artistic growth, economic development, exploration in the field of medicine, astronomy and geography, philosophical growth, craftsmanship. Education in pre-British India was provided through the various means of educational institutions like Homeschooling, Madrasas, Ashramas and the most preferred aids, Gurukul and Pathshalas.

The misconception about Britishers being the bringers of the education system in India is conventional because of their establishment of the English based education. However, this can't be considered as accurate information. With the detailed study of Dharampal's milestone contribution 'The Beautiful Tree', this research delves on the pedagogical methods of education in the pre-British era. This paper also highlights the impact of colonialism and the concept of 'Macaulayism'.

OVERVIEW:

India had a well-established home-grown and ancestral educational system before the arrival of Britishers. An educational system where students were taught various subjects regardless of their caste, creed and gender through various scholastic institutions but people unaware about India's indigenous educational past, flows with the misconception that Britishers were providers of education. This research paper, aims at unveiling the misbeliefs about the pre-British education of India along with some other objectives.

OBJECTIVES:

The research paper has following objectives:

1. To learn about the pedagogical method which were used by the ancient Indian academies of knowledge i.e., Gurukuls.
2. To gain insight on the influence which colonialism had on the indigenous education system.
3. To plumb deeper into the concept of 'Macaulayism'.

SCOPE:

Our study embraces various research papers, articles and websites. The scope covers:

1. To understand the historical - cultural growth and development of education in India from the ancient time to the colonial era to the present time.

2. Ancient Indian education using various pedagogical methods can inspire the modern guides to improvise their teaching techniques.
3. The review of how colonial nations compelled their language and made it dominant while holding back the native Indian language can enlighten the individuals about the marginalized status of the native language and the traditional wisdom.
4. Analysing Macaulayism can help to interpret the origin of today's educational structure and framework followed by the issues it faces.
5. Studying the Macaulay minute which inaugurated colonial education in India can address the timely question related to the language and social inequality.

METHODOLOGY:

Published research papers and articles were systematically studied from an academic intellect resource called 'Google Scholar'. Adding to the knowledge were the information from websites and books which would assist by extending the relevant and relatable data to the research topic. The selected texts were relevant to the research, held a particular reputation and exceptional insight. Any article which doesn't accord with the criteria for inclusion is eventually excluded. The key findings and relevant data have been selected as the refined knowledge. A portion of information includes about 'Gurukuls' as the primary education system - their strict disciplinary rules and regulations, their educational curriculum and the Guru's demeanour of teaching, The underlying principles of the ancient education system such as formal and informal education and the Britishers view on it. The collected data also includes the survey results which were conducted by the Britishers to know about the numbers of schools, high schools and colleges established in diverse sides of the Indian subcontinent followed by the number of students getting educated there.

The impact of colonialism and the introduction of Macaulayism which shifted the perspective of some individuals about their tradition and culture that ultimately gave rise to social inequality can be considered as pivotal data that has been collected for the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

As articulated by Dr. Radhika Kapur in *Education in the Ancient Period*: During the ancient time, knowledge was not only embraced via the access of books but accepted with magnanimity through the Guru's sermonizing. Education is a method which assists the difference between moral and immoral. The formal education grants individuals the knowledge to perform their professional responsibilities effectively whereas the informal education guides them to have appropriate communication and interaction with others. Education in ancient India was free. People from any caste, creed or religion could educate themselves without

recompense. The Gurukuls and Ashramas were self-administered with their own rules and norms. Access to good education was not based on a student's status in society or wealth.

As indicated in the Education system in Ancient India before the British Raj: Earliest observation made on ancient education was by Fra Paolino da Bartolomeo. According to him, India had the archetypal method of teaching and writing that was introduced around 200 years before Christ. He believes that only rare cultures on earth have cherished their eternal traditions and customs as firmly as the Indians have. The British raj conducted a survey to learn about the prevailing education system before manifesting their own idea. Evaluations were conducted within the Bombay presidency and Madras presidency and half-surveys were done in the Bengal presidency. W. Adam's report showed that there were 100,000 elementary schools. The Madras exhaustive report revealed that there were 12,498 schools, serving a total of 188,650 scholars. It was found out by Leitner that 8000 students acquired their tutorship in the school of Punjab or 26 years of stringent educational policies enforced by the educational department.

According to the survey taken in the province of Bombay (1820-30), 16 institutions of higher education were located in Ahmednagar, while 164 schools were established in Pune. Madras presidency documented 1,101 schools of higher education which trained around 543 students. Rajahmundry, Trichinopoly, Nellore and Tanjore headed with schools in the number of 279, 173, 137, 109 respectively. These educational emporia taught 5,431 students who specialized in subjects such as Vedas, Law, Astronomy, Poetics or Music.

As per Dr. Hareet Kumar Meena in Educational Structure and the Process of Colonization in Colonial India: Governor-General Lord William Bentick introduced English as the official language of court in India. The East India company had verified their crystal-clear vision of the adoption of English as the official linguistic system of administration, by the letter which was dated for 29th July 1930 by the court of directors to William Bentick. The letter was read to state that the anticipated change in the language of public business, including judicial proceedings, was expected to bring several collateral advantages would be that the judge or other European officer, being thoroughly acquainted with the language in which the proceedings were conducted (English), would be, and would appear to be, less dependent on the surrounding natives, leading to fewer opportunities for them. William Bentick supported and appreciated Thomas Macaulay's views on education with English as the language in schools and colleges. Lord Macaulay explained that the company's purpose was to educate an elite group, who would subsequently educate the general public, thereby achieving the broader goal of mass education. He stated that the aim of education in Indian was to anglicize Indians through English education, shaping them in terms of their way of living, behaviour, thought, culture, tradition, and morality. Such individuals were expected to act as a bridge between the British government and the general public.

In keeping with Ariba Anwar UI Haq and Fatima Sajjad in An Analysis of the 19th century educational reforms of the subcontinent through the post - colonialism: Awasthi (2008), in a comparative analysis of 'Wood commission' and 'Macaulay Minute of 1835' examined that there were numerous underlying intentions behind their strategy of flourishing the English and thus a disparity was formed between the mass (who lacked English education) and Indian elite (who has learned the language). English dominated education, trade and commerce. Another damaging effect of the educational reform was the natives started to see

the pride in learning English and neglecting their language. The educational reforms overshadowed the Indians instead of developing them, “And the major aim of the educational reforms was not to develop India, but to have reformed colonized subjects or intermediaries between the imperial power and the masses”.

As noted by Hitesh D. Raviya and Tahenaz Parvin Biva in *Exploring English Education in India in the Pre-Macaulayan Period*: Education was granted in the homegrown native language through madrasas before 1800s. Persian schools did introduce ‘English education’ but only for the children of European employees and not for other Indians. Britishers started to think about educating the native Indians by the end of the 18th century, mainly for two reasons:

- a) “To create awe and respect towards the Europeans”.
- b) “To spread Christianity in India”.

The initial framework for English education in India, was formulated in 1792 by Charles Grant, who was then the director of the East India Company. His goal was to introduce a modern education system in India. Charles Grant was the unparalleled devotee of Anglicists view and favoured the English education as he believed that the gross simple-mindedness and the societal scourge could be vanished only with the help of education in India. He wrote the treatise called “Observations on the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britian, Particularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving it” in 1792 and presented to the Company’s directors in 1797 and to the lower house of Parliament in 1813. He advocated the suggestion of “using the English language Western education and Christianity to effect moral, social and mental transformation in Indian culture”. After renewing his proposal in 1797, he pleaded for the government’s establishment for free schools to teach English throughout various regions of the province and the replacement of Persian with English in judicial proceedings, revenue administration, and other official matters; and to spread the Englishmen’s religion and culture in all over India.

The Charter Act of 1813 might be regarded as a pivotal moment in the history of the education in British India. Their goal of spending one lakh Rupees for the Indian’s educational responsibilities and duties brought a new turn to the English in India story. “Several English Journals were published between 1780 and 1795 encouraging Indians to write in English. Furthermore, in 1830, employment opportunities for the English-educated Indians become available, prompting them to learn English”. However, the era of discomposure which was initiated by the Charles Grant, Wilberforce and others, was ended by the Charter Act – “It permitted missionaries to arrive in India in substantial numbers and establish modern English schools, thereby laying the groundwork for a well-organized modern educational system”

Discussion:

Pedagogical Educational methods of Ancient India: Gurukuls

India has always been recognized and applauded for its educational system which encouraged people to visit India to educate themselves from any nook and corner of the world.

One of the leading keys of the Indian education system was the 'Gurukul system' which held a great esteem, was highly admired and appreciated by the citizens. It held the omnipotence to bring an influence on ethical, cultural and intellectual growth of the individual. The 'Guru-shishya Parampara' worked as the heart of the Gurukul system as it helped the students to ace in the academic and the life matters because of their Guru's guidance. Guru and the student's relation was pure and pristine, filled with loyalty and devotion. It extended to a realm much beyond the classroom where Guru doesn't equate to an instructor but a role model for the students.

Prevalent in the Vedic age, Gurukuls followed the method of oral teaching. Guru sermonized the preachings in Sanskrit followed by the students reciting it and memorizing it, which preserved the wholeness and perfection of ancient scriptures and texts. Students, capable of memorizing the vast scriptures, holy texts, Vedas and Upanishads preserve the philosophical and religious wisdom.

Gurukuls promoted the student's critical thinking, analytical knowledge of the subject matter through the discussion acknowledged as '*Shastrartha*', engaged with the Guru and their fellow mates. In tandem with the theological knowledge, the utilitarian knowledge such as music, dance, astronomy, medicine and mathematics are also accentuated. Students were ingrained with the sense of responsibility for being self-disciplined as it was considered as non-detrimental for character development. The Ancient India used to delineate the education in keeping with the caste. Brahmins were taught about the sacred texts, Kshatriyas were enlightened about the war and the techniques used during the wars, Vaishyas were fostered to learn about the commerce and trade whereas the Shudras were edified to take up social services. Gurukuls, often, worked on balanced nurturing of the *shishyas* simultaneously with their critical, theoretical and analytical knowledge as they had an unwavering commitment to develop a well-rounded individual.

Gurukuls were, oftentimes, legitimized and instituted in the idyllic landscape. The serene and the peace was believed to simplify yet energize and augment the process of learning and meditation. Thus, the roots of the ancient education system were profoundly deep under the beautiful tree of tradition, culture, spirituality and soulful unfolding.

The impact of colonialism on the Indigenous education of India

The impact of colonialism on the Indian education is a byzantine topic that had inefaceable repercussions on the rich cognitive infrastructure of India.

Annihilation of Indian education system: The colonial authorities quashed India's indigenous language, tradition, culture and knowledge. This dwindled the traditional educational practices enveloping the Sanskrit-based gurukuls and ashramas. The mortals have a misbelief about the Britishers being the bringers of the education, which is nothing but fictitious and bogus. The colonial authorities did ferry "English" to India and galvanized it to the education, thus introduced to the westernized scholasticism.

Western education: The underpinning of the westernized schools and universities was primarily sourced for the fortunate benefits of the British administrators but subsequently, opened to the emerging Indians. The westernized schools and universities entered the subjects like English literature, mathematics and science. Although, these subjects were found as extraordinarily unique by the traditional vantage but it played a significant role in shaping the modern education of India.

Pervasiveness of English language: The mission of suppressing the traditional Indian languages happened concurrently with the advancement and elevation of the English language. English was selected as the medium of language in most of the scholarly emporiums which was opposed by some Indians at that time but the individuals who were beguiled and hoodwinked into thinking that English maintains a certain standard which Indian traditional language doesn't, kneeled and bowed before the English verbalization. The widespread use of the English language fabricated a gloss logical divergence between those who were masters in the vernacular language and the educated elite. Westernization of the schools and universities, spreading of the English language and the Indians getting divided in two groups were handful of the reasons behind the withering of the beautiful tree.

Impact on the pedagogic syllabus: The British authorities brought a structured plan of action to the education system. The data proves that the western system introduced subjects like history, geography and political science which reflected their interest. Those subjects were antithetical to indigenous ancient education system.

The impact of colonialism on the Indian education was an intriguing historical backdrop. Colonial period has bought a multifarious change that metamorphized into the challenges that continue to sculpt the scholarly panorama.

Deeper insight about the 'Concept of Macaulayism'

'Macaulayism' is a term which was used to describe the social, cultural and political influence associated to the British administrator Lord Macaulay. He played a majestic role in sculpting the British policy during the 19th century, especially the education.

Vintage Back drop: Lord Macaulay shaped the policies and laws that governed the British colonial India. He also established the "westernization" in India by choosing English as the medium of the language used for instruction and information in India. Thomas Babington Macaulay's ethereal can be ascended back to the time when he catered on the Governor-General's council of India.

Academic reforms: In 1835, Macaulay premiered the "English education act". He laid the groundwork to anglicize the Indian education by proposing the adoption of English language as a conduit of information and instructions in schools, universities and other sectors. Introducing English language was a well-executed strategy to replace the classical system of education and traditional Indian language. This was also envisioned to manifest a gentry of people who would be Indians by the colour but were mesmerized by the English intellects and morals.

Language persuasion: Macaulay's policy promoted English as 'the language' and sequestered traditional Indian languages. This had a consequential impact on the diminishment of the indigenous tradition and culture.

Social and Political undertones: As the Macaulay's minute created a class of people who were highly influenced by the western thoughts, morals, intellects and culture, fabricating them to be pliable for the British superior. It led to the unfolding elevation of Indian class who often unified themselves with the British officials and in the course of time, concocted a difference between the 'western based educated elite' and the throng.

Legacy: The legacy of 'Macaulayism' can be witnessed in today's Indian education. English remains as a supreme language and the occident-flavoured education is held in high regards. The

imposition of the English language and culture guided the disengagement from India's rich heritage, culture and traditions.

The influence of the Macaulay's proposal of English based education and culture contemplate the tautness between the safeguard and preserve the ancient Indian culture, heritage, language and tradition.

CONCLUSION:

The comprehensive analysis of the "*The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the 18th century*" has uncovered the complicated and intricate mosaic of India's ancient education, Britishers' influence on the education and the shadiness of Macaulayism concept.

As mentioned by P. Selvamani in *Gurukul system - An ancient educational system of India*: 'Gurukul' could be considered as the most prominent form of the intellectual hub from the early Vedic period to the time of British raj. Gurukul served as the South Asia's 'primary education system' and the founding stone for providing wisdom and knowledge, cherishing the generations with life skills. Gurukul taught different subjects and the curriculum included 'the preaching of the four Vedas, The Upanishads and the Vedangas'. British authorities introduced 'English' language and westernized the ancient education by forwarding 'English' to overshadow the beautiful indigenous education.

In accordance with Aziz Rahman, Mohsin Ali and Saad Kahn in *The British Art of Colonialism in India: Subjugation and Division*: India had a well-established education system before the arrival of Britishers where the students were taught various subjects such as theology, medicine, Arabic, Sanskrit and more but the British government, however, wished to replace it with the British education system. Macaulay introduced the scheme of bringing English as the official language. He remarked that, during that time, efforts were focused on cultivating a class, capable of bridging the divide between the rulers and the millions governed – individuals who, while Indian by heritage and appearance, were English in taste, opinions, morals, and intellect. This class was tasked with refining the vernacular dialects, infusing them with scientific terms from Western nomenclature, and gradually evolving them into effective mediums for disseminating knowledge to the broader population. (Macaulay, 1965, p.116)

Macaulayism, was indeed influential to the Indian citizen to acknowledge and welcome the western scholarly instructions but the Lord Macaulay's concept could never relocate the ancestral tree. While Indians embraced the Westernized education, it can be considered as a fact that they did not completely abandon the Indian traditional education which has played an important duty in sculpting the beauty of India. As the last touch of beauty, the journey of this research paper has not only cultivated our knowledge about the educational history of India but also emphasized the unyielding spirit of episteme. "The beautiful tree" perseveres with its root abysmal in their soil of Sanskrit spirit, creating a dusky veil that embraces the spirit of heterogeneity and grandiosity in education.

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