

M.S. Thirumalai, Ph.D. "Lord Macaulay: The Man Who Started It All, And His Minute." Language in India 3 (April 2003). [<http://www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay.html>]

[I have amended the article slightly, silently correcting typographical errors, amending some punctuation, removing one subheading, and inserting hyperlinks within the document. Otherwise, the text stands as the original author presented it. (AY)]

[graphic omitted: portrait of Lord Macaulay: available at <http://www.strecorsoc.org/macaulay/picture.html>]

This article may be read in three parts: the first part deals with the life and times of Lord Macaulay, and the second part presents Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education. The third part presents the objections raised against Macaulay's Minute by Prinsep, a Secretary who dealt with matters of education in the government then. This third part presents also the orders issued by William Bentinck, the then Governor General, that upheld Macaulay's Minute, and a discussion on the identity of views held by Ram Mohun Roy and Macaulay. I believe that Macaulay's Minute is better understood and appreciated if we have some understanding of the man who wrote it. Macaulay was an extra-ordinary administrator, master of English prose, and statesman. Remember Macaulay was writing his Minute nearly 175 years ago.

1. A BRIEF SOJOURN, AN ENDURING IMPACT

Lord Macaulay (Thomas Babington Macaulay) was born on October 25, 1800, and died on December 28, 1859. He arrived in India (Madras) on 10th June 1834 as a member of the Supreme Council of India. William Bentinck was the then Governor General. He returned to England early 1838, and resumed his writing career there. Macaulay was in India, thus, only for nearly four years, but he was destined to impact the lives of millions of Indians forever.

2. MACAULAY'S FAMILY

Lord Macaulay's father Zachary Macaulay himself had seen overseas service in the West Indies and Sierra Leone, and was highly regarded for his contribution to public life. Zachary was against slavery and worked closely with Wilberforce and others.

Macaulay was a student of Trinity College at the University of Cambridge and was called to the bar in 1826. His nephew-biographer George Trevelyan wrote that Macaulay did not make it a serious profession (Trevelyan 1876 : 101). Macaulay was greatly attached to his family: his father, mother, and two sisters. Once he wrote to his mother,

How sick, and sleepless, and weak I was lying in bed, when I was told that you were come! How well I remember with what an ecstasy of joy I saw that face approaching me, in the middle of people that did not care if I died that night except for the trouble of burying me! The sound of your voice, the touch of your hand, are present to me now, and will be, I trust in God, to my last hour. (from a letter of Macaulay to his mother dated March 25, 1821, in Trevelyan [1876])

Macaulay loved his sisters, Hannah and Margaret, deeply. Both were younger to him by ten and twelve years respectively. His letters to them were full of affection and concern for their welfare. He was truly affected much when his sisters got married one after another. Macaulay wrote philosophically in November 1832,

The attachment between brothers and sisters, blameless, amiable, and delightful as it is, is so liable to be superseded by other attachments that no wise man ought to suffer it to become indispensable to him. That women shall leave the home of their birth, and contract ties dearer than those of consanguinity, is a law as ancient as the first records of the history of our race, and as unchangeable as the constitution of the human body and mind. To repine against the nature of things, and against the great fundamental law of all society because, in consequence of my own want of foresight, it happens to bear heavily on me, would be the basest and most absurd of selfishness. (Trevelyan 1876: 265)

Margaret died young.

3. MACAULAY AS A HUMANIST

Even as a young man, Macaulay was more interested in humanistic pursuits than in any other activity. He showed hardly any interest in sports and games while in college.

. . . Macaulay was utterly destitute of bodily accomplishments, and (that) he viewed his deficiencies with supreme indifference. He could neither swim, nor row, nor drive, nor skate, nor shoot. He seldom crossed a saddle, and never willingly. When in attendance at Windsor as a cabinet minister he was informed that a horse was at his disposal. 'If her Majesty wishes to see me ride,' he said, 'she must order out an elephant.' The only exercise in which he can be said to have excelled was that of threading crowded streets with his eyes fixed upon a book. (Trevelyan 1876: 112)

Macaulay graduated from his college as a staunch Whig strongly believing in the need to increase the power of the Parliament, and all his life he remained a liberal. People who met him always seemed to agree with a gentleman who met Macaulay in 1826 and who said,

Overflowing with words, and not poor in thought. Liberal in opinion, but not radical. He seems a correct as well as a full man. He showed a minute knowledge of subjects not introduced by himself.

4. MACAULAY AS A LEADING PARLIAMENTARIAN

Thomas Babington Macaulay was twice elected to the House of Commons before he came to India to serve the British India Government. While in London, he "was appointed one of the Commissioners of the Board of Control, which, for three quarters of a century from 1784 onwards, represented the Crown in its relations to the East India directors" (Trevelyan 1876: 235) and thus had a deeper understanding of British colonies.

Macaulay was at the Board of Control for eighteen months. In this period he learned a lot about India and the colonies. Once he wrote to his sisters on June 10, 1832,

I am already deep in Zemindars, Ryots, Polygars, Courts of Phoujdary, and Courts of Nizamut Adawlut. I can tell which of the native Powers are subsidiary, and which independent, and read you lectures of an hour on our diplomatic transactions at the courts of Lucknow, Nagpore, Hyderabad, and Poonah. At Poonah, indeed, I need not tell you that there is no court; for the Paishwa, as you are doubtless aware, was deposed by Lord Hastings in the Pindarree War. Am I not in fair training to be as great bore as if I had myself been in India?-that is to say, as great a bore as the greatest. (Trevelyan 1876: 237)

As a studious person, Macaulay's days at the Board of Control helped him to master the history of British accession in India very well. He also imbibed a general knowledge of Indian religions, caste system, missionary work in India, and a host of other subjects that would continue to guide him throughout his days in India. He also acquired a very critical and negative approach to Indian arts, theology, and sciences during this period.

5. WHAT MOTIVATED MACAULAY TO COME TO INDIA?

It appears that his decision in 1833 to accept the position of membership in the Supreme Council of India and thus come to India was motivated more by personal necessity than anything to do with his zeal for reformation or understanding and admiration of diverse cultures. His father's investments were lost, and the family faced difficult pecuniary circumstances despite Macaulay's membership in the House of Commons. Macaulay's heart was really in pursuing a writing career, but he was not sure whether this career would give him enough money to live a modest life. He wrote to his sister Hannah on August 17, 1833,

I am about to write to you on a subject which to you and Margaret will be one of the most agitating interest; and which, on that account chiefly, is so to me.

By the new India Bill it is provided that one of the members of the Supreme Council, which is to govern our Eastern Empire, is to be chosen from among persons who are not servants of the Company. It is probable, indeed nearly certain, that the situation will be offered to me.

The advantages are very great. It is a post of the highest dignity and consideration. The salary is ten thousand pounds a year. I am assured by persons who know Calcutta intimately, and who have themselves mixed in the highest circles and held the highest offices at that Presidency, that I may live in splendour there for five thousand a year, and may save the rest of the salary with the accruing interest. I may therefore hope to return to England at only thirty-nine, in the full vigour of life, with a fortune of thirty thousand pounds. A larger fortune I never desired.

I am not fond of money, or anxious about it. But, though every day makes me less and less eager for wealth, every day shows me more and more strongly how necessary a

competence is to a man who desires to be either great or useful. At present the plain fact is that I can continue to be a public man only while I can continue in office. If I left my place in the Government, I must leave my seat in Parliament too. For I must live: I can live only by my pen: and it is absolutely impossible for any man to write enough to procure him a decent subsistence, and at the same time to take an active part in politics. I have not during this Session been able to send a single line to the Edinburgh Review . . . Now in order to live like a gentleman, it would be necessary for me to write, not as I have done hitherto, but regularly, and even daily. I have never made more than two hundred a year by my pen. I could not support myself in comfort on less than five hundred: and I shall in all probability have many others to support. The prospects of our family are, if possible, darker than ever.

In the meantime my political outlook is very gloomy. A schism in the Ministry is approaching . . . I tell you in perfect seriousness that my chance of keeping my present situation for six months is so small, that I would willingly sell it for fifty pounds down . . . In England I see nothing before me, for some time to come, but poverty, unpopularity, and the breaking of old connections.

. . . But, if I could escape from these impending disasters, I should wish to do so. By accepting the post, which is likely to be offered to me, I withdraw myself for a short time from the contests of faction here. When I return, I shall find things settled, parties formed into new combinations, and new questions under discussion . . . In the meantime I shall save my family from distress; and shall return with a competence honestly earned, as rich as if I were Duke of Northumberland or Marquess of Westminster, and able to act on all public questions without even a temptation to deviate from the strict line of duty. While in India. I shall have to discharge duties not painfully laborious, and of the highest and most honourable kind. I shall have whatever that country affords of comfort or splendour; nor will my absence be so long that my friends, or the public here, will be likely to lose sight of men. (Trevelyan 1876: 299-301)

Macaulay addressed communications in the same vein to Lord Landsdowne and others after his appointment as a member of the Supreme Council of India.

6. A LOVER OF WESTERN SCIENCES AND ARTS: A MAN OF HIS OWN IDEAS

Macaulay always devoted his best to the job on hand. In his youth, Macaulay exhibited "vehemence, over-confidence, the inability to recognize that there are two sides to a question or two people in a dialogue," just as other young men displayed (Trevelyan 1876; 112). While these traits were tempered in his later years, Macaulay was always a man of his own ideas. And he was greatly influenced in his ideals, ideas, and ideologies by the great achievements of Western civilization, sciences, philosophy, and theology. His nephew-biographer writes, "His speeches and essays teem with expressions of a far deeper than official interest in India and her people; and his minutes remain on record, to prove that he did not affect the sentiment for a literary or oratorical purpose" (Trevelyan 1876: 235).

7. MACAULAY ARRIVES IN INDIA: A SALUTE OF FIFTEEN GUNS!

Macaulay arrived in Madras on June 10, 1834, and proceeded to Ootacamund, Nilgiris, where the Governor General of India William Bentinck was camping for the summer. Macaulay wrote of his initial experience as follows: "To be on land after three months at sea is of itself a great change. But to be in such a land! The dark faces, with white turbans, and flowing robes: the trees not our trees: the very smell of atmosphere that of a hothouse, and the architecture as strange as the vegetation" (Trevelyan 1876: 334). There was a salute of fifteen guns when he set his foot on the beach!

Macaulay's initial reaction was one of amazement how the dispossessed Rajahs and Nawabs now submitted to the suzerainty of the British, and meekly "preserved the forms of royalty," and be satisfied with 'the privilege of occasionally sending letters of condolence and congratulation to the King of England, in which (they called themselves) his Majesty's good brother and ally" (Trevelyan 1876: 336). Trevelyan points out that Macaulay reminded himself "he was in a region where his countrymen could exist only on the condition of their being warriors and rulers" (Trevelyan 1876: 335).

8. TO NILGIRIS VIA MYSORE: 400 MILES ON THE SHOULDERS OF MEN

Within seven days of his arrival in Madras he left for the Nilgiris via Bangalore-Mysore. He wrote, "I traveled the whole four hundred miles between this (Ootacamund) and Madras on men's shoulders. I had an agreeable journey on the whole" (p. 341). All through his stay in India, Macaulay kept up with his study of European classics even as he continued to consider Indian arts, sciences, and theology as not so worthy of pursuit. Macaulay was particularly very critical of the Christian converts from caste Hindus in south India who refused to have the Lord's Supper with the converts from the low castes. He wrote once, "it was hardly worth the while of so many good men to come fifteen thousand miles over sea and land in order to make proselytes, who, their very instructors being judges, were more children of hell than before" (Trevelyan 1876: 348).

9. STRICT NEUTRALITY BETWEEN RELIGIONS

Macaulay considered himself to be a Christian, but when it came to public affairs he stoutly kept aside his Christian identity and stood for neutrality. He declared in the House of Commons on July 10, 1833:

Her Majesty is the ruler of a larger heathen population than the world ever saw collected under the sceptre of a Christian sovereign since the days of the Emperor Theodosius. What the conduct of rulers in such circumstances ought to be is one of the most important moral questions, one of the most important political questions, that it is possible to conceive. There are subject to the British rule in Asia a hundred millions of people who do not profess the Christian faith. . . . Now, Sir, it is a difficult matter to determine in what way Christian rulers ought to deal with such superstitions as these. We might have acted as the Spaniards acted in the New World. We might have attempted to introduce

our own religion by force. We might have sent out missionaries among the natives at the public charge. We might have held out hopes of public employment to converts, and have imposed civil disabilities on Mahometans and Pagans. But we did none of these things; and herein we judged wisely. Our duty, as rulers, was to preserve strict neutrality on all questions merely religious: and I am not aware that we have ever swerved from strict neutrality for the purpose of making proselytes to our own faith. But we have, I am sorry to say, sometimes deviated from the right path in the opposite direction. Some Englishmen, who have held high office in India, seem to have thought that the only religion which was not entitled to toleration and to respect was Christianity. They regarded every Christian missionary with extreme jealousy and disdain; and they suffered the most atrocious crimes, if enjoined by the Hindoo superstition, to be perpetrated in open day. (Young 1935: 203-204)

10. THE BEST MODE OF SECURING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

In his speech delivered in the House of Commons on July 10, 1833, just a few months before he left for India, Macaulay declared,

If the question were, what is the best mode of securing good government in Europe? The merest smatterer in politics would answer, representative institutions. In India you cannot have representative institutions. Of all the innumerable speculators who have offered their suggestions on Indian politics, not a single one, as far as I know, however democratical his opinions may be, had ever maintained the possibility of giving, at the present time, such institutions to India. (Young 1935: 125)

He further said, "We have to frame a good government for a country into which, by universal acknowledgment, we cannot introduce those institutions which all our habits, which all the reasonings of European philosophers, which all the history of our own part of the world would lead us to consider as the one great security for good government. We have to engraft on despotism those blessings which are the natural fruits of liberty" (p. 126). He questioned, "But what constitution can we give to our Indian empire which shall not be strange, which shall be anomalous? That Empire is itself the strangest of all political anomalies. That a handful of adventurers from an island in the Atlantic should have subjugated a vast country divided from the place of their birth by half the globe . . . a territory, inhabited by men differing from us in race, colour, language, manners, morals, religion . . ." (Young 1935: 130). "In what state did we find India? And what have we made India? . . . society was a chaos. . . (Young 1935: 133).

That the average of intelligence and virtue is very high in this country is matter for honest exultation. But it is no reason for employing average men where you can obtain superior men. Consider too, Sir, how rapidly the public mind in India is advancing, how much attention is already paid by the higher classes of the natives to those intellectual pursuits on the cultivation of which the superiority of the European race to the rest of mankind principally depends. . . . (Young 1935: 141)

11. THE SCEPTER MAY PASS AWAY, BUT . . .

Despite his staunch patriotism and contempt-like posture towards Indian culture, languages, arts, sciences, and theology, Macaulay wanted Indians to prosper and excel themselves in all ways of life. He told the House of Commons in his speech on July 10, 1833,

We are told that the time can never come when the natives of India can be admitted to high civil military office. We are told that this is the condition on which we hold our power. We are told, that we are bound to confer on our subjects every benefit-which they are capable of enjoying?-no; --which it is in our power to confer on them? -no ; --but which we can confer on them without hazard to the perpetuity of our own domination. Against that proposition I solemnly protest as inconsistent alike with sound policy and sound morality. . . . We are free, we are civilized, to little purpose, if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilization. Are we to keep the people of India ignorant in order that we may keep them submissive? Or do we think that we can give them knowledge without awakening ambition? Or do we men to awaken ambition and to provide it with no legitimate vent? Who will answer any of these questions in the affirmative? . . . It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all of our own. The sceptre may pass away from us. Unforeseen accidents may derange our most profound schemes of policy. Victory may be inconstant to our arms. . . . (Young 1935: 152-155)

12. WELL SET IDEAS BEFORE HIS REAL EXPOSURE TO INDIA

Thus, in many ways his views about India and what India needed at that moment in history were all well set before he arrived in India. No wonder, then, that he was willing to implement his ideas when he was placed in a position to do. His earliest fight was against the British Press in India, whose leaders wanted unbridled freedom just as the Press in England enjoyed. Macaulay wrote, "We know that India cannot have a free Government. But she may have the next best thing-a firm and impartial despotism. The worst state in which she can possibly be placed is that in which the memorialists [i.e., the British Press in India] would place her. They call on us to recognize them as a privileged order of freemen in the midst of slaves. It was for the purpose of averting this great evil that Parliament, at the same at which it suffered Englishmen to settle in India, armed us with those large powers which, in my opinion, we ill deserve to possess, if we have not the spirit to use them now" (Trevelyan 1876: 367). The very same strand of thought and action would dominate his career in India.

13. MACAULAY'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Macaulay's contributions to Indian political administration and justice were manifold, but two

among these stand out as his outstanding contributions that influenced the course of ideas and life in the Indian subcontinent. These were: his minute on the education that had a direct impact on the content and methodology of what was best to be taught in Indian educational institutions along with the medium through which these should be taught. The second relates to his monumental work for the development of the Indian Penal Code. My focus in this article on Macaulay's Minute on Education. So, I do not propose to deal with Macaulay's contribution in the development of the Indian Penal Code. However, to give a sense of his contribution, let me simply quote two short passages here.

Mallikarjun writes in a recent pre-publication article that discusses and documents the language rights in South Asia and Singapore: "Written Law or codification of laws as a body of literature that was intended to be adhered to and interpreted in judicial proceedings was an innovation, in spite of the widespread knowledge of Manu's Dharma Shastra, and Islamic Shariat. It was a contribution of the British rule, and it had had its own impact. It was also intended for the convenience of the western model of governance. Lord Macaulay (1800-1859), the architect of the Indian Penal Code, wrote that the penal code "should be framed on two great principles, -- the principle of suppressing crime with the smallest possible amount of suffering, and the principle of ascertaining truth at the smallest possible cost of time and money" (Trevelyan 1978 (1876): 382). Macaulay's successor Fitzjames Stephen wrote that the framing of a code was a "great revolution in the state of society of a whole continent" for the "regular administration of a rational body of criminal law" (Trevelyan 1978 (1876): 385)" (Mallikarjun, work in progress).

When I read Lord Macaulay's letters and speeches, I find that he was happy and justifiably proud about his achievement in framing the Indian Penal Code. Trevelyan (1876: 385) remarks, "If it be asked whether or not the Penal Code fulfils the ends for which it was framed, the answer may safely be left to the gratitude of Indian civilians, the younger of whom carry it about in their saddle-bags, the older in their heads."

14. INDIA IN 1830s: THE MINUTE IN PREPARATION

Macaulay's biographer supplies an excellent description of the situation prevailing in India in the field of education when Macaulay arrived:

. . . that moment was the very turning-point of her (India's) progress. All educational action had been at a stand for some time back, on account of an irreconcilable difference of opinion in the Committee of Public Instruction; which was divided, five against five, on either side of a controversy,--vital, inevitable, admitting of neither postponement nor compromise, and conducted by both parties with a pertinacity and a warmth that was nothing honourable to those concerned. Half of the members were for maintaining and extending the old scheme of encouraging Oriental learning by stipends paid to students in Sanscrit, Persian, and Arabic; and by liberal grants for the publication of works in those languages. The other half were in favour of teaching the elements of knowledge in the vernacular tongues, and the higher branches in English. On his arrival, Macaulay was appointed President of the Committee; but he declined to take any active part in its proceedings until the Government had finally renounced on the question at issue. Later in

January 1835 the advocates of the two systems, than whom ten abler men could not be found in the service, laid their opinions before the Supreme Council; and, on the 2nd of February, as a member of that Council, produced a minute in which he adopted and defended the views of the English section in the Committee. (Trevelyan 1876: 370)

On March 7, 1835, the Governor General William Bentinck agreed with Macaulay's Minute and wrote, "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India," thus promoting and establishing a permanent position for the use of English language in Indian educational institutions. Trevelyan writes, "two of the Orientalists retired from the Committee of Public Instruction; several new members, both English and native, were appointed; and Macaulay entered upon the functions of President with an energy and assiduity which in his case was an infallible proof that his work was to his mind" (Trevelyan 1876: 373).

15. GOOD-BYE TO INDIA

Macaulay left India in December 1837, apparently with satisfaction for the job he did in India. He wrote to a friend of his on December 18, 1837, "Our Penal code is to be published next week. It has cost me very intense labour; and, whatever its faults may be, it is certainly not a slovenly performance. Whether the work proves useful to India or not, it has been of great use, I feel and know, to my own mind" (Trevelyan 1876: 430).

16. MACAULAY RESUMES HIS WORK IN THE COMMONS

Macaulay returned to his homeland to pursue his political and writing career. In both these parts of his life, he indeed did very well continuing his liberal outlook and influencing people that he came across. He was elected to the Commons from Edinburgh several times, and was also defeated once in the elections. He became a cabinet minister. He functioned also as a distinguished member of the Opposition when his party was not in power. His speech demanding the recall of the then Governor General of India, Lord Ellenborough, for his certain acts of omission and commission at the political level gives some important pointers for the governance of a multi-religious society like India. He also became the most successful of all writers in English before his time in terms of income derived from writing. And certainly he was happy about this fact and mentioned it in several of his letters!

17. MACAULAY ON THE FIRST INDIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE: SEPOY MUTINY IN 1857

The last few years of his life were years of discontent, momentous changes, and uprising in India. The First War of Indian Independence, often called the Sepoy Mutiny, would shock Macaulay. He was not now part of the Indian landscape, living in far away England. And he left India nearly twenty years before the start of the "mutiny" or "rebellion." However he kept himself in touch with the developments in India.

On June 29, 1857 Macaulay wrote in his diary, "Horrible news from India; massacre of

Europeans at Delhi, and mutiny. I have no apprehensions for our Indian Empire; but it is a frightful event. . . . I cannot settle to work while the Delhi affair is undecided" (Trevelyan 1876: 358, Second Volume).

Macaulay also wrote,

The cruelties of the sepoy have inflamed the nation to a degree unprecedented within my memory. Peace Societies, and Aborigines Protection Societies, and Societies for the Reformation of Criminals, are silenced. There is one terrible cry for revenge. The account of that dreadful military execution at Peshawur,--forty men blown at once from the mouths of cannon,--their heads, legs, arms flying in all directions,--was read with delight by people who three weeks ago were against all capital punishment. Bright himself declares for the vigorous suppression of the mutiny. The almost universal feeling is that not a single sepoy within the walls of Delhi should be spared; and I own that it is a feeling which I cannot help sympathizing. (Trevelyan 1876: 359, Second volume)

On September 19, 1857 Macaulay wrote in his diary,

The Indian business looks ill. This miserable affair at Dinapore may produce serious inconvenience. However, the tide is near the turn. Within a month the flood of English will come in fast. But is painful to be so revengeful as I feel myself. I, who cannot bear to see a beast or bird in pain, could look on without winking while Nana Sahib underwent all the tortures of Ravaillac. And these feelings are not mine alone. Is it possible that a year passed under the influence of such feelings should not have some effect on the national character? The effect will be partly good and partly bad. The nerves of our minds will be braced. Effeminate, mawkish philanthropy will lose all its influence. But shall we not hold human life generally cheaper than we have done? Having brought ourselves to exult in the misery of the guilty, shall we not feel less sympathy for the sufferings of the innocent? In one sense, no doubt, in exacting a tremendous retribution we are doing our duty, and performing an act of mercy. So is Calcraft when he hangs a murderer. Yet the habit of hanging murderers is found to inure the character. (Trevelyan 1876: 360, Second volume)

On his 57th birthday, October 25, 1857 Macaulay wrote,

I have some complaints however to make of the past year. The Indian troubles have affected my spirits more than any public events in the whole course of my life . . . the Indian mutiny has now lasted several months, and may last months still. The emotions which it excites, too, are of a strong kind. I may say that, till this year, I did not know what real vindictive hatred meant. With what horror I used to read in Livy how Fulvius put to death the whole Capuan Senate in the Second Punic War! And with what equanimity I could hear that the whole garrison of Delhi, all the Moulavies and Mussulman Doctors there, and all the rabble of the bazaar had been treated in the same way! Is this wrong? Is not the severity which springs from a great sensibility to human suffering a better thing than the lenity which springs from indifference to human

suffering? (Trevelyan 1876: 362, Second volume)

18. MACAULAY IN PERSPECTIVE

Macaulay died on December 28, 1859. He was fifty-nine years old when he died. A great master of English prose, European classics, and English history, Macaulay was an advocate of liberal attitudes in politics. He was a staunch English patriot, and thought that the Empire had a role, function, and duty to civilize the colonies, by bestowing upon them and nurturing among them the English political and judicial institutions. English was the means par excellence for this purpose, Macaulay advocated. Although he was patriotic to the core and was even prompted to be vengeful or vindictive because the Europeans were murdered in India during the "rebellion," yet, as we saw, he was not wholly convinced about the need and justification for these feelings. He appeared to have no particular admiration for anything Indian! And yet as a well-meaning intellectual, he wished that Indians should prosper and excel in such a way that one-day they might even end the rule of the Empire!

Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education is a public document that is made available in sources such as Young (1935) and Sharp (1920). Young (1935) says that a complete copy of the document is not found in the British Museum. What is available in the above cited sources and in Trevelyan (1876), however, offer a good picture of the thought processes of Macaulay as regards the plan of education for "the subjects of Her Majesty in India." As already pointed out earlier, Macaulay's Minute on Education was dated February 2, 1835. The Governor General of India, William Bentinck approved the Minute on March 7, 1835 and it became the cornerstone of British India educational policy.

We may question the logic and the arguments of Macaulay, particularly his diatribe against Indian culture, religion, theology, arts, and sciences. He wrote these words nearly 175 years ago, and as a representative of a ruling power. Some of his words certainly hurt us even today when we read him, and if he were to write to this generation, I have no doubt that he would have been perhaps more circumspect, and would have been "restrained by the necessity of paying a decent reverence to the practices of an established religion" (to slightly alter the words of Young 1935: viii). However, we all know that the number of Indians who wish to learn and use English has been growing steadily for the last two centuries. We all know that English has come to stay in India. The ruling Indian castes or classes have embraced English with suitable modifications as to the contents of lessons and the lexicon that are used in textbooks and taught in classes. English has become the language of higher castes and the affluent in the Indian subcontinent. The lower castes and poorer classes try to emulate the model set by their peers. The net result is that English will continue, and no central or state government will dare to abolish it from the curriculum in India. Globalization makes English a value added language, the access to which becomes a passport for jobs around the world.

As I remarked elsewhere (Thirumalai 2002, Chapter 1), Christian Missionaries have vehemently differed from one another about the usefulness of English as a tool for the purpose of communicating the story of Jesus to the natives of India, and to further the socio-economic development of Indian communities. Many during Macaulay's tenure in India actually fought for

the use of Indian languages as media of instruction. Even as English contains excellent Christian literature, it also is home for secular literature. Secular Humanism found its way in many lands through the learning of English language and literature. Macaulay's project for the use of English in Indian schools did actually accomplish this goal. Its "ennobling" characteristic as a tool and purveyor of culture, the scientific knowledge it opens up for those who learn it, the ease with which one could transact business using it, all have more or less overshadowed the deep Christian foundation upon which the language, literature and culture is built.

Aided by the influence of secularism, many Christian teachers of English have more or less abandoned the Christian program while teaching English. Ethics and morals portrayed in literature were interpreted not as emerging from the Christian base but from universal humanism. English is still pregnant with Christian metaphors, idioms and set phrases, which cannot be wholly understood and used without a grasp of the underlying Christian message.

Perhaps because of the reason last mentioned, most nations have embarked upon a process of textbook contextualization when it comes to teaching English. The original pieces of writing by the native speakers of English are sought to be replaced by the writings of the nationals who are masters of English prose and poetry. In their creative writing, metaphors, idioms, and set phrases from the national languages, which imply local culture and religion, are more freely used. Translations from the local tales are more frequently substituted for tales from Europe. In addition, government-inspired documents on ideology become part of the textbook. Nations (and individuals) want to appropriate English as a language minus the culture and religion it represents and communicates. And this trend has been successfully established in the last fifty years in India. Macaulay's diatribe is simply a nuisance at the moment for the ruling castes and classes, but his momentous decision to introduce English in the Indian School System is followed with a force never before seen in the Indian subcontinent for any language.

It is also recognized that English could not and would not be taught by the native speakers of English in India. This is economically impractical, and politically inconvenient, and sometimes would be viewed as a disastrous step. The former colonies of Britain such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and several African nations have provided for the teaching of English mainly through their nationals. Some countries like Japan and China open their doors to more number of native speakers of English to teach English. This step has far-reaching consequences for the quality of English language instruction and use in India, but the people of the Indian subcontinent have admirably "resolved" the problem with their own nuances. Better schools and colleges continue to seek a competence for their students similar to that of native English speakers. It is possible that this trend would gain momentum as Indians begin to generate more wealth.

When English is introduced in the school curriculum as a language to be learned in addition to a national language or languages, it is inevitable that governments and institutions would look for training their own nationals to meet the demand.

Missionaries in the past responded to this by training nationals in the art of teaching English as a foreign or second language, while noting all the time the inadequate skills attained in

pronunciation and naturalness of usage. Macaulay's letters and minutes make subtle references to the nuances of Indian English, without looking down upon such innovations. The missionaries and others involved in teaching English have recognized that a perfect duplication of the native speakers' language is neither possible nor desirable.

Learning English is closely associated with the study of English literary pieces in the Indian subcontinent. Even as many adult students in short term English courses may not care for the literary benefits of learning English, many more do not feel satisfied with just learning the language and using it only for practical ends. They do, indeed, seek to understand, enjoy and appreciate what English literature offers them. School curriculum always blends learning English language with learning and enjoying English (and American) literature.

The following sections present Lord Macaulay's Minute on Indian Education, written on February 2, 1835, and approved by the Governor General William Bentinck on March 7 in the same year. The subsection headings are not part of the original document. I introduce these subheadings to help our readers to pursue Macaulay's line of thought on the subject.

19. MACAULAY'S MINUTE ON EDUCATION, 2ND FEBRUARY, 1835 [[back to top](#)]

19. 1. LEGISLATIVE ACT NECESSARY TO CHANGE CURRENT PRACTICE?

As it seems to be the opinion of some of the gentlemen who compose the Committee of Public Instruction, that the course which they have hitherto pursued was strictly prescribed by the British Parliament in 1813, and as, if that opinion be correct, a legislative act will be necessary to warrant a change, I have thought it right to refrain from taking any part in the preparation of the adverse statements which now before us, and to reserve what I had to say on the subject till it should come before me as a member of the Council of India.

19. 2. THE CHARTER OF 1813 DOES NOT SPEAK ABOUT THE CHOICE OF LANGUAGES: THE DEFINITION OF LITERATURE

It does not appear to me that the Act of Parliament can, by any art of construction, be made to bear the meaning which has been assigned to it. It contains nothing about the particular languages or sciences which are to be studied. A sum is set apart 'for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories.' It is argued, or rather taken for granted, that by literature, the Parliament can have meant only Arabic and Sanscrit literature, that they never would have given the honorable appellation of 'a learned native' to a native who was familiar with the poetry of Milton, the Metaphysics of Locke, and the Physics of Newton; but that they meant to designate by that name only such persons as might have studied in the sacred books of the Hindoos all the uses of cusa-grass, and all the mysteries of absorption into the Deity. This does not appear to be a very satisfactory interpretation. To take a parallel case: suppose that the Pacha of Egypt, a country once superior in knowledge of the nations of Europe, but now sunk far below them, were to appropriate a sum for the purpose of 'reviving and promoting literature, and encouraging learned natives of Egypt,' would anybody infer that he

meant the youth of his pashalic to give years to the study of hieroglyphics, to search into all the doctrines disguised under the fable of Osiris, and to ascertain with all possible accuracy the ritual with which cats and onions were anciently adored? Would he be justly charged with inconsistency, if, instead of employing his young subjects in deciphering obelisks, he were to order them to be instructed in the English and French languages, and in all the sciences to which those languages are the chief keys?

19. 3. MONETARY PROVISIONS ONLY? NO!

The words on which the supporters of the old system rely do not bear them out, and other words follow which seem to be quite decisive on the other side. This lac of rupees is set apart, not only for 'reviving literature in India,' the phrase on which their whole interpretation is founded, but also for 'the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories,' -words which are alone sufficient to authorize all the changes for which I contend.

If the Council agree in my construction, no legislative act will be necessary. If they differ from me, I will prepare a short Act rescinding that clause of the Charter of 1813, from which the difficulty arises.

19. 4. NO PLEDGE GIVEN ON SUPPORT TO INDIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The argument which I have been considering, affects only the form of proceeding. But the admirers of the Oriental system of education have used another argument, which, if we admit it to be valid, is decisive against all change. They conceive that the public faith is pledged to the present system, and that to alter the appropriation of any of the funds which have hitherto been spent in encouraging the study of Arabic and Sanscrit, would be down-right spoliation. It is not easy to understand by what process of reasoning they can have arrived at this conclusion. The grants which are made from the public purse for the encouragement of literature differed in no respect from the grants which are made from the same purse for other objects of real or supposed utility. We found a sanatorium on a spot which we suppose to be healthy. Do we thereby pledge ourselves to keep a sanatorium there, if the result should not answer our expectation? We commence the erection of a pier. Is it a violation of the public faith to stop the works, if we afterwards see reason to believe that the building will be useless? The rights of property are undoubtedly sacred. But nothing endangers those rights so much as the practice, now unhappily too common, of attributing them to things which they do not belong. Those who impart to abuses the sanctity of property are in truth imparting to the institution of property the unpopularity and the fragility of abuses. If the Government has given to any person a formal assurance; nay, if the Government has excited in any person's mind a reasonable expectation that he shall receive a certain income as a teacher or a learner of Sanscrit or Arabic, I would respect that person's pecuniary interests-I would rather err on the side of liberality to individuals than suffer the public faith to be called in question. But to talk of a Government pledging itself to teach certain languages and certain sciences, though those languages may become useless, though those sciences may be exploded, seems to be quite unmeaning. There is not a single word in any public instructions, from which it can be inferred that the Indian Government ever intended to give any

pledge on this subject, or ever considered the destination of these funds as unalterably fixed. But had it been otherwise, I should have denied the competence of our predecessors to bind us by any pledge on such a subject. Suppose that a Government had in the last century enacted in the most solemn manner that all its subjects should, to the end of time, be inoculated for the small-pox: would that Government be bound to persist in the practice after Jenner's discovery? These promises of which nobody claims the performance, and from which nobody can grant a release; these vested rights, which vest in nobody; this property without proprietors; this robbery, which makes nobody poorer, may be comprehended by persons of higher faculties than mine. I consider this plea merely as a set form of words, regularly used both in England and in India, in defence of every abuse for which no other plea can be set up.

I hold this lac of rupees to be quite at the disposal of the Governor-General in Council, for the purpose of promoting learning in India, in any way which may be thought most advisable. I hold his Lordship to be quite as free to direct that it shall no longer be employed in encouraging Arabic and Sanscrit, as he is to direct that the reward for killing tigers in Mysore shall be diminished, or that no more public money shall be expended on the chanting at the cathedral.

19. 5. WHAT IS THE MOST USEFUL WAY OF USING THE MONEY ALLOCATED FOR THE INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE OF INDIA?

We now come to the gist of the matter. We have a fund to be employed as government shall direct for the intellectual improvement of the people of this country. The simple question is, what is the most useful way of employing it?

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

19. 6. WHAT THEN SHALL THAT LANGUAGE BE?

What then shall that language be? One-half of the Committee maintain that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommend the Arabic and Sanscrit. The whole question seems to me to be, which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. -But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.

It will be hardly disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the eastern writers with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

19. 7. INDIANS CANNOT BE EDUCATED BY MEANS OF THEIR MOTHER-TONGUE: ENGLISH IS THE LANGUAGE

How, then, stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence; with historical compositions, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equaled; with just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and trade; with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to expand the intellect of man. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may be safely said, that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is like to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are raising, the one in south of Africa, the other in Australasia; communities which are every year becoming more important, and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

19. 8. DO WE ABDICATE OUR RESPONSIBILITY?

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages, by which, by universal confession, there are not books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronise sound Philosophy and true History, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines, which would disgrace an English farrier, --Astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school,--History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years

long,--and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

19. 9. THE PRECEDENTS: EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

We are not without experience to guide us. History furnishes several analogous cases, and they all teach the same lesson. There are in modern times, to go no further, two memorable instances of a great prejudices overthrown, --of knowledge diffused,--of taste purified,--of arts and sciences planted in countries which had recently been ignorant and barbarous.

The first instance to which I refer, is the great revival of letters among the Western nations at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time almost every thing that was worth reading was contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Had our ancestors acted as the Committee of Public Instruction has hitherto acted; had they neglected the language of Cicero and Tacitus; had they confined their attention to the old dialects of our own island; had they printed nothing and taught nothing at the universities but Chronicles in Anglo-Saxon, and Romances in Norman-French, would England have been what she now is? What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity. I doubt whether the Sanscrit literature be as valuable than that of classical antiquity. I doubt whether the Sanscrit literature be as valuable as that of our Saxon and Norman progenitors. In some departments, --in History, for example, I am certain that it is much less so.

Another instance may be said to be still before our eyes. Within the last hundred and twenty years, a nation which had previously been in a state as a barbarous as that in which our ancestors were before the crusades, has gradually emerged from the ignorance in which it was sunk, and has taken its place among civilized communities. --I speak of Russia. There is now in that country a large educated class, abounding with persons fit to serve the state in the highest functions, and in no wise inferior to the most accomplished men who adorn the best circles of Paris and London. There is reason to hope that this vast empire, which in the time of our grandfathers was probably behind the Punjab, may, in the time of our grandchildren, be pressing close to on France and Britain in the career of improvement. And how was this change effected? Not by flattering national prejudices: not by feeding the mind of the young Muscovite with the old women's stories which his rude fathers had believed: not by filling his head with lying legends about St. Nicholas: not by encouraging him to study the great question, whether the world was or was not created on the 13th of September: not by calling 'a learned native,' when he has mastered all these points of knowledge: but by teaching him those foreign languages in which the greatest mass of information had been laid up, and thus putting all that information within his reach. The languages of Western Europe civilized Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for the Hindoo what they have done for the Tartar.

19. 10. THE LEARNERS CANNOT PRESCRIBE WHAT THE TEACHERS SHOULD TEACH: INDIANS ACTUALLY DESIRE TO LEARN ENGLISH AND WESTERN SCIENCES

And what are the arguments against that course which seems to be alike recommended by theory

and by experience? It is said that we ought to secure the co-operation of the native public, and that we can do this only by teaching Sanscrit and Arabic.

I can by no means admit that when a nation of high intellectual attainments undertakes to superintend the education of a nation comparatively ignorant, the learners are absolutely to prescribe the course which is to be taken by the teachers. It is not necessary, however, to say anything on this subject. For it is proved by unanswerable evidence that we are not at present securing the co-operation of the natives. It would be bad enough to consult their intellectual taste at the expense of their intellectual health. But we are consulting neither, -- we are withholding from them the learning for which they are craving, we are forcing on them the mock-learning which they nauseate.

This is proved by the fact that we are forced to pay our Arabic and Sanscrit students, while those who earn English are willing to pay us. All the declamations in the world about the love and reverence of the natives for their sacred dialects will never, in the mind of any impartial person, outweigh the undisputed fact, that we cannot find, in all our vast empire, a single student who will let us teach him those dialects unless we will pay him.

I have now before me the accounts of the Madrassa for one month, -- the month of December 1833. The Arabic students appear to have been seventy-seven in number. All receive stipends from the public. The whole amount paid to them is about 500 rupees a month. On the other side of the account stands the following item: Deduct amount realized from the out-students of English for the months of May, June and July last, 103 rupees.

19. 11. DO WE PAY PEOPLE TO LEARN WHAT THEY WANT TO LEARN?

I have been told that it is merely from want of local experience that I am surprised at these phenomena, and that it is not the fashion for students in India to study at their own charges. This only confirms me in my opinion. Nothing is more certain than that it never can in any part of the world be necessary to pay men for doing what they think pleasant and profitable. India is no exception to this rule. The people of India do not require to be paid for eating rice when they are hungry, or for wearing woollen cloth in the cold season. To come nearer to the case before us, the children who learn their letters and a little elementary Arithmetic from the village school-master are not paid by him. He is paid for teaching them. Why then is it necessary to pay people to learn Sanscrit and Arabic? Evidently because it is universally felt that the Sanscrit and Arabic are languages, the knowledge of which does not compensate for the trouble of acquiring them. On all such subjects the state of the market is the decisive test.

Other evidence is not wanting, if other evidence were required. A petition was presented last year to the Committee by several ex-students of the Sanscrit College. The petitioners stated that they had studied in the college ten or twelve years; that they had made themselves acquainted with Hindoo literature and science; that they had received certificates of proficiency: and what is the fruit of all this! 'Notwithstanding such testimonials,' they say, 'we have but little of bettering our condition without the kind of assistance of your Honorable Committee, the indifference with which we are generally looked upon by our countrymen leaving no hope of encouragement and

assistance from them.' They therefore beg that they may be recommended to the Governor General for places under the Government, not places of high dignity or emolument, but such as may just enable them to exist. 'We want means,' they say, 'for a decent living, and for our progressive improvement, which, however, we cannot obtain without the assistance of Government, by whom we have been educated and maintained from childhood.' They conclude by representing, very pathetically, that they are sure that it was never the intention of government, after behaving so liberally to them during their education, to abandon them to destitution and neglect.

19. 12. THE CONTEST BETWEEN TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

I have been used to see petitions to Government for compensation. All these petitions, even the most unreasonable of them, proceeded on the supposition that some loss had been sustained—that some wrong had been inflicted. These are surely the first petitioners who ever demanded compensation for having been educated gratis, -- for having been supported by the public during twelve years, and then sent forth into the world well furnished with literature and science. They represent their education as an injury which gives them a claim on the Government for redress, as an injury for which the stipends paid to them during the infliction were a very inadequate compensation. And I doubt not that they are in the right. They have wasted the best years of life in learning what procures for them neither bread nor respect. Surely we might, with advantage, have saved the cost of making these persons useless and miserable; surely, men may be brought up to be burdens to the public and objects of contempt to their neighbours at a smaller charge to the state. But such is our policy. We do not even stand neuter in the contest between truth and falsehood. We are not content to leave the natives to the influence of their own hereditary prejudices. To the natural difficulties which obstruct the progress of sound science in the East, we add fresh difficulties of our own making. Bounties and premiums, such as ought not to be given even for the propagation of truth, we lavish on false taste and false philosophy.

19. 13. EXPENDITURE ON SANSKRIT AND ARABIC LEARNING IS DEAD LOSS

By acting thus we create the very evil which we fear. We are making that opposition which we do not find. What we spend on the Arabic and Sanskrit colleges is not merely a dead loss to the cause of truth; it is bounty-money paid to raise up champions of error. It goes to form a nest, not merely of helpless place-hunters, but of bigots prompted alike by passion and by interest to raise a cry against every useful scheme of education. If there should be by opposition among the natives to the change which I recommend, that opposition will be the effect of our own system. It will be headed by persons supported by our stipends and trained in our colleges. The longer we persevere in our present course, the more formidable will that opposition be. It will be every year reinforced by recruits whom we are paying. From the native society left to itself, we have no difficulties to apprehend; all the murmuring will come from that oriental interest which we have, by artificial means, called into being, and nursed into strength.

19. 14. THE REAL DESIRE OF INDIANS

There is yet another fact, which is alone sufficient to prove that the feeling of the native public, when left to itself, is not such as the supporters of the old system represent it to be. The

Committee have thought fit to lay out above a lac of rupees in printing Arabic and Sanscrit books. Those books find not purchasers. It is very rarely that a single copy is disposed of. Twenty-three thousand volumes, most of them folios and quartos, fill the libraries, or rather the lumber-rooms, of this body. The Committee contrive to get rid of some portion of their vast stock of oriental literature by giving books away. But they cannot give so fast as they print. About twenty thousand rupees a year are spent in adding fresh masses of waste paper to a hoard which, I should, is already sufficiently ample. During the last three years, about sixty thousand rupees have been expended in this manner. The sale of Arabic and Sanscrit books, during those three years, has not yielded quite one thousand rupees. In the mean time the School-book Society is selling seven or eight thousand English volumes every year, and not only pays the expenses of printing, but realizes a profit of 20 per cent. on its outlay.

19. 15. THE INDIAN PENAL CODE WILL REPLACE SANSKRIT AND ARABIC TEXTS

The fact that the Hindoo law is to be learned chiefly from Sanscrit books, and the Mahometan law from Arabic books, has been much insisted on, but seems not to bear at all on the question. We are commanded by Parliament to ascertain and digest the laws of India. The assistance of a law Commission has been given to us for that purpose. As soon as the code is promulgated, the Shastras and the Hedaya will be useless to a Moonsief or Sudder Ameen. I hope and trust that before the boys who are now entering at the Madrassa and the Sanscrit college have completed their studies, this great work will be finished. It would be manifestly absurd to educate the rising generation with a view to a state of things which we mean to alter before they reach manhood.

19. 16. INDIA GOVERNMENT WILL BE TOLERANT AND NEUTRAL TO ALL RELIGIONS

But there is yet another argument which seems even more untenable. It is said that the Sanscrit and Arabic are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred millions of people are written, and that they are, on that account, entitled to peculiar encouragement. Assuredly it is the duty of the British Government in India to be not only tolerant, but neutral on all religious questions. But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value, only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly reconcileable with reason, with morality, or even with that very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly preserved. It is confessed that a language is barren of useful knowledge. We are to teach it because it is false History, false Astronomy, false Medicine, because we find them in company with a false religion. We abstain, and I trust shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting natives to Christianity. And while we act thus, can we reasonably and decently bribe men out of the revenues of the state to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?

19. 17. INDIANS CAN ATTAIN EXCELLENCE IN ENGLISH

It is taken for granted by the advocates of Oriental learning, that no native of this country can

possibly attain more than a mere smattering of English. They do not attempt to prove this; but they perpetually insinuate it. They designate the education which their opponents recommend as a mere spelling book education. They assume it as undeniable, that the question is between a profound knowledge of Hindoo and Arabian literature and science on the one side, and a superficial knowledge of the rudiments of English on the other. This is not merely an assumption, but an assumption contrary to all reason and experience. We know that foreigners of all nations do learn our language sufficiently to have access to all the most abstruse knowledge which it contains, sufficiently to relish even the more delicate graces of our most idiomatic writers. There are in this very town natives who are quite competent to discuss political or scientific questions with fluency and precision in the English language. I have heard the very question on which I am now writing discussed by native gentlemen with a liberality and an intelligence which would do credit to any member of the Committee of Public instruction. Indeed it is unusual to find, even in the literary circles of the continent, any foreigner who can express himself in English with so much facility and correctness as we find in many Hindoos. Nobody, I suppose, will contend that English is so difficult to a Hindoo as Greek to an Englishman. Yet an intelligent English youth, in a much smaller number of years than our unfortunate pupils pass at the Sanscrit college, becomes able to read, to enjoy, and even to imitate, not unhappily, the compositions of the best Greek Authors. Less than half the time which enables an English youth to read Herodotus and Sophocles, ought to enable a Hindoo to read Hume and Milton.

19. 18. TO SUM UP

To sum up what I have said, I think it clear that we are not fettered by the Act of parliament of 1813; that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied; that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanscrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law, nor as the languages of religion, have the Sanscrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our engagement; that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed. In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.

19. 19. I SHALL HONOR ALL EXISTING COMMITMENTS

I would strictly respect all existing interests. I would deal even generously with all individuals who have had fair reason to expect a pecuniary provision. But I would strike at the root of the bad system which has hitherto been fostered by us. I would at once stop the printing of Arabic and Sanscrit books, I would abolish the Madrassa and the Sanscrit college at Calcutta. Benares is the great seat of Brahmanical learning; Delhi, of Arabic learning. If we retain the Sanscrit college at Benares and the Mahometan college at Delhi, we do enough, and much more than enough in

my opinion, for the Eastern languages. If the Benares and Delhi colleges should be retained, would at least recommend tht no stipends shall be given to any students who may hereafter repair thither, but that the people shall be left to make their own choice between the rival systems of education without being bribed by us to learn what they have no desire to know. The funds which would thus be placed at our disposal would enable us to give larger encouragement to the Hindoo college at Calcutta, and to establish in the principal cities throughout the Presidencies of Fort William and Agra schools in which the English language might be well and thoroughly taught.

19. 20. RELIEVE ME IF MY PROPOSAL IS NOT ACCEPTED

If the decision of his Lordship in Council should be such as I anticipate, I shall enter on the performance of my duties with the greatest zeal and alacrity. If, on the other hand, it be the opinion of the government that the present system ought to remain unchanged, I beg that I may be permitted to retire from the chair of the Committee. I feel that I could not be of the smallest use there-I feel, also, that I should be lending my countenance to what I firmly believe to be a mere delusion. I believe that the present system tends, not to accelerate the progress of truth, but to delay the natural death of expiring errors. I conceive that we have at present no right to the respectable name of a Board of Public Instruction. We are a Board for wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish, who live on the public while they are receiving their education, and whose education is so utterly useless to them that when they have received it they must either starve or live on the public all the rest of their lives. Entertaining these opinions, I am naturally desirous to decline all share in the responsibility of a body, which, unless it alters its whole mode of proceeding, I must consider not merely as useless, but as positively noxious.

*** **

20. OBJECTIONS TO MACAULAY'S MINUTE [[back to top](#)]

As already pointed out, the Governor General William Bentinck gave his "entire concurrence to the sentiments expressed in this Minute" on February 2, 1835. Certain serious objections to the content and manner of argument and presentation found in Macaulay's Minute were raised by another member of the Supreme Council, H. T. Prinsep who was Secretary for matters pertaining to education. He first kind of took objection to the procedure adopted in obtaining the signature of the Governor General in some secrecy. Secondly, he objected to the various arguments offered by Macaulay in support of his position. In a note he wrote on February 1835, Prinsep wrote as follows (Only some excerpts are given below):

It is laid down that the vernacular dialects are not fit to be made the vehicle of instruction in science or literature, that the choice is therefore between English on one hand and Sanscrit and Arabic on the other-the latter are dismissed on the ground that their literature is worthless and the superiority of that of England is set forth in all animated description of the treasures of science and of intelligence it contains and of the stores of intellectual

enjoyment it opens. There is no body acquainted with both literatures that will not subscribe to all that is said in the minute of the superiority of that of England but the question is not rightly stated when it is asserted to be this "whether, when it is in our power to teach this language"-that is English-we shall teach those which contain no books of value. The whole question is-have we it in our power to teach everywhere this English and this European science? It is in doubting nay in denying this that those who take the opposite view maintain the expediency of letting the natives Pursue their present course of instruction and of endeavouring to engraft European Science thereon.

An analogy is drawn between the present state of India and that of Europe at the time of the revival of letters. The cultivation of English is likened to the study of Latin and Greek in those days and the grand results that have followed are held out as an example to be imitated hereby inculcating English in order that a Bangalee and Hindee literature may grow up as perfect as that we now have in England. This however is not the true analogy-Latin and Greek were to the nations of Europe what Arabic and Persian are to the Mooslims and Sanscrit to the Hindoos of the present population of Hindoostan and if a native literature is to be created it must be through the improvements of which these are capable. To the great body of the People of India, English is as strange as Arabic was to the knights of the dark ages. It is not the language of the erudite of the clergy and of men of letters as Latin always was in Europe and as Arabic and Persian are extensively in Asia.

The analogy of Russia is less convincing. It is through communication with foreigners through imitation and translations that the Russians are building up a native literature. This is the method that is specifically advocated by those who despair of making English the language of general adoption or the vehicle for imparting a knowledge of the sciences to the millions who compose the population of India. The argument would only have weight if, in the schools and colleges of Russia, German were now or had ever been the exclusive organ through which the youth of that country derived instruction which it assuredly is not and never was.

But to proceed to the real arguments of the minute. It is said that in teaching Arabic and Sanscrit we are not consulting the intellectual taste of the natives but are "forcing on them the mock learning which they nauseate." If there were the slightest ground for believing that the great body of the Mooslims did not venerate to enthusiasm their Arabic and Persian literature or to believe that the Hindoos as a body were not partial to their studies Sanscrit then of course would the whole case or those who advocate the prosecution of those studies require to be thrown up. This however is a matter of fact and of opinion that cannot be conceded to either party upon mere assertion. It is necessary to examine the grounds upon which so startling a proposition as that above stated is advanced and maintained.

The minute proceeds "This is proved by the fact that we are forced to pay our Arabic and Sanscrit students while those who learn English pay us..... We cannot find in all our vast empire a single student who will let us teach him those dialects unless we will pay him.

These assertions are supported by adducing from the report upon the Mudrusa of Calcutta the circumstance that there were in December 1833 seventy seven Arabic Students on that foundation receiving in the aggregate above Rs. 500 per mensem while in three months Rs. 103 were collected by the English master from out-students who paid for his instruction in that language. The contrast is dwelt upon as conclusive but a very little explanation will suffice to show that the argument is quite groundless.

There are ordinarily taught in the Mudrusa between two and three hundred youths. The Government scholarships are eighty and if the President of the Education Committee would attend the next examination of candidates for these scholarships he would see in the keenness of the competition and in the proficiency of the candidates abundant evidence that the salaried scholars are not the only persons in our Indian Empire who learn the rudiments of Persian and Arabic literature. I am no Sanscrit scholar and never attended the examinations of that college in Calcutta nor do I pretend to much acquaintance with its constitution or with the rules under which its scholarships are given away but only the other day the Education Committee received a report of the examinations of the Sanscrit College at Benares and it cannot have escaped the president of that Committee to have observed that, although the jageers or scholarships were only 130, upwards of three hundred students pressed forward for examination.

In truth the jageers or monthly allowances given at the Mudrusa and in the Sanscrit Colleges and elsewhere are in all respects similar to the Scholarships of the Universities or to the foundation Scholars of the Public Schools of England. They are given not as inducements to study the language but as the rewards of successful study and in order to keep at the institution for the prosecution of further studies those who by their progress evince a love of science and the qualification to become learned men, Moolavees or Pundits. Most of those who enjoy these jageers are themselves the teachers of many pupils, teachers in the College to those who attend there for instruction and teachers at home in families of the better order to those who prefer that their sons shall be so instructed.

Whether it is expedient or not to give these stipendiary provisions as rewards for ardent study and to keep students longer at their education by means of them is a question that has heretofore been argued in the Committee of Public Instruction. Something is to be said on both sides and although the Committee heretofore decided in favour of the practise it does not follow that they may not have decided wrong. But however this may be the fact that there are paid scholars on the establishment or foundation of any seminary affords no ground for assuming that none would learn if they were not paid, yet this is the argument of the minute. As well might it be assumed from the fact that there are foundation scholars at Eton and scholarships in all the Colleges of both Universities in England that no body would learn Latin and Greek if it were not for these stipendiary advantages. Be it Latin and Greek or Mathematics or Law or Arabic and Sanscrit literature or be it English the principle is the same. Scholarships are given and it is thought right to give them to reward and encourage the poor scholar and to lead as well through the excitement of competition as by lengthening the course of study to the

attainment of higher proficiency. In the Mudrusa itself separate scholarships have been established for proficient in English in order to encourage the study of that language. If this be a conclusive argument that the study of English is nauseated because it requires to be paid for, then may it be applied to Arabic and Sanscrit and to Mathematics and to all other studies. All must participate in the reproach or it will evidently apply to none.

But the fact remains to be explained that a sum of Rs. 103 was collected in three months from out students of English whereas nothing is shown by the accounts of the Mudrusa to have been collected from out students of Persian and Arabic. Everybody knows that with Moolavees and Pundits, for both profess the same principle in this respect, it is meritorious to give instruction gratis and sinful to take hire or wages from the pupil who receives it. The teacher's remuneration is always in the way of a present and perfectly voluntary. The English Master on the other hand who is a Christian and who has been appointed by the Committee to the Mudrusa acts on quite different principles and not only deems it no sin to take payment for the lessons he gives but makes a special demand of it from all who appear to him to have the means of paying. The wonder is rather, considering that the teacher in this instance is a first rate instructor and that he gives instruction to Hindoos as well as Mooslims, that more was not realized. The fact that a sum of about Rs. 30 a month was realized when upwards of three hundred per mensem is paid from the Committee's funds to the Schoolmaster is surely no proof of the violent desire for instruction in English which is inferred from it. If again the desire of this instruction were so great how comes it to have been proposed to make the learning of English compulsory in the Mudrusa and how does it happen that of all the students now in the Mudrusa there are but two who have made progress beyond the spelling book.

Undoubtedly there is a very widely spread anxiety at this time for the attainment of a certain proficiency in English. The sentiment is to be encouraged by all means as the source and forerunner of great moral improvement to those who feel its influence but there is no single member of the Education Committee who will venture to assert that this disposition has yet shown itself extensively amongst the Moosulmans. It is the Hindoos of Calcutta, the Sirkars and their connexions and the descendants and relations of the Sirkars of former days, those who have risen through their connexion with the English and with public offices, men who hold or who seek employments in which a knowledge of English is a necessary qualification. These are the classes of persons to whom the study of English is as yet confined and certainly we have no reason yet to believe that the Moosulmans in any part of India can be reconciled to the cultivation of it much less give it a preference to the polite literature of their race or to what they look upon as such.

The minute proceeds to cite a petition from certain students of the Sanscrit College complaining that their studies did not secure them an assured and easy livelihood as affording another conclusive argument against extending encouragement to such studies. But surely the disappointment of the too sanguine hopes of any class of persons as to their future provision in life affords no evidence that the knowledge they have acquired is useless. Much research and patient investigation would be indispensable before any determination could be come to on the important question to native youth at this moment

how best to secure respect in after life and by what course of education to provide themselves the best chance of a comfortable livelihood. In all times and amongst all people this is an important question for youth but more especially to the youth of India at present when society with all its institutions is so evidently in the transition state. This argument again even were it sound as respects the study of Sanscrit has evidently no application to the Mudrasa and to those who study Arabic and Persian. These at least have never complained that through proficiency in their studies their means of obtaining a livelihood have not been improved nor will it be maintained that the study of both is not at this moment highly useful for this great purpose of life.

But the great argument remains to be noticed and that is that by encouraging the study of native literature we create the very opposition which is adduced as the chief obstacle to the introduction of the study of English and of true science. This is a most important question but seems to involve the previous one—does or does not the prejudice exist? It is declared by those who take the opposite view to Mr. Macaulay that it does exist and that the prejudice is so general especially amongst the Moosulmans that there is no hope of our being able by the mere offer of instruction in English and English science to secure that it shall be received for its own sake. These persons say that the best chance of procuring that true knowledge shall ultimately prevail is to engraft it upon the course of education now most esteemed and to take every means of leading the youth to the improved condition in which it is desired to place them by giving them first all they respect and admire in their fathers and then besides the further instruction we have to impart. The argument on the other side is that unless we violently assail and displace the false literature that we see held up as erudition and learning we shall by continuing instruction in it create opposition to the reception of the new. Now this argument on the very face of it seems to assume that the possessors of the old literature are necessarily opposed to the new, it seems to build upon the impossibility of reconciling the two and yet in the same breath we are told that all the world is anxiously seeking the new and attaches no value to the old.

On the other hand it is maintained that, if at this time the desire for European science and literature is extensively felt and is still on the increase, the cause of it is to be found in the manner in which the Government interfere with the work of education which was commenced and has hitherto been carried on, and in particular to the strict observance of the principle of encouraging every course of education that is followed by any extensive class of the population and doing violence to no existing feelings whether of prejudice or prepossession.

It is maintained that by following this course we bind and perpetuate no enmities but on the contrary mitigate and reconcile opinions and doctrines that seem adverse and when we recollect that out of the philosophy of the schools the same philosophy that is the highest point of knowledge in Arabic and Sanscrit grew the very philosophy we wish to inculcate, viz., that of Bacon and Locke and Newton, why should we despair of engrafting on the similar stock of Arabia and India a similar fruit?

With respect to the expenditure upon printing and translating in regard to which it is argued that the fact that the books of the Committee do not sell is proof conclusive that the money is thrown away and that there is no taste for the literature it was meant to encourage, I fear it must be admitted that very considerable sums have been thrown away upon works which have yielded no fruit. The translations have been the most expensive and the least profitable of these works, for they have been executed at very enormous rates of charge and in a style for the most part not popular and taking. I quite agree that the funds appropriated to revive literature ought not to be lavished on works that will not pay and that for the printing of those that will pay, there can be no need of aid from Government. But I do not admit that because we have failed to make our printing and translating a profitable speculation that therefore there is no taste for the literature. Our prices have been exorbitant and our works childish or ill got up. This alone accounts for their not being taken off our hands and as for the fact that private Printing establishments find a profit in printing English School Books they have had the extensive patronage of the Committee and of Mofusil institutions and more especially of Missionary schools and a growing Christian population to provide. Besides which the relative expense of printing in the native languages as compared with that of printing in English will of itself account for the difference. Our books be it observed have been mostly printed at the same press which is referred to as having thrived by its printing business and it has thrived mainly at our expense. However there is not I believe in the Committee of public instruction a single advocate for a continuance of the printing and translating business on the footing on which it has hitherto been conducted It has been ruinously expensive and has yielded no return but we see establishments for printing Persian and Arabic books as thriving as the English Presses and numberless books and little treatises are issued from them of which we hear nothing. The text book of the Moolavees who recently rose in insurrection is an instance in point. Although printed in Calcutta it was not heard of by Europeans until the sect broke out into rebellion.

If our translations and the books of our selection have not hit the taste of the reading classes or have been too dear for them to purchase it is a reason for discontinuing the provision of such but no proof that there is no taste for anything that might be provided. There are applications in abundance for our books as presents and we know not when one is issued how many copies are made from it at less cost even than that we ask to compensate the charge of publication. The price too paid by the Committee for native publications is the first subscription price and the Committee is always undersold by the presses which supply them books for they sell the reserved copies at a reduced price.

The minute proceeds to say that it cannot be necessary to keep up instruction in Arabic and Sanscrit because of the connection of these languages with the religion of the Hindoos and Mooslims. I have never heard this reason assigned as an argument for a Christian Government's continuing to give the instruction. The circumstance has been referred to as both proving and accounting for the confirmed veneration these classes have for their respective literatures and because it has sometimes been denied that the natives have any respect for their own literature which is quite inconsistent with the idea that all their religion is wrapped up in it.

It is on account of the connection of these languages with existing laws that the necessity of continuing instruction in them has been maintained. This argument is met in the minute by reference to what the Law Commission are expected to do and what the Legislature intends should be done. Herein however is an admission that for so long as this intention is unfulfilled the motive for continuing instruction in that which is the law, exists in full force.

The nature of the instruction in English that will have to be imparted is the next point. Those opposed to the discontinuance of instruction in Sanscrit, Arabic and Persian maintain that in place of them the Committee would have to commence everywhere teaching the English alphabet. It cannot surely be denied that this must be the beginning. The minute dwells on the capability of the natives to attain high proficiency. This may be admitted as a result to be expected hereafter but if the teaching of English be substituted everywhere for the perfecting of youths in their present courses of education does it not follow as a necessary consequence that we shall have to substitute the teaching of the alphabet and spelling book for instruction in advanced literature? The candidates for admission into our Arabic and Sanscrit Colleges know already much of those languages and are prepared to be taught science. The students we should get for English would require to be taught to read.

To the recapitulation at the close of the Minute I have nothing new to object. It is admitted that we must endeavour to carry the people with us in all we seek to do for their improvement. The party whose sentiments I am endeavouring to express argue to the question what are the best, indeed to their minds the only means of doing this. Their opponents, looking to grand results to follow when all the desired improvements have been effected, pass over altogether the necessary consideration of means. *Opfer volo jubeo* is their policy on this great question. The abolition of the Mudrusa and Sanscrit College at Calcutta and the alteration of the character of all other Institutions supported or assisted from the Public funds is their proposition but it is submitted that there are many considerations which should protect the Mudrusa at least from any present demolition. It is the a only link through which the Government has at present any connection whatsoever with the instruction of the Mooslim youth of Bengal, it is not one of the passing institutions of recent establishment for the support of which funds are assigned from the Parliamentary lack of Rupees but is an old established college endowed separately and efficiently performing the purposes of the endowment. If this be doubted let the fact be made the subject of enquiry the more searching the better will the advocates of this institution be satisfied. Even though the Committee of General Instruction should come to a resolution or should be desired by Government to change altogether the principles by which it has hitherto been guided in the application of the Parliamentary grant, it would by no means follow that the Mudrusa should be placed on a different footing. The Moosulman subjects of the Government are much more jealous of innovation upon their habits and their religion than the Hindoos ever were. When it was first proposed to teach them English they consulted their oracle of the day Uzeezooddeen of Dehlee as to whether it was sinful to yield to the innovation. He gave them a most sensible answer and since then not only has English and English science been extensively

taught but much progress has been made in instilling correct moral principles and reconciling the sect to further improvements. Such a measure at this time as the abolition of the Mudrusa would produce alienation in this wide class of the population....instead of aiding would impede if it did not prevent any further improvement. To the principle of conciliation it is decidedly opposed and will universally be looked upon as touching close upon intolerance.

I have written much more than I had intended or thought would be necessary and yet feel that I have not half stated all that I have myself to urge on this important question. The cause has many advocates who also deserve to be heard before Government shall come to a final determination. There is a minute by Mr. Macnaghten about to be sent up by the Education Committee which seems entitled to much attention and I am sure that not only that gentleman but every member of the Committee would wish to be heard upon any resolution passed for abolishing the Mudrusa. In the height of the discussion as to the proper course to be followed by the Committee for promoting the improvement of the education of the country such a proposition was never brought forward by any one of those most opposed to the continuance of instruction in Arabic and Sanscrit. It is now submitted separately and it is my hope that I have shown sufficient ground to induce the Members of Government to suspend their judgment at least.....of investigation. (Sharp 1920)

21. PRINSEP'S DIARY

It appears that Prinsep's objection came a little late. Macaulay had already got the concurrence of the Governor General. It would have been impossible to change the decision now. Prinsep's arguments were both administrative and issue-based. However, Prinsep felt that Macaulay carried the day with him because of his name and fame as a literary figure. Prinsep wrote in his diary as follows February 15, 1835:

I took part of course against the innovations which this party wanted to introduce, and I carried with me the vote of the majority of the Council of Education. But when T.B. Macaulay arrived to be the new legislative member of the Council of India, his high literary reputation induced the Government to appoint him President of the Council of Education, and the English party, as it was called, entertained high hope that his influence and authority would turn the scale against me and my supporters. He was a mere silent observer, however, for some time, until Lord W. Bentinck had resumed his place at the seat of Government, then one day without mooted the matter at all in the Council of Education, he prepared an elaborate Minute proposing not only to withhold any further grant of public money from institutions for conferring instruction in native literature of any kind, but even to abolish the existing Sanskrit and Madrassa colleges to which Government had made grants many years ago, that of the Madrassa dating from the time of Warren Hastings. This Minute T.B. Macaulay gave to Lord W. Bentinck at Barrackpur, the Governor-General's country-house. Lord William sent it down to me (the Educational being one of my Secretariat Departments) with a short note written at the foot adopting it and desiring it to be put in train to be brought before Council. I accordingly circulated it

in a box in the usual form. The box was returned to me without a note or memorandum of any kind from any of the Members. I accordingly considered it my duty to prepare and circulate a memorandum explaining the nature of the institutions proposed to be abolished, and giving reasons why they should hesitate to adopt the extreme views propounded by Mr. Macaulay. This memorandum I sent up to the Governor-General and it was afterwards circulated to the Members of the Council from whom it elicited separate short minutes of their opinions. These discussions of course were confidential, and were by me communicated to nobody. But somehow the report got wind that the Government was about to abolish the Madrassa and Sanskrit Colleges. The mind of the public of Calcutta was immediately in a ferment. In three days a petition was got up signed by no less than 30,000 people in behalf of the Madrassa and another by the Hindus for the Sanskrit College. T.B. Macaulay took it into his head that this agitation was excited and even got up by me. He sent for the Head of the Madrassa who of course was the recognised promoter of the Muhammedan petition, and questioned him upon the subject, I using for interpreter John Colvin, a junior civil servant, who was in the Council of Education and of the party opposed to me. He particularly asked him whether he had obtained from me or from my office the knowledge of its being the intention of Government to do anything with the Madrassa. The Hafiz (as the head teacher of the Madrassa was called) answered decidedly in the negative. After this examination he came to me to tell me what had passed: upon hearing it I asked from whom he had got the information, when he told me it was from John Colvin himself who had acted as interpreter, for he had been at Barrackpur when T.B. Macaulay presented his Minute to Lord W. Bentinck, and there learning that it was adopted by the Governor-General had come back elate at the triumph of his party, and could not help boasting of it to the people of the College.

When the subject came under consideration in Council, there was a very hot argument between myself and Mr. Macaulay. The issue was the resolution that was published not abolishing existing colleges, but requiring them to teach English as well as native literature and making the former obligatory, also giving some encouragement to vernacular studies, but declaring that all Government pecuniary aid in future should be given exclusively to promote the study of European science through the medium of the English language. Lord W. Bentinck would not even allow my memorandum to be placed on record. He said it was quite an abuse that Secretaries should take upon themselves to write memorandums; that it was enough for the Court of Directors to see what the Members of Council chose to place on record; that what the Secretaries wrote was nothing unless adopted by the Government. Thus ended this matter for the time. The Resolution passed on this occasion was modified afterwards and made a little more favourable for the old native institutions by Lord Auckland, but English has ever since been the study preferentially encouraged by Government in connection with vernacular literature. The study of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian is, in consequence, less cultivated than heretofore, but none of the old institutions have been altogether abolished. (Sharp 1920)

22. WILLIAM BENTINCK'S ORDER

On March 7, 1835 Governor General Bentinck issued an order that supported the position of Macaulay, with some slight changes. The order said:

The Governor-General of India in Council has attentively considered the two letters from the Secretary to the Committee of Public Instruction, dated the 21st and 22nd January last, and the papers referred to in them.

First, His Lordship in Council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India; and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone.

Second, But it is not the intention of His Lordship in Council to abolish any College or School of native learning, while the native population shall appear to be inclined to avail themselves of the advantages which it affords, and His Lordship in Council directs that all the existing professors and students at all the institutions under the superintendence of the Committee shall continue to receive their stipends. But his lordship in Council decidedly objects to the practice which has hitherto prevailed of supporting the students during the period of their education. He conceives that the only effect of such a system can be to give artificial encouragement to branches of learning which, in the natural course of things, would be superseded by more useful studies and he directs that no stipend shall be given to any student that may hereafter enter at any of these institutions; and that when any professor of Oriental learning shall vacate his situation, the Committee shall report to the Government the number and state of the class in order that the Government may be able to decide upon the expediency of appointing a successor.

Third, It has come to the knowledge of the Governor-General in Council that a large sum has been expended by the Committee on the printing of Oriental works; his Lordship in Council directs that no portion of the funds shall hereafter be so employed.

Fourth, His Lordship in Council directs that all the funds which these reforms will leave at the disposal of the Committee be henceforth employed in imparting to the native population a knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of the English language; and His Lordship in Council requests the Committee to submit to Government, with all expedition, a plan for the accomplishment of this purpose. (Sharp 1920)

23. IDENTITY BETWEEN THE VIEWS OF MACAULAY AND RAM MOHUN ROY

In some sense, Macaulay was simply echoing the sentiments of several Indian leaders of his time. For example, ten years before Macaulay wrote his Minute, Ram Mohan Roy sent an appeal or address to William Pitt, requesting him to lay his appeal before the Governor General of India, in which he pleaded that the British India Government spend the money authorized by the British Parliament for the education of the natives on teaching western sciences to them, not Sanskrit or Arabic.

On December 11, 1823, Ram Mohan Roy wrote,

Humbly reluctant as the natives of India are to obtrude upon the notice of Government the sentiments they entertain on any public measure there are circumstances when silence would be carrying this respectful feeling to culpable excess. The present Rulers of India, coming from a distance of many thousand miles to govern a people whose language, literature, manners, customs, and ideas are almost entirely new and strange to them, cannot easily become so intimately acquainted with their real circumstances, as the natives of the country are themselves. We should therefore be guilty of a gross dereliction of duty to ourselves, and afford our Rulers just ground of complaint at our apathy, did we omit on occasions of importance like the present to supply them with such accurate information as might enable them to devise and adopt measures calculated to be beneficial to the country, and thus second by our local knowledge and experience their declared benevolent intentions for its improvement.

The establishment of a new Sangsrit School in Calcutta evinces the laudable desire of Government to improve the Natives of India by Education,-a blessing for which they must ever be grateful; and every well wisher of the human race must be desirous that the efforts made to promote it should be guided by the most enlightened principles, so that the stream of intelligence may flow into the most useful channels.

When this Seminary of learning was proposed, we understood that the Government in England had ordered a considerable sum of money to be annually devoted to the instruction of its Indian Subjects. We were filled with sanguine hopes that this sum would be laid out in employing European Gentlemen of talents and education to instruct the natives of India in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful Sciences, which the Nations of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world.

While we looked forward with pleasing hope to the dawn of knowledge thus promised to the rising generation, our hearts were filled with mingled feelings of delight and gratitude; we already offered up thanks to Providence for inspiring the most generous and enlightened of the Nations of the West with the glorious ambitions of planting in Asia the Arts and Sciences of modern Europe.

We now find that the Government are establishing a Sangsrit school under Hindoo Pundits to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This Seminary (similar in character to those which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon) can only be expected to load the minds of youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practicable use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtilties since produced by speculative men, such as is already commonly taught in all parts of India.

The Sangsrit language, so difficult that almost a life time is necessary for its perfect

acquisition, is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check on the diffusion of knowledge; and the learning concealed under this almost impervious veil is far from sufficient to reward the labour of acquiring it. But if it were thought necessary to perpetuate this language for the sake of the portion of the valuable information it contains, this might be much more easily accomplished by other means than the establishment of a new Sangsrit College; for there have been always and are now numerous professors of Sangsrit in the different parts of the country, engaged in teaching this language as well as the other branches of literature which are to be the object of the new Seminary. Therefore their more diligent cultivation, if desirable, would be effectually promoted by holding out premiums and granting certain allowances to those most eminent Professors, who have already undertaken on their own account to teach them, and would by such rewards be stimulated to still greater exertions.

From these considerations, as the sum set apart for the instruction of the Natives of India was intended by the Government in England, for the improvement of its Indian subjects, I beg leave to state, with due deference to your Lordship's exalted situation, that if the plan now adopted be followed, it will completely defeat the object proposed; since no improvement can be expected from inducing young men to consume a dozen of years of the most valuable period of their lives in acquiring the niceties of the Byakurun or Sangsrit Grammar. For instance, in learning to discuss such points as the following: Khad signifying to eat, khaduti, he or she or it eats. Query, whether does the word khaduti, taken as a whole, convey the meaning he, she, or it eats, or are separate parts of this meaning conveyed by distinct portions of the word? As if in the English language it were asked, how much meaning is there in the eat, how much in the s? and is the whole meaning of the word conveyed by those two portions of it distinctly, or by them taken jointly?

Neither can much improvement arise from such speculations as the following, which are the themes suggested by the Vedant:-In what manner is the soul absorbed into the deity? What relation does it bear to the divine essence? Nor will youths be fitted to be better members of society by the Vedantic doctrines, which teach them to believe that all visible things have no real existence; that as father, brother, etc., have no actual entirety, they consequently deserve no real affection, and therefore the sooner we escape from them and leave the world the better. Again, no essential benefit can be derived by the student of the Meemangsa from knowing what it is that makes the killer of a goat sinless on pronouncing certain passages of the Veds, and what is the real nature and operative influence of passages of the Ved, etc.

Again the student of the Nyaya Shastra cannot be said to have improved his mind after he has learned from it into how many ideal classes the objects in the Universe are divided, and what speculative relation the soul bears to the body, the body to the soul, the eye to the ear, etc.

In order to enable your Lordship to appreciate the utility of encouraging such imaginary learning as above characterised, I beg your Lordship will be pleased to compare the state

of science and literature in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon, with the progress of knowledge made since he wrote.

If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner the Sanscrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British Legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.

In representing this subject to your Lordship I conceive myself discharging a solemn duty which I owe to my countrymen and also to that enlightened Sovereign and Legislature which have extended their benevolent cares to this distant land actuated by a desire to improve its inhabitants and I therefore humbly trust you will excuse the liberty I have taken in thus expressing my sentiments to your Lordship. (Sharp 1920)

24. TO CONCLUDE

Indians have reconciled the controversy in some strange ways in the last two centuries. During the freedom struggle people preferred to study through the media of Indian languages. The governments led by the Indian National Congress in British India progressively reduced the importance of English as the medium of instruction in high schools. However, much against the expectation that in independent India English would lose its relevance and that people in large numbers would adopt Indian languages as media of instruction, the clamour for English continues to grow by leaps and bounds since independence. In the 1950s and 1960s Indian fiction in English was not popular, and was not regarded as meritorious. Now, Indian fiction in English is highly regarded and the authors are more popular than even the best creative writers in Indian languages. Perhaps a similar situation may or may not soon be upon us with the growing popularity of the new genre of English cinema in India. The Hindu reported on March 15, 2003,

Responding to a question on the impact of English cinema on regional art cinema in the light of the increasing influence of English and the struggle of regional languages such as Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi to protect themselves as languages and as powerful cultural tools, Amol Palekar said, "English is also a regional language." Stating there was no need to exhibit a 'hostile' attitude towards English movies being made in the country, he said, 'English has been the language of a generation of people in the country on a par with any regional language.' The nonagenarian film-maker G. V. Iyer, who was present at the interaction session, quipped, "English is an inevitable language."

*** **

REFERENCES

Sharp, H. (ed.). 1920. Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781-1839). Superintendent, Govt. Printing, Calcutta.

Thirumalai, M. S. 2002. "An Introduction to TESOL: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages." Language in India.

Trevelyan, Sir George Otto. 1876. The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay. Oxford University Press, Oxford. (Reissued in 1978).

G. M. Young (ed.) 1935. Speeches by Lord Macaulay with his Minute on Indian Education. Oxford University Press, London.