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THE MIRROR AND THE LAMP: COLONIAL EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN 19TH CENTURY PUNJAB

Recently, education in colonial India has generated considerable and varied academic interest. Bayly's seminal work on knowledge and information gathering extended the discussion on knowledge systems in India beyond the cabinet and classroom while Viswanathan's'*Masks of Conquest'* analysed the use of literature to advance imperial political and religious aims. Other scholars like Minault, Kumar, Allender, Whitehead and Seth critically engaged with female education and social reform, the political economy of education, the role of missionaries and the social and political historiography of education respectively. A critical lacuna that remains, however, is a searching look at the indigenous system of education in the subcontinent and its fate at the hands of colonialism. This paper attempts to fill the gap by evoking a description of the system using colonial sources and describes the unfortunate impact of colonialism on it. Simultaneously, the disappointment and disillusionment that met British efforts to achieve mass literacy are also charted and lessons for educational policy and reform today are then drawn from this historical episode. For a more focussed discussion, attention is restricted to the province of Punjab, at that time one of the largest provinces of British India, spanning territory from Delhi to Peshawar.

The paper is structured as follows: a brief look is taken at the larger policy debates among British policymakers at the time to give the relevant intellectual framework in which reform took place in the Punjab. The particularities in the province are then studied in closer detail using the work of G.W. Leitner, a renowned orientalist and linguist of the time, and government papers and reports. The paper concludes with some recommendations for policy reform in the region today that emanate from this engagement.

Historical Background:

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the British were not overly concerned with education in India, primarily because their efforts were concentrated on expanding and consolidating their political power (Moir and Zastoupil 1999:1). At this time, they opposed missionary activity in the region as they feared it would create unrest and antagonism in a populace they were endeavouring to subjugate.

By the beginning of the 19th century however, British power was more firmly established and the 'contempt for an inferior and conquered people' had set in (Ghosh 1993: 178.) As part of their civilizational mission, the British felt the urge to enlighten the Indians and introduce them to the wonders of Western science and learning. In a sense, colonialism became pedagogic, with the instruments of education extending beyond formal institutions to give public works, railways, the postal system, etc. an educative significance (Seth 2007:2.) Education became a hot topic in parliamentary debates with different camps lobbying for specific policies. At this time, there were three groups trying to influence education in India- the evangelicals, the liberals and the utilitarians. Evangelicals like Charles Grant regarded the Indians as a 'race of men lamentably degenerate and base' (Basu 1978:54) that had to be succoured by Christianity and western science and literature. Viewing Indian society as locked in a deadly embrace of tradition and authority, Grant criticized the 'false system of beliefs and total want of right instruction' among the Indians. It is possible that Grant purposefully exaggerated his views to rally support for the missionary cause. With the consolidation of British power in India, the British forewent their earlier opposition and in 1813, the Charter Act was promulgated which allowed missionaries to proselytize in India.[1]

The missionary zeal was later combined with a practical interest in breeding loyalty among the Indians and cultivating British social values among them (Crook 1996:12). In the 1820s, under the influence of Whig liberalism and utilitarianism, the British took upon themselves the task of 'civilizing' their colonial subjects. Perhaps the most well-known liberal is Thomas Macaulay who advocated 'enlightened and paternal despotism' for a country that was 'debased by three thousand years of despotism and priestcraft' (Ghosh 1993:183). Macaulay, who knew neither Arabic nor Sanskrit, famously asserted that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia'. Utilitarians like James Mill on their part termed Indian learning as 'obscure and worthless knowledge' (Basu 1978:55). Both groups advocated the introduction of Western science and learning and the creation of an elite class that would act as the loyal servants of the British in executing the day to day affairs of government. It was further desired that the real basis of the British empire would rest on the dissemination of British civilization via English education. This standpoint came to be known as the Anglicist position and was opposed by the Orientalists who advocated the promotion of the indigenous learning of India. The Anglicist-Orientalist controversy lay at the heart of educational policy and reform in 19th century India, with decisive consequences for the policy framework pursued.

In 1835, Lord Bentinck vindicated the Anglicist position and ordered that all funds for education would be spent on English institutions alone. No stipends or funds would be given for Oriental learning, with a discontinuation of the printing of the works in Oriental languages.[2] This decision, while couched in a narrative of enlightening the Indian masses, was motivated by economic concerns with the British needing a class of English-speaking Indians who would man the lower levels of British administration in India, thereby reducing administrative costs (Bellenoit

2007:1). In 1844, Indians were allowed to compete in civil service exams and the adoption of English as language of public business and courts furthered the growth of English education in India. Contemporaneously, Urdu was promoted by the British, replacing Persian which was reminiscent of Mughal (and in the Punjab, Sikh) rule. This automatically displaced the hitherto elite *ashraf* class, whose competency in Persian rhetoric and legislation became useless, paving the way for the creation of a new elite aligned with imperial interests (Bellenoit 2007:3).

Education was also a chief instrument in the creation of a colonial subject that would be a loyal and willing consumer of British knowledge and produce. Macaulay voiced this concern thus: 'Indians should not be too ignorant or too poor to value and buy English manufactures' (Basu 1978:58). In a larger sense, the loyal subjects were needed for the calm preservation of empire, echoing the imperial policy of cultivating supportive local elites practiced elsewhere in the colonies.

These concerns translated into a series of despatches and other policy measures that lay the foundations of the new education system. Between 1854 and 1900, there was a rapid westernization of the educational system in India and a concomitant withering away of indigenous schools. As Naik and Nurullah note: 'indigenous elementary schools were either killed by ill-planned attempts at reform, or destroyed by deliberate competition, or allowed to die of sheer neglect' (1951:50). By 1900, the indigenous schools were almost completely extinct and all the institutions of higher education taught Western knowledge and science, using English as the medium of instruction. On the lower level, efforts of achieving mass education floundered and failed for multiple reasons, including low funding, bureaucratic indifference, poor quality of teaching and inspection, etc. Even for the choice few who were educated in government schools, the amount of administrative posts available were limited giving rise to the phenomenon of the educated and unemployed Indian (Basu 1978:60).

All was not bleak however. Even as attempts to achieve mass literacy failed and indigenous education perished, there was a growing class of people who prospered and profited from the regime. The new Indian elite and the ambitious commercial classes had come to embrace Western education in a bid to partake of power and benefits under colonial rule (Naik and Nurullah 1951:xviii). At the same time, social reformers arose in both the Hindu and Muslim communities and advocated the cause of education under the new conditions. Furthermore, the missionaries, many of whom were genuinely devoted to educating the Indians, succeeded in setting up and running institutions of academic merit, whose excellence would continue even in the post-colonial era.

It must be borne in mind however that the British system of education remained marginal and elitist, in its aims and presence, till the end of colonial rule in India. In principle, the Despatch of 1854 did away with the filtration approach and advocated mass education for the Indians and the Hunter commission (1882) allowed a greater role for private education. In practice, however, the British were not concerned with mass education, soon losing 'much of their interest in education for India, and tended to ignore or oppose local efforts to revive it' (Crook 1996:12). When the

British exited in 1947, the literacy rate was a paltry 16%. Even socially, the project was not too successful and Governor-General Mayo in one of his private letters wrote that English education was not 'diminishing the people's dislike to us and to our rule.' (Bhattacharya 1992:xxi)

The Case of Punjab

This larger historical narrative finds particular expression in the province of Punjab which was annexed by the British in 1849. Conquered at the cusp of colonial acquisitions in India, during what Talbot describes as a 'mature imperialism' (1988:10), the Punjab was a rich Sikh kingdom with an ethnically diverse community and a geographically varied landscape. By the time of its conquest, British interest in India had gradually transformed from the economic and extractive concerns of the East India Company to the full munificence of an imperial power wanting to stamp its civilizational imprint on the subcontinent. Upon the completion of annexation, the British were keen to give the area the best of their administrative and organizational capabilities, and a complex attempt in social and economic engineering resulted. Education, in particular, received special attention in this enterprise. Hundreds of young Oxbridge graduates sailed to India aspiring to educate the 'natives' and introduce them to the wonders of Western science and learning. Disillusionment and disappointment would meet these aims however, and by the turn of the century, the indigenous system would perish, the British scheme of mass education would fail and the only saving grace would be a few urban institutions of academic merit that catered to a new and aspiring elite. The gull between what the British professed and what they created merits second thought was it a failure or success of the real design?

The impact of colonial policy on indigenous education was particularly pernicious. G.W. Leitner[3], a renowned educationist and linguist of the period, conducted an in-depth study of the indigenous education system in the Punjab and its fate at the hands of colonial policies. Leitner was an outspoken critic of the official stance towards education at the time, finding the policies ignorant and misdirected. His statistical and anthropological mapping of the indigenous schools in his book was meant as hard evidence to convince imperial policymakers to change their outlook, especially towards indigenous education. Even as Leitner succeeded in establishing the Government College in Lahore in 1864 and a society for the dissemination of indigenous knowledge, his unpopularity in official circles grew, culminating in particular animosity with the Director of Public Instruction, Holroyd, in the 1860s. His book on the indigenous system[4] signals his growing disillusionment with government policy and begins as follows:

> *'I am about to relate-I hope without extenuation or malice- the history of the contact of a form of European with one of Asiatic civilization; how, in spite of the best of intentions, the most public-spirited officers, and a generous Government that had the benefits of the traditions of other provinces, the true education of the Punjab was crippled, checked, and is nearly destroyed; how opportunities for its healthy revival and development were either*

neglected or perverted; and how, far beyond the blame attaching to individuals, our system stands convicted of worse than official failure.'

Leitner reports that prior to annexation, Punjab was home to a progressive and self-sustaining system of education that was tailored to the community's needs. The Settlement Report of 1852 showed that a school existed for every 1965 inhabitants (adults and non-adults) and the schools were not only associated with places of worship like mosques and temples, but also dotted the Punjabi landscape in village halls, shops, open air spaces, etc. Five types of educational institutions, *madrassahs, maktabs, patshalas,* Gurmukhi schools and Mahajani schools watered the educational landscape of the province. The *maktabs* (places of writing) referred to Persian schools which were often open to all religious denominations. The *madrassahs* (places of lesson), on the other hand, were chiefly for Muslims and taught the Quran, Arabic language and literature, law, logic and the sciences in Arabic. The *patshalas* were Sanskrit schools whereas the Gurmukhi schools were mainly for Sikhs in which Gurmukhi was taught. The Mahajani schools chiefly catered to the commercial and trading classes and taught the various tachy graphic forms of Lande and Sarafi, in addition to arithmetic.

Leitner carried out an extensive survey of the indigenous schools in the Punjab in the decades following the annexation and reports that there were at least 330,000 pupils enrolled in the schools in the 1840s who could read, write and carry out basic arithmetic while thousands more were enrolled in Arabic and Sanskrit colleges attaining mastery over Oriental literature and law, logic, philosophy and medicine. The curriculum was both advanced and sophisticated: Leitner observes that 'in philosophical reasoning, there was not a single European system in which it has not been preceded by an Indian school or thinker' ([1882]1982:20). While the teachers in the colleges were often able scholars, even those at the elementary level were amply qualified in teaching a curriculum that was relevant for the children.

There were no regular fees charged and instruction was mostly given gratis- in many instances, teachers fed and clothed the pupils as well. Local rulers and chieftains actively promoted the indigenous schools, giving grants in monetary terms to the teachers as well as allotting them land. Parents of the students, on their part, gave a portion of their agricultural produce and other gifts to the teachers. The system sustained itself through an innate love of learning and esteem for the learned, and there was no direct state involvement. Rather, it was a decentralized, community-based set-up with a focus on providing education that the students would find useful in their lives. The teachers, on their part, ran the schools for ethical, rather than pecuniary considerations and all three major religious traditions in the province, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, urged its followers to acquire knowledge.

The chief merits of the system were that it was adapted to local needs and its vitality and popularity endured despite the often adverse political and economic conditions (Naik and Nurullah 1951:42). In spite of civil war and political upheaval, educational endowments witnessed a steady rise and the traditions of founding schools and rewarding the learned were firmly established. 'There was not a single villager who

did not take pride in devoting a portion of his produce to a respected teacher' (Leitner 1982:i) and education was looked upon as a sacred and social duty.

The system undoubtedly had its flaws e.g. outcasts and girls were not allowed to enroll in Hindu schools; but the schools run by Sikhs and Muslims were open to all. In fact, Sikhs actively aimed to destroy the monopoly of learning by Brahmins and made education a mass value, which points to the existence of progressive elements in the system that were attempting to broaden the reach and prevalence of education. Leitner (1982) includes syllabi of the various schools in his book, and though scientific instruction was not highly advanced, the curriculum encompassed literature, religious knowledge, arithmetic, philosophy and science.

The Colonial Intervention

Under the influence of the Bentinck policy of 1835, the indigenous schools lost all official patronage and grants, and the attitude of the Education Department was of neglect, born out of thinly-disguised contempt[5] for the system. The financial drain was not only thus inflicted- the British also set up an Educational Cess in the Punjab for the avowed purpose of collecting funds for the establishment of schools in the region. The funds were however used by the British for other purposes and no schools were set up, to the indignation of the people. Leitner sums up the situation thus:'Whatever their own tyrants had done, they had not come with words of progress and enlightenment to take the money out of their pocket for their education and then appropriate it to something else… In a village on the frontier a school was demanded in return for the cess, and on its refusal an outbreak took place, which had to be suppressed by the dispatch of troops' (Leitner 1882:39).

Arguably, one reason for the neglect of indigenous learning by the British were their own energetic plans for education in the Punjab. Punjab was a prized province and commanded colonial attention and interest with its rich natural resources and potential for growth. The British would set up the world's largest canal network for irrigation in the province, and their enthusiasm for social and economic construction in the newly inhabited lands would include hopes of a well-administered system of education. Unfortunately, mass education was not one of the aims, and the initial mode of using locals to aid supervision in schools was also quickly discarded. This had an unfortunate impact on school quality and attendance, recorded in the Report on Popular Education for 1860-61:

> 'If Her Majesty's Government were prepared to make education compulsory on the people of India, there would've been no need to change the system' (of appointing Indians as inspectors through which 'a vast deal of personal influence and local knowledge were brought to bear on the work') 'but, under the voluntary system of education which we are bound to pursue, our difficulty is to procure the "raw material." The district officer has to persuade people to send their children to school and the 'desire for education has yet to be created' (:2)

Civil authorities were often indifferent to educational responsibilities and secondly, the *tehsildars* (lower level administrators) were not qualified enough to inspect higher classes in schools. The report notes that a great decline in attendance was witnessed, not only from bureaucratic neglect, but also because of the famine, the levy of fees, the rules of absenteeism and the absence of influential teachers from schools while they were away for training (:3). While land revenue payments and income tax increased endowments to educational institutions declined in the period. Consequently, people were starved of economic resources and unable to make fee payments (:4). The poor quality of teaching was an additional disincentive and the report notes that the teachers 'were sadly ignorant of the subjects we wished them to teach, and incapable of teaching even what they did know in a sensible and clear manner' (:5).

The numbers of government schools and attendance in them would remain unimpressive in following years compared to the earlier numbers for indigenous schools, a fact which is documented in successive Reports on Popular Education from the period. In 1860-61, there were 37,280 pupils[6] in schools administered or aided by the government. While the number rose to 52,480 the following year, average daily attendance was 42,192. The report for 1861-62 notes that the levy of fees was a major deterrence to attendance, but also qualified that the Secretary of State for India had explicitly demanded that the fee be imposed as was the case in the rest of India (:3). A system of *Mohurirs* was introduced in 1861 to aid the district officers in inspection and administration but it did not lead to any dramatic improvement.

An overriding concern for British administrators in the period was that the system be both economical and efficient. While the reports from the early 1860s begin with a discussion of schools and enrollment, those from later years start off with an account of financial expenditure and savings made. The reports also become lengthier, testament to the increased bureaucratic activity that the reforms were generating, although educational statistics worsened in the period. Financially, things were certainly improving. In 1859-60, only Rs 1,134 were collected in fees, a figure which rose to Rs 12,539 in 1863-64. In the same year, the number of pupils in government or government-aided institutions was 81,102 out of the total population of 15 million. In 1863-64, the number dropped to 76,213. The report for 1869-70 notes a decrease in both the number of government schools and scholars. Schools for females, in particular, fell from 206 in the previous year to 164 in 1869-70. The causes for the declines in numbers were identified as low salaries of teachers, scarcity of resources, illnesses, exhaustion of savings of the educational cess fund and insufficient teachers (:1). The number of scholars reduced from 100,146 in 1868-69 to 86,551 in 1869-70.

A chief factor for the poor performance of government schools was the poor curriculum and teaching. The report for 1870-71 notes that the textbooks were all inferior, 'neither the English language nor literature is taught upon any scientific or intelligent system, and the success of English education as a consequence has not been marked in the Punjab.' (:4) A frequent lament in the reports is the lack of funds available to the administrators for furthering education. Mass education was

not even an ideal however as the report for 1876-77 remarks: 'it is evident that many of the considerations that apply to countries where schools are provided and education is compulsory for all, are not applicable to the Punjab' (88.)

The British established *Zillah* schools (divided into higher, middle and lower levels) inserting an institutional straitjacket into the more fluid system that had existed earlier with an attempted standardization of curriculum and procedures. While a few institutions established by the British became quite prestigious, the vast majority of the schools were not qualitatively different from the schools that had existed earlier. In fact, in several dimensions, the government schools fared worse than the indigenous schools. The personal relationship between teacher and student, and between teacher and parent, which had existed in the indigenous system was sundered. Similarly, one of Leitner's most interesting finds is that rote-learning was prevalent in government schools rather than indigenous ones. While even the humbler indigenous schools, the *Chatsalas*, taught mental calculation and writing and lessons in morality, it was in the government schools that pupils learnt by rote, memorizing answers without any comprehension of the material. The Parliamentary Report of 1874 states that the curriculum being taught in government schools at the time was pathetic and riddled with mistakes[7] and the system of inspection encouraged cheating and deception in attendance records (Leitner 1882:41).

Leitner describes a typical visit to a government school where in the decorum and greeting the predominant wish is of personal ingratiation. 'A few you may observe more reticent or naturally respectful. They are those in whom English instruction has not yet succeeded in eradicating the sense of dignity and propriety inherent in untampered oriental human nature.' While discussing the teaching, he notes that the prevailing method of instruction caused pupils to memorize estoreic facts and to repeat sentences of whose meaning they were completely unaware, subjecting them to 'the tyranny of cram' (:4). He also quotes an instance where he had to look over fifty papers in English prose where none of the answers to the question were correct. The question was to translate the following sentence: 'In studying we should be as docile as children.' A few of the answers given were:

'children are good therefore we should study them'

'children are ignorant but we are not'

'children are clever'

'we should be as children because Jesus blessed them as they are wise' (:4).

The deficiencies of the system are also recorded in Parliamentary reports from the period: 'Our Indian system of education … cannot be said to have given culture, one of the highest marks of education' noted the Parliamentary Report of 1874. The report further observed that native elegance and refinement where it lingered was of Persian origin, and mental discipline and scholarly habits only existed among the *pandits* and *maulvis* while the British had just given a 'smattering of various branches of 'instruction' more or less offensively paraded' in their system.

The Lieutenant Governor of Punjab noted in 1873 that 'the system produced few scholars and was not successful in producing gentlemen either…If the result of sending boys of good family to school is... that they return pert, conceited, and studiously rude and familiar, it is no wonder that parents desire to educate their children at home…True learning and taste among the natives of India are still Oriental, not English.' (Parliamentary Report 1873)

The locals, on their part, preferred their children to remain uneducated than to send them to government schools that provided an education wholly irrelevant to the local context and needs of the community. Simultaneously, the indigenous system of education was dealt a deathly blow. Describing the state of Lahore in 1864, Leitner recounts how 'all that was respectable in the country was either alienated or disappointed' (Leitner 1882:iv). He mentions a village, Babe-di-ber in Sialkot with a population of 250, where everyone could read and write before annexation but 'which an alien system… tended to deprive of the kind of education which it had, because no longer equally useful, and, at the same time, has given no other education instead, thus plunging the country into barbarism (:36). A sharp decline in enrollment was witnessed and the number of indigenous schools also fell. Compared to the situation when every village had at least one school, 'at the turn of the century three out of four villages were without a primary school, and less than one fifth of the boys of school-going age were in school' (Basu 1978:59).

The biggest change instituted by the British however was not in the modalities of providing education, but in the relegation of education from being an instrument of moral and mental culture to 'a means for purely worldly ambition' (Leitner 1882:ii), in the form of low-level jobs in the British administration. The religious basis of education was undermined and the erstwhile forerunners of providing education, the *maulvis*, *pandits* and *gurus*, found no place in the government schools that were mostly manned by poorly qualified teachers on the lookout for jobs. The *fakirs*, many of whom were able scholars, were treated with suspicion and contempt because of their external appearance (Leitner 1882:41). The British system was actively embraced by the commercial and trading classes however, who saw in their education a means to obtaining employment and prestige and of shaking the yoke of the authority of the hitherto influential aristocratic and priestly classes. The aristocracy on its part shied away from a system that educated plebians and rich people together, and many schools run 'for the sake of God' died out.

Furthermore, the colonial system of education did not impart scientific or technical education of much worth and the curriculum remained heavily laden with the humanities, albeit the sources were all European and local languages were not studied (Basu 1978:60). The misplaced emphasis in terms of curriculum becomes apparent in the Lieutenant Governor's wishes for the superior *Zillah* schools, thus quoted in the Report on Popular Education, 1860-61,: 'I am… to impress upon you the importance of enabling the students to acquire a good English accent; and to suggest, as one expedient, that wherever there be a master of English birth, he be required to read out loud some portion of the daily lessons, and that the classes be

taught to repeat after him.' Another case in point is the emphasis on the Bible, as recorded in the same report:

> 'It has been laid down by the Secretary of State for India that the Bible should be lodged in every Government Library, and free access allowed to it. Hence, under the express orders of the Punjab Government, copies of the Holy Scriptures in English and the Vernacular and in Romanised Urdu, have been supplied to all school libraries. Every facility is afforded to scholars, who spontaneously desire to read the Sacred Volume, to do so out of school hours; and to Christian Teachers, whether European or Native, to assist their pupils in understanding its eternal truths.' (:12).

Basu finds that qualitatively, the indigenous schools were at par with British schools of the time. In fact while the indigenous system perished in India, the British adopted its feature of monitorial instruction in their schools in England. This system, under which a senior pupil supervised the education of a junior one to aid the efforts of the teacher, came to be known as the Madras system in England and was the 'chief method by which England achieved expansion of primary education at a very low cost between 1801 and 1845' (Naik and Nurullah 1951:50).

The change in language from Persian to Urdu was also highly significant. Persian had been taught for ages in the Punjab and by teaching pupils in Urdu and later English, the government broke off the continuity of learning that had been a feature of indigenous education. In the Punjab, public enthusiasm for learning Persian was so great that the British had to recant their earlier policy, and instead had to teach it in government schools. The promotion of Urdu eventually won out though and was linked with the influence of natives and Europeans connected with Delhi who desired its promotion (Leitner 1882:46). On a familial level, this crippled the role of parents in a child's education and upbringing and the introduction of a foreign language as the medium of instruction stunted the mental capabilities of the student. Leitner notes that 'thinking in the medium of a foreign language did not aid reflection and indeed had disastrous effects on both the intellect and character' (:51.)Mastery over English did not signify cognitive ability and Leitner notes 'the first B.A. Graduate of this year is a Maulvi who does not know a word of English and who has beaten, among 15 candidates, 13 who were English scholars, including a 'first man' of the Calcutta University' (:51.)

In 1860-61, there were 6559 indigenous schools, a number that had reduced to 4406 by 1875-76 and become insignificant by the turn of the century. As the responsibility for providing education attached more and more to an imperial Educational Department, the role of the community in educational matters receded further and further. Instead of a community sensitive to and actively responsive to its educational needs, the bureaucratic indifference of the educational department dispossessed the Indians from their collective and active participation in their educational structures. Nevertheless, the episode yields important lessons for educational reform and policy in the region today and some of these are discussed below.

Discussion

As a prelude, the successes of the new system must be appreciated. Even as the imperial system of education resulted in mass illiteracy, there were some institutions in leading provincial centres that became oases of academic excellence, and epicentres for nationalist and reformist movements in India. In particular, the missionaries succeeded in setting up several institutions, at the school and college level, that attempted to give the Indians the very best of Western education. While education never became an administrative priority for the British, and funds allocated for furthering it remained paltry, there were many committed British educators who manned the ranks of the Indian Education Service (finally set up in 1896) and their contribution cannot be lost sight of. Whitehead's book is a fascinating account of the many young men and women who devoted their lives and energies to furthering education in India (2003:17). Missionaries, on their part, were not just 'handmaids of empire' but became a significant social factor in the shaping of modern India. Bellenoit discusses how Hindus and Muslims adapted the rhetoric and practices of the missionaries, codified religious canons and organized themselves along proselytizing lines' (2007:7).

Some other battles met with early disappointment- such as the abortive attempt to increase female attendance in schools. Anxious to quell any antagonism in what was otherwise a calm and stable region of the empire, the British quickly receded from their initial aims to expand female education in the Punjab. In the Report on Popular Education for 1861-62, the Lieutenant Governor explicitly cautions against pressing for reforms in this area that may 'resuscitate all the prejudices which have been at rest' (:iii). In fact it was this misplaced appeasement that would prove detrimental to the cause of education in the long run. Even the ensuing reform movements would prove counter-productive in this vein, as Minault shows in her work. She asserts that 'reform movements involved the assertion of male authority and value judgments over those areas of women's lives that in pre-colonial society were largely autonomous' (1998:6). In fact, this is but an instance of the larger failure of the colonial educational enterprise to produce the modern, loyal subject that the British had been anxious to create.

The reality of educational reform in 19th century Punjab (and elsewhere in India) was a burgeoning, resource-constrained bureaucracy, on the sidelines of the larger imperial machinery. With the motives of economy and efficiency being the guiding principles of British administration, educational reforms were bound to be limited in scope and impact. More crucially, there was no social or economic transformation underway that would propel the masses towards modernity- there was no philosophical movement, no rapid industrialisation[8] and no overall change in social customs or family structure as happened in Europe. 'Even as theyengaged with modern institutions, engaged in modern practices, and acquired western knowledge, Indians often seemed to do so in ways that did not render them modern, and that did not accord with the core presumptions of this knowledge' (Seth 13.) In such a state, the impact of a modern bureaucracy was merely to cement existing feudal and traditional structures, albeit in

conditions where the masses became increasingly impoverished and powerless. The rise of the power of the new elites, the feudals, bureaucracy and army, would institute a power structure that would remain resilient and influential in the post-colonial context and continue the indifferent attitude towards education.

But for the policy-maker today, is the counter-factual of the flourishing indigenous system of education worth consideration? Arguably, the indigenous system had lost its relevance for a modernizing state with its attendant centralizing and bureaucratic processes. The system, with its decentralized, community-based model, was reminiscent of the loose suzerainties of the sub-continent and would prove increasingly insufficient to meet the educational needs of a modern nation-state. The possibility exists that the system could have evolved organically, instead of being choked of finances and thoughtlessly discarded but even at the time, 'few nationalists doubted that what India needed was modern, western education, and hardly any advocated a return to 'indigenous' knowledge practices, even as they urged that modern knowledge be disseminated through Indian languages rather than through the medium of English' (Seth 2007:12). However what remains a valuable lesson is the approach to learning in indigenous schools: that of understanding, critical thinking and relating to one's circumstances in a meaningful way, which is the essence of education and must not be sacrificed for a standardized curriculum or proficiency in a foreign language for better employment opportunities. Another key insight is the central role of the educationist or teacher, rather than an automated, disinterested bureaucracy in making key decisions of planning and resource allocation. The sprawling bureaucracy that came to characterise the British attempt (and lingers to this day) was criticised as early as 1861, in the Report on Popular Education as follows: 'there is constantly an outcry against the Educational Department in all parts of India on account of the mass of vexatious forms and returns it is said to demand from every school' (:12).

Additionally, a community-based set-up conjoined with a nation-wide coordination mechanism is feasible for a region that continues to be ethnically diverse. As discussed earlier, the indigenous system was far more pervasive than the colonial one and possessed elements of progress and change. This suggests that in the present scenario, a community-based system, decentralized except in a fundamental organizational sense, is a better ideal to pursue than a monolithic, administrative leviathan. At the same time, the provision of education must be recognized as a fundamental, inalienable right of every child. The extensive mushrooming of private schools in current day Pakistan, along with exams conducted by foreign examination boards, are lamentable and ultimately regressive trends, engendering inequality and furthering class divisions in society.

Leitner's advocacy of self-government in education remains a pertinent suggestion for educational reform in the sub-continent. In a globalized world, the temptations to make English the medium of instruction in schools and standardize curriculum across the country are very strong indeed. However, the importance of learning in one's mother tongue and devising a curriculum that is adapted for a community's

needs are also important considerations. A bilingual system which is attuned to communal and national needs may best serve the aims of mental and financial emancipation. This is especially relevant for Pakistan where the knowledge of English has not only become a tradable skill in the labour market but also impacts social mobility and is considered to facilitate the country's participation in the global economy. Leitner's recommendation of retaining the vernacular for basic instruction so that it aids critical thinking and generates a synergy between home and classroom learning needs to be taken on board however, and English can perhaps be taught at the higher secondary level, as another language. Western science and learning should be engrafted on an indigenous base so that education remains imbued with a local character and is confidently apprehended.

Perhaps the enduring lesson that can be derived from the indigenous system and the colonial impact on education in the nineteenth century, is a forceful argument in favour of a socially relevant system of education that not only enables a populace to revere its language, thought and literature but also treats education as an expansion of mental and creative faculties. The pressing needs of economic and social development may push towards the adoption of foreign languages and practices of instruction but the inherent value of education must not be bartered away in the process. The mercantilist view of education as an importable and later tradable commodity must give way to a system that encourages thought and critical thinking, and which does not make education the privilege of a choice few.

Notes

[1] Anglicists like Grant did not fear any political reprisal from educating Indians in Western science and philosophy. Grant was of the view that 'political liberty cannot flourish among the timid submissive people of India' and a 'vegetable diet and absence of maritime taste will check ardent designs of independence'-cited in Naik and Nurullah, '*History of Education*', 1951:76.

[2] The effect of the Anglicists, especially Macaulay, on indigenous education cannot be underestimated. Lord Curzon noted that "Ever since the cold breath of Macaulay's rhetoric passed over the field of the Indian languages and Indian textbooks, the elementary education of the people in their own tongue has shriveled and pined."

[3] Leitner had an M A and PhD and was a professor of Arabic and Muhammadan law at King's College London before being appointed principal of Government College Lahore. He was a leading linguist of his time, with command over nearly fifty languages, and a distinguished scholar and educationist.

[4] This was first published in 1882.

[5] Leitner mentions how the indigenous system was considered vicious, obsolete and useless by the Educational Department. Furthermore, the officers did not attempt to honestly examine the prevailing system, basing their reports on falsified accounts stemming from an entrenched bias against the system.

[6] Compared to the figure of 330,000 reported by Leitner for indigenous schools in the 1840s.

[7] For example in elementary schools, the maps used showed the Sahara as running through Spain.

[8] Industrialization of the Punjab only occurred after independence in 1947. Previously, the agricultural produce, especially cotton, had been shipped to England for use in manufacturing industries there.

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