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# British Education Policy in India

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During British rule, education in India was not only a tool for territorial control but also a means to "civilise the natives" by changing their customs and values. The British debated how Indians should be educated to become "good subjects". This chapter explores the evolution of British educational ideas and Indian responses over two centuries.

## Orientalism and Early British Scholars

William Jones, arriving in Calcutta in 1783, was a linguist who studied Sanskrit and ancient Indian texts. Along with Henry Thomas Colebrooke and Nathaniel Halhed, he founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to study and translate Indian literature and culture. They believed Indian civilisation had declined after a glorious ancient past and that rediscovering ancient texts was essential for future development.

**Exam Question:** What was the Orientalist view of Indian culture and education?

**Answer:** Orientalists respected ancient Indian culture, believing it had declined over time. They thought studying ancient texts like Sanskrit and Persian literature was important to understand India's heritage and aid its development.

## Orientalist Educational Institutions

To promote Oriental learning, the British established institutions like the Calcutta Madrasa (1781) for Arabic, Persian, and Islamic law, and the Hindu College in Benaras (1791) for Sanskrit studies. These aimed to teach Indians subjects familiar to them to gain their respect.

**Exam Question:** Why were institutions like the Calcutta Madrasa and Hindu College established?

**Answer:** They were set up to promote the study of traditional Indian and Islamic knowledge, helping the British win the respect of Indian subjects by teaching familiar and valued subjects.

## Criticism of Orientalist Education

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From the early 19th century, many British officials criticized Orientalist education as unscientific and impractical. James Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay argued that Indians should be taught Western scientific and technical knowledge instead of Eastern literature. Macaulay famously claimed that a single shelf of a good European library was worth more than all native literature of India and Arabia.

**Exam Question:** What were the main criticisms of Orientalist education by British officials?

**Answer:** Critics said Orientalist education was full of errors, unscientific, and impractical. They believed Indians should learn Western science and English literature to become civilized and useful subjects.

## Macaulay's Minute and English Education Act

Macaulay's Minute led to the English Education Act of 1835, making English the medium of instruction for higher education and reducing support for Oriental institutions. English textbooks were introduced, emphasizing Western knowledge.

**Exam Question:** What was the impact of Macaulay's Minute on education in India?

**Answer:** It promoted English as the medium of instruction, reduced support for Oriental learning, and introduced Western textbooks, shifting education towards European knowledge.

## Wood's Despatch and Education Reforms

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In 1854, Wood's Despatch outlined a policy emphasizing European learning for practical benefits, including economic development and moral improvement. It advocated for a system of university education and government control over education. Universities were established in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay in 1857.

**Exam Question:** What were the key features of Wood's Despatch of 1854?

**Answer:** It promoted European knowledge for practical and moral benefits, called for university education, government control of education, and emphasized the economic advantages of Western learning.

## Missionary Education in India

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Christian missionaries, initially restricted by the East India Company, established schools like the Serampore Mission and Serampore College to spread Christian education and moral values. After 1857, the British government was cautious about supporting missionary education to avoid antagonizing Indians.

**Exam Question:** What role did Christian missionaries play in education during British rule?

**Answer:** They established schools and colleges to spread Christian teachings and moral education, contributing to the spread of Western education in India.

## Vernacular Education and Pathshalas

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Before British reforms, vernacular schools called pathshalas were widespread, flexible, and community-supported. They had no fixed fees, no formal buildings, and teaching was oral and adapted to local needs, such as agricultural cycles.

After 1854, the British introduced regulations to standardize pathshalas, including regular fees, fixed timetables, examinations, and government grants for compliant schools. This reduced flexibility and made attendance difficult for poor children during harvest seasons.

**Exam Question:** How did British regulation affect traditional pathshalas?

**Answer:** British rules imposed fixed schedules, fees, and examinations, reducing the flexibility that allowed poor children to attend, leading to difficulties for many students.

## Indian Thoughts on Education

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Indian thinkers like Aurobindo Ghose, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore had varied views on education. Gandhi criticized English education for creating cultural inferiority and advocated education in Indian languages with practical skills. Tagore founded Santiniketan to promote creative, free, and nature-based learning combining Indian tradition with modern science. Aurobindo emphasized awakening national spirit and combining modern knowledge with Indian culture.

**Exam Question:** What were Mahatma Gandhi's views on education?

**Answer:** Gandhi believed education should develop mind, body, and spirit, include handicrafts, be in Indian languages, and help Indians regain dignity and self-respect rather than imitate Western ways.

## National Education Movement

Many Indians called for a national education system that was distinct from British models, focusing on Indian culture, languages, and values. The debate on what constituted "national education" continued until after independence.

**Exam Question:** What was the goal of the national education movement in India?

**Answer:** To create an education system rooted in Indian culture and values, promoting national pride and identity, different from British colonial education.

## Solved Examples

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**Example 1:** Explain the significance of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

**Answer:** The Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded by William Jones and others, was significant for promoting the study and translation of ancient Indian texts, helping preserve Indian heritage and informing British understanding of India.

**Example 2:** Describe the impact of Wood's Despatch on Indian education.

**Answer:** Wood's Despatch emphasized European knowledge, led to the establishment of universities, increased government control over education, and aimed to create a system that supported British economic and administrative interests.

## Practice Set

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### Easy

- Who was William Jones and why is he important in Indian education history?
- What was the main aim of the English Education Act of 1835?

### Moderate

- Explain the differences between Orientalist and Anglicist views on education.
- What were the effects of British regulation on traditional pathshalas?

## Challenging

- Discuss the contributions of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore to the idea of national education.
- Analyze the impact of Wood's Despatch on the social and economic fabric of India.

## Answer Key

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- **William Jones:** A British linguist and judge who studied Sanskrit and founded the Asiatic Society to promote Indian studies.
- **English Education Act 1835:** Made English the medium of instruction and reduced support for Oriental learning.
- **Orientalist vs Anglicist:** Orientalists valued ancient Indian learning; Anglicists promoted Western science and English language.
- **Pathshalas:** British regulation imposed fixed rules, reducing flexibility and attendance by poor children.
- **Gandhi and Tagore:** Gandhi emphasized education in Indian languages and practical skills; Tagore promoted creative, nature-based learning combining Indian and Western ideas.
- **Wood's Despatch impact:** Strengthened British control, promoted European knowledge, and influenced economic and administrative systems.

## Quick Reference

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- **Orientalism:** Study and respect for ancient Indian culture and languages.
- **Anglicism:** Promotion of English language and Western knowledge.
- **Pathshala:** Traditional vernacular school.
- **Wood's Despatch:** 1854 policy promoting European education in India.
- **National Education:** Education system rooted in Indian culture and values.

## Glossary

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- **Linguist:** A person who studies languages.

- **Orientalists:** Scholars studying Asian languages and cultures.
- **Munshi:** Teacher or clerk skilled in Persian.
- **Vernacular:** Local language or dialect.
- **Madrassa:** Islamic educational institution.
- **Asiatic Society:** Institution promoting Asian studies.
- **Serampore Mission:** Christian missionary educational institution.
- **Pathshala:** Traditional Indian village school.
- **Nationalist:** Person advocating for national independence and pride.

## Chronology of Education in British India

Year	Event	Significance
1783	William Jones arrives in Calcutta	Begins Orientalist study of Indian culture and languages
1781	Calcutta Madrasa established	Promotes Arabic, Persian, and Islamic law education
1791	Hindu College established in Benaras	Encourages Sanskrit studies for administration
1835	English Education Act	English made medium of instruction; Oriental institutions lose support
1854	Wood's Despatch	Promotes European education; university system established
1857	Universities established in Calcutta, Madras, Bombay	Modern higher education system begins
1901	Santiniketan founded by Rabindranath Tagore	Alternative education emphasizing creativity and nature