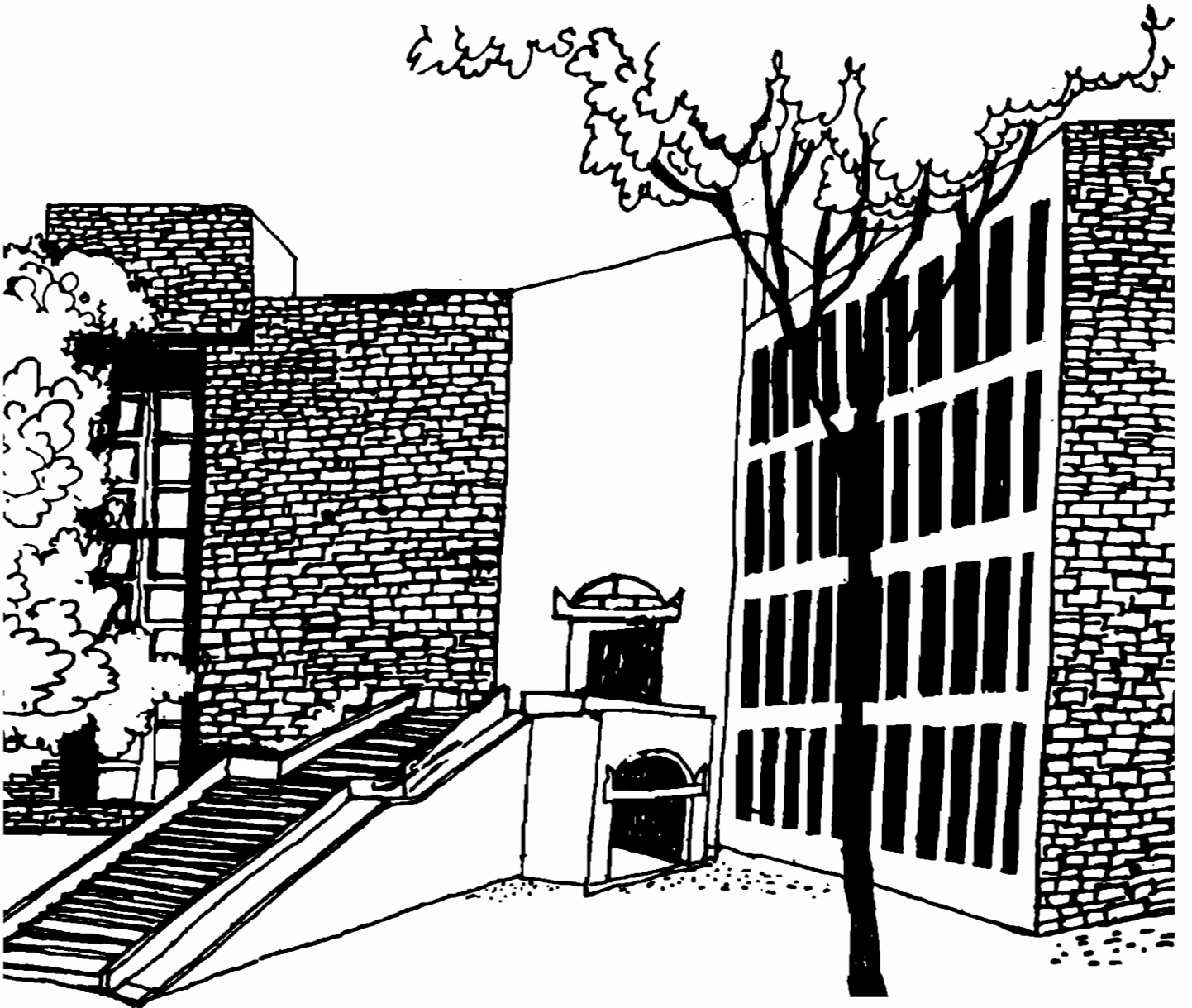




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**A CRITIQUE OF THE HISTORY OF
HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

The main argument of this paper rests upon the assumption that while the post-colonial education policy has emphasised the need for a truly national goal of education, arguing for a departure from the British racist system of education, its critique of the British system, however, does not reflect an awareness even of the methodological concerns, let alone far deeper epistemological break which resulted in the formation of the colonialist system of knowledge. Ironically the nationalist education policy seeks to derive legitimacy from those very hegemonic processes aiming at a manufactured consensus in public life which were set in motion during the period of Orientalist education, and were further sustained by the Anglicist policy makers. Most histories of Indian higher education thus typically fall into a fairly predictable pattern, written as history of acts and resolutions whose interest lies in their presumed effect on the existing social and cultural system. From these histories it is apparent that educational historians have concerned themselves far less with what processes are involved into the making of an education policy -- the discourses and institutions that led to its formulation and the experience context in which the event occurred -- than with the outcome such an education policy aimed at with regard to the targeted population.

In order to develop a comprehensive critique of the history of higher education, it would be imperative to re-work a genealogy of structures of significations and their affiliations with the civil and administrative machinery that have constituted the field of education in India since late eighteenth century. The 'field' thus constituted can be discussed as three discrete moments along a continuum of policies. These 'moments', which draw upon the archival material of specific periods, can also be interpreted as indicators of the quality of philosophical as well as administrative investments that went into the making of contemporary higher education in India.

A CRITIQUE OF THE HISTORY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

In order to develop a critique of the history of higher education in India, it would be necessary to trace the genealogy of structures of significations which have constituted the field of higher education since the beginning of British Orientalism in late eighteenth century India¹. To trace this genealogy, however incomplete and fragmented, is to remind ourselves of a quiet epistemological violence perpetrated on India -- quiet, because its implications for the formation of a "modern" Indian history and subjectivity have yet to be fully explored, and epistemological, because rather than working at an overtly violent level of political and social control, it has worked towards creating new forms of knowledges, displacing previous ones, by implanting new cognitive domains -- often with the consent of the governed -- and thus structuring a new field of educational discourses, institutions and actions for the 'people' of India.

The 'field' thus constituted can be divided into three 'moments' which I discuss below. My argument, however, is not based on an assumed chronological or natural order of these moments. They are indicators of the quality of philosophical as well as administrative investment made in contemporary system of higher education in India.

The Moment of Orientalist Education and the Discovery of the 'Golden Age' of India

The mission to 'revitalise' ancient Indian culture and protect it from oblivion merged with the literary vogue of "Orientalism" and formed the mainstay of that phase of British rule known as the "Orientalist" phase. Orientalism was adopted as an official policy partly out of expediency and caution and

partly out of an emergent political sense that an efficient Indian administration rested on an 'understanding' of Indian Culture. It grew out of the concern of Warren Hastings, governor-general from 1774 to 1785, that British merchants were not sufficiently responsive to Indian languages and Indian traditions of scholarship. The distance between the ruler and the ruled was perceived to be so vast as to evoke the sentiment that "we rule over them and traffic with them, but they do not understand our character, and we do not penetrate theirs. The consequence is that we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affection"².

Thus Orientalism as an educational and cultural project began in late eighteenth century in order to facilitate the process of reverse acculturation whose goal was to train British administrators and civil servants to fit into the culture of the ruled, and to assimilate them thoroughly into the 'native' way of life. The scholars produced by Orientalism -- William Jones, Henry Colebrooke, Halhead and Charles Wilkins -- undertook exhaustive research digging out vast literary and linguistic resources of ancient India for the reintroduction of the 'natives' to their own 'heritage'.

Whether later Orientalists were willing to acknowledge it or not, Warren Hastings clearly understood the driving force of Orientalism to be the doctrine that "every accumulation of knowledge, and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity"³. Hastings' statement is of course an unabashed rationalisation of the dialectic of information and control that can be characterised as the basis of academic Orientalism. What is most striking about this statement is the intellectual leap it makes from knowledge that is useful to the state to the knowledge that becomes the gain of humanity. It was

not merely that the state had a vital interest in the production of knowledge about those whom it ruled; more important, it also had a role in actively processing and selectively delivering that knowledge up to mankind as "objective knowledge".

In his first presidential address to the Asiatic Society, William Jones stated that his inquiry into the history, civil and natural, the antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of Asia was a means to the end of discovering 'truths' about man and Nature. Asian knowledge would add a new dimension to the understanding of human learning, or knowledge, which was for Jones, "the true concern of the Asiatic Society" and which he divided into three parts: history, science and art. He thus tells us:

The first (history) comprehends either an account of natural productions, or the genuine records of empires and states; the second (science) embraces the whole circle of pure and mixed mathematics, together with ethics and law, as far as they depend on reasoning faculty; and the third (art) includes all the beauties of imagery and the chores of invention, displayed in modulated language, or represented by colour, figure or sound⁴.

There were largely two modes of dissemination by which Orientalism in India was enshrined and sustained. One was the disseminative capacities of modern learning, its diffusive apparatus in the learned professions, the educational centres, the professional societies, the publishing and printing ventures, the geographical organisations etc. All these were consolidated and organised into the reputed, objective authority of the pioneering scholars, translators, travellers and artists, whose cumulative vision had shaped the India of their dream. The doctrinal or doxological manifestation of such an 'India' can be described as the 'field' created out of the experience of academic Orientalism.

What is actually amazing is the tremendous enunciative potency of this 'field', a potency which not only continues to remain unchallenged to this day in the domain of educational goals set up for the 'new' Indian nation.² The venture of the Orientalists, like the enunciative capacities, and the discourses they enabled, is, therefore, not only conservative but also repetitive. Transmitted from one generation to another, it has now become as much a part of Indian educational culture as that of India's response to other cultures. No wonder it has survived the freedom-struggle, various forms of local and regional resistances, and has succeeded in even absorbing them one way or another.

The second method by which the 'field' delivered India to British imperialism was the result of a systematic specialisation in academics. Over many long years, the Europeans and even other Asian travellers and scholars had spoken about India -- but the eighteenth century British-orientalist in India was an expert, like a Flaubert or Gibbon, whose prime concern (for Hastings his 'public and professional responsibilities') was to interpret India and the Indian civilisation not only to the West, but more importantly, to its own people who had supposedly become oblivious of it after a fall. The task of interpretation was thus extended to Indian education, languages, habits of thinking and behaviour, tradition, religion and dynasties; its virtues of the past and its faded, abased present; its instinctive passion and its sexual promise.

William Jones stands out as the first man (expert) to tell us that India's golden period as a culture lay in a remote, unchartered period in world history. This was further confirmed by his affirmation in the same discourse about the remarkable discovery of a common source of the languages of the Indo-European peoples:

The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity both in the roots of verbs and in the form of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident...there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothic and the Celtic, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family...⁶

Not surprisingly, Jones reacted to Indian philosophy and Vedanta in particular, in the same way. It was inconceivable for him

to read the Vedanta or many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India⁷.

For Jones, the six schools of Indian philosophy, Manusmriti, the religious myths and symbols, and the varied sculptural and the architectural remains testified to a people with a fertile and inventive genius: "Howsoever degenerate and abased the Hindus may now appear", argued Jones, "that in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge..."⁸ seemed certain to him. Obviously this Orientalist rediscovery of the 'Golden Age of India' implied not only the present abased and wretched predicament of the 'Hindus' [the use of 'Hindus' betrays a callous indifference to the diversity and richness of the texture of Indian society] which the Orientalists affirmed in a chorus, and from which they came to redeem Indians, but also a drive towards the actualisation of that glorious past in the future by strictly adhering to the 'universal' laws and truths of man, nature, society and history.

In his treatment of history Colebrooke did not prove himself less imaginative than a Jones. He said before the Royal Asiatic Society:

I do not refer merely to the succession of political struggles, national conflicts, and war-like achievements; but rather to less conspicuous, yet more important occurrences, which directly concern the structure of society, the civil institutions of nations. Their internal, more than their external relations, and the yet less, prominent, but more momentous events which affect society universally, and advanced it in the scale of civilised life... The west owes a debt of gratitude to the civilisations of Asia for their contributions in Arts and Sciences. Civilisation had its origins in Asia." (emphasis added)

But now whereas West was making fast progress towards a new civilisation, Asia was in a state of decline and abasement. The way to show them the path of progress, Colebrooke recommended, was to investigate the history of their cultures, with the hope of facilitating ameliorations of which they may be found susceptible.

Similarly by concentrating his research on Vedic India, Colebrooke churned many interesting facts out of the sacred scriptures of the past of India, and presented them as models of progress for the Indians. As with Max Muller, who continued Colebrooke's work, each discovery of Vedic India was dramatically and metaphorically contrasted with the peculiarities and abasement of contemporary Indian practice in the 'Hindu' society. It was, for instance, Colebrooke who first sought the historical origins of the Indian caste system and focused on the discrepancies between ancient textual requirements and actual contemporary practices, and it was he who, twenty years before Rammohun Roy's tract on sati, demonstrated on the basis of the ancient texts of India, that the voluntary immolation of the widows in Bengal was a departure from the 'authentic' tradition.

It was as a result of such discoveries, translations and demonstrations that the Orientalist believed: "Now Indians could hold up their heads as civilised, cultured men. The way had been opened for them to regain their literature.."10

We noticed in the foregoing pages the emphasis on a particular vision of history and the rise of a cultural interpretative community with the institutional innovations in Bengal, at the end of the eighteenth century. This shift is characterised by a move away from the despotic to a strategic articulation of power via knowledge. The intellectual disciplines that arose in the new colonial space were specialised ones in which the human subject was collapsed into swarming detail. Later, the subject was acted upon by the new disciplines to acquire the rules of the details most naturally and thus to make them both docile and functional. From these disciplines thus evolved an administrative apparatus for maintaining order and cultural integrity of India.

This calls for an examination of the nature of power which the Hastings administration sought to exercise on the Indians. This form of power is never apparently repressive or inhibiting - rather its *modus operandi* consists in its ability to create a free and new space of action for its subject. It is never exercised by the confrontation of the two groups, but by the way in which the conduct of the individuals or groups might be directed to acquire new knowledge produced by the professionals and scholars for 'the gain of humanity'. To govern in this sense is, as Foucault puts it, "to structure the possible field of action for others"¹¹. The relationship proper to this form of power can thus be located not at the site of violence, confrontation or struggle, but at the site of a benign, close, even romantic kind of relationship which is persuasive and whose terms of dispersal are often internalised by the acting subject within himself. The diffusion of this kind of awareness is

hardly visible in the clear-cut ideologies which are propagated by political parties or the various repressive state-apparatuses.

One may elaborate further the characteristic educational zeal of the Orientalist narrative which is sustained and developed by a host of others, many of whom were trained after the foundation of Fort William College on November 24, 1800 at Calcutta. Many of these were linguists, professors, translators, philologists, grammarians, philosophers and historians. To name a few, one can think of Robert Chambers, Jonathan Duncan, Edmunstone, P. Henry, John Gilchrist, William Hunter, S. Davies and Charles Wilkins as a select band of administrators-cum-scholars with the 'classical' taste and temper who rediscovered for the Indians 'the Golden Age of India'.

The Moment of Macaulay and the Institutionalisation of English as a Secular Discipline

As a candid acknowledgement of the implicit political goals of Orientalism, Hasting's argument belies some of the arbitrary distinctions that are made at times between Orientalism and Anglicism, the countermovement that gained ascendancy in the 1830s. Briefly, Anglicism grew as an expression of discontent with the policy of promoting the Oriental languages and literatures in 'native' education. In its vigorous advocacy of Western instead of Eastern learning it came into sharp conflict with the proponents of Orientalism, who vehemently insisted that such a move would have disastrous consequences, the most serious being the 'alienation' of the natives from British rule. However, while it is true that the two movements appear to represent diametrically opposed positions, what is not adequately stressed in the educational literature is the degree to which Anglicism was dependent upon Orientalism for its ideological programme.¹² Through its state-sponsored research and scholarly investigations Orientalism had produced a vast body of knowledge

about the native subjects that the Anglicists subsequently drew upon to mount their attack on the 'Indian Culture' as a whole. In short, Orientalist scholarship undertaken for "gains of humanity" gave the Anglicists precisely the material evidence they needed for drawing up a system of comparative evaluations in which one culture could be set off and measured against the other.¹³ Therefore, it would be more appropriate to describe Orientalism and Anglicism not as polar opposites but as points along a continuum of policies, attitudes and structures of ideas towards the manner and form of native education and governance.

It is not necessary to dwell here on the pronouncements of Macaulay and his (in)famous Minute of 1835 condemning the native traditions, particularly the system of education, since this literature is fairly wellknown in the educational circles. The more important issue is to stress, first, how the institutionalisation of Englit as a "secular" discipline of knowledge resulted as a by-product of the triangular debate and tension between the East India Company and the British Parliament, between Parliament and the English missionaries, and between the East India Company and the Indian elites, and secondly, how the implantation of the discipline of Englit in India became an effective weapon of establishing socio-political and cultural hegemony whose deeper structures are still in tact in our education system, despite several transformations and modifications at the surface.¹⁴

English education made its appearance in India, albeit indirectly, with a crucial act in Indian educational history: the passing of the Charter Act in 1813. The Charter Act radically altered the prevailing state of laissez-faire in Indian educational matters. The 13th Resolution categorically stated that England was obligated to promote "the interests and happiness" of the natives and that measures ought to be adopted

"as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement"¹³.

Thus if by blurring the distinction between education, literature and religion the Orientalist had arrogated to themselves the authority to decipher ancient Indian texts, the Anglicists ensured a relocation of authority in the English texts themselves. It is very interesting to note that a great deal of emphasis was laid in this period on the "eternal spirit of the English texts", particularly when they themselves derived inspiration from European classicism, and from a cosmopolitan spirit of universal humanism and rationality, rather than by faith or dogma. This process is brilliantly summarized as willed strategy in a report filed by the president of the Board of Education at Bombay in April 1853:

We have the subtle Brahmin, the ardent Mohamedan, the meek, though zealous, Christian missionary, each and all relying on this promise of non-interference, and pressing the evidence of his respective faith on the attention of the people of India; and when these people look up to the government, and say, "you tolerate all religions; all cannot be true; show us what is truth", the government can only answer, "Our own belief is known to you; we are ready to give a reason for the faith that is in us; and we will place you in a situation [by teaching the English literary and scientific tradition] through which you may judge whether those reasons are convincing or not... we will expand your intellectual powers to distinguish truth from falsehood..."¹⁴

It is clear from this report that though a policy of religious non-interference in education may have been originally adopted for reasons of expediency, it was quickly transformed into a medium of self-preservation. As a symbol of free intellectual inquiry, religious non-interference generated an image of the Englishman as benign, detached, impartial and judicious. Needless to add how crucial this 'image' of the

Englishman was for the preservation and consolidation of the British Rule.

English literary study, thus considered, offered itself as both subject of study and method of analysis -- the means through which the claims of colonial belief system were at once asserted and the grounds of its truthfulness vindicated. What made this two-fold activity possible, as the president's report implied, is English literature's double stance toward reason and faith, utility and tradition, empiricism and revelation -- a stance completely obscuring its affiliations with institutional production of knowledge as truth; the entire system of social and political formation of which it was a part, and through which it made an appeal to an objective, empirical reality apprehended solely by the mind. This move prefigures in a way the phenomenological method of inquiry which places the supreme value on the universal mind, and the a priori structure of rationality, for the verification of the "objective reality", regardless of the various material forces which shape the very structure and function of rationality, often in mutually contradictory directions.

Thus, through the establishment of English as an ideal intellectual discipline -- for which India provided an excellent setting -- British educational and administrative system enabled the grounding of its rule by consent of the Indian intelligentsia. The differentiated education that the Indian social structure encouraged, that is, vernacular for the lower classes, and English for the upper classes, ensured English high culture to be maintained in all its purity without the erosion that was then occurring to the so-called polite literature within England.¹⁷ The filtration theory of Macaulay and John Stuart Mill succeeded in cultivating a small elite group of Indians who were to act as the benevolent disseminators of the values of freedom, justice, rationality and humanism enshrined in the body

of English texts. This paved the way for the construction of an ideological system of education which "even a political revolution will not destroy and upon which after ages may erect a vast superstructure".¹⁸

The Moment of the Vernacular/Early Nationalist Education in India

Commentaries on the Orientalist Anglicist debate, and the momentous decisions taken in 1835 to replace the higher education in the Indian classical languages by English studies, rarely point out that most Anglicists considered the use of English as the medium for the transmission of useful knowledge and the improvement of moral character only as a temporary stage in the long term enterprise of educating the Indian people. Any viable and efficient system of education, they were broadly agreed, would necessarily have to replace English by the vernacular, just as, the implication was, the study of vernacular literature would eventually substitute for the study of English literature. When pressed to take a clear position on this issue, the Committee for Public Instruction, which had been responsible for the 1835 decisions, made it quite clear that the formation of a vernacular literature was "the ultimate objective" to which all efforts should be directed. English, they argued, had been rendered indispensable only by "the almost total absence of a vernacular literature, and the consequent impossibility of obtaining a tolerable education from that source only".¹⁹

Written into the recommendations made in the Education Despatch of 1854 therefore, was the commitment to 'strengthen' Indian vernaculars and make them suitable vehicles for the communication of useful knowledge of western science and literature. These objectives called for a rupture in existing literary and educational discourses as well as in the existing social processes. Significantly, it also meant sweeping aside in

a single stroke the existing linguistic, literary and technical resources as non-useful, or simply barbaric, impure knowledges.

It was assumed that while the indigenous languages would as a matter of course be modernised as they came into contact with English, a planned and conscious effort to upgrade these languages, and to make them suitable vehicles for modern science and literature would involve equally drawing on the classical Indian languages, Sanskrit and Arabic. Modern historiography in our times is no doubt keenly aware how carefully invented "tradition" was being drawn on to legitimate and endorse 'modernization', but what we actually find in this process of invention is also, as Susie Tharu points out, a definite "reversal of developments in language use precipitated by the medieval bhakti movements, and an endorsement of the upper-caste male power".²⁰ The bhaktas had broken the literary and religious hold of Sanskrit, rejected the authority of the priests and used the languages spoken by the people for philosophical discourse and poetic composition. What is mostly ignored by the historians of this period, however, is that the bhakti movement also nourished the growth of a literature, secular as well as spiritual that drew for its themes on the lines of the artisanal classes and consequently brought into the scope of literary language a whole new technical vocabulary based on their expertise. Nineteenth century colonial efforts to "modernise" the so-called regional languages of India -- which was a major programme on their educational agenda -- were charged with an altogether different socio-economic and political initiative which drew, for the development of a 'modern' science and technology, on forms of knowledges which totally discredited and marginalised the existing system of scientific, technical and educational knowledges.²¹ Contemporary educationists, both Indian and British, were largely agreed that while Sanskrit and Arabic, like English, could boast of distinguished ancient literatures, the regional languages had no literatures at all.

According to the Fifth and Final Report of the General Council on Education in India, 1885, it was the sad misfortune of India that

Whatever literature she does possess is defiled with impurity. Even in the sacred books, with passages of rare beauty and great excellence there is a great deal that is immoral and impure, while most of the profane [the term secular was reserved only for the English literature] literature in circulation is too vile for description²²

Most educationists were unanimous in asserting that no vernacular literature, suited to the requirements of a liberal curriculum, or to the educational enterprise as a whole, existed and that one of the most pressing needs of the time was the creation of a national literature for India. Charles Traveleyan had already addressed the question of the creation of a suitable national literature, and by implication, national culture.²³ The process through which the vernacular languages would develop and become capable of expressing modern scientific ideas, and the one through which a real national literature will be created, he argued, were similar. Indeed both would draw on the universal spirit of English, and "the languages of India will be assimilated to the languages of Europe as far as the arts and sciences and general literature are concerned".²⁴ As his argument proceeds it becomes clearer why he regards English as providing the foundations for a national language and a national literature:

The vernacular dialects of India, will, by the same process, be united among themselves. This diversity among languages is one of the greatest obstacles to improvement in India. But when English shall everywhere be established as the language of education, and when the vernacular literature shall everywhere be formed from materials drawn from this source, and according to models furnished by this prototype, a strong tendency to assimilation will be created. Both the matter and the manner will be the same. Saturated from the same source, recast in the same mould, with a

common science, a common standard of taste, a common nomenclature, the national languages as well as the national characters will be consolidated....We shall have a united and enlightened nation where we found a people broken up into sections...and depressed by literary systems, designed much more with a view to check the progress, than to promote the advance of the human mind²⁵ (emphasis added)

It was this characteristic zeal of Traveleyan which appealed to the minds of many early Indian nationalists who spent a lifetime in chiselling the existing vernaculars, and their literature to the shape of the "universal humanism" of English literary form. A massive programme of translations, not only from English and other European languages, but also from the classical Indian languages, was launched. It is difficult for a reader today not to be struck by the Orientalist dimensions of what was regarded as an appropriate beginning for an Indian National Education. Indeed Indians were duly 'encouraged' to create 'original' works in the indigenous languages. The Allahabad Government announced a price for "useful works in the vernacular, of approved design and style, in any branch of science or literature..."²⁶ The new literature was to emerge from minds saturated with English knowledge and tastes formed by the study of English masterpieces. The authorities were convinced, records Arthur Mayhew, that "pecuniary inducements, the instigation of ambition and the desire to do good would produce the artistic temperament".²⁷

Consequently, a remarkable number of early novels written in the Indian languages were indeed responses, if not to pecuniary inducements or moral pressures, to an ideological ambience in which a totally new sense of the responsibilities of the writer as well as the social function of languages and literary study featured prominently. The new literary and linguistic genres in the vernaculars, modelled after the Englit, provided the training ground on which writers "grew into the dimensions of their newly sculpted writer-subjectivities, even as they elaborated a new

idea of education and literature in particular; of its social function, and more broadly of the aesthetic itself".²⁸ Further, these were the genres in which the basic currency of "realism" was mined, and the politics of aesthetics consolidated. With that coinage came a subtle new economy which required that this would be measured out in its proportions: objects, sensations, emotions, ethical values, logics, psychology, taste, temperament, even vision or optics were to be reshaped, if they were to appear plausible, as were indeed the writer and reader subjectivities required to negotiate the terms of a new plausible world. It was a quiet violence, this, the violence of "realism" derived from a positivistic world-view of science coeval with the greed of Imperialism; as quiet as the cognitive mode with which individualism established its hegemony, with the conception of a new self. However, as Michel Foucault has expressed so clearly, the individual which relations of power have constituted is, at the same time, its vehicle. Realism, in the disciplines of literature in particular, and as an objective of education in general, thus emerged as a configuration as subtly constituted by power so as to also become, like the new individual it helped create, its suitable vehicle.²⁹

The moment of vernacular education can thus be interpreted to be an integral part of the larger narrative of British imperialism which consumed within its draconian grasp also the nationalist effort to carve out a new indigenous identity for itself. A vernacular education would only achieve the assumed ideals, objectives and goals more efficiently. Macaulay, in his times, would have agreed, as would many nationalist education policy-makers today.

Rethinking Higher Education in the Humanities

Since what we traditionally mean by the humanities literature, philosophy, history, history of art -- are subjects

studied in the universities and articulated by university teachers, questions about the future of humanities are increasingly about how the concerns and activities of those who teach and write about these materials will function in institutional contexts and what effects they will have. How, for example, will university system adapt to changing social and political circumstances -- such as a cultural situation where film and television play a crucial role in ideological engineering, and where -- at least now in India -- the threat of right-wing "national culture" with certain fascist tendencies inherent in it looms increasingly large? [for example the tampering of primary and secondary school text books in U.P. and M.P. under the B.J.P. government which generated heated debate in the academic circles.] To reflect on the future of humanities in India is in part to imagine how the organisation and orientation of intellectual disciplines within the universities can respond to these situations, and to ask how university structures are affecting and are affected by intellectual activity.

Being placed in this cultural predicament, however, does not mean that everybody -- and that includes university professors, policy-makers as well as educationists -- has come round to thinking that the very fundamental basis of liberal humanist education has to be changed, if it is to play a meaningful role in future education. In fact, the old foundationist and universalist rationale for the humanities is invoked more often than not, in defence of preserving the national and cultural unity. It proposes roughly that the humanities, by studying the greatest products of the human spirit, "the best that has been thought and written",³⁰ in Matthew Arnold's phraseology, masterpieces of literature, art, philosophy and history, will provide an understanding of 'man' and insights about the human nature, 'human condition' but above all basic principles -- methodological, epistemological and ethical. Knowledge of literature, history and philosophy would train the moral

intelligence, working to produce a community with shared values, and would provide foundations for thought and action.

A new rationale, is needed not only because the old one is so deeply entrenched in the colonialist power system but also because much of the most interesting recent work in the humanities has involved critiques of foundationist and universalist claims. In philosophy, the analytic project turns out not to have brought us closer to firm foundations, but to have rendered problematic the very conception of the search for origins or foundations. Notable examples of this disciplinary enterprise have been analysed in psychoanalysis, in literary theory, and recent colonial discourse analysis. Readings of Freud's case studies for example, show them to be structured by the mechanisms of the very psychic forces which they analyse -- operations of condensation, displacement and repression; and the difficulties of the foundationist project are nowhere better illustrated than in its most ambitious modern version -- that is, in Habermas's attempt to ground rationality in norms presupposed by the exercise of language, or communicative action.³¹

Of course a good deal could be said about the conception of "greatness" or "masterpiece" that even today in the 1990s in our university departments yields a corpus of canonised works written by White, upper class (caste) males, or by models derived therefrom. Such works ought to be contested or engaged in debate on two quite different fronts: on the one hand, by the argument that certain excluded works (written by women, blacks, low-caste and invisible experiences of various working-class people which are available in the non-standard genres of literary, popular and folk narratives) would serve the "declared purposes" of the canon better than some of those that are taught traditionally, and thus the application of the principle of greatness, disinterestedness, or objectivity is itself highly questionable. Secondly, we have to demonstrate in our analysis the specific ideological character

of a canon, or a "great work of art" in all its historico-cultural implications. This is so, because humanity is essentially plural: humanities, we ought to remind ourselves, is humanity in the plural. One of the important functions of education is to make one realise that other people act on moral convictions different from one's own. Therefore, a particular virtue of education in general, and of literature, history, philosophy, and social sciences in particular is a patient and thought-provoking instruction in otherness: vivid, compelling evidence of differences in cultures, mores, assumptions, values. At their best, these subjects make otherness palpable and make it comprehensible without reducing it to an inferior version of the same, as indeed a universalising humanism threatens to do. The dramatisation of a graspable plurality -- not a facile cultural relativism or diversity where the cutting edges, or subversive potential of 'otherness' is blunted -- is the task ahead for the re-writing of the educational agenda.³² The first step in this direction can be to break the boundaries of traditional intellectual disciplines -- by moving out of one's area of narrow specialisations, in order to grasp the inter-relatedness of various kinds of discourses and institutions in their historico-cultural formations: by --the juxtaposition--of literary, historical, sociological, scientific, technological, anthropological and psychoanalytic material. This will also require re-thinking the current structure of academic institutionalisation itself. Through this combination of critical material, and a methodological consciousness arising out of this bold enterprise alone can higher education become a constructive and responsible domain in our endeavour for social and political change.

Notes And References

This paper owes much to several long discussions I had with V.S. Sreedhara and Rookkamal Rastogi. My thanks are also due to N.Janardhana Rao for secretarial assistance.

1. See David Kopf, British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California Press, 1969). Kopf's account of the venture of these scholars and administrators in Bengal is a good example of the range of the British cultural and scholarly undertakings in India in the last quarter of the 18th century.

The term 'Orientalism', however, has gained popular currency after Edward W Said's highly polemical book Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books), 1978. Said's emphasis is on the way this term has been employed by the western academic and institutional discourses to describe the non-western societies and cultures. I have found Said's argument attractive and fruitful even though his analysis seems to be more in favour of discursive formations than actual material and institutional practices.

2. Letter of Warren Hastings to N. Smith, October 4, 1784. Quoted in G.R. Gleig, Memoirs of Warren Hastings, (London, 1841), Vol.I, p.8.
3. Ibid, p.372. For a nuanced and elaborate account of Hastings' several pronouncements linking British administration with ideals of contemporary Indian education, also see A. Mervyn Davies, Life and Times of Warren Hastings: Maker of British India (1935), (Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, reprint 1988).
4. William Jones, 'A Discourse on the Institution of A Society' Asiatic Researchers, Vol.I (1788), p.9.
5. See Challenge of Education --A Policy Perspective (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India, 1985). This document of the government of India represents an important stage in the process of reviewing and re-shaping the education system to enable it to meet the challenges of the future. See especially Foreword by K.C.Pant, former union minister of education. Also see Moonis Raza et al, Higher Education in India: A Survey (NIEPA, New Delhi: n.d.), particularly Chapter IV. The New Policy of Education raises far more issues than one can hope to deal with here. But it would not be unfair to say that in it a kind of mechanistic 'vision' which hardly deserves the name of science has acquired dominance, trying to fit the enormous complexity and inequality obtaining in the existing

education system into simplistic utilitarian equations. We have now entered a regime of 'human resource development' which treats human beings with the same 'beneficent' zeal that characterizes the State's attitude to other natural resources. There can be nothing at the centre of an official education policy in which the quiz (or the machine-readable objective-type examination) is the dominant form of knowledge. Indeed, there is no centre, only an inventory of discrete grains of 'information'.

6. William Jones, 'Third Annual Discourse', Asiatic Researchers, Vol.I(1788), pp.422-23.
7. *Ibid.*, p.425.
8. G. Canon, The Biography of William Jones, quoted in David Kopf (*op.cit.*), p.34.
9. H.T. Colebrooke, 'Discourse at the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland', quoted in Kopf, p.39.
10. G. Canon, The Biography of William Jones, quoted in Kopf, p.34.
11. For description of knowledge-institutions as the vehicle of state ideology, and the relations of knowledge with power in constituting human beings as subject, see Michael Foucault, Power/Knowledge, ed Colin Gordon (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980); (see especially the essay entitled, 'Truth and Power', pp.109-133) and Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in Lenin and Philosophy (London: NLB, 1971), pp.127-186.

Foucault's idea of "governmentality", however, goes far beyond the traditional liberal divide between state and civil society and posits a very specific form of power that entrenches itself in all 'modern' societies irrespective of the form of polity, or the nature of state. This specific kind of power has the well being of a population as its goal, a certain instrumental notion of economy as its mode of reasoning, and a very elaborate network of surveillance as its apparatus. It does not lend itself to a liberal interpretation of government characterising the State as a domain of control as well as coercion, and civil society as the zone of resistance as well as freedom. Such an idea of governmentality insists that by exercising itself through forms of representation and by offering itself as an important aspect of the self-policing of the very population over which it is exercised, the 'modern' form of power, with or without the guidance of the State, is capable of generating an immensely flexible network that can simultaneously braid coercion and consent. See Graham

Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.87-104.

12. For an excellent exposition of this issue see Gauri Viswanathan, Masks Of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India (London: Faber & Faber, 1990), pp.45-67.
13. Partha Chatterjee has described this method of comparative evaluation of cultures as a part of the 'Orientalist thematic'. See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse? (Delhi: O.U.P., 1986), pp.12-38.
14. While the post-colonial education policy has emphasised the need for a national goal of education, arguing for a departure from the British racist and exploitative system of education, its critique of the British system does not reflect an awareness even of the methodological concerns, let alone deeper epistemological issues which constituted the basis of the formation of the colonialist system of knowledge. Ironically, however, the nationalist education seeks to derive legitimacy from those very hegemonic processes aiming at a manufactured 'consensus' in public life which were set in motion during the period of Orientalist education. Most histories of Indian education thus typically fall into a pattern written as a history of acts and resolutions whose interest lies in their presumed effect on the existing social and cultural system. The broad questions addressed are: what political and social relationships are altered, modified, redefined, or at the other extreme, maintained or perpetuated? What kinds of new behaviours or modes of thought are instilled or promoted? What institutions are brought into existence, and what impression do they leave upon the social fabric? From such an inventory of question it is apparent that educational historians have concerned themselves less with what goes into its making -- the discourses and institutions that led to its formulation, the experience context in which the event occurred -- than with the outcome it had with regard to the targeted population.

For examples of these histories see especially, J.V. Naik, "An Early Appraisal of British Colonial Policy," Journal of the University of Bombay (1975-76), 44-45 (80-81): 243-270; Philip Altbach and Gail Kelly, eds. Education and the Colonial Experience. 2nd revised edition, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1984, and Aparna Basu, The Growth of Education and Political Development in India 1898-1920. (Delhi: O.U.P., 1974).

Indeed, to record the 'Indian' nationalist response to colonialist frameworks of education is no more an act of restoring the "native's voice" as, of course, not recording it is to render her/him mute. As Benita Parry points out, neither the critical positions against universalising narratives, nor the "self righteous rhetoric of resistance" which is limited to "devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority" sufficiently recognizes the colonised as possessor of another knowledge and other histories and as producer of alternative traditions. See Benita Parry, "Problems in Current theories of Colonial Discourse" Oxford Literary Review (Vol.IX, No.1-2, 1987), pp.27-58.

15. Parliamentary Debates, 1813. Quoted in Gauri Viswanathan, Masks of Conquest (op.cit), p.41.
16. Report of the President of the Board of Education at Bombay, April 1853, in Parliamentary Papers (1852-53), quoted in Viswanathan, *Ibid.*, p.42.
17. Raymond Williams has put together with admirable diligence the rise of the popular and peripheral voices within England, even as the Colonialist administration and education was preparing to filter them all through the grid of a homogenised canon gilded with a cosmopolitan as well as 'classical' temper and taste. See Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) and Culture and Society 1780-1950. 1958; rpt. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
18. British Report on Indian Education, published by Asiatic Journal (1826), p.450. This report reinforces the concept of rule by consent: by creating an ideological system of cultural production which is capable of generating its own controlled opposition and co-opting in the process a substantial part of the native intelligentsia as "willing participants" in the system. For the original concept of 'rule by consent' as developed by Antonio Gramsci, see Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p.57.
19. Charles Traveleyan, On the Education of the People of India (London: Longman, 1838) p.3.
20. Susie Tharu, "The Arrangement of an Alliance" in Svati Joshi (ed.) Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991), pp.160-181.
21. See Dharampal, The Beautiful Tree (New Delhi: Biblia Impex, 1981).

22. See Fifth and Final Report of the General Council on Education in India, 1885. This report was formed with a view to promoting the general education of people on a national basis, as laid down in the Education Despatch of 1854.
23. Traveleyan, On the Education of the People of India (op.cit).
24. Ibid, 124.
25. Ibid, pp.124-125.
26. Allahabad Government Gazette, Notification No.791A, 20 August, 1868.
27. Arthur Mayhew, Pre-Independence Education Policy of India: Study of British Educational Policy in India, 1835-1920, and of its Bearing on National Life and Problems in India Today (1926; rpt., Delhi: Archives Books, 1988), p.85.
28. Susie Tharu, "The Arrangement of (an Alliance" (op.cit), p.170.
29. See Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in Colin Gordon, ed., Power/Knowledge (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p.98. He writes, "The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike....In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the vis-a-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle."
30. Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, ed. D. Wilson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), See especially pp.80-81.
31. J. Habermas, Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (Cambridge: MA MIT Press, 1987), see esp. pp.83-88, 97-105.
32. Cultural relativism or what is often euphemistically called 'unity in diversity', has remained an essential ideological component in the programme of nation-building in India. For a classic example of this position, See Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India (Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1945).

Several attempts have been made in the recent past to pose the problem of "multiculturalism" -- which underwrites our existing national educational agenda -- differently from the founding values of liberalism. However, it is extremely difficult to justify the granting of substantively different collective rights to cultural groups on the basis of liberalism's commitment to procedural equality and universal citizenship. The charge levelled against "universal citizenship" is not merely that it forces everyone into a 'single homogeneous cultural mould', and thus threatens the distinct identities of 'minority groups', but that the 'mould' itself is only deceptively neutral, turning out to be in the last instance the culture of the dominant group, so that, as Partha Chatterjee puts it, "it is not everybody but only the minorities and the disadvantaged who are forced to forego their cultural identities. That being the case, neither universalism, nor neutrality can have any moral priority over the rights of cultural groups to protect their autonomous existence". See Partha Chatterjee, "Secularism and Toleration" Economic and Political Weekly, July 9, 1994, p.1774.

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