



Research Paper

Colonial and Neo-colonial Designs of the English Education in India

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ABSTRACT: Under the guise of 'liberal education' the British Empire tried to bring Indian natives into the European discursive network. After the colonial rule, the United States tried to replace the United Kingdom by pursuing the policy of gaining cultural hegemony through educational programme. Soon the canonical British texts lost their monopoly and the American and Common Wealth Literature acquired importance. The US foreign policy of acculturation was similar to the colonial strategy of 'civilizing mission'. As the Imperial Britain misappropriated terms like 'humanism' and 'universalism', the US propagated terms like 'natural justice' and 'globalization' to serve their ulterior purpose. Infact 'Globalization' and 'Americanisation' has soon become interchangeable words. America being a capitalist country, the policies concerned are formed by the multinationals and exploitation with the help of Eurocentric knowledge is its hall-mark. Commodification has become the trend and luring advertisements have become the misleading modern mythologies.

KEY-WORDS: Cultural hegemony, educational programme, universalism, globalization, ,neo-colonial designs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the background of neocolonial aggression all over the globe and particularly in the developing countries, a lot of research has been done to study about the introduction of 'English Education in India,' the colonial educational policies and their after- effects. Most of the former colonies including India, witnessed tendencies to look upon English Language and literature as a "form of continuing cultural imperialism," as Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan says in *The Lie of the Land* (13). The West's encounter with the rest of the world naturally began with territorial aggression and exploitation. Natural and human resources were exploited and the Government, the judicial system and the education system were devised to suit the exploitation of the colonized. The education system introduced in India had far reaching effect. Om P Juneja notes: "It throws the colonized out of the history-making process, calcifies his society and deadens his culture which in turn helps maintain the myth of the superiority of the colonizer over the colonized" (1).

By the introduction of English education, the British colonial rulers intended to establish their hegemony over India. Bill Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin in their introduction to *The Empire Writes Back* says; "It can be argued that the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate..." (3). Apparently the introduction of English studies was part of the civilizing mission which the British undertook by themselves. It was a tactful method to tame the natives and to get consent from the colonized people to establish the West's supremacy. The study of the aesthetics and ethics in English literature was supposed to nurture the mental cultivation of the natives to suit the empire's interest. In *Subject to Change* Susie Tharu says; "In fact literary studies were to provide the indefinable, but recognizable, quality that would help consolidate British rule while moderating the possibly dangerous effects of radical European ideas" (5).

Thomas Babington Macaulay with his Education Minute of 1835, recommended Lord Bentick, the then Governor General of India, for the official support of English Language and to withdraw support to Arabic and Sanskrit Language and education. This official promotion of English language and literature was detrimental to the survival of Sanskrit and Arabic which were traditionally the languages of scholarship in India. Charles Trevelyan notes about the then situation:

Indeed, books in the learned native languages Arabic and Sanskrit are such a complete drug in the market that the school book society has for sometime past ceased to print them; twenty three thousand such volumes, most of them folios and quartos, filled the library, or rather the lumber room, of the education

committee at the time when their printing was put a stop to, and during the preceding three years their sale had not yielded quite one thousand rupees. (79)

The British official policy was not only pernicious to the vernacular languages but also to the ethnic culture and dignity which the books inherently contained.

By the introduction of English education in India, the British claimed that they were giving the primitive natives an access to genuine values, civility and modernity. Mahasweta Sengupta says:

The English Education Act of 1835 sought to replace the diverse indigenous education systems that had catered to different communities of India, and was clearly an effort to subject the natives to the discursive network of the ruler. In other words, the Act not only replaced Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian as a medium of instruction, but, inculcated a certain ideology that was not immediately apparent to Indians who thought that gates of “modern” knowledge were being opened for them for the first time in their history. The result was not only the imposition of English and with it, the world view of those in power, but also the indoctrination of the idea that this language possessed a literature that was surely superior to anything in the native’s domain of learning or knowledge. What the British needed was not merely a class of people who would staff the lower rungs of the administrative machinery, but also a class whose categories would be framed by the structures of English discourse. (219-220)

English education in India advanced with the covert or overt patronage and support of the British agencies. But this was not entirely a part of British connivance but also out of a “White man’s burden” with sheer ignorance about the rich culture and plurality of India. So many institutions emerged for the purpose of “English education” to Indians and the Hindu College of Calcutta was one of such prominent institutions. Referring to the Hindu College, Manju Dalmia remarks: “European professors were appointed to raise standards, and Hindu College became the focus of attention of the British India Society, formed in England by retired company officials and English philanthropists for ‘the intellectual and moral improvement’ of Indians” (48).

It is quite evident that the British could not understand the profound Indian philosophy and culture and considered Indians as socially, intellectually and morally inferior. Charles Trevelyan the brother-in-law of Macaulay and a high official in the British India in his work, *On the Education of the People of India*, emphasizes the superiority of the British against the inferior positioning of the Indians (36). He claims that English Language and Literature would help Indians to “become more English than Hindu . . .” (190).

A careful reading of the documents of the British India reveals that the “civilizing mission” of the British also targeted the realm of religion. Macaulay himself writes: “No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. . . . It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal thirty years later” (Arthur Mayhew 15). The symbolic significance of idolatry and other such conventional practices was not even realized by the majority of practitioners, let alone the British. So, the missionaries also took it as their obligatory duty, to lead the ‘Hindoos’ to the “right path” and they thought that their task would be easier if they taught the natives the English language. Manju Dalmia explains in one of her foot-notes in *The Lie of the Land*:

The initial foreign impetus for teaching Indians English came from the missionaries. In fact it was not till the 1830s that the state assumed a public role in education. The missionaries thought that a knowledge of English amongst the Indians would make their conversion easier. The Serampore College, founded in 1818 by Carey, Marshman and Ward to train native evangelists, combined the religious courses of study with a training in Western science, English language and English literature. (46)

But missionary endeavours in the English education programme often invited sharp criticism and reaction from the part of the natives as it happened in the Hindu College as narrated by Manju Dalmia in her article “Derozio: English Teacher” in *The Lie of the Land*. So naturally, the British made their official English education apparently neutral and distanced from religious motives, “As an alternative, the missionaries focussed on the shared features of Literature and Christianity” (Jyotsna G. Singh 129). She also notes: “This emphasis on English Literature as a vast repository of Christian values helped the administrators to represent literary texts as transcendental and time- less. Thus they found an ally in literature, in promoting the superiority of the British/Christian culture, under the guise of a liberal education” (128). Although some missionaries asked whether literature could really substitute the Bible (Jyotsna G. Singh 128), the argument was that teaching English Literature would be better to check “the harmful effects of teaching English for its own sake, without any reference to morals or values” (Gauri Viswanathan “English in a Literate Society” 36). Thus, even English canonical texts which apparently do not deal with Biblical themes like the works of Shakespeare were used for propagating Christian values to civilize the natives. The testimony of a priest, William Keane is given in *Masks of Conquest*:

Shakespeare, though by no means a good standard, is full of religion; it is full of the common sense principles which none but Christian men can recognise. Sound Protestant Bible principles, though not actually folded in words, are there set out to advantage, and the opposite often condemned. So with Goldsmith . . . and

many other books which are taught in the schools . . . have undoubtedly sometimes a favourable effect in actually bringing them to us missionaries. (80)

It became the fashion of the day in the early nineteenth century in Calcutta, not only to appreciate Shakespearean plays but also to recite an act or scene from the plays. Thus Macaulay's Anglicized subjects were also known for their ability to quote from English classics (Jyotsna G. Singh 130). Such types of exhibition of "abilities" or pedantry by the enthusiastic Indian youth were also a tactic to find a place for them in the new socio-economic terrain opened by the British. The objection of the orthodox natives to the direct propagation of the English classical texts which help "inculcation of a code of Christian values by which men of culture were to live" (Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest* 56) was to be nullified by the offer of employment opportunities under the British rule. "After the early nineteenth century, Calcutta was where jobs and wealth were possible through contacts with Europeans. Knowledge of English was a very valuable asset and the English text therefore became an object of increasing importance" (Manju Dalima 44). Manju Dalima elaborates: According to British official thinking, jobs linked to education would be incentive enough for Indians to pursue a learning that would provide government with a class of men to support their rule as well as cheap manpower. . .

The government was very much aware of the possibly negative political consequences of openly advocating English education. It wanted educated Indians to feel that the British respected Indian traditions, learning and manner. (45)

Thus the ideological underpinnings of the English Education include a sort of missionary zeal which wanted the natives of India with their ethnic culture, religion and vernacular languages, to accept the "superior" British culture, religion and language. The Empire effectively used English Literature to serve their purpose of establishing their hegemony. The English classical texts were projected as carrying the real values of the European people. Peace, justice, equality, fraternity and liberty became almost synonymous with European values. Mahasweta Sengupta observes:

To a large extent, the popular construction of the identity of the English in the colony was based on two stereo types of the romantic. The revolutionary fighting for justice and equality, and the spiritually blissful calm of the prophet—the two aspects exemplified by Byron and Wordsworth. Therefore, certain forms of representation came to be taken as the final truth about the colonizer's race. Like their romantic revolutionaries, the British were conceived as always on the side of liberty, equality and fraternity; they were taken as the torch-bearers of liberal humanism in the world, and were given credit for the imaginative achievements of poets like Shelley and Byron who were actually social outcasts at home. Romanticism also valorized the individual imagination to such an extent that it seemed to be a place where everything was possible; this valorization gave colonial subjects a taste of power that could be safely contained in an aesthetic and not in a socio-political context. (230)

It is interesting to note that in practice the Empire was just antithetical to the values reflected in the English texts. The same gap can be seen between the British official stance on the English education policy and practice. They pretended to be the most civilized people in the world. They wanted the English educated Indians to believe that the English were far superior in each and every aspect and that the natives should imitate the British. Naturally if the middle and upper class elites emulate the British, the other categories also would consider everything connected to the British as speckless, superior and covetable and this itself is the Filtration theory propounded by Macaulay and Stuart Mill. What the study of English language and literature aimed at was this formation of an alien taste, opinion, morals and intellect, i.e., establishing the hegemony of an alien culture over the ethnic culture. Whatever ideals projected through the medium of English Literary texts, were, far from the reality experienced. But the native's faculty of thought and response were rather conditioned by the pseudo-ideals of the English texts. The English education in India served the purpose of this kind of a pretension as Sengupta elaborates: . . . English literature was given primary importance in the curriculum not because it would help the natives learn better English and communicate in a more efficient manner, but because that literature would provide them with alternative experiences of English culture. Indians, it was hoped, would valorize the texts over the reality of the imperial race in India as authentic specimens of the culture that the texts represented. If the reality conflicted with the textual representation, the native was taught to consider the textual world of liberalism and justice as the ultimate truth about their ruler's race. (220)

The kind of "humanism" or "Liberal education" provided by the Empire to the Indians was one in which the European standards definitely played the role of the criterion. It always insisted on the "European superiority" and the "Oriental inferiority". Anyone who could not accept the Western concepts was naturally outside the purview of real humans. Jyotsna G. Singh explains: "Thus, as the colonial ideology projected its viewpoints as transcendental and ahistorical, it was able to claim to represent 'human nature' and to define those whom it considered to be outside the bounds of humanity - who then became its 'others'" (131).

Thus when the colonial "education programme" in India is analysed, it could be seen that the "civilizing mission" itself was based on a false Eurocentric notion. The concepts of liberal education, universalism and

humanism were used rather as a mask to cover the reality, i.e., the ruthless, opportunistic face of imperialism. Gauri Viswanathan in her article, "Currying Flavour: The Beginning of English Literary Studies in India" says:

In effect, the strategy of locating authority in English texts all but effaced the often sordid history of colonialist expropriation, material exploitation, and class and race oppression behind European world dominance. Making the Englishman known to the natives through the products of his mental labour removed him from the plane of ongoing colonialist activity — of commercial operations, military expansion, administration of territories — and de-actualised and diffused his material presence in the process. . . . The English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state . . . (103).

Under the guise of a liberal education, the empire tried to bring the natives into the European discursive network. Elimination of ethnic culture or genocide as it happened in many colonies could not be made possible in India. The stains of the Empire's connivance and callous treatment can be found in the literatures of the times. Harish Trivedi opines: "Not in the railways or the canals or the postal system or cricket or Christianity but rather in English and Indian literatures is to be found the deepest impress of the British Raj; the most permanent and authentic record of its process and proceedings" (1) and hence the importance of the literature.

After the diminution of the empire also, the colonial strategies of establishing hegemony over the less privileged continued and an analysis would foreground the present neocolonial designs. The only difference is that the epicenter of capitalistic motives turned to be the United States. The motive of hegemony through educational programme was also pursued by America. Soon after independence, in India, American Literature gained vast popularity and established itself as a major strain of studies. Narasimhaiah wrote in *ACLALS Bulletin* :

... India, witnessed the expansion of American Literature as an academic discipline from mere scratch in 1957 to an independent status in almost every one of its eighty-odd universities in the beginning of the 1970s. It witnessed, too, the flow of hundreds of young Indian teachers to American Universities and a considerable number of the senior American faculty in the opposite direction to Indian Universities; the organisation of local, regional and national seminars: a national network of USIS libraries, distribution of book gifts, reissue of inexpensive editions, of classics, the founding of American Studies Research Centre with sophisticated research materials. (1 -2)

Soon the canonical British texts lost their monopoly and American and common wealth literature acquired importance. As Narasimhaiah writes in *Moving Frontiers of English Studies in India*:

one of the major academic events in the Literature of the twentieth century is that the English Literature syllabus from Chaucer to Hardy has often made room for 'Literature in English' in which English Literature has slowly acquiesced in the loss of pride of place with American Literature and Literature of the Commonwealth sharing the front rank in world Literature (30).

But this enthusiasm of the US to extend all-out support for the study of American Literature, as in the case of the British, was also not so innocent. It was again part of the state policy of the U.S., to extend their reach and influence. Tim Watson views the project in his article in *ARIEL* as "...a postcolonial instrument of US foreign policy remarkably similar to the British uses of literary education in India during the nineteenth - century colonial period..." (63). J.W. Fulbright who is associated with the exchange programs and scholarships after his name writes: "Educational exchange is not merely a laudable experiment, but a positive instrument of foreign policy, designed to mobilize human resources just as military and economic policies seek to mobilize physical resources" (xi). The echoes of the "civilizing mission" are evident here. Tim Watson further writes:

My skepticism about the overall benefits of this kind of state/university relationship does not mean that I doubt the importance or local efficacy of individual exchanges. However, proponents of a cosy relationship between the ASA and federal agencies in Washington ought perhaps to go back and examine the substance and rhetoric of debates over exchange programs, and international cultural programs in general, in US government circles in the immediate postwar period. Charles Johnson, for instance, head of the international Information Agency testified before a senate subcommittee in 1955 that educational exchanges were the "hard core" of US information programs during world war II, and had therefore become associated with US propaganda "greater strength, greater respectability, and greater credibility". (64)

This intentional education programme sponsored by the US has also invited introspection from the US experts in education, which once again confirms the "civilizing mission" of capitalist forces. Robert Spiller, the co-author of *American Literary History* and one of the pioneer figures of American studies in the US also repeatedly confirms the kind of acculturation US tries in foreign countries (3-9). Thus it becomes evident that just as the British used "education" for its "civilizing mission" which in turn was the means to achieve the Britain's imperialistic motives, the US, in the post colonial world has been establishing its hegemony through different capitalistic strategies including that of Eurocentric knowledge and education.

In fact even the supremacy of British-dominated canon in the field of literature was questioned in the 1960s and the framing up of Commonwealth Literature was one of its outcomes. Sooner or later the advances of America to establish their hegemony in the field of literature were also resisted. The opening address of A. Jeaffares, the first editor of *ARIEL* and a prominent figure in the Post war British Academy, at a conference at the University of Leeds, September 1964 which paved the way for the formation Commonwealth Literary Studies,

confirms the fact (Jeaffares 9-14). Alan McLeod the editor of *The Commonwealth Pen* or *PEN* also writes of “the somewhat chauvinistic decision not to invite any Americans in the 1964 Leeds Conference, on the theory that they might ‘over run’ the field” (12).

Just as the Imperial Britain misappropriated terms like “humanism” and “universalism”, the US also misuses terms and concepts like “natural justice” and “globalization” to serve their ulterior purposes. Gauri Viswanathan writes in her introduction to *ARIEL* : “...Americanisation and globalization have become interchangeable terms, notwithstanding the fact that what appears as globalization from the American perspective will be read more realistically as Americanisation from another site in the world” (22). Interestingly, Gauri Viswanathan also refers to the renaming of the American Studies Research Centre in Hyderabad, India as the Indo American Centre for International Studies (21).

America being a capitalist country, the policies concerned are formed by the multinationals and exploitation with the help of Eurocentric knowledge is its hall-mark. Commodification has become the trend and luring advertisements have become the misleading modern mythologies. The products of the multinationals and values of the West are made covetable for the people through calculated propaganda. Thus we can see that colonization still works more at the intellectual or cultural level.

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