🎯 Introduction

British rule in India was not only about political and economic control — they also believed they had a cultural mission. They thought it was their duty to "civilise the natives" by changing Indian customs, traditions, and especially the system of education. This chapter explores the British ideas of education, how they tried to implement them, and how Indians responded with their own vision of what education should be.

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📚 The Tradition of Orientalism

In the late 18th century, British officials like William Jones arrived in India. Jones, a judge at the Supreme Court in Calcutta, was a highly educated linguist who had mastered several languages including Greek, Latin, French, Arabic, Persian and later Sanskrit.

He and other British officials like Henry Thomas Colebrooke and Nathaniel Halhed developed a deep respect for ancient Indian texts on law, philosophy, science, and religion. They believed India had once achieved great intellectual and cultural heights. So they promoted the study of ancient texts to understand Indian civilisation and even to administer it better.

📷 Fig. 1 – William Jones learning Persian

📷 *Fig. 2 – Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Sanskrit scholar*

In 1781, a madrasa was set up in Calcutta to promote Arabic and Persian studies, and in 1791, the Hindu College was established in Benaras for Sanskrit learning.

These officials, called Orientalists, thought the British should win the respect of Indians by teaching them subjects they valued — not by forcing alien content. They hoped this would make British rule more acceptable.

🟦 Definition: Orientalist – A scholar of Asian languages and cultures

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❌ Criticism of Orientalism: The New Education Debate

By the early 1800s, many British officials began rejecting Orientalist ideas. They argued that Indian literature and knowledge systems were outdated, filled with errors and unscientific beliefs.

James Mill, a powerful British historian, believed education should not be about pleasing Indians but about making them modern through European science and knowledge.

The most aggressive critic was Thomas Babington Macaulay. In 1835, he wrote his famous "Minute on Indian Education", in which he dismissed Indian knowledge systems. He claimed:

“Just one shelf of a good European library was worth the entire literature of India and Arabia.”

📷 *Fig. 3 – Warren Hastings statue with Indian scholars (shows Orientalist influence)*

📷 *Fig. 4 – Macaulay in his study*

Macaulay pushed for English to be the medium of instruction. He wanted Indians to read the finest works of Western literature, learn Western science and philosophy, and become "civilised" in the British way. He believed this would create a class of Indians who were "Indian in blood but English in taste."

As a result, the English Education Act of 1835 was passed. Oriental institutions like the Calcutta Madrasa and Benaras Sanskrit College lost government support. English textbooks were produced, and higher education shifted toward Western subjects and language.

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📜 Wood's Despatch (1854)

In 1854, Charles Wood, President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, sent an educational policy known as Wood's Despatch to India.

Key ideas of the Despatch:

- **English education would develop moral character in Indians.**
- **It would produce reliable and honest civil servants for British administration.**
- **Indians would appreciate European culture and begin buying British goods.**
- **Universities were to be established in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras (founded in 1857).**
- **A system of school education was also introduced.**

🟦 **Wood's Despatch became the blueprint for British education in India.**

📷 *Fig. 5 – Bombay University (19th century)*

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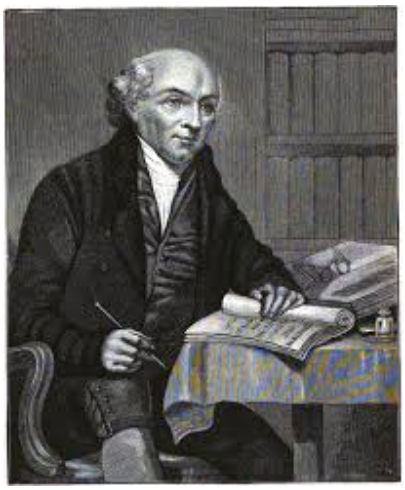
✝️ Missionary Activities and Moral Education

Christian missionaries argued that education should also focus on morality. They believed moral values could only be taught through Christian education.

However, till 1813, the East India Company was against missionary activity, fearing backlash from Indian communities. So, missionaries established Serampore Mission in a Danish-controlled area near Calcutta.

- **A printing press was set up in 1800.**
- **Serampore College was established in 1818.**



📷 *Fig. 6 – William Carey, founder of Serampore Mission*

📷 *Fig. 7 – Serampore College building*

After the Revolt of 1857, the British government became cautious about supporting religious education that could offend Indians.

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🏫 What Happened to Local Schools?

Before British reforms, India had its own traditional system of schooling. William Adam, a Scottish missionary, surveyed education in Bengal and Bihar during the 1830s.

He found:

- **Over 1 lakh pathshalas (village schools)**
- **Each had about 20 students, mostly oral education**
- **No fixed fees, printed books, or classrooms**
- **Classes held under trees or in homes**
- **Children of farmers could study when free from harvest**

📷 *Fig. 8 – Painting of a village pathshala by Francois Solvyn*

Education was flexible and adapted to local needs.

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📏 British Interference in Vernacular Education

After Wood's Despatch, the Company wanted to standardise education. They appointed government pandits to monitor schools.

Changes introduced:

- **Regular timetable and annual exams**
- **Teaching based on textbooks, not guru's judgment**
- **Fees became fixed; attendance became compulsory**
- **Those who followed rules got government grants**

But this made it hard for children from poor families (especially peasants) to attend school regularly. Harvest season kept them in fields, so they dropped out or were labelled "undisciplined".

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🇮🇳 Indian Thinkers on National Education

British were not the only ones with views on education. Many Indians also developed their own ideas about what kind of education India needed.

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🧵 Mahatma Gandhi: Education Should Uplift, Not Enslave

Gandhi strongly criticised British education. According to him:

- **It created a sense of inferiority among Indians.**
- **Made them believe that Western civilisation was superior.**
- **Destroyed Indian self-respect and culture.**
- **Education in English disconnected people from their communities.**

He wanted education:

- **In Indian languages**
- **That involved craft and manual work**
- **That developed mind, soul, and body**

📷 Fig. 10 – Gandhi with Kasturba Gandhi and Tagore at Santiniketan (1940)

📜 Gandhi's Belief: "Literacy is not education. Education should bring out the best in body, mind, and spirit."

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🌳 Rabindranath Tagore: Santiniketan and Freedom in Learning

Tagore hated his early schooling — found it rigid and suffocating. So he dreamt of an alternative school system.

In 1901, he founded Santiniketan:

- **A school in natural surroundings, far from the city**
- **Focused on creativity, art, music, and open learning**
- **Teachers guided children to think freely, not obey blindly**

He believed education should balance the best of Indian tradition and modern Western ideas.

📷 Fig. 11 – Santiniketan open-air classroom (1930s)

📷 Fig. 12 – Girls playing in a missionary school (early 1900s)

Tagore and Gandhi shared many values — but while Gandhi rejected modern industrial civilisation, Tagore wanted a creative blend of Indian and Western systems.