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Myth and Reality in the History of Indian Education

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Abstract: At the outset, «myth», which is a widely held false belief, and «history» as a scientific discipline based on actual fact might appear to be incompatible. However, the history of Indian education abounds with several myths that are far removed from reality. Such myths were developed for political and ideological reasons. As Eric Hobsbawm argues, «myth and inventions are essential to the politics of identity»; to claim that «we are different from, and better than the other is part and parcel of this process» (Hobsbawm, 1997, p. 7). In the history of Indian education, myths were invented and perpetuated to prove that Indians were essentially different to Europeans. In certain myths, Indians are superior to the Europeans and do not require the knowledge created in Europe, and in other myths it was the might of the colonial state that imposed modern education upon the passive recipients. All these myths begin with basic assumption that the world consists of neatly divided categories of East-West; coloniser-colonised, and European-non-European. These categories are often considered to be mutually exclusive, incompatible and impermeable. This paper addresses two primary myths in the history of Indian education – that «pre colonial indigenous education was oral» (Kumar, 1991) and «modern education was European cultural imposition» (Carnoy, 1972) – as well as a cluster of secondary myths created to reinforce them.

Keywords: India; history; education; Gandhi; myths.

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1. Pre-colonial indigenous education as oral education

The myth that the pre-colonial indigenous education was entirely oral came into prominence during the past hundred years. This is a strange myth far removed from the reality, because when it was constructed, India had 10 distinct scripts in its diverse regions which were taught in the classrooms. Most importantly, the pre-colonial India had produced 500 texts covering a range of subjects like poetry (like *Sakuntala* of Kalidasa), philosophy (like *Upanishad*s, *Tripitaka*s, *Agama*s), mathematics (like *Lilavati* of Bhaskara), medicine (like *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushurata Samhita*), astronomy (like *Aryabhatiya*), and ritual texts (like *Veda*s, *Brahmana*s and *Mimansa*s).

In addition to it, there were 75,000 inscriptions strewn across India (See *Epigraphica Indica* Volumes 1-100). If the entire domain and transmission of knowledge was oral, why were these texts and inscriptions written? More importantly, construction of such an image undermined the literary and intellectual attainments of Indians. Such an act that showed the Indians in poor light is incomprehensible at the time of India's freedom struggle.

The first Indian to construct this myth was none other than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who controlled and dominated the last 30 years of India's 65 years long (1885-1947) anti-colonial struggle. The Indian National Congress which led the movement had always campaigned for the expansion of educational infrastructure, higher taxes to provide for the introduction of compulsory education (Rao, 2014, pp. 151-175). Gandhi rejected these campaigns, particularly the one for the introduction of Compulsory Education. Gandhi asserted,

> What is the meaning of education? It simply means a (sic) knowledge of letters. A peasant earns his bread honestly. He has ordinary knowledge of the world. He knows fairly well how he should behave towards his parents, his wife, his children and his fellow villagers. He understands and observes the rules of morality. But he cannot write his own name. What do you propose to do by giving him a knowledge of letters? Will you add an inch to his happiness? Do you wish to make him discontented with his cottage or his lot? (Gandhi, 1909, p. 63).

By defining education only as «knowledge of letters», Gandhi removed from its purview broad enlightening, and all encompassing aspects of education. His argument is particularly important as India was an agrarian economy and at that time over 85 percent of the population depended on agriculture. Gandhi's argument meant that majority of India's population was not entitled to education and should remain in ignorance. Gandhi unequivocally stated that «a study of geography, astronomy, algebra, geometry is false education» and «to give millions knowledge of English is to enslave them» (Gandhi, 1909, pp. 64-65). Gandhi rejected modern education because,

> the curriculum and pedagogic ideas which form the fabric of modern education are foreign, and till they are repudiated there never can be national education. The force that maintains society together is a series of high loyalties, loyalty to faith, calling, parents, family, *dharma*. The ancient educational system in India certainly maintained the long tradition of pride and service (*Young India,* 20 March, 1924).

He declared that, «if I had the powers of a despot, ... If I had my way, I would certainly destroy the majority of the present text-books» (Gandhi, Young India, 1 September 1921) After rejecting the modern education, Gandhi declared that «our ancient school system is enough, character building has the first place in it and that is primary education» (Gandhi, 1909, p. 65). Gandhi insisted that his educational system was rooted in the Indian tradition by arguing that «the rishis taught without books. They only gave them few *mantra*s – religious hymns, which the pupils

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treasured in their memories and translated in practical life» (Gandhi, Young India, 29 January 1925). He also emphasised that the indigenous schools were conducted in open spaces, under the trees as «our climate does not require the buildings» (Gandhi, Young India, 11 July 1929). Gandhi called the indigenous education the «beautiful tree which perished under the British rule» (Dharmapal, 1983, p. xi).

After doing away with the foreign influences, text books and buildings, Gandhi addressed the question as to who should pay for the schools. He insisted that children should pay towards the salaries of the teachers and day to day running of schools. Gandhi justified his educational ideas on the basis of «securing to the students economic, social and spiritual freedom» (Gandhi, 1962, p. 77). Gandhi's triple freedom has resonance with Juan Domingo Perón, the authoritarian Argentinean politician. Peron's triple agenda of «political sovereignty», «social justice» and «economic independence» and Gandhi's triple freedom of *swaraj*-political freedom, *sarvodaya*-social justice, and *swadeshi*-economic independence are more than one way similar (Holzwarth and Oelsner, 2014, pp. 196-223). To secure the triple freedom, Gandhi advocated «the self supporting school system». To sustain this system «the children as young as 7-12 paid for their education through work» (Young India, 2 February, 1921, 15 June, 1921). The self supporting schools were partially self- supporting as the cost of buildings; equipment's as well as numerous recurring items of expenditure were born by the state (Verkey, 1940, p. 79)

So, Gandhi's Basic Education did not liberate education from the clutches of the state. What it actually did was to place the body and mind of a child under the control of the teacher. The schools were to work for six hours a day and out of which the child would work for four hours and the remaining two hours would be utilised for learning. Within these two hours, music, drawing and arithmetic were to be taught within a period of 40 minutes which allotted 13 minutes for each subject, while both social studies and general science were to be taught within a period of 30 minutes there by devoting 15 minutes for each subject (Verkey, p. 85) Since the salary of the teacher was derived from the labour of the child, there was a greater tendency to concentrate on the labour than acquisition of knowledge. These schools worked for 288 days a year that is 24 days a month, without summer or winter break. So the Gandhian Basic Education left little scope for even an ideal situation to thrive, where in the most sincere teacher would attempt to teach and most diligent student would attempt to learn anything in the sense of knowledge.

Though Gandhi claimed that his Basic Education is rooted in the Indian tradition, forcing a 7 years old child to earn by working was certainly against the Indian tradition. It was not rooted in the traditional agrarian economy but was located in the modern industrial economy. In the Indian *gurukula* tradition, the students lived with the teacher or Guru who along with teaching fed them and took care of them. The students along with learning assisted the Guru in running errands and not carry the burden of running the household of the Guru. Gandhi substituted machines by artisanal tools but sanctified and spiritualised child labour. In the traditional Sanskrit and Arabic schools, the master took care of the food and shelter of the students. Gandhi reversed it and made young seven years olds responsible for the food and shelter of the grown up teachers.

While «reviving the indigenous education», Gandhi did not derive inspiration from ancient Indian philosophical (*upanishidic*), scientific or even literary tradition, which are datable and historic achievements, but selective mythologies (*puranas*) which upheld social hierarchies and enforced stratification. This was in resonance with his own argument that «caste» the social stratification of the Indian society was rational, scientific, like the laws of Newton. Gandhi declared that the caste system is «not a human invention, but an immutable law of nature – the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation» (Gandhi, 1962, p. 13).

Gandhi created certain notions regarding pre-colonial education which were not based on facts. These notions were the entire education system was oral, all teachers were priests or of Brahmin caste and students were subservient to the teachers. These ideas along with Gandhi's defence of the caste hierarchy were opposed by the educationists of his times. M.R. Paranjape argued that modern education has enabled the people to «successfully challenge the caste system of India» (Paranjape, 1938, pp. v-vi). T. N. Sequeira condemned it as «a mask for exploitation» (Sequera, 1939, p. 201). Gandhi's educational ideas along with other ideas were opposed leading members of the anti-colonial struggle. (Gandhi, 1962, p. 54). Gopal Krishna Gokhale called it «crude and hastily conceived» (Gandhi, 1909, p. 10). At the ground level, though people supported Gandhi's anti colonial agitation but refused to send their children to school. Gandhi promised that he would pay attention to sciences like chemistry and physics (Gandhi, Young India, 7 August 1924, Young India, 12 March 1925). Still, there was no popular support.

Gandhi created five important myths regarding education in India. Accordingly, modern education is European, hence, incompatible to Indian tradition, and it made «honest Indians» into «dishonest ones». The indigenous education system was entirely oral, the instruction was religious and given by Brahmins sitting under the trees. Finally, the teacher had unlimited powers over the student and the student was subservient to the teacher (*guru-sisya parampara*). Most of the writers attempt to find sources or construct sources to supports these myths. Since, historically, it was not the British but the Indians who first established modern schools; it had to be explained away by various theories like European hegemony, missionary enterprise, colonial imposition and even pass of institutions established by Indians as «British» institutions. Since no historical records are available to prove it, history itself is rejected as «much of Indian historical knowledge has been derived from the writings of foreigners» (Dharmapal, 1983, p. 1).

2. Oral instruction, Brahmin teacher and subservient student

In the Indian tradition oral instruction was limited to a small part of Vedic literature comprising of four texts and the instructions for performing the rituals, while the Hindu, Jaina, and Buddhist philosophies, astronomy, mathematics, poetry, and drama in Sanskrit as well as the vernacular languages were in written form. The data of over 15,000 Sanskrit and vernacular schools collected during the first half of the nineteenth century show that except the Sanskrit schools teaching the Vedas, the rest of the Sanskrit and vernacular schools taught through texts and gave

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literacy and numeracy to students. On the very first day the boys entered the school they were taught to trace the alphabet. In most cases oral instruction was limited to arithmetic tables and moral stories. The writing was integral to these schools and severe punishment was imposed on boys for not writing well. Even before a boy is sent to school there were elaborate rituals surrounding the first time writing called *aksharabhyasa*, (*akshara* means alphabet and *abhyasa* means practice). «When a boy is ready for school, usually around the age of 4 or 5 years, an auspicious day was selected, feast was prepared and father of the boy or the teacher held the boy's finger and alphabet was traced on a plate of rice».[1] The data also show that every school was conducted in a building and not under trees. This is logical in a tropical country like India with seven months of summer with temperature ranging from 35 to 48 degree Celsius and lashing monsoon rains in the rainy season, it is difficult to imagine a school under a tree. The elaborate data collected by William Adam, the Sanskrit and Bengali scholar from Scotland, who visited over 2000 schools in Bengal Presidency showed that the Brahmin domination existed only in Sanskrit schools. Of the 1471 vernacular teachers, there were only 208 Brahmin teachers (Adam's Report, 1941, pp. 228- 247). Moreover, in the Madras Presidency, 11,691 schools had 142,477 students, of them only 30,479 were Brahmins. In the Bombay presidency, 65 percent of teachers were from non-Brahmin castes.[2] So across India, there were more non-Brahmin teachers than Brahmin teachers. In spite of this, the myth of Brahmin teachers who had complete control over education, whose «Brahminhood gave him an authority that in reality even the king did not possess» (Kumar, 1991, p. 87), continue to rule the debates in the history of Indian education.

The curriculum in the vernacular schools was varied not what Gandhi called «mantras» or religious hymns and some moral story from the *Purana*s or mythology. In the indigenous schools, «boys were taught reading and writing, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, measurement of land and commercial and agricultural accounts, together with the modes of address proper in writing letters to different persons. In the final stage, the boys were further instructed in agricultural and commercial accounts and the more advanced boys wrote popular poetical compositions» (Adam's Report, 1941, p. 8).

In order to support and validate Gandhi's idea of Self Supporting School System, in which children aged 7-12 worked four hours a day to earn money to pay the salaries of the teachers, the myth of «total allegiance to authority, unquestioning obedience, capacity for enduring hardship and self-sacrifice» (Kumar, 1991, p. 87) was created. The examples of Upamanyu and Ekalavya are used to support this line of argument. Upamanyu in all probability a boy of ten or less was deliberately starved by his teacher Ayodhyaumya. Unable to bear pangs of hunger he ate poisonous

[1] Every report on the indigenous education talks of writing in schools and some of them report on the ceremony, for example Board Collections, No. 26361, Collector of Broach to Bombay government dated 17 July 1824, Alexander Johnston to Chares Grant dated 23 July 1833, *Madras Public Consultations*, 21 August 1835, Nos. 104-105. Boys belonging to all castes except those belonging to untouchable castes followed the ritual. Girls of all castes had no access to literacy. They remained outside the system.

[2] This data is compiled from district level reports. General Department Files 1824-25 for Bombay Presidency, Board of Revenue Files 1823-15 for Madras Presidency.

berries in the forest and became blind. Ekalavya was not even a student of his teacher Dronacharya; he had heard the greatness of the teacher and made a statue of him and practiced archery before the statue. When Dronacharya saw the mastery Ekalavya had attained, he realised that in an expected future war, his favourite student Arjina would be at a disadvantageous position. The teacher demanded and took the thumb of his right hand as *gurudakshina*, or payment for his teaching or rather in this case never teaching. Due to loss of thumb Ekalavya, a passionate archer could never use bow and arrow again. Such arbitrary behaviour is upheld by arguing that in the in the Indian tradition, the teacher had the freedom to delay the learning of one pupil, and in the case of another to permit a rapid progression through several stages. This autonomy in the pacing of pedagogy gave the teacher tremendous power over the student (Kumar, 1991, p. 72)

Moreover, the Indian philosophical, literary and knowledge tradition do not celebrate or uphold the teachers of Upamanyu and Ekalavya. Ayodhyaumya-Upamanyu episode is a tiny narrative when compared to over 500 text strong Indian tradition. This episode is not repeated anywhere else as an example of sorts and is forgotten story. Dronacharya the Brahmin teacher of Arjuna is one of the influential figures in the epic *Mahabharata*. He defended his favourite student Arjuna and protected the knowledge that he imparted to him throughout the epic, thereby becoming a person responsible for final victory of Arjuna and his brothers in the battle. In spite of this, the Indian tradition does not celebrate Dronacharya as an ideal teacher. The «pedagogy of the Puranas» upheld by Gandhi (Gandhi, Young India, 29 January 1925) and his supporters (Kumar, 1991) cannot be found in the actual Puranic tradition.

The Puranas elevate the status of a teacher *guru* and equates him to «the creator, and the almighty god». Here, anyone with a stick or the authority or holding a position of the teacher is not «god» as the tradition strongly emphasise the qualifying factor to become a «guru».

> akhaṇḍamaṇḍalākāraṃ vyāptaṃ yena carācaram
> tatpadaṃ darśitaṃ yena tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ
>
> The teacher makes it visible (the knowledge) of the movable
> And immovable objects of the universe, so I bow to such a teacher
>
> ajñānatimirāndhasya jñānāñjanaśalākayā
> cakṣurunmīlitaṃ yena tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ
>
> With knowledge, the teacher opens the eyes
> Blinded by ignorance, so I bow to such a teacher
>
> gururbrahmā gururviṣṇurgururdevo maheśvaraḥ
> gurureva paraṃ brahma tasmai śrīgurave namaḥ[3]

[3] Uttara Khanda, *Skanda Purana*, 10 century Sanskrit text.

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Teacher is Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara (Hindu gods)
Teacher is the almighty creator, so I bow to such a teacher

So according to the Hindu tradition, the teachers of Upamanyu and Ekalavya are not ideal teachers. This stanza is not tucked away in some obscure text that Gandhi and his supporters did not have access to. This is a part of popular prayer hymns sung in many schools and widely known. Moreover, Upamanyu and Ekalavya are not the only examples available in the Hindu tradition, where the teacher was ruthless and students were helpless to the point of despair. They were character in stories. A counter example can be found in the story of Yagnavalkya, a teen age student who dared to question and challenge his teacher in the first century ce. He had to endure ostracism and hardship but triumphed in the end. Yagnavalkya split the *Yajurveda,* most sacred text of Hindus and created *Shukla Yajurveda*, wrote legal treatise *Yagnavalkya Smriti*. Sanskrit scholars consider this text as more systematic than similar other texts (Kane, 1968, p. 430). The scholarship of his time recognised his genius and thousands of Brahmins became his followers. This is not a lone example, the presence of multiple philosophies ranging from agnosticism, atheism to idol worship and extreme ritualism within the sacred ambit of Hinduism demonstrate that dissent and not conformity was the hallmark of Hindu education and intellectual tradition.

3. European Cultural Imperialism

The British education policy in India has been explained as «an attempt to bring people to an institutionalised and formal», structure (Dharmapal, 1983, p. 10). It has been argued that the process of bringing in the colonised into a structured educational system began as soon as the British established control over India. Martin Carnoy begins the analysis of Indian education by stating that «in the mercantile period of European imperialism (1500 to 1780), … the British East India Company created Moslem colleges to elicit the cooperation of the Moslem elite. The colleges were then used to develop elite loyal to European values and norms» (pp. 21-22). Actually, the British did not establish a single Muslim college until 1780. The first Muslim College – the Calcutta Madrassa was established in 1781, by Warren Hastings who was a Persian scholar. This college taught only Islamic texts and Persian literature and not anything else to encourage «loyalty to European values and norms». Hastings enjoyed Persian literature and he had earlier unsuccessfully tried to establish a professorship of Persian at Oxford. In India, Hastings encouraged the British officers «to learn Indian languages and study its literature». When Charles Wilkins translated *The Gita*, Hastings commented «such works would live when the British domain in India has long ceased to exist» (Edwards, 1976, p. 153). Hastings' Madrassa, Wilkins' *Gita* and such other efforts like Jonathan Duncan's Sanskrit College at Banaras earned Indian goodwill for the British rule, but the motive for undertaking such ventures was not just *realpolitik* but also a genuine appreciation of non-European literature by Europeans. Moreover, during the first 95 years of the colonial rule (1757-1853), the colonial state did not establish any school to teach modern curriculum. It established Arabic and Sanskrit colleges and gave funds to

indigenous schools. Under pressure from the British liberals, an amount of 100,000 rupees was earmarked by the British parliament for Indian Education in 1813. It remained unutilised till 1821 and the amount was used to establish Sanskrit College at Calcutta. It was only in 1853 at the time of the renewal of the charter of the East India Company that the British liberals were able to pressurise the British Indian government to establish modern educational institution[4]. The reason for the extreme reluctance of the British to introduce the English language in schools and modern curriculum was the fear that Indians would get access to European radical literature and over throw the British rule (Kinghton, 1853, p. 19).

In spite of the fact that during the first hundred years of the colonial rule, all the educational institutions established by the colonial state was Arabic and Sanskrit colleges and all the modern educational institutions were established by Indians, theories have been built on how the colonial state imposed modern European knowledge over the colonised. Martin Carnoy has argued that «as the English found their way towards absolute power in the nineteenth century, they founded the Anglo-Indian vidyala college in 1816» (p. 98). The Vidyalaya (abode of Knowledge) or the Hindu College as called by the British was not founded by the British but by the people of Calcutta – rich and poor contributed 113,179 rupees towards the establishment this college to teach English and modern sciences[5]. The amount thus collected was more than the annual educational budget of the East India Company for India at that time. This was the first modern institution established in Asia to teach modern subjects and the founders of this college comprised of both the radical reformers like Rammohan Roy and extreme orthodox Hindus like Radha Kant Deb. The Vidyalaya taught «Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Byron, Pope, Scott, and Homer's *Illiad* in English literature, Bengali grammar, prose and translation, Euclid, algebra, differential and integral calculus, and trigonometry in mathematics, astronomy, Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, works of Jeremy Bentham, David Hume, John Locke, histories of India, Greece and Rome and England» (Day, 1879, p. 23). The structure Vidyalaya and its curriculum remained as a model for other colleges established in the nineteenth century India.

The desire for modern education among the Indians was created by introducing «the myth» that «schooling has served the poor to succeed» (Carnoy, 1974, p. 3). He further argues that, «the farmer's or artisan's son who gets some schooling and then goes to work in the factory has available to him goods that were not available on the farm or village: lots of people, movies, modern cloths, and the very small possibility of getting a high – paying job. But the son also gives up control over his own time and the social conditions that surround him. … the son, thanks to his schooling and migration to the city, has increased his choice of some goods but has also become dependent on working and social condition set by others and out of his control» (Carnoy, 1974, p. 14). India was an agrarian economy throughout the colonial rule

[4] The English East India Company, a joint stock company which came to trade with India in 1600 gradually acquired the territories and ruled India until 1858. During this time the company the EIC had to get its charter renewed every 20 years from the British parliament. The liberal British members of parliament, the press and the pressure groups used this opportunity to force the British Indian government to introduce educational reforms.

[5] Board's Collections, No, 50501, India Office Records, London.

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and 85% of the population lived in the villages. Even the few cotton textile industries that were established in western India employed unskilled and semi-skilled illiterate labour force.

Even in the administration during the first 100 years of the colonial rule (1757-1857) only menial jobs were available to the Indians. However, Carnoy argues that the aim of the colonial educational policy was «to create a class of cheaply paid but loyal Indian low-level bureaucrats… Malcolm's successor Lord Clare set up an English college in Boodwar Palace (Poona) in 1833 and called it Elphinstone college[6]. This statement is based on several factual inaccuracies. The first educational institution established by the British in the Bombay presidency was a Sanskrit college in Poona in 1821. Clare did not establish Elphinstone College; it was done by the people of Bombay Presidency who collected 226,172 rupees to establish a modern institution in 1827. The Directors of the East India Company contributed an equal sum. Clare instituted 18 scholarships to enable poor students to pursue their studies in this institution[7]. The graduates of this Sanskrit college which produced Sanskrit scholars could not be appointed as «low level bureaucrats», similarly the graduates of Elphinstone College with sound knowledge of «differential and integral Calculus, Dynamics, Mechanises, trigonometry» could not be appointed to similar positions[8]. Many graduates of Elphinstone college like- K.T. Telang, M.G. Ranade, N.G. Chandavarkar went on to become judges of Bombay High Court. Dadabhai Naoroji who studied in this college became a member of British Parliament. The low level bureaucratic positions required little English and a thorough knowledge of vernacular. Most of those positions were filled by students of vernacular schools through patronage»[9],

It has also been argued that purpose of the colonial education system was to give «some sense of vocabulary as used in law and administration. More importantly it instilled in them a respect and awe for the aristocratic virtues of the majestic English language and culture, and a corresponding contempt and disdain for their own background (Carnoy, p. 101). Contrary to this notion, the colonial system of education over emphasised the importance of Hindu and Islamic traditions. When modern schools were established during the second half of the nineteenth century, the texts of indigenous school texts like *Amara Kosha, Hitopadesa, Ramcharitmanas*, *Prem Sagar*, *Mufid-ul-Mubtidi, Dairai Ilm, Amud Namah, Hqquik-ul-Moujudat*, were extensively used for teaching[10].

Consistent efforts have been made to establish the notion that the colonial state imposed the European cultural hegemony over Indians. Thomas Babington Macaulay's Minute on Education of 1835, has been extensively quoted to establish this point, while Macaulay's other minutes which supported the compulsory study of mother tongue in the modern schools, and his directives to the scholars to prepare

[6] Ibid.

[7] *India Office Records* - Board collections, No. 81577

[8] General Department/Education, 1839, No 485.

[9] Minute by J.P. Willoughby dated 12 January 1850, *Report of the Board of Education 1850*, p. 136

[10] Home/Education, 1869, A Nos. 3-5.

vernacular text books have been sidelined. The «Minute» is only an opinion of an officer on a particular issue. In the official files dating from 1810 to 1947 there are hundreds of minutes on education by some one or the other who thought he had an opinion. Most of them contradict one another on various issues like the medium of instruction, teaching of modern sciences, standards to be set at various levels of schooling and such other things. Macaulay's minute of 2 February 1835 and its endorsement by the Governor-General William Bentinck have been represented as «English Education Act» which officially required the Natives of India to submit to the study of English literature, irrevocably altering the direction of Indian education (Viswanathan, 1990, p. 41). It has been argued that Indians were forced to study English, by changing the nomenclature of a document called a «Minute» which is only an opinion, to an «Act» which has legal sanction. None of the writers take even a cursory look at the Auckland's Minute on Education dated 24 November 1839, which effectively ended any influence of Macaulay's Minute, by arguing that teaching English and modern curriculum, would make a peasant boy, unhappy and discontented in his peculiar position[11]. This was «regarded as an authoritative pronouncement of the educational policy of government», by the British officers (Richey, 1922, p. 1). So, Macaulay's Minute was effective only for four years out of 190 years of the British colonialism in India. Still for every writer, Macaulay's Minute represent the educational policy for the entire span of British rule. Interestingly, while opposing the proposal for compulsory education, Gandhi verbatim reproduced the statement of Auckland when he stated «do you wish to make a peasant discontented with his cottage or his lot?» (Gandhi, 1909, p. 60).

4. Missionaries as «Mask of Conquest»

The writers have argued that the colonial education policy was formulated to «to assist evangelical exhortation, and a propaganda to extend Christian "light" and "knowledge" to the people» (Dharmapal, 1983, pp. 10-11). Carnoy makes an attempt to prove that the British administration succeeded in enforcing cultural imperialism through the missionaries. He argues that,

> Under the military protection of the company, missionaries could get to know a geographic area more intimately and provide essential information about the social structure, culture and economic production, and trading habits of the people. They helped to legitimate foreign presence among the natives by demonstrating the superiority of Christianity. … committing resources, manpower, and energy to seizing new lands and building trading operations overseas was not possible without the ideology of the «white man's burden' and it is missionaries and their reformist zeal most of all that confirmed this ideology» (Carnoy, 1974, pp. 88-89).

[11] Minute by Auckland dated 24 November 1839, *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction, 1840*, p. ix.

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The missionaries were allowed into India in 1813 after intense agitation during the previous twenty years. The British had won the battles of Plassey and Buxar, two Maratha, three Carnatic and four Mysore wars and certainly did not need the missionaries to win the three remaining battles – one Maratha and two Sikh wars. In this sense, when the British decided to allow missionaries to enter India, they had won eleven out of fourteen wars. Even after missionaries were allowed into India, a «General Order» was issued in 1842 prohibiting the employment of clergymen in connection with education in India. Time and again it refused to relax this rule.[12] The notion of «White Man's Burden» was originally popularised by Rudyard Kipling in 1899 through his poem of the same name. Carnoy uses «the White Man's Burden», as a motivating factor for the British expansion in the eighteenth century – 100 years before it was even invented.

Until 1813, the EIC actively and quite effectively opposed the entry of the Christian missionaries into India. The official reason was that the ECI was essentially a trading company interested in profits and not in the propagation of religion. They argued that any support to the missionaries would be seen by the Indians as support to conversion into Christianity and eventually turn them hostile to the British. In addition to this practical reason the internal conflict of the highly divided the protestant church in England was also a contributory factor. The state and the ruling classes including most of the directors of the Company belonged to the Anglican Church which up held elite privileges and the rest of the population followed one of the dissenter groups, like the Baptist, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Unitarians, and Quakers. They struggled against aristocratic privileges in both church and state.(Cowherd, 1954, p. 136). They had no access to the privileged universities of Oxford and Cambridge[13]. The Anglican Church believed that the existing class distinctions were divinely ordained. (Laird, 1972, p. 116). Theoretically one could transcend class distinction, however the road leading to it education, enterprise and wealth was blocked by the elites, the church, the state. So virtually the class operated like caste in England. Brian Simon, the historian of education has called the English class system as the caste system (1974, p. 97).

In India, the elite government officials and civilians «did all in their power to make the missionaries appear contemptible in the eyes of the natives, describing them as low-caste people in their own country, and quite unfit to hold conversation with the learned Brahmins, or even to teach the ignorant soodras (low caste/class) of the land» (Kitzan, 1971, p. 465). The Baptist missionaries like William Carey (1761-1834), William Ward (1769-1823) and Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) came from humble backgrounds. William Carey was the son of a master of charity school. He had a precarious existence as a cobbler and teacher. Joshua Marshman's father was a weaver and William Ward was a son of carpenter (Laird, 1972, pp. 37-38). The elite attitude of disdain was also guided by the fact that the missionaries from dissenter groups refused to abide by racial markers, or segregate European and Indian children. The early missionary schools were mostly residential schools where

[12] *Memorandum on the Rule prohibiting the employment of clergymen in the Education Department,* Home/Education 14 May, 1858, Nos. 16-17, National Archives of India.

[13] They could enter these universities only when the Test Acts were removed in 1871.

poor and lower caste Indians, children of mixed races and children of poor European soldiers lived and studied together (Reeve, 1822, p. 161).

All those who were not employed by the company had to have the company's licenses to proceed to and reside in India. Through this the Company effectively controlled the British non-official inflow into India and the British missionaries were repeatedly denied permits to enter India. The Court of Directors of the Company defeated the missionary effort to enter India in 1793 at the time of the renewal of the Charter of the Company (Kitzan, 1971, pp. 457-459). The missionaries struggled hard to enter India. The British ships were forbidden even to carry them aboard. William Carey a Baptist missionary boarded a British ship in 1793 to enter India. When the captain of the ship found out that Carey was a missionary he and his pregnant wife were off loaded at Isle of White. He managed to travel on a Danish ship and reached Serampore a Danish settlement in India. The Danish and French settlements in India became entry points for the protestant missionaries to reach India.

The fellow missionaries of Carey, William Ward (1769-1823) and Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) came to India through the same route. Soon they came to be known as Serampore trio. They worked hard, learnt Indian languages and established a press which could print any work in Bengali, Urdu, Oriya, Tamil, Telgu, Kannada and Marathi. The missionary educational institutions maintained complete religious neutrality. The Serampore college allowed full liberty of conscience. No Hindu or Muslim youth was to be constrained to do any act as a condition of enjoying the benefit of the institution which could be repugnant to his conscientious feelings (Howells, 1927, p. 18). Marshman explained that «the object of the school is not to bring about immediate conversions, but rather enable people to see things just as they are when their understanding matured» (Laird, 1972, pp. 114-115).

In the Bombay Presidency, the officials were surprised to find «Hindoos using even our religious books for their children». They also observed that «the natives are not by any means averse to the introduction of our scriptures even, ... all natives believe in a God, and all believe that truth and honesty and charity and whatever is great and good, are essential to that respectability and honour, not to say happiness»[14]. The Bombay Education Society was established for the education of the poor European and Eurasian children. English and Bible were taught in these schools. In these schools, native boys outnumbered European and Eurasian boys (Seventh Annual Report, 1822, pp. 48-52). The officers noticed that it was not just Bombay but even the people in remote villages were not averse to sending their children to schools where Bible was taught as a part of the curriculum. The secretary to the government attributed it to «the easy tolerant spirit of Hindooism... to use even our religious books for their children»[15].

[14] Letter from T. B. Jervis the government dated 8 September 1824, John A. Dunlop collector of South Konkan to the government, dated 14 September 1824, General Department, No 13 of 1824, Vol 63 of 1824.

[15] General Department, 13 of 1824, John A. Dunlop to the Secretary to the government dated 14 September 1824.

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This was not limited to Hindus; Muslims too were equally enthusiastic in pursuing modern education. First native boy to enter the Bombay Education Society School was a Muslim (*First Annual Report,* 1816, p. 14). Again, such interaction was not limited to common people. The German missionary Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1726- 1798) came to Tiruchirapalli in 1750, where he worked as a chaplain in the garrison. When he visited the Tanjavur in 1769, its king Tuljaji not only supported his activities but placed his adopted son and heir to the throne Serfoji in the hands of Schwartz for education. Serfoji and another boy Veda Nayagam lived in a house with Schwartz and studied. When Serfoji became the King, he built a church and St. Peter's school as a token of gratitude (See William, and Thanasingh, 2013). Therefore, the missionaries and the colonial state did not have to trick the Indians to study «animated, vivified, hallowed, and baptized», English literature (Viswanathan, 1990, p. 80).

At that time, the usual missionary attitude towards non Christian religions was based on a literal understanding of Genesis: Adam was the ancestor of all mankind, and he had originally worshipped god rightly, but since his fall, his descendants had deviated in various ways from the true religion. Therefore, they were ready to detect traces of god's revelation in Hinduism. This enabled the missionaries to study Sanskrit, William Carey translated Ramayana and considered that Mahabharata was written in exquisite language and compared it to Homer's Illiad. William Ward praised the Hindus for having attained «very extensive learning» (Laird, 1972, pp. 55-56). So, Hindus too were virtuous and had become corrupted with superstitious practices over a period of time. According to W.W. Hunter, «the modern missionary to the Hindus takes the tone in which the great proselytising apostle addressed the Brahmins of Europe at Athens; he quotes their literature, and starting from their devotion at their own alter he labours to support an ignorant worship by an enlightened faith» (Hunter, 1908, p. 220) However they could not agree with the Hindu view that it is possible to find god through various ways and through any religion. Islam as a part of shared Semitic tradition attracted little criticism from the missionaries.

For the missionaries, Christianity, western scholarship and European civilization were all intertwined (Bellenoit, 2007, p. 25). The missionary schools did not transplant a curriculum from England to India. In Bengal they taught «Bengali language including grammar, introduction to Sanskrit literature, Aesop's Fables, Historical Anecdotes, geography of India and Asia, arithmetic, History of India and Asia and chronology, solar system, ethics partly based on the Hindu philosophy and partly on Christianity». One of the most significant contributions of the Serampore missionaries was their compilation of text books. These textbooks were written by both the missionaries and Indians. In spite of such examples, the image of the fear of proselytisation felt by Indians is constructed by inventing the sources. Here is an example,

> The parents were affected by the «tyranny of the Bible» … let Duff Saheb do what he can' was, the Lal Behari Dey's father's defiant challenge to the threat of proselytism. But Duff Saheb was a little more devious than even Dey's father imagined (Viswanathan, 1990, p. 58).

The actual statement of Dey's father was thus,

> If it be written on my son's forehead that he will not become Christian, then he will not become Christian, let Duff Saheb do what he can, but if it be written on my son's fore head that he will become a Christian, then he will become Christian, do what I can (Dey, 1879, p. 47).

This was not a threat but resigning to fate- a very typical culturally conditioned Hindu behaviour. The Indians were not averse to the study of the Bible. Lal Bihari Day gives a typical example of a Brahmin well-versed in Hindu scriptures and the Bible, alongside a familiarity with the Koran, who would attend Sunday lectures at Duff's School whose discussions with missionary teachers including Duff would go on till eleven o' clock at night (Dey, pp. 142-143).

Missionaries often fought for the rights of the local population from the very beginning. Rev. V. Taylor after witnessing the execution of a Kannada peasant in Dharwar district fought for the recognition of Kannada as a court language in the Bombay presidency in 1836. This entirely Kannada speaking district had Marathi village and district officers due to the pre-colonial Peshwa rule. The system was continued under the colonial rule. The execution had taken place because the peasant charged with murder had given his testimonial in Kannada which was recorded in Marathi language by the native official and the court proceeding was conducted in Hindustani language. The prisoner ignorant of both Marathi and Hindustani unwillingly expressed assent to the confession. There was no circumstantial evidence against him. He was charged with murder and later executed. Taylor effectively fought for the introduction of Kannada as the language of administration and schools. Within six months Kannada was made a court language and 27 Kannada primary schools were established in the district (Parulekar, 1957, pp. 46-50).

The British government in India often treated missionaries with suspicion. In 1860, Dinabandhu Mitra wrote a Bengali play *Nil Darpan* - Blue Mirror which depicted the plight of the indigo peasants. It squarely accused the British indigo planters and Indian factory managers for the miseries of the peasants. The play was performed to packed houses. Though it was just two years after the Indian Revolt of 1857, the government did not object. Rev. James Long got it translated into English and published it. Immediately the government imposed a fine on Long and imprisoned him[16]. The reason for quoting this example amidst numerous others is that, most of the missionaries belonged to Protestant Dissenter groups like Baptists, so an extension of conflict in England could easily be cited for such an action. Long belonged to Anglican Church, the church denomination to which most of the British ruling classes belonged to in India. In spite of this, the government prosecuted Long for committing no crime. This clearly shows how the British government in India treated the missionaries. There were few British officers who supported the missionaries in their individual capacity, but most of the time they were warned and transferred out by the government[17]. The missionaries instead of being instruments

[16] Home/Public 8 August 1861 Nos, 34-37 A.

[17] Minute by J.P. Grant dated 19 June 1861, Home/Public 28 June 1861 Nos, 103-105.

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of colonial expansion were actually closer to Indian social and political realities, opposed the policies of the colonial state. They also took part in India's freedom struggle against the British rule (Bellenoit, 2007).

According to Koji Kawashima the idea that the Christian Missions were «the hand maiden of imperialism» is certainly over simplistic. In Maharaja of Travancore established a free school in 1836 where Bible was taught till the turn of the century. In other words, the Travancore state continued to allow the student many of whom would become government officials, to learn about Christianity in school (Kawashima, 1998, pp. 54-85). W. W. Hunter, the elite British officer and the chairman of the Indian Education Commission grudgingly admitted that, «no class of Englishman receive so much unbought kindness from the Indian people while they live; no individual Englishman are so honestly regretted when they die, what aged viceroy ever received the posthumous honour of affection accorded to the Presbyterian Duff by the native press?» (Hunter, 1908, p. 216).

5. Concluding observations

Firstly, the data was collected by British educationists and officers who were also scholars of Indian languages. Most of them visited the class rooms and observed the teaching and have left behind elaborate reports. Many of them like William Adam, Thomas Munro, Alexander Duncan Campbell, Saville Marriott, John Sullivan, Henry Pottinger and others fought on behalf of Indians to obtain concessions from the colonial state. So, this cannot dismiss off as Eurocentric understanding of Indian culture or such officers as agents of imperial project.

Secondly, the prevalence of such myths does not mean to say that there exists no body of historical works. Bhagaban Prasad Majumdar's *First Fruits of English Education: 1817-1857*, Margrit Pernau's edited volume *The Delhi College,* D.H. Emmott's «Alexander Duff and the Foundation of Modern Education in India», M. A. Laird's *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793-1837,* and Hayden Bellenoit, in the *Missionary Education and Empire in Late Colonial India 1860-1920* are rigorously historical and based on archival sources. These books are available in very few libraries and seldom used by social scientists and educationalists. They are dismissed off as «modernists» or those «influenced by western thought» (Kumar, 1991, p. 179). Hence the writings in the history of education continue to espouse the ideas of pre-colonial oral education in contrast to reliance of written texts modern education, and modern education as a project of European cultural imposition brought in through the agency of the missionaries.

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