
Indian Higher Education: The Legacy

Introduction

We have a heritage in higher education drawing upon many sources, viz. ancient, medieval, colonial and post-independence. It is upon this heritage that further developments directed towards new national objectives in the changed circumstances on the eve of the 21st century have been based. Our legacy has assets as well as liabilities and both will have to be taken into account. In this unit, we propose to examine what resources and traditions our country has had on which it has to build and which legacy or liabilities we have to take into account while planning towards fulfillment of national goals.

Learning outcomes

After going through this unit you will be able

- to appreciate the development of higher education in general, and in India, in particular;
- to understand the genesis of our affiliating, external examination – oriented system, weak in science, technology, research and creativity;
- to acquaint yourself with the role played by the intelligentsia in the national movement in creating a suitable system. This will be highlighted in both its positive and negative aspects;
- to appreciate the repercussions of colonialism for India's higher education and, finally;
- to identify the problems which remain and have to be taken into account while evaluating the post-independence developments in education.

The evolution of the university

As with other professional groups, historical traditions play a key role in the academic profession. The history of the academic consciousness of the academic profession not only tells us a great deal about how the profession developed over time, but also the contemporary situation. This section is devoted to a discussion on the historical perspective of the university.

University – the concept

To begin with, let us note that the typical contemporary Indian institutional form of higher education is the university with a number of affiliated or constituent colleges. The unitary universities are few and far between. However, the concept of a university is generally associated with Europe, where many universities have a continuous tradition of a thousand years or more, and where, but for a few exceptions, separate colleges within a university did not exist. The university was an institution which was **universal** in as much as it gathered students or scholars from many lands (territorial university) and pursued knowledge of various kinds (intellectual universality) at the higher levels within a single unit. The universal milieu in terms of people as well as knowledge was and is conducive to free enquiry, to fertilization of ideas across disciplinary boundaries and to research as well as teaching.

Development of the university system

Over the Western world, the university developed many variations. Oxford and Cambridge took the form of colleges in which learned fellows lived along with their students and taught them mainly as under-graduates. To begin with Oxford and Cambridge colleges were essentially academically independent. Their being located in the same place and within a common organization merely facilitated individual exchange. In the beginning there were no external examinations which were instituted only as a measure of reform of corrupt practices which had crept in during the eighteenth century. In Germany particularly, a tradition of research and specialization around a chair occupied by a specialist professor, and the free development of disciplines (**Lernfreiheit** and **Lehrfreiheit**, i.e., freedom to learn and to teach according to one's preference and area of competence) was the custom. The French university acquired large number of students who were not residents and were free to attend or not attend the lectures of professors. The role of the University of Paris and of its faculty grew to be central to society. The University became responsible for training the key professions of the day – the clergy, lawyers and medical doctors. Based mainly on the University of Paris model, universities grew throughout Europe. Only in Italy and to a lesser extent in Spain did the student dominated model of the university persist.

Influence of science and technology

When Science and Technology grew, many specialized institutions developed e.g. the higher national schools such as **Ecole Normale Superieure**, **Ecole Technique** etc. in France, and the technological institutes (**Technische Hochschule**) in Germany. In post-revolution USSR, a large number of specialized institutes were established. The circumstances in the U.S.A. were however special. It was a new country of immigrants continuously opening up newer areas and building a new society and economy and, therefore, less bound by tradition and more free to change institutional forms and practices. Greater emphasis was laid on **useful** learning, e.g., agriculture, and later social work, education, etc., and on **extension** functions, i.e., direct teaching to farmers, artisans, professionals in skills and knowledge of immediate practical use, in some of the universities. In Britain, during the nineteenth century, the following factors marked the universities of the industrial cities (called the Redbrick Universities):

- a) the introduction of Science and Technology,
- b) the participation of industrialists, merchants and professionals in university management, and
- c) a preponderance of day scholars (in contrast to residential universities where most students lived on campus in secluded places)

- d) teaching programmes and research in non-traditional and interdisciplinary areas relevant to socio-political needs of the country.

Indian higher education – a historical perspective

The development of most Indian higher education as we know it today derives from a particular style of British higher education even as it is influenced by all the others. But before we discuss that we must note another important source – and that is, India's heritage in higher education.

While accepting the basically Western origins of today's higher education in India, we must notice important and significant elements of India's own past which have also been influential in varying degrees. In the long distant past as also in the not so distant past, India had its institutions of higher education, some like the universities and other quite different. There were two, or perhaps three, streams of tradition on which we have to rely. They are (i) the **ancient and medieval Sanskrit and Buddhist traditions**, (ii) the **medieval Arabic and Persian traditions** and (iii) other **East and South Indian traditions**, such as the **Tamil traditions**. In the sections to follow, we will discuss the first two of these traditions.

Ancient seats of learning

We have existing records of centers of learning and enquiry at Taxila, Kanchipura (Conjeevaram), Nalanda, Odantapuri (or Uddandapma), Sri Dharryakataka, Kashmira, and Vikramashila. We get a valuable picture of the working of some of these institutions from Chinese travellers. Fi-hien, Hiuen Tsang, and I-Tsing who visited India in the fifth and seventh centuries A.D. Fi-hien, for example, was in India between 399 and 414 A.D. and visited Nalanda but apparently found no monks or monasteries. However, when Hiuen-Tsang came (629 A.D. to 645 A.D.) he found a flourishing Nalanda University as a Buddhist center of learning which, by then, had a world-wide reputation. Its site has been found, near Rajgir in Bihar, and excavations have revealed the existence of large buildings, a library, and other academic and residential buildings.

Perhaps it was not until 450 A.D. that it received recognition of the King of Magadh and assumed the character of a university, and it may have existed for four hundred years, until about 850 A.D. Hiuen Tsang wrote about Nalanda:

“The priests, to the number of several thousand, are men of the highest ability and talent. They follow in sincerity the precepts of the moral law. The rules of this convent are severe and all the priests are bound to observe them. The countries of India respect them and follow them. The day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night they engage in discussion, the old and the young help one another. Those, who cannot discuss questions out of Triptika are little esteemed and are obliged to hide themselves for shame If men of other quarters desire to enter and take part in discussions, the keeper of the gate proposes some hard questions, many are unable to answer, and retire.

He further adds that 70 to 80 per cent of such applicants failed to pass the test for admission. The sense of integrity and discipline is notable, as is the role of discussion as a means of learning.

Vikramashila, founded in around 800 A.D. had given and taken with Nalanda, but about its location it is only known that it was on a hill on the right bank of the Ganges. Among the subjects studied here were **grammar**, **metaphysics** including **logic** and **ritualistic** books. The monastery had 108 resident monks and priests at one time. Pandits who were eminent for learning and character were rewarded by having their images painted on the walls of the university. Six of the most learned sages were appointed

to guard its gates, i.e., to control admissions. This university was destroyed during the invasion of Bakhtiar Khilji in 1203 A. D.

Takshashila (Taxila) whose site is now in Pakistan, was a center of its own kind which is frequently referred to as a seat of higher learning in **Buddhist literature**, as well as a Brahmanic intellectual center. Taxila was the capital of Gandhara in northwest India, the native land of Panini. It was a strong hold of Brahmanic learning from the 4th or 5th century B.C., and it was here at the time of Alexander's invasion that the Greeks first came into contact with Brahmanic philosophers and were astonished by their asceticism and strange doctrines. Students here could get instruction in almost any subject, religious or secular, from the Vedas to mathematics and medicine and astrology and archery.

This heritage is of interest because these universities existed in one of the best periods in Indian history, where philosophy, art (Ajanta and Ellora caves are of the same period) and science and technology all flourished. The admission by measure of excellence, and interactive ways of learning combined with intellectual honesty and rigour made them famous.

The Arabic and Sanskrit tradition

The **Arabic madrassah** was a much more unified entity, intact when the British came but not much more enquiry-based and perhaps also more religious in the orientation of its learning or methods. In terms of social extraction, while the **Sanskrit scholar** was by definition a **Brahmin male**, the Arabic scholar was perhaps a little less exclusive in his social origin or location. In both Sanskrit and Arabic higher learning, much secular and scientific learning in law, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, etc. was cultivated besides literature, philosophy and theology with the help of books and discussion but chiefly through memorization. The creation of new knowledge based on imagination, free thinking or intense observation was not so much in demand in those feudal monarchical societies as conformity and ability to reproduce long texts purely from memory.

This tradition did not continue to grow as such. The **causes** of its **decline** could possibly be

- the Indian caste system leading to segregation of knowledge of Brahmins from or manual skills of the "others"/castes and lesser status / prestige of practical arts or perhaps
- the related failure of an Indian Industrial Revolution and Nation State to emerge for which the times and technology were not yet ripe or
- the dogmatic, authoritarian intellectual tendencies set in motion by traditional Hindu orthodoxy. These were the main causes of the **decline** of the tradition. Most scholars tended to concentrate in some cities such as Varanasi, Pune, Tanjore, Madurai, Nadia etc. mostly by encouragement of local rulers.

Self-assessment

1. Write a short essay on the evolution of the University in Europe. Restrict your answer to 200 words.

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The advent of the British

The advent of the British was at first in the form of a great **commercial concern** called the **East India Company**, most of whose employees had low salaries and an indifferent attitude towards local education. In order to protect the English trading interests, the commercial enterprise turned into service of the empire. To fulfil the new job, the Company had to involve the dominant groups of Indian society – which would facilitate the setting up of the colonial state. The colonizers introduced a system of education in India with the agenda of initiating a process of **socialization** in order to create a new order in the colony and a civil society amongst the natives. But unlike the popular education movements in nineteenth century England where education had become a viable dream for all, in India the colonizers had no such objectives. Their objectives were to expand and facilitate profit making with the help of dependable persons in the native community and to ‘pierce India’s ignorance with the light of Western science to enable Indians to lead a life of reason, with their passion under control’. These sentiments were echoed by Charles Grant who came to India in 1767 who contended that only the “healing touch” of Christianity through the dissemination of Science and Literature of Europe could transform the situation. In this connection he believed that the knowledge of English language was essential and establishment of English schools under teachers of “good moral character” was needed. Charles Grant’s views on education covered all aspects of the imperialist education-religio, cultural, commercial and political. No British thinker on Indian education from Macaulay to Curzon and later could improve upon his blue print (Sharp, 1920:85). The Act of British Parliament, renewing the East India Company’s Charter for another 20 years passed in 1813, authorized, on the one hand, missionaries to operate in India, and on the other, the Governor General to appropriate “a sum of not less than one lac of rupees” for the revival and improvement of literature, the encouragement of learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the Sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India. In spite of the Parliamentary sanction, there had been a lull in the educational activity and the money remained unspent. Nothing was done upto 1823 when General Committee of Public Instruction was appointed. The Committee recognized the Calcutta Madrasa and the Benaras Sanskrit College. In 1823 Lord Amherst founded the Sanskrit College of Calcutta. Two more oriental colleges at Agra and Delhi were also established. The Committee undertook the task of publishing Sanskrit and Arabic texts and translation of English books containing, ‘useful knowledge’ into oriental classical languages.

By now the British Government had become the principal agent in disseminating modern education in India which was primarily motivated by the political, administrative and economic needs of Britain in India. It was not a mere accident that by the middle of the nineteenth century, especially under Lord Dalhousie important beginnings of the inauguration of modern education in India were made. It was by that time that Britain brought under its rule a substantial portion of the Indian territory. It was also then that the industrial products of Britain began to flow into India and the trade between Britain and India reached huge proportions.

The well-known “**minute**” of **Macaulay** was written in 1835, championing the cause of English, and summarizing the aim of British educational policy in the following words: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern, a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect”. Sir William Bentinck was the Governor General who approved this minute, and he was the same who made **Sati** illegal in 1829 and took steps to eradicate **thugi** and infanticide, besides establishing the first Medical College at Calcutta.

**Higher Education:
Retrospects and Prospects**

For whatever we might say about the deleterious effects of English on education, English education was very popular in the big cities of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras because in the otherwise uncertain economic situation, it was a passport to jobs, even though at the lower rungs.

Education influenced the self-perception of the educated Indian. In some individuals education caused a turmoil, an identity crises but in a greater number of cases, education led to a new positive self-image. The educated man's loyalty to the empire was distinct from that of the semi-literate soldier precisely because it had the added component of faith in oneself as a product of English education. This faith made the completion of one's educational career look like a second birth (Kumar: 35)

Soon demand for higher education became so great that a note was sent in 1845 from the Indian side to the Court of Directors of the East India company including a proposal for setting up universities in India, in addition to other very important recommendations regarding education as a whole. This, in a way, led to another famous document, the "Education Despatch" or "Wood's Despatch" of 1854, which was sent by the Company to Dalhousie, the then Governor General of India. Dalhousie had a positive attitude towards education and he had already converted the senior part of the Calcutta Madrassah into the Arabic College, and the Hindu College in Calcutta into the Presidency College, thrown open to young people of all castes, classes or creeds and expected to "expand itself into something approaching to the dignity and proportions of an Indian university". He had also extended support to technical education and women's education. Charles Wood had sent a directive of a 100 paragraphs regarding many aspects of education, but a small quotation from the opening paragraphs presented give a taste of this important document:

"Among many subjects of importance, none can have a stronger claim to our attention than that of education(for) confirming upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge and to supply you with servants to whose probity you may with increased confidence commit offices of trust in India".....

"Not, while the character of England is deeply concerned in the success of our efforts for the promotion of education, are her material interests altogether unaffected by the advance of European knowledge in India; this knowledge will teach the natives of India the marvelous results of the employment of labour and capital, rouse them to emulate us in the development of the vast resources of their country, guide them in their efforts, and gradually, but certainly, confer upon them all the advantages which accompany the healthy increase of wealth and commerce; and at the same time, secure to us a large and more certain supply of many articles for our manufacturers and extensively consumed by all classes of our population, as well as an almost inexhaustible demand for a produce of British labour"

The Despatch further observed, "The system of Science and Philosophy which forms the learning of the East abounds with grave errors, and Eastern literature is at least very deficient as regards all modern discovery and improvement" and concluded the discussion with the following declaration: "We must emphatically declare that the education which we desire to see extended in India is that which has for its object the diffusion of the improved Art, Sciences, Philosophy and Literature of Europe; in short of European knowledge" (Richey: 366). The Despatch made valuable suggestions as regards university education. The Despatch emphasized the importance of vocational instruction and also recommended Teachers Training Institutions on the model then prevalent in England.

The ideas and methods advocated in the Despatch dominated the field for about five decades – the same period also witnessed a rapid westernization of the education system in India and the demise of the indigenous system.

Soon after this Despatch was received, Dalhousie set in motion the process of creating universities in India, and in the very year of the revolt in 1857 the three universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras came into existence. It is a quaint fact that Wood himself was afraid of creating a "discontented class unless they are employed" they would ruin the British Empire in India ultimately.

Although, it was good that the universities were created and modern learning thus promoted in India. These were, however, unconnected with even the positive aspects of oriental learning, and with Indian culture, and consideration for the uplift of Indian society. They became such a powerful stereotype that even to this day, more than 56 years after Independence, we have not quite succeeded in altering them to our advantage. These universities were set up as purely examining bodies with affiliated colleges where actual teaching took place. To further improve the situation, the British Government set up the first **Indian Universities Commission** in 1902 and in this connection Lord Curzon is reported to have said,

"How different is India! Here the university has no corporate existence in the same (as in Oxford Cambridge) sense of the term; it is not a collection of buildings, it is scarcely even a site. It is a body that controls courses of study and sets examination papers to the pupils of affiliated colleges. They are not part of it. They are frequently not in the same city, sometimes not in the same province". (quoted in the report of the Education Commission, 1964-66).

Lord Curzon was not satisfied with the condition of Indian Universities which were set upon London model by the Wood's Despatch. Though the London University had been remodeled in 1829, Indian Universities went on following the old model. They were all examining bodies and affiliating universities. The expansion in higher education had been so great and so much burden was placed on each university that it was incapacitated to discharge its duties efficiently.

In 1901 Lord Curzon summoned the first All India Conference of Directors of Public Instruction and representatives of universities at Simla. The deliberation of the Conference were a great help to him in planning his educational reforms. Lord Curzon appointed a Commission on Education known as the Indian Universities Commission under the Presidency of Sir Thomas Raleigh on 27 January 1902 'to enquire into the condition and prospects of universities in India and to recommend proposals for improving their constitution and working'. (Report Indian University Commission, 1902, p.1). The recommendation of the Indian Universities Commission were incorporated in the Government of India Resolution 1904. The publication of the Government of India Resolution was followed by the passing of the Indian Universities Act, 1904. The functions of universities were enlarged. They could now appoint their new professors and lecturers, undertake research, hold and manage educational endowments, maintain their own libraries, laboratories and museums. (Nurullah and Naik, 1962. pp.219-20).

The impact of the British policy

As noticed earlier, the minute of Macaulay and the Despatch of Wood, generally, express the objectives of British policy namely:

- to form a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect;
- to supply trusted servants for running the functions of the empire in India; and
- to create a market in India for British goods, and to obtain supply of articles needed in Britain.

A glance at the development of education in India during that phase clearly shows that the objectives articulated as part of the British policy had been fulfilled. Although unemployment of educated youth reared its head early, and the expansion of university education was restricted, the manpower needed for various lower categories and mostly clerical jobs was supplied by the colleges and the universities.

Content of education

The most important aspect, however, was the content of education which was limited to passive and unquestioning learning of ideas projected by British authors and conveyed through books published in Britain. These ideas denigrated oriental learning, cultivated the concept of British and Western superiority, encouraged prejudices based on community, language and region, and promoted alienation from Indian society and culture. All this suited the rulers, and made most of the educated people to uncritically accept the point of view of the British ruling classes. The spirit of questioning and enquiry, of critical evaluation of social and economic life, of creativity in science, technology and other fields was discouraged and constrained in a variety of ways. Unfortunately the knowledge of English, exclusively made even honest scholarship in India, a victim of a host of concepts which may have had relevance in British society, but which were not applicable in Indian conditions. The textbook came to acquire a revered position in the teaching-learning process. For both teacher, and pupil, the textbook was the curriculum. It was seen as containing the only knowledge that mattered in the sense of having been approved by authorities as the basis of examination. It excluded virtually the entire culture of the colonized society, including its traditions, folklore, religions, and its crafts, arts and sciences. (Kumar, 67). Even to this day we find that our universities are using English reference books or even textbooks in subjects as sensitive as Sociology, Political Science, Social Works, Social Anthropology, etc. The message, in the present context, is not that English should be given up, but that the medium of instruction should be the regional language and, simultaneously, high standards of competence in English should be maintained. There should be more critical studies and original work done in our universities in relation to our own society, so that books would be produced in our own languages with concepts founded on our own data, and of course, world experience. The universities should have far more interaction with the productive sectors of our economy, and pay much more attention to raise the quality of research undertaken by them.

Self-assessment

2. *Discuss the main characteristics of the teaching-learning process that was being followed during the British period.*

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Role of the national movement

In any assessment of the legacy of Indian education system, it is important to notice the role of the national movement. While, indeed, it is correct that some academically oriented British educational officers and even Governor General, Lord Curzon, spoke of advanced teaching and research, their main thrust was towards restriction of expansion in the name of quality. This was so because they were concerned about the

nationalist political fallout of the unemployment of the educated young people.

Regarding the role of the nationalists, Historians, such as Pannikar say that 'the educational ideas of the Indian intellectuals of the nineteenth century differed from the policy of the colonial rulers on the following three counts

- first, in the emphasis on science education;
- secondly, in the realization of the need for mass education, and
- thirdly, in support for education in the vernacular (1975)

There are however differences of opinion on this position expressed by others. {Kumar 1991, Acharya (1998) and Banerjee (1998)} maintain that there were similarities between the colonial and nationalists views on the role of education which can be attributed to the social background of these leaders, majority of whom came from upper, caste, Brahmin families. Without getting any further into this debate it is however clear that the national movement did create a fervour for the following:

Focus on expansion and pursuit of equality

National intelligentsia took the position that education must both rise and spread. It was only in the context of a wide expansion of higher education that sufficient numbers of able individuals from among whom great and creative minds could develop would be reared. A ferment of ideas and a climate of enquiry and thought would also require a wide and expanding intelligentsia drawn from diverse social classes of Indian society. The greater demand for higher education was also projected by an expanding middle class. Wider expansion, creation of new universities at Dacca, Patna, etc., paying more attention to specific and local needs and development of research thus resulted. The spread of education amongst the lower strata in colonial India was extremely low, leaders like Jyotirao Paule and Ambedkar fought for its spread to disadvantaged sections.

Promotion of culture, creativity, Science and Technology

National movement was concerned not only with freedom from the British rule, but also with national culture and, even more significantly, education in Science and Technology and intellectual creativity. There was however a conflict among nationalists – those who perceived English education as an enriching contribution to India's culture and those who perceived English education eclipsing higher Indian culture. Both however believed that the control of educational institutions should pass into Indian hands. Thus, we notice that early in the twentieth century, after the movement against partition of Bengal in 1905, and through Rash Behari Bose and others, a national education movement developed. The Bengal National Council of Education (NCE) with its emphasis on industrial training created the Engineering College which has now grown into Jadavpur University.

Creation of new institutions

(Vishwa Bharti, Banaras Hindu University and the Muslim-Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh)

The goals of spreading Science and Technology and promoting research and creativity in education were sought to be achieved by founding new institutions. Tagore created the **Viswa Bharati** emphasizing Indian cultural roots, creativity, and philosophical synthesis of the best that was in Western thought and Oriental philosophy. The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science at Calcutta created facilities for research where resources from Government were not available. In Bombay and Madras also criticism was voiced of the manner in which the meagre resources and tight control of

Government led to low quality and unspecialized education in scientific and technical fields. At Benaras, a whole new university was founded where technological education was emphasized by Pt. Malaviya and his associates. Seeing that Muslims had been left behind in Western education and hence Government employment, the Muslim-Anglo Oriental College of Aligarh was founded (which later grew into the Aligarh Muslim University). Here emphasis was on mastery of English, gentlemanly attributes, gracious living and sports. In course of time, study of Science, and later, of Technology was started. The Benaras Hindu University, even as it emphasized Technology, gave substantial attention to classical and even religious elements in higher education.

Reform, consolidation and the legacy

During the five decades of Independence (since 1947), India has built up a massive system of higher education (in 1998-99, there were 214 universities, 198 State Government established and 16 Central Government established), 38 institutions "deemed-to-be universities", 11 institutes of national importance, 9,703 colleges, and 887 polytechnics. The system now employs 321,000 teachers and caters to 6,755,000 students – though estimated to be covering barely 6 percent of the population in the relative (17-23) age group. Let us discuss the key characteristics of this system.

The 10+2 system

Note must be taken here of the Report of the Calcutta University Commission (1919) and the University Education Commission (1948). We will discuss the findings in these sections.

One of the problems noticed by the 1919 University Commission was that the Indian student entering the universities right after high school tended to be too young and immature for the type of courses and instructional methods adopted in the universities. The young students needed greater personal attention under conditions of proper discipline, both of which factors were not available in the universities. A proposal to separate the first two classes of the affiliated colleges, after 10 years of high school was made but remained unimplemented at Calcutta itself for a long time. However gradually intermediate colleges were set up in U.P. and some other states. The Report of the Education Commission (1964-66), on the basis of which Government adopted a policy on education in 1968, strongly recommended the transfer of these two classes to the schools since the Intermediate Colleges were themselves a neglected lot and their facilities and working conditions led to comparative neglect of these two classes. Furthermore, the Kothari Commission Report recommended that during the two-year period following 10 years of school, there should be greater diversification of studies, vocational courses should be made available and it should be possible for more students to enter services after 10+2 years of education. By this it visualized a "flexible" educational structure covering

- a pre-school stage of one to three years;
- a primary stage of seven or eight years divided into two substages – a lower primary stage of four or five years and a higher primary stage of three years;
- a lower secondary or high school stage of two or three years in general education or of one to three years in vocational education;
- a higher secondary stage of two years of general education or one to three years of vocational education;
- a higher education stage having a course of three years or more for the first degree followed by courses of varying duration for the second or research degrees.



We have experienced lot of difficulties in implementing the idea of vocational courses and 10+2 is largely acting as a conduit to enter universities. In the absence of vocational courses the only choice students have is academic type of study rather than cultivation of skills related to jobs.

The influence of English

The other important point of the Calcutta University Commission Report about the dominating influence of English and the consequent failure of higher education has remained unresolved until today. English remains the dominant medium of world scientific and intellectual discourse. While the solution put forward by the Report was to make the intermediate college a transitional institution where mastery of English would be one major objective, the actual development has been in two directions. The Indian society has allowed that for an elite section, a stream of English medium schools would be run followed by an elite set of colleges. However, the bulk of institutions after Independence have tended to move in the direction of Indian languages. This transition has also been partial and incomplete, partly because the protagonists of Indian languages to be used as medium of instruction failed to undertake translations on a

suitable scale, and original writings, which should have been based on original research or studies, have also been in short supply. Unfortunately, whatever books are published in Indian languages in the universities or the academies largely remain unsold. Sciences, Technology and selective institutions remain firmly anchored to English. Society remains divided between the upper classes and urban intelligentsia which takes advantage of English, and the lower classes or rural people who have to do with regional language. Naturally lots of benefits are associated with the English medium. This is what prevails while official policies are clearly committed to regional languages as medium of instruction in the universities.



I knew someone was bound to come up with that idea. He is saying, "English is essential, I admit – but ways and means should be found to teach it in regional languages!"

Courtesy: R. K. Laxman

Research and creativity

The emphasis on research and creativity which was lacking in the British period was strengthened after Independence. But, ostensibly to apply research more closely to practical tasks – a chain of laboratories outside the university system has developed under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ministries of Defence and Agriculture, etc. Similarly, some institutes in Social Sciences have also been set up. The originally weak research orientation of the Indian university has thus not been substantially corrected even after Independence. In fact, because of a diversion of human and material resources to the system of laboratories and institutes outside the university system, there is considerable handicap to the development of high quality research in the universities.

Science and Technology

Important exceptions to this generally have been in the field of agriculture. Agricultural higher education has been more realistically organized since the late 60s because of its emphasis on useful knowledge and extension thereof to the cultivator. Similarly, Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) were set up to undertake higher education and research in engineering. These institutions are sometimes criticized for relative failure because:

- a) industry has not tended to profit from the technological institutions;
- b) their graduates often prefer foreign employment since the developed countries have a demand for their services and Indian industry has not picked up high technology areas of operation;
- c) the industry itself has relied much more on foreign and imported technology than indigenous efforts to correct its weaknesses.

Medical higher education has been equally afflicted with the tendency towards brain drain. There has been reluctance to train medical personnel suited for service in rural areas. This is related to the health policy of the Government more than to educational failure. These problems are really rooted in the class divided social reality of India where its middle and upper middle classes using English are profiting from their higher education, separating themselves from the rest of people and seeking profitable links abroad. These developments leave the vast mass of our college and university students in the same weak state which was inherited from British rule.

The content of education

The legacy in the matter of content of education also needs some attention. Two themes have recurred again and again, **indigenouness** and **relevance**. The Nationalist Movement, and later the student movement of the 1930s and 40s, emphasized the inclusion of national culture, national and anti-imperialist ideas in the Social and Human Sciences. The tradition of subservience and inactivity in the methods in institutional discipline as well as in learning processes also came in for adverse attention. However, it is only after Independence that some correctives in the intellectual content of Social and Human Science instruction have emerged. Vast and rapid expansion of higher education in the post-Independence period has prevented the correction of these negative features adequately. The growth of social and historical research and its incorporation into curricula is taking its own time, and barely effects a small number of elite institutions. Increasing number of new and existing weak institutions continue to teach mechanical and uncreative content. Also the fact that India had a "peaceful" transfer of power and therefore "smooth transition" or rather continuity with the pre-Independence period rather than a radical break must explain some of the features of the current situation. Neither curricula, nor enrolment of students from the weaker sections radically changed after Independence.

The issue of relevance

The question of relevance of the higher education curriculum has been a difficult one the world over. For, knowledge in higher learning is not always directly relevant but is in fact a medium for the training of the mind without necessarily being applicable immediately. The processes and practices of higher education institutions provide the skills and personality qualities which are useful in contemporary civil and productive life. Only a fraction of people in higher education are taught directly productive skills. This has been so in most countries except in planned socialist economies in conditions of nearly full employment and / or of restriction of enrolments in higher education in

accordance with employment requirements. The usefulness or success of this practice is also open to question. In the Indian case, however, given India's weak and subservient relation to the world economy, a substantial part of its manpower is surplus whether educated or uneducated. Thus, except for a small number of persons trained for specified skills, education of most youth of college age has had to be "general" which incidentally is also more economical to provide. The major element in our heritage (negative, infact) thus is employment bottleneck. Most of the expansion is in the Humanities and Social Sciences. In spite of much expansion of science education, the percentage of enrolment in the Sciences continues to hover around 20%. And even so, not all are employed in Science or Technology based occupations. Continued and increasing differentials of reward in terms of emoluments and prestige in favour of bureaucratic-professional occupations as against the skill-vocational ones continue to accentuate preference for traditional courses except in the as yet small managerial – technological sector.

Methods of teaching

The legacy in terms of methods of teaching by lecturing is difficult to overcome even in normal circumstances. Large sized classes resulting from expansion, inadequately backed by resources and an external examination system which is easy to negotiate with small amounts of unimaginative work perpetuate this legacy in teaching and learning. Corrective to this can come through a context of life and work in which it has to be applied. As, however, much educated manpower has no employment, this corrective does not operate. On the other hand, competition among large numbers of young people for the same small number of jobs and admissions to valued courses, tends to emphasise further the importance of written external examinations for selection – a difficulty which can to a certain extent be met by more skilled examining but not entirely. In the event, marks and grades tend to get inflated. The number of examinations individuals have to take increase, influencing the teaching-learning process in the same prevalent direction of bookishness, verbal memory, etc.

Education for whom?

A British view of knowledge has prevailed in India in respect to elite education especially at upper secondary and higher levels, yet political and educational aims since Independence in 1947 have been to democratize educational access. The expansion of provision has not been even or universal. There is stringent selection of pupils for every level of education either, through exams or through differing economic capabilities of the pupils to support attendance especially in higher levels of education.

Issues of quality and quantity

The response of the Union government to the growth of poor-quality higher education both before and after 1947, was to develop a few quality institutions often concentrating on scientific and technological subjects. These high-quality institutions often have a very high reputation in teaching and research. But the typical higher education student still follows predominantly Humanities courses at poor quality institutions and highly specialized curriculum at higher levels has not been amenable to change when such change would involve parallel changes in selection procedures. Humanities have retained a strong place in the curriculum of higher education and these subjects have offered greater opportunities for success for poor students in poor institutions.

Self-assessment

3. Discuss the reasons responsible for weak research orientation of Indian universities?

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4. Has the content and method, of instruction in higher education contributed to making it an elitist stronghold? Discuss with reasons in support of your answer.

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Summary

In this unit, we have seen how education clearly serves the needs of colonizer, not the colonized, the rulers are the one who make educational decisions – who shall get education, what shall be learned, what language it shall be learned in and the parameters of the use to which education can be put. The colonizers, in the process of establishing their empire, in the Indian case, drew upon the negative features of our heritage choosing to ignore its assets. This trend was accentuated by many other factors such as the use of a foreign language, the teaching of a great deal about alien culture and society and the stifling influence of uniform external examinations. After Independence, attempts were made in the direction of translating the positive aspirations of the National Movement. But these were consistently marked by the difficulty of breaking with past patterns of behaviour and established institutions. Not only is there a lack of readily available models but the cost of changing the structures is often quite high such has been the post-Independence experience. There have been successes in some areas. But many negative elements of the legacy have also tended to get emphasized in the bulk of the system, keeping aspirations at the level of aspirations only.

Unit-end activities

1. “The thread that ran through all colonial education was the fact that it was offered by the colonizer without the input or consent of the colonized”. After going through this unit, write an essay on how this statement holds true in the context of British policies on education in India.
2. “The curriculum represented a basic denial of the colonized’s past and withheld from them the tools to regain the future... With this education one might become a secretary or interpreter; one could not become a doctor or a scientist or develop indigenous cultures on their own terms”. Compare this situation with the one that exists today. Do you think there is a radical difference? How do you account for the differences, if any?
3. Do you agree with the statement that the universities of modern India owe very little to our ancient or medieval centers of learning? Discuss in detail.
4. What is your opinion on the continuation of English as a medium of instruction in higher education? Discuss the significance of the three-language formula in this context.

Suggested readings

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