

Chapter – 08

Civilising the ‘Native’ Educating the Nation

British rule affected Rajas and Nawabs, peasants and tribals.

British felt that they had a cultural mission, they had to ‘civilise the natives’, change their customs and values.

How the British saw Education-The Tradition of Orientation:

(i) In 1783, William Jones a linguist, was appointed as a junior judge at the Supreme Court that the company had set up. He started studying ancient Indians text on law, philosophy, religion, politics, morality, arithmetic, medicine and other sciences.

(iii) Englishmen like Henry Thomas Colebrooke and Nathaniel Halhed were busy discovering the ancient Indian heritage, mastering Indian languages and translating Sanskrit and Persian works into English.

(iv) A Madrasa was set up in Calcutta in 1781 to promote the study of Arabic, Persian and Islamic law.

(v) In 1791, the Hindu College was established in Benaras to encourage the study of ancient Sanskrit texts that would be useful for the administration of the country.

Grave Errors of the East:

(i) In early 19th century many British officials began to criticize the Orientalist version of learning. They said that knowledge of the East was full of errors & unscientific thought.

(ii) Eastern literature was non-serious & light-hearted.

(iii) James Mill was one of those who attacked the Orientalists. According to him, the aim of education ought to be teach what was useful and practical. So, Indians should be made familiar with the scientific and technical advances that the West had made, rather than with the poetry and sacred literature of the Orient.

(iv) **Thomas Babington Macaulay**, another critic of Orientalists, saw India as an uncivilized country that needed to be civilized. He emphasized the need to teach the English language. Following Macaulay's minute, the **English Education Act of 1835** was introduced.

(vi) A decision was taken to make English the medium of instruction for higher education and to stop the promotion of Oriental institutions.

Education for Commerce:

(i) In 1854, Wood's Despatch, an educational dispatch, was sent to India. Outlining the educational policy that was to be followed in India. It emphasized on the practical benefits of the system of European learning.

(ii) Wood's Despatch argued that European learning would improve the moral character of Indians and make them truthful and honest and thus supply the company with civil servants who could be trusted and depended upon.

(iii) Following the 1854 Despatch, several measures were introduced by the British. Steps were taken to establish a system of university education. Attempts were also made to bring about changes within the system of school education.

What happened to the Local Schools:

(i) In the 1830s William Adam, a Scottish missionary toured the districts of Bengal and Bihar and was given charge by the company. To give report on the progress of education in vernacular schools.

(ii) Adam found that the system of education was flexible and local schools were known as **pathshalas**.

(iii) There were no fixed fee, no printed books, no separate school building, no benches or chairs, no blackboards, no system of separate classes, no roll-call registers, no annual examinations and no regular time-table. Fee depended on the income of parents: the rich had to pay more than the poor.

(iv) Classes were usually held under a Banyan tree or in the corner of a village shop, in temple or at the guru's home.

(v) Teaching process was oral and the guru decided what to teach , in accordance with the needs of the students.

(vi) The guru interacted separately with groups of children with different levels of learning.

New Routines, New Rules:

(i) After 1854 the company decided to improve the system of vernacular education by introducing order within the system, imposing routines, establishing rules, ensuring regular inspections.

(ii) Company appointed a number of government pandits each in charge of looking after four to five schools.

(iii) Teaching was now to be based on textbooks and learning was to be tested through a system of annual examination.

(iv) Students to pay a regular fee, asked to attend regular classes, sit on fixed seats and obey the new rules of discipline.

(v) Those Pathshalas which accepted the new rules were supported through government grants.

(vi) New rules had some consequences, students have to attend school regularly even during harvest time. Inability to attend school seen as indiscipline and as evidence of the lack of desire to learn.

The Agenda for a National Education:

(i) Some Indians impressed with the development in Europe felt that western education would help to modernize India.

(ii) Huge capital was invested on education; to establish more schools, colleges & universities.

(iii) Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore reacted against western education.

English Education has enslaved us:

(i) Mahatma Gandhi urged that colonial education created a sense of inferiority in the minds of Indians. It was sinful and it enslaved Indians, it cast an evil spell on them. Moreover, it destroyed the pride Indians had in their own culture.

(ii) Mahatma Gandhi wanted an education that could help Indians to recover their sense or dignity and self-respect.

(iii) According to Mahatma Gandhi, Indian languages ought to be medium of teaching and the means to develop a person's mind and soul.

(iv) Mahatma Gandhi on Western education said, " focussed on reading & writing rather than oral knowledge; value textbooks rather than practical knowledge".

Tagore's 'Abode of Peace':

(i) Rabindranath Tagore stated Shantiniketan in 1901.

(ii) Tagore as a child hated going to school as he described school as a prison. He said he could never do what he felt like doing in school.

(iii) He wanted to set up schools where children were happy, where they could be free and creative, where the child was able to explore their own thoughts and desires. He felt that childhood ought to be a time of self-learning.

(iv) He emphasized the need to teach Science and technology at Shantiniketan along with art, music and dance.

(v) According to him, creative learning be encouraged only within a natural environment and hence set up his school 100 kilometres away from Calcutta in a rural setting. He saw it as an "abode of peace" (shantiniketan), where living in harmony with nature, children could cultivate their natural creativity.

The difference between the educational views of Mahatma Gandhi & Rabindranath Tagore

- Mahatma Gandhi thought that the western education was hampering the Indian culture. He also felt that the ideas of western education could modernise the Indian people but could not educate them .
- Tagore wanted to combine the good aspects of it with the Indian traditions. He recognised the importance of science and technology and wanted to promote them along with art ,music and dance at Shantiniketan.