

## The British Colonial Education Policy: A Study in Retrospect

**Mohammad Arshad Ali**

Professor, Dr. & Head, Department of English  
Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Prime University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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\*Corresponding Email: arshadalimohammad54@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Colonization is an inclusive process that not only occupies the land and wealth of the colonized country but also dominates all facets of the life of the people—economic, political, social, cultural, psychological, and educational, the last being of paramount importance as it impacts, modifies and reshapes the other aspects both explicitly and implicitly. The British colonial power having at its command the knowledge of how to prolong its rule over the colonized people resorted to superimposing an Education Policy on the Indian people. It was impregnated with the power of subjugating the Indian people under the yoke of colonialism. The policy was to destabilize and demoralize the native people, the colonized race, in their life in its entirety. The paper has made an attempt to delineate the effects of the colonial education system on the different facets of the life of the people of the colonized India, particularly of Bengal. The study shows how the colonial power not only appropriated territories and land but also destroyed indigenous culture and superimposed other cultures in an attempt to create a rootless nation divested of the sense of belonging to their original race.

**Keywords:** Colonization, Education Policy, Macaulayism, Superimposition, Subjugation

The New Encyclopedia Britannica defines colonialism:

The exercise of political and economic sovereignty by a country on a country or territory outside its borders. Colonies have often been established by military conquest followed by an occupation and settlement that places the colonized peoples in a subservient position.

An analysis of the definition shows that colonialism gains possession of foreign land by military force and establishes human settlement of the colonial population there. Colonialism exercises domination over the colonized people who are relegated to a subservient position by force of economic and territorial subjugation. Colonialism, thus, affects the entirety of life in the colony and the process it adopts causes unprecedented changes there assuming to itself the role of the almost absolute determining force of bringing visible and invisible changes in the currents and cross-currents of life of the people of the land dominated inclusive of academic- socio-cultural aspects effectively, that is, it effects a totalitarian change in the colony –the country or countries under its subjugation.

The study has made use of both primary and secondary data, the former primarily comprising Adam's Report, Wood's Despatch, Hunter Commission Report, Macaulay's Minutes and Nathan Commission Report, while profuse use has been made of the secondary data derived from the interpretations of different aspects of the Colonial Education Policy by the distinguished authors. Attempt has been made to relate both types of data with a view to making the study an integrated whole.

The author makes sincere effort to go through the works of different distinguished authors on the related issues. Guha (1988) has emphasized on the political aspect of the British Education Policy. Long (2004) dwelt on the British policy on education which did not make effective attempts to bring the desired social change. Stokes (1959) delineated the attempts of how education was made an instrument for conversion of the native people into Christianity. Viswanathan made a detailed study of the proceedings of the British Parliament to show how the curriculum of British education in India

attempted to perpetrate western hegemony in conjunction with expansion of commerce and military supremacy. Mukherjee (1972) explained the efforts of missionaries to increase enrolment of students in their schools with the ultimate objective of preaching their religion and motivating them to come into the fold of Christianity. Shastri (1957) made exposure that the knowledge of English that was disseminated among the learners was not meant to equip them with useful education but a means of gaining pomp and power thus alluring them to prop the colonial establishment and its expansion. The mentioned personalities including some other writers have brought into focus one or another aspect of colonial education system not in its entirety that played crucial role in the subjugation of the Indian people's life as a whole prolonging the rule of the British Raj in the Sub-continent. The present study is a humble attempt to fill up this gap bringing into light the total scenario of the British colonial education system with its impact on the people's life as a whole.

Education is a bi-functional instrument—one cultural and the other socio-political i.e., it is a cultural weapon bringing moral, intellectual and spiritual well-being as well as a political or power wielding weapon contributing to the acquisition of supremacy over the colonized land and people. During the colonial rule all agencies—government, nongovernment and missionaries—dressed education only with its cultural garb giving it the lopsided appearance of the change agent for the intellectual development of the native population:

Although colonialism and the many-sided thrust of liberal politics made it out to be so, there was more to education than was thus conceived. It stood not only for enlightenment but also authority — a fact which it has been the function of ideology in all its forms, including historiography, to hide both from the educators and the educated. In other words, it was an ideological effect that made both the propagators and the beneficiaries of education regard the latter as a purely cultural transaction and ignore that aspect of it which related directly to the power (Guha 1988: 15).

Education has always been used as the most effective but secret weapon of cultural imperialism. It is due to this ideological ground that concealed the power acquiring aspect that English education was equated with modernism and progress while the education of pre-British days, if that was education at all, was branded as substandard by the colonialists. But F.W. Thomas (1891: 1) has rightly remarked: “Education is no exotic in India. There is no country where the love of learning had so early an origin or has exercised so lasting and powerful influence”. This age-old traditional indigenous system of education continued to exist till 1835 when Lord William Bentinck took step towards educational reforms, for the British in the interest of perpetration of their colonial domination viewed this system as ineffectual and unworkable—an attitude of antagonism not arising out of objective assessment of existing conditions but one bred from idiosyncratic attitude toward the culture of a dominated people. They dealt a deathblow to this really broad-based system of education by totally replacing it by the so-called modern system of education, which was nothing more than English education. Had they been really imbued with the ideal of catering to the changing educational need of the people, they could have reformed and improved it thus channelizing the system of education properly—a measure which, if implemented at the time, could have changed the face of our country, and we would not have to run short of really educated persons even after the passage of eighteen long decades.

Bentinck appointed Rev. William Adam, a Scottish missionary, to inquire into the existing state of education in January, 1835. Adam was more a humanist than a religious preacher, more an educationist than a missionary, and so, he conducted assiduous survey in parts of Bengal and Bihar and prepared three reports which were faithful representations of the educational facilities available at the time. Adam's Report makes us aware of our glorious heritage and fills us with melancholy and nostalgia when it enumerates that as far back as two hundred years our country was the proud possessor of one school per 400 people. Had those institutions not been made extinct, they could have, more than adequately waged the war of universal primary education and won victory long ago and we would not have to be infested with multitudinous problems that have heaped up with the passage of time, for illiteracy, it is rightly divined, breeds most of the deterrents to advancement, social, economic and political. And if once illiteracy could have been removed, and that, it has already been pointed out, was

within a very easy reach, a new era could have dawned burgeoning with activities, meaningful and gainful, in all fields of life. Since education was broad based in this part of the world, our people in those days were in many ways more advanced than the invaders. Our cottage industries and other industrial products could not only meet the demand of the country but leave a tangible surplus for export to Europe & the Middle East where they were in great demand by virtue of their quality. The quality of the products and the flourishing international trade may be said to be an indicator of the development that ensued from the spread of education among the people during that period.

The educational institutions at the time of the advent of the British were socially sustained, not supported by the state or government. If the British rulers really meant education for the people, they could have developed those institutions into effective organizations for the desired social change. Long says:

Adam, in his report, dwells on the importance not only of vernacular but also of oriental education, which must be the fountain of polishing the vernacular, making English ideas to be clothed in an oriental garb suitable to the people (Long 1868: 31).

That the quality of education was not at all poor is testified by the following remark in Adam's report: Perhaps we shall not err widely if we suppose that the state of learning amongst the Mussalmans of India resembles that which existed among the nations of Europe before the invention of printing (Long 1868: 215).

Having occupied the state power the British could realize that the light of education should be put out from before the broad masses and they should be hurled down to the abyss of ignorance and illiteracy to be doomed to backwardness in all spheres. This they did to serve their own ends because it is easier to rule a backward people than a forward one who are imbued with a deeper realization of what life is and what it should be. To hoodwink the people and fabricate a semblance of education before them the British rules engineered a system that was designed to produce a class of people Indian in blood and color but English in taste and ideas, in moral and intellect."

With this education policy which was the corner-stone of their fundamental 'Divide and Rule Policy' they were perfectly able to achieve their ultimate objective of perpetrating their domination for a period of 200 years. As education in the true sense was withheld from the people, prolonged subjugation became their lot (Ali, 2012: 1-2).

That is why, Macaulay's policy is the most far-reaching single measure in the history of perpetration of the colonial rule in India.

In the interest of perpetration of their domination the British, according to the blue print of their Divide and Rule Policy, established as early as 1780 and 1792 Kolkata Madrasa and Benaras Sanskrit College to gratify and appease the Muslim and Hindu elite respectively in addition to supply the Persian and Sanskrit knowing persons to act as judges for trial of cases under the Muslim and Hindu Laws. Since almost inception of the Company rule, initiatives were launched for the introduction of English in Bengal. Phillip Francis, one of the top executives of the Company, advocated:

If...the English language could be introduced into the transaction of business, ...it would be attended with convenience and advantage to government and no distress or disadvantage to the natives, ... to qualify themselves to employment, they would be obliged to study English instead of Persian (Guha, 1988:16).

Then in 1792 Charles Grant demanded that printing machine should be set up, schools established for free education, and English made the medium of instruction thereby conceiving a plan for colonial education to the consolidation of the dominance and long-term accrual of profit. That Grant's proposition could have inspired Macaulay's minutes in later days is of reasonable acceptance. Shore, Grant, Wilberforce's advocacy made a great impact on the colonial policies:

Shore and Grant, who on their return to England went to live as neighbours to Wilberforce at Clapham, and, together with Zachary Macaulay, Henry Thornton, and John Venn, formed the Clapham Sect. The influence of this group sprang from its leadership of Evangelical and Methodist opinion on political issues. Wilberforce, as a personal friend of Pitt, and Grant, as a

director and for many years chairman of the East India Company, were able to command a powerful minority in the Commons (Stokes, 1959:28).

Their staunch advocacy found acceptance in the British Parliament as it enacted the Charter of 1813 that declared education of India as one of the responsibilities of the British Government. Though there existed sharp differences in the attitudes of the Evangelists and the Orientalists, they were unanimous that education was to be used as an instrument of colonialism.

The colonizers, the mission top executives, judges, social reformers were fully alive to the role of education in the perpetration of colonial rules: They well-understood that control over raw-materials and labour is not sufficient to the continuance of the rule, there should be extension of their hold on the consciousness and mental plane of the colonized. The missionaries set store on education for conversion:

Both Methodists and Evangelicals concentrated... on securing a minimum standard of education as a prerequisite for conversion, at least sufficient for a person to read and understand the Bible (Stokes, 1959:30).

Persons like Grants did not forget the strings of commercial profit attached to the expansion of education. Grant clearly emphasized: "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" (Quoted in Stokes 1959: 34). Macaulay was no less convinced of the efficacious relationship of education to business in that he was prompted to argue in a debate in 1833 in the House of Commons that if allowed to rule by themselves, the Indians would follow the English manners and use English goods and commodities and there lay welfare of the English. Was there any gain for the British to have allegiance of the people devoid of purchasing power? (Quoted in Sen 1977: 4) During the 19<sup>th</sup> century all propaganda centered round the spread of modern education in India pointed out the prospect of long-term economic gains. It was held that the English language and the English medium education would be the source of knowledge in modern science and letters. The rulers did, however, use this modern weapon of knowledge and science as the most potent means of inculcating the western sense of values and tastes among the natives. This embedding of the western culture has been identified as the gentle violence for intellectual enslavement:

The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. But where the former was visibly brutal, the latter was visibly gentle...language was the most important vehicle through which power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation (Thiong'o, 2007: 9).

The same thing happened in case of India as revealed by a study of the proceedings of the British Parliament by Viswanathan:

The Eurocentric curriculum of the nineteenth century was less a statement of the superiority of the western tradition than a vital, active instrument of western hegemony in concert with commercial expansionism and military action (Viswanathan, 2009: 166).

He has found out that the study of English literature virtually denigrated into an instrument of economic and material exploitation as well as political hegemony in India.

Long before the commencement of implementation of Macaulay's Education Policy in 1835, there was a strong craze for learning English in Kolkata—an issue that could acquire unanimity of views of both the English and the Bengali babus. The knowledge of English was virtually wedded to earning money. A man possessing a little knowledge in English was capable of carrying on commercial enterprise and employment in English business houses. So English and Western education gained status and glory. The craze for English education grew so infectious that Shibnath Shastry recorded: The slogan "We want English education" could be heard throughout the length and breadth of the country (1957: 46 translation mine). He has further noted (1957: 46) that David Hare was seriously embarrassed by the admission seekers to his school. Whenever he went outside his house, encountering numerous boys rushing alongside his plauquin repeatedly uttering the desperate cry, "me poor boy, have pity on me,

take me in your school” was a common sight. The pitiful mourning that was rending the city of Kolkata at the death of David Hare underscored the city dwellers’ reverence for English education. As English was the medium of communication with the English, the natives became so enamored of the language that 31000 copies of English books were sold within two years while the sale proceeds of Arabic and Sanskrit books, though all of them published by the Government run Education Committee at the same time, were not sufficient to pay the salaries of the workers engaged for the task. So far as English education was concerned, there was no divergence between the ‘progressives’ and ‘reactionaries’ as between the Orientalist and Evangelist English. The initiative for the establishment of Hindu College did come from the wealthy elite, who were orthodox Hindus having social clout. The Kolkata Book Society which was an institution contemporary to the Hindu College functioned by the government and non-government British personnel in association with the Indians. Many of them—for example, Radhakanta Deb, Ramkomal Sen, Tarini Mitra, etc.—were reactionaries and antagonistic to Rammohun, the leading progressive, who pioneered the establishment of the Hindu College and launched movement for the abolition of ‘Satidah’ and ultimately succeeded.

The Englishmen did their best to teach the natives English. That the missionaries were the better facilitator of this venture was borne out by the fact that the year 1818 saw the enrolment of at least 1800 students (Mukherjee, 1972: 350) in English schools. Apart from government and missionary schools, there were numerous private schools for teaching English words, not sentences, set up by many Anglicans as described by Shibnath:

The inclination for giving the children English language learning grew so intense among the elite of the city of Calcutta that a few Anglicans set up a number of schools in several parts of Calcutta to put the situation to their benefit. One Anglican Surbron by name opened a school at Chitpur where the famous Dwarkanath Tagore learnt English as the first student. Another Anglican named Martin Baul founded a school at Amrahtola that taught the reputed Matilal Shill. Another Englishman Aratun Pitrash set up another school whose student population included the blind Nitai Sen and lame Adwaita Sen of Kalutola. These persons could speak and write disjointed and ungrammatical English words, not sentences, and that was adequate enough to earn them pomp and power in the contemporary Calcutta society (Shastri, 1957: 73-74 translation mine).

The knowledge of English disseminated in these schools was limited to memorizing words, and not learning grammar and writing correct sentences, as has been noted by Shibnath: It is heard that Serampore missionaries used to issue certificate to its fostered students that the person concerned had learnt two or three hundred words (Shastri, 1957: 74 translation mine). The Kolkata Society, however, gradually graduated from word learning to language learning of English and the Hindu College was established as the first formal institution of that education. Thus, the formal inauguration of English language learning was heralded with the start of the Hindu College that manifested the collusion and collaboration of the colonizer and the colonized. The latter steps to raise the status of English language in different fields of life were taken by the government as demonstrated in its installation as the official language of India in 1844. Charles Wood propounded for the wider spread of English language learning resulting in the establishment of the three universities at Kolkata, Madras and Bombay in 1857. The year 1859 proclaimed reserving the posts of Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector solely for English knowing persons. While the year 1864 ruled that Civil Service and Law Examinations should be offered through the medium of English only. Thus, English earned its final victory by gaining the status of the most honored language among the colonized. Though Bengali marked its ascendancy in the interregnum of 1835 to 1857 between the end of Persian and the beginning of English and several hundred books on medicine were written in Bengali and medicine was taught in Bengali, the use of Bengali in the higher echelon was abandoned almost entirely with the coming into being of the universities. So tremendous a surge English had that in a score of years of the commencement of the functions of the universities English had its all pervasiveness even in the primary schools as recorded by Hunter Commission (Sarkar, 2003:18).

Macaulay's Policy of Education adopted in 1835 received cordial acceptance from the elite of Kolkata as evident from the famous letter of Rammuhan Roy. The triumphant introduction of this policy paled the issues of mass literacy and indigenous education system into insignificance for a long period dwindling it to a state of nullity. As contained in Adam's Report there were more than one lac schools of the indigenous type in Bengal and Bihar in addition to the school set up by the missionaries, Kolkata School Society and a good number of Bangalee and English philanthropists to impart education in the local languages. Adam's excellent report recommended that the indigenous schools should serve for national education as the building blocks upon which the super structure would be constructed comprising the high schools, colleges and universities to be set up at thana, sub-division, district, divisional and provincial levels with due importance attached to education through mother tongue along with the provision for pursuit of English medium education by the more meritorious students. His report contained detailed scheme and plan for education. His recommendations could curry favor with neither the British nor the elite Bengalis. Reverend Long prepared a report on mass education in 1866, (De, 1974: 52-53). He recommended that the tuition fees be increased in the English schools to maintain them and the government money thus saved therefrom be spent for imparting mass education. He also proposed for imposition of taxes on zamindars (landlords) for providing cost for mass literacy. The government refrained from implementing the recommendation because of strong opposition from the landlords. The governmental policy in this issue was quite clear. The decision of the government sprang from its consideration of curtailment of expenditure for education and in the interest of long-term colonization. This theory was, of course, very much useful in consolidating their rules with the assistance of a handful of educated bhodraloks (De, 1974: 63). The low-income group could not avail themselves of the educational facilities creating gap between them and the elite contributing conduciveness to the Divide and Rule Policy engineered by the British. There was almost no monetary sanction for the spread of literacy, only a paltry sum of Tk. 1.03 lac was allocated for Bengal. The policy of the government created disparity in opportunities of education between the vast majority of the common people and the privileged middle class ultimately resulting in an imbalance of opportunities and the standard of life. The expansion of mass literacy was stunted, and the number of primary schools and their students decreased considerably, though there was an acceleration of English education and in the number of high English schools and colleges. This was corroborated by the Nathan Commission Report known as the University Commission Report 1919 which recorded fall in the number of primary schools but a rise in opportunities for higher education: Nothing could more clearly show that it was not education at large, but English education, and especially English education preparatory to the university course which aroused the enthusiasm of Bengal (Sen, 1977: 43). The Education Policy that introduced English language in 1835 was posed to be the inauguration of modern education against the existing Sanskrit and Persian. It was fraught with the consequences of disintegration of the classical oriental education, of destruction of cultivation of the local languages in addition to the creation of a racial discrimination against the eastern civilization and culture marking the over-all triumph of colonialism. The implementation of the policy led to the extinction of not only ordinary but well-established primary schools (pathshalas) like Hindu College Pathshala, Tatwabodhini Pathshala that were founded for education through the medium of the native language of Bengali. The Education Report of 1843-44 contains:

The primary objects contemplated in the establishment of the pathsala were to provide a system of national education, and to instruct Hindoo youths in literature, and in sciences of India and of Europe, through the medium of Bengali language (Quoted in Paul 2007: 19).

But this Policy of 1835 was not, in the true sense of the term, the introduction of western education at all, rather what it actually implemented was the installation of English literature in the scheme of education. The English Literature Course quite successfully initiated the process of establishment of the colonial hegemony as the works of English literature could skillfully perform the duties of the ambassador of English culture and civilization appearing to symbolize modernism, and as such, contributed to the unaware acceptance by the locals of the colonial subjugation. Viswanathan says:

The nineteenth-century Anglicist curriculum of British India is not reducible simply to an expression of cultural power; rather, it served to confer power as well as to fortify British rule against real or imagined threats from a potentially rebellious subject population (Viswanathan, 2009: 167).

The introduction of this policy was so meaningful and powerful in the context of consolidation of the imperial hegemony that it gained support of the English people of all hues—the Anglicist and the Orientalist as noted by Viswanathan:

Both the Anglicist and the Orientalist factions were equally complicit with the project of domination, British Indian education having been conceived in India as part and parcel of the act of securing and consolidating power (Viswanathan, 2009: 167).

Macaulay's Minutes envisaged transforming the Indians in taste, opinion, intellect and moral according to English standard. And as such the dissemination of English literature was applied as an instrument of inculcation of the western sense of values. It is amazing to note that English literature was introduced in India as an academic discipline much earlier than in its birthplace England. As the introduction might cause an imbalance or knowledge gap between the Indian officials and their English colleagues because of their deficiency in English for not being academically taught in England, an English literature course covering 1000 marks was added to the Civil Service Examination Syllabi. This made the Universities of England introduce English literature as a subject of study conceding a status of respect to the so long neglected subject in its homeland. Walter Raleigh's appointment as the first Professor of English at Oxford University bears testimony to the integral relationship of raising the status of English in its native England with the colonization of India because prior to his appointment he served as a Professor of English in Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh in India (Banarjee 1991: 100). Macaulay's policy could achieve what was conceived by him (its progenitor) as he himself wrote to his Evangelist father Jackery Macaulay on October 12, 1836:

No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. It is my firm belief [so they always were] that if our plans of education are followed up there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years hence (Quoted in Anderson, 1983: 87).

This policy of turning the "idolaters" not so much into Christians but into people culturally English while retaining 'their irredeemable colour and blood' was not only consciously 'formulated' but also meticulously 'pursued' and the result was as expected. The objective of the education system was to turn out a group of people to carry out the colonial administration system in the securer interest of the colonizers, not to produce manpower with the quality of self-enterprise, initiative and contrivance in conformity with the ground reality and the particular professional requirement with the result that the highly educated people from the colleges and university faced unemployment. The number of the college and university graduates in Bengal soared to ninety-four thousand *vis-à-vis* forty-two thousand in England (Bhattacharya, BS 1396: 127). The wretched condition of the highly educated people of Bengal has been captured:

Nothing meaningful is taking place in the country. Under the fashionable exterior garb of Shakespeare, Milton and Differential Calculus lies the hidden empty interior. In all matters we cannot but depend on the shahibs, without their help we are but do-nothings (Bose, BS 1402: 320 translation mine).

The above statement of Rajnarayan captures the objective conditions prevailing in the academic arena of the day. But it falls short of finding out the reason of the deplorable situation which is nothing but the consequence of the introduction of English education. The colonial system of education could, no doubt, have alluring enchantment for higher education but it certainly lacked the necessary arrangements and provisions for producing manpower skillful enough to prove equal to the contemporary problems of life, thus resulting in astounding unemployment.

Thus, a deplorable condition prevailed not only in the academic arena of the day and it all resulted from the introduction of English education in the Indian colony. The colonial system of education

could, no doubt, have alluring enchantment for higher education but it certainly lacked the necessary arrangements and provisions for producing manpower skillful enough to prove equal to the contemporary problems of life, thus resulting in astounding unemployment. It is conspicuously the manifestation of the inherent characteristic of the colonial rule which being fascism created disparity among the masses by benefiting a privileged class or group of people while depriving the vast majority who were mired in poverty. The privileged worked to serve every purpose, fair or foul, of the colonizers who, in turn, allowed them so-called agencies in the form of trading facilities or zamindaries to enhance their financial status. This unholy alliance fostered a condition of society where there was an imbalanced preponderance of the destitute population against a very few enjoying the pomp and pelf of life with the blessings of the colonizers.

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