

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY OF 1835: THE EMERGENCE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Annotation: In 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay, a representative of the British government, presented the well-known document entitled "Minute on Indian Education". This document fundamentally transformed the entire educational system in India. Macaulay's main objective was to make English the primary medium of instruction in India and to form a new social stratum among the local elites who would speak English and acquire Western knowledge. This policy accelerated the processes of modernization within Indian society.

Keywords: India, education system, Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education", elite class.

Education in Colonial India and Lord William Bentinck's Policy

In the early nineteenth century, when India was a British colony, there existed two major intellectual tendencies regarding the development of education. The first group, known as the Orientalists, supported the continuation of traditional education in Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian, which focused on religious and classical studies. The second group, known as the Anglicists, advocated the introduction of the English language and European sciences into India.

At that time, Lord William Bentinck (1828–1835) served as the Governor-General of India. During the British colonial period, Bentinck distinguished himself as a reform-oriented administrator. He initiated a number of broad reforms in various spheres of Indian life, including social, administrative, and educational domains.

For instance, he banned the sati practice (the burning of widows), implemented significant changes in the colonial administrative system, and undertook ambitious educational reforms. According to Bentinck, efficient governance of India required "modern, English-speaking local officials" who were well educated. Therefore, he sought to modernise the educational system based on Western principles.

Among his reforms, the changes introduced in the field of education were especially noteworthy. During his tenure, the most significant document that radically altered educational policy in India was the "Minute on Indian Education", written by Thomas Babington Macaulay.

In 1835, Bentinck officially approved this document and made it part of state policy. Lord Bentinck's educational policy marked a turning point in Indian history. Under his rule, an education system based on the English language and Western knowledge was established.

Although this policy initially served colonial purposes, in the long term it contributed to the rise of modern thought, a broader worldview, and a growing sense of national identity among Indians. Thus, Bentinck is remembered in Indian educational history as one of the pioneers of modernisation.

Thomas Babington Macaulay and His Educational Reforms

Thomas Babington Macaulay was an English writer, politician, and educational reformer. Originally, he began his career as a lawyer, but later devoted himself to politics and literature. Macaulay was a member of the Whig Party, a liberal political organisation in Britain. He actively served as a Member of Parliament and became known for his eloquence and strong advocacy of liberal reforms.

In 1834, he was sent to India as a representative of the British government and appointed as a member of the Supreme Council of India. During this period, there were intense debates concerning the purpose, content, and objectives of education in India.

To resolve these disputes, Lord Bentinck established a Committee on Public Instruction in 1835. Macaulay was appointed as the head of this committee, and on 2 February 1835, he presented his famous policy paper titled “Minute on Indian Education”.

In this document, Macaulay strongly supported the ideas of the Anglicists, advocating for a comprehensive introduction of English education in India. Consequently, his proposals reflected a distinctly British and Western orientation.

According to Macaulay, the main language of education in India should not be any of the native Indian languages, but English. He believed that through English-language education, a new class of local intellectuals would emerge — individuals who, although Indian by birth, would think, reason, and act like the British.

Macaulay also criticised existing educational systems that relied on Arabic, Hindu, and Sanskrit texts, describing them as outdated and unproductive. He argued that these should be replaced with modern, “useful” Western subjects such as mathematics, physics, history, philosophy, and political science.

His most famous statement from this document summarised his vision clearly:

“We must at present 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.”

Implementation of the Programme and Its Impact

After the adoption of Macaulay’s “Minute on Indian Education”, the Governor-General of India began to put its principles into practice. The following significant measures were taken to reform the education system:

- Financial support for Arabic and Sanskrit schools was discontinued.
- English-medium schools and colleges were established in various parts of India.
- The Hindu College in Calcutta (later renamed Presidency College) was transformed into a centre of Western education.
- English language proficiency was introduced as a key requirement for entry into civil service positions.
- Western sciences, philosophy, and technology were integrated into the educational curricula.

The primary political objective behind this policy was to create a loyal class of local elites who would think in English, uphold British values, and serve the interests of the colonial administration.

This educational policy had both positive and negative consequences for Indian society.

Positive Consequences

- A new, educated class of Indians fluent in English and familiar with Western sciences emerged.
- Western knowledge, particularly in science, technology, and medicine, was introduced into Indian society.
- The new generation of educated Indians later became the leaders of national awakening and independence movements, contributing to the foundation of the Indian National Congress.
- Contact with Western civilisation encouraged modernisation and intellectual reform within India.
- English-speaking Indians gained greater access to civil service and administrative positions, strengthening local participation in governance.

These developments were seen as positive outcomes of the policy. Many believed that through English education, India achieved a form of intellectual progress and entered a new era of

enlightenment and modernity.

Negative Consequences

However, the policy also produced several negative effects:

- Indigenous languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Arabic, and Sanskrit became secondary and lost their prestige.
- Traditional religious and philosophical knowledge was devalued and gradually abandoned.
- Education became accessible only to urban and wealthy classes, while poorer sections of society remained largely illiterate.
- English language and culture turned into powerful instruments of colonial domination and cultural subjugation.

Conclusion

To sum up, “Macaulay’s Minute on Indian Education” was not merely an ordinary administrative document but a political declaration that became one of the fundamental pillars of British colonial ideology. Its ultimate aim was to reshape Indian society into one that thought in English and embraced Western values.

It must be acknowledged that the educational policies introduced by Lord William Bentinck and Thomas Babington Macaulay marked a major turning point in the history of Indian education. These reforms established English and Western sciences at the core of the Indian educational system and gave rise to a new intellectual and administrative class.

Although the policy primarily served the colonial interests of the British Empire, its long-term consequences went far beyond those aims. It played a decisive role in the intellectual awakening and modernisation of Indian society. By introducing Western ideas and education, the policy contributed to the formation of national consciousness and the emergence of modern Indian identity.

Thus, the reforms of Bentinck and Macaulay laid the groundwork for the dominance of English language and Western-style education in India. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, India’s educational system entered a new phase, which eventually brought profound political, social, and cultural changes to the country.

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