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## An Analytical View On the Minute by the Hon'ble T. B. Macaulay dated the 2nd February 1835.

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## Abstract

*Macaulayism*<sup>1</sup> meant a British *neocolonial*<sup>2</sup> rule by uprooting the Indian values and tradition and introducing the western culture. In this paper, I take a neutral stand to present my view '*On the Minute by the Hon'ble T. B. Macaulay dated the 2nd February 1835*'.

## Introduction

Macaulay, a member of the Supreme Council of India, proposed the need for an educational reform to the then Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck. He thought that it was the '*White Man's Burden*'<sup>3</sup> to educate the Indian colony with science and knowledge. According to him, the

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<sup>1</sup> [Macaulayism](#)

<sup>2</sup> Term here refers to the dominance of the British by influencing India's culture. [\[Link\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> A phrase from the poem written by Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands, 1899." [\[Link\]](#)

court-languages Sanskrit and Arabic weren't helping enough to do 'useful learning' and instead thought of English to be the *prima facie* language. Another member of the Supreme Council H.T. Prinsep objected to Macaulay's minute. Nevertheless, most of his views paved the way into the '*Bentinck's English Education Act 1835*'.

## Body Paragraphs

### A Fund Of One Lakh Rupees

The fund was set for the 'revival and promotion' of the Indian literature. Macaulay rightly argued that the funds did not serve the purpose as a majority of the sciences were in English and French, whereas these native languages were primarily used for religious scriptures. There was a need to learn science as it is present in everyday life but to further his cause he ridiculed the Indian languages.

### Mocking Sanskrit And Arabic languages

#### Poor Literary Works

Macaulay albeit accepting that he doesn't know either Sanskrit or Arabic, claims that the literary works, even including the poetry of which the Eastern Languages stand highest, cannot be compared to a single shelf of European Literature. This is a very strong statement from him considering the fact that the Ramayana consists of 480,002 words and it is four times the size of Greek poem Iliad. The greatest Indian Epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* provide a very detailed imaginative description of the wars including the weapons used, alignment of stars during the period, the life history of every character. Be it a fact or fiction, they are true literary marvels.

#### Not fit for science

It is true that most of the modern science was mainly in English and French, but one cannot forget the works of Aryabhata in the field of mathematics and astronomy including the zero, approximation of pi, and the motions of the solar system for which he used Sanskrit<sup>4</sup>. Panini's Sanskrit has one of the most well-structured sets of rules for grammar consisting of 3949 rules and is still being used in research in Natural Language Processing(NLP)<sup>5</sup>. Islamic Mathematicians translated Euclid's Elements to the Arabic Language. However, Macaulay totally ruled out these languages as not being fit for science. Then, what should be the language?

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<sup>4</sup> [Works of Aryabhata](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Is Sanskrit Language the most suitable language for NLP?](#)

## English Is The Language

It is obvious that English, the language of the ruling class, had to be introduced. English became “*the language of the world*”<sup>6</sup>. But, the major question arises whether the Britishers had the power to force an ‘alien’ language on the natives and impose European science on them. Macaulay takes the European experience into account to conclude that *forcing* was the best option to civilize the natives and give them access to the knowledge written in English. Would India miss out on the latest scientific inventions and discoveries if they didn’t learn English? Language is only a means of communication and modern science could have been translated into vernacular dialects as was done in the past. Trade and commerce, sharing of knowledge and resources across the world as it has always been happening. What was the main reason to stop the funding for Sanskrit and Arabic?

## Unprofitable Business, And The Indian Desire

Macaulay stated an example of a Madrasa where students learning Arabic received stipends from the public whereas those studying English had to pay fees. He observes that the printing costs of Arabic and Sanskrit books cost sixty thousand rupees to the government whereas the sale was less than a thousand rupees. Surprisingly, the English book sales recorded a 20 percent profit. Macaulay rightly pointed out that spending on Sanskrit and Arabic was clearly an unprofitable venture. I think that the government should have made a trade-off between the native languages and English but Macaulay opted to completely stop the funds for these languages. I also agree to the ideology that if the Indians wanted to learn Sanskrit or Arabic, they had to pay fees and not the other way round. Nevertheless, one cannot totally blame Macaulay for failing to conserve Sanskrit and Arabic when the Indians were mainly interested in learning English.

## Indian Penal Code

Macaulay envisioned a uniform law across all religions and castes since the *Charter Act of 1833*<sup>7</sup>. I agree that there should be a uniform law as this proved the belief in equality as all humans are *first humans per se*. However, as a consequence of abolishment of the ‘*Hindoo law and the Mohematan law*’<sup>8</sup>, India lost her traditional values and cultural heritage.

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<sup>6</sup> A term coined by German Linguist, Jacob Grimm in 1852, also predicted by John Adams in 1780. [\[Link\]](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Charter Act of 1813](#)

<sup>8</sup> Term used to describe the Indian laws based on Religion at that time.

## Indian English Scholars

The popular belief of *'foreigners learning English can never match an Englishman'* was put it into question as Macaulay substantiated that Indians could also attain proficiency in English. At once, he thought those who opposed his views were mainly Sanskrit and Arabic scholars. However, he failed to consider the possibility that once the Indians were taught English and have access to the so-called vast knowledge, why can't they learn to rebel to the idea of colonialism and strive for independence? This can be viewed from the fact that many of India's freedom fighters including Mahatma Gandhi<sup>9</sup> and Sardar Vallabhai Patel<sup>10</sup> were indeed Indian English Scholars.

## Strike at the Root

Towards the end, Macaulay proposed to retain only a few colleges that would teach eastern languages and stop providing funds to promote these languages. He instead wanted to build more colleges that would teach English. This is clearly not the ideal solution since this meant the promotion of English at the expense of Sanskrit and Arabic.

## Conclusion

Finally, Macaulay coerced the Council by issuing an idle threat to relieve him, if his proposal was not accepted. Lord William Bentinck agreed to his demands as he expressed *"I give my entire concurrence to the sentiments expressed in this Minute"*.

As a result of Macaulayism, India's cultural richness, speakers of vernacular dialects, traditional values started getting replaced by English and Western culture. Nevertheless, *"Macaulay's Children"*<sup>11</sup> have made India proud with the innumerable scientific discoveries and inventions.

In conclusion, I believe Macaulay's ideas of teaching English and modern science were correct but the methods proposed were wrong.

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<sup>9</sup> [Mahatma Gandhi](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Sardar Vallabhai Patel](#)

<sup>11</sup> A phrase used to denote people born in India but adopt a western lifestyle.

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