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Impact of British Colonial Policies on Modern Indian Education

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Abstract- The British colonial rule significantly transformed the educational environment in India by entrenching the policies which were aimed at supporting the imperial rule, and not the intellectual growth of Indians. Colonial education was not neutral knowledge transmission practice, it served as an administrative instrument of knowledge control, and also reorganization of culture, and social control. This essay will look at how the British great British educational policies, starting with the Charter Act of 1813 to the late colonial education commissions, contributed to shaping modern Indian education. Using a historical analysis- approach, the research uses a synthesis of colonial policy documents, commission reports, and critical historiographical writing to follow changes in curriculum design, language of instruction, institutional structure and access to education. The discussion shows that colonial education brought about standardized forms of school education, universities and bureaucratic rationality which helped bring efficiency to the administration and professional training. Nonetheless, all these processes also pushed away indigenous knowledge systems, solidified prevailing social structures, and supported education in English language as the only means of access, thus restricting equal opportunities. Colonial education has left legacies in post-independence India in terms of examination-based pedagogy, curriculum preference, language policy and elite reproduction. According to the argument of the paper, modern Indian education has become a paradoxical inheritance because it has provided social mobility to a few individuals and has also made compliant structural inequality. This colonial genealogy is vital to a critical approach in the present with the debates of educational reform and decolonization in India.

Keywords- Colonial education, British India, English education, educational policy, postcolonial legacy

I. Introduction

Education has taken a central stage in the shaping of the modern India and the modern discussions on the language policy, curriculum reform, access and equity can never be complete without simultaneously analyzing its colonial roots. The British colonial education policies were not impartial interventionist policies whose main aim was to disseminate literacy or modern knowledge. Instead, they were fundamentally ingrained in the colonial colonial politics economy and served as tools in restructuring knowledge, power and social desire. The colonial state in order to consolidate power, foster loyalty, and produce a group of medium through which management could be facilitated, and who would still be culturally oriented on British interests, had this goal through education (Basu, 1974; Kumar, 2005).



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A turning point in the colonial policy on education was the Minute on Indian Education (1835) by Thomas Babington Macaulay. The Minute vigorously demanded English as the medium of higher education and rejected native institutions of education, though Sanskrit and Arabic education, as intellectually inferior and practically useless. This stance signified a decisive break with the previous orientation of Orientalist practices and created an orientalism of dominance in which the Western epistemologies became superior to the native cultures (Macaulay, 1835/1978). It was then seen that English education would help in creating a group of Indians who would be Indian in blood and colour yet English in taste, opinions as well as morals and intellect, and thus have the requirements of the colonial administrations.

This ideological bias was codified by the Despatch of Wood of 1854 which is commonly referred to as the Magna Carta of English education in India. Wood and his Despatch gave detailed plans on how schooling should be conducted nowadays such as opening up universities in large presidencies, the introduction of graded education such as the primary to the higher, teacher training, and state control of education. Though theory put on mass education on primary level, in practice, higher education was prioritized by the colonial system in provision of clerical and professional manpower to the colonial bureaucracy (Nurullah & Naik, 1951). This showed that education access was still also restricted and disproportionately, which strengthened established social structures.

Thereafter, this organization was refined by various successive education commissions as they addressed issues of the administration and increasing national nationalistic pressures. The Hunter Commission (1882) concentrated on primary training as well as local administration yet did not handle structural underfunding. The Sadler Commission (1917/19) focused on university education and pointed out the lack of relevance between higher and secondary education, whereas the Hartog Committee (1930) brought out the problem of quality, wastage and stagnation at the secondary level (Aggarwal, 2009). Even though these commissions brought about reform, they mostly functioned under the state of colonialism and did not significantly oppose its pattern of exclusion.

Legacies of colonial education can be traced in the language hierarchies of modern India, examination focussed syllabuses and institutional establishments. English is still a language of power and movement that tend to duplicate disparities in access to advanced education and jobs (Kumar, 2005). Simultaneously, colonial education also produced some unwanted outcomes: an educated Indian intelligentsia was formed; it served as a key factor in nationalist ideas and anti-colonial activism. Colonial education was, therefore, of a bipolar nature, as it was both a modernizing and a domination instrument at the same time.

As a whole, policies on British colonial educational measures were influenced by politics and ideological agenda and not necessarily on educational issues. They created an intricate legacy that still mirrors in the discussions on education in modern India by transforming institutions, curricula and language hierarchies.



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This legacy is critical to understand to be able to engage in the process of reforms of our time critically and to think about a more equitable education system.

II. Literature Review

Colonial Education as an Instrument of Power

A large amount of nationalism and postcolonial research literature position colonial education in India as a planned tool of imperial authority and not a charitable endeavor of social betterment. Education served as an instrument by which the colonial power generated cultural compliance, administration submission and ideological congruity among a few representatives of the colonized society. Krishna Kumar (1991/2005) posits that the British education policy was informed by political agenda that sought to justify the colonial rule by the influence of the curriculum and access selection. In line with Kumar, the colonial government did not want mass education, rather it wanted to produce a culturally Anglicized new class of intermediates who will internalize colonially acceptable value yet will not be apportioned as part of the general population.

Such argument is further elaborated by Gauri Viswanathan (1989), who reveals how the sphere of English literary studies became a strong ideological weapon during the colonial period in India. Instead of passively receiving aesthetic knowledge, the English literature made the British moral values, hierarchy of their culture, and civilized notions of civilization their norm. As the contrast between the British culture as a global norm and the other supposedly lesser one, colonial education implicitly changed Indian subjectivities, making everyone admire imperial standards and dismissing native intellectual cultures. Collectively these works indicate how education served as a kind of cultural governance that asserted colonial domination to a more surpassing effect than political domination.

Decline of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Among the strongest criticisms of colonial schooling is the fact that it undermined the native systems of education. Most colonial rulers used to support the action taken by describing pre-colonial India as educationally backward. Dharampal (2000) has firmly challenged this account with his archival evidence of the years of widespread networks of indigenous schooling in the eighteenth century in India. Dharampal also demonstrates that the institutions incorporated in the villages inherently financed literacy, numeracy, and vocation education based on local government and village funds, believing in contrary with the colonial argument of lack of education.

Colonial education policies especially following introduction of English-medium instructions, systematically moved the state patronage out of these native institutions. They put financial support, institutional status, and social prestige in the hands of the colonial schools and colleges and the community-based learning gradually declined. The degradation of indigenous education was therefore not an inescapable aspect of modernization but a by product of policies made by favoring the colonial epistemologies to the systems of local knowledge. Later historians have highlighted that this displacement also has led to cultural alienation and epistemic inequality that still haunt Indian education.



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Missionary and Vernacular Education

Missionary activity was a significant but a two-sided aspect of colonial education. Christian missionaries also contributed to the widening of literacy skills especially to women and marginalized groups since they tend to argue with state-supported institutions. According to Whitehead (1999) and Lankina and Getachew (2013), the role of missionary schools in female education is apparent in areas where social reform movements overlapped with missionary efforts.

Nonetheless, missionary education was also strongly associated with the religious conversion and cultural change. School systems usually advanced Christian values of morality and Western cultural norms with worries of intrusion and influence of the culture together with religion. Policymaking wise, the missionary institutions would supplement the colonial interests by spreading education to the state at comparatively minimal expenditure and by strengthening ideological coherence to the Western standards.

Vernacular education took a precarious role in the colonial policy. Despite the formal approval of classes in Indian languages in the primary education level as established by Despatch of 1854 by Wood, the vernacular schools were still underfunded and did not fit well into the higher educational and job opportunities. According to Rathore (2020), vernacular education was more of an end product, whereas English education was used as a prerequisite to social mobility. This dichotomous system strengthened language become inequalities and added to the further inequality of access and opportunity.

Science, Modernity, and Colonial Knowledge

Colonial education is also a central factor that defined science and modernity in India. According to Gyan Prakash (1992), the transfer of colonial science to India did not take place as pure transfer but instead was transformed in the framework of the colonial world that promoted the Western knowledge as being universal and rational and moved the native knowledge into the world of traditions. Scientific training was now used to define modernity, which comes with advancement, rationality and administrative efficiency.

Equally, David Arnold (2000) points out how the colonial institutions were discriminatory on what kind of scientific disciplines they propagated in the interest of the imperial regime, which included medicine, engineering and surveying. Scientific education was a close preserve of urban elites and helped to emphasize the disruption of classes and deny the general population an opportunity to be transformed. Even though colonial science led to some technological and professional advancement, it also excluded other epistemologies and enhanced Western paradigms.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Although the current literature is very enriching, there are still considerable gaps in the literature on colonial education. A large portion of the scholarship is either concerned with the colonial will or concerned with particular areas of education, linguistic or curriculum without adequately tracking continuities into the post-independence era. Limited integrative analysis relating the frameworks of colonial policy to fundamental



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structural characteristics of contemporary Indian schooling such as examination-based pedagogy, institutional stratification and linguistic stratification exist.

The present paper will attempt to compile this gap by bridging the policy development and the outcomes of postcolonial education. The analysis of colonial education as a system deeply rooted in history whose legacies persist to influence contemporary practices will add to a better detailed perception of how modern Indian education was formed out of the contradictions of its colonial history after which it remains to negotiate.

III. Methodology

The research design followed in this study is the historical-analytical research design because the research aims to find out the influence of the British colonial policies on the development of modern Indian education. It uses a qualitative method to examine the conceptualization, implementation and institutionalization of the policies of colonial education and how the effects of the policies continue to be felt in the post-independence educational systems. The application of historical methods and methods of analysis is especially suited to the research since the policies of colonial education were inherent in the structures of the political, administrative, and ideological activity that cannot be measured quantitatively but are subject to contextual interpretation. The proposed study will examine the intended goals and unintended outcomes of colonial educational interventions by placing the education policy into the framework of its historical and social-political context.

The approach is based on the interpretive historiography that does not consider policy documents as administrative documents and is an expression of power relations, ideological assumptions, and strategies of government. This strategy enables one to approach colonial education as a cultural and political project and not a process of neutral modernization.

Data Sources

The paper relies on primary and secondary sources in order to offer depth, credibility and analysis balance.

Primary sources include official documents of colonial policy, acts of parliament, and reports by the commission written between the period of 1813 and 1944. Among them there are landmark policies on education including the Charter Act 1813, the Minute of Indian Education by Macaulay (1835), the Despatch of 1854 by Wood and reports of Hunter Commission (1882), the Sadler Commission (1917-1919) and the Hartog Committee (1930). These documents are considered as the official record of the will of the colony and the rule of the country. They offer first hand experience of policy rationales, curriculum interests, institutional patterns as well as assumptions concerning Indian society and knowledge systems.

The secondary sources consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs, edited volumes and critical historical enterprises created by historians of education, postcolonial theorists, and scholars of education policy. These literatures provide



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conceptual frameworks on how colonial education can be interpreted as a strategy of rule making, culture control and social hierarchy. It is also through secondary literature that one finds a way of comparing regions and period and this allows one to discover both continuity and change. Integration of primary and secondary sources makes sure that the process of reading policy texts does not take place in the vacuum but it becomes interpreted by the existing scholarly discussions.

Analytical Framework

The study is made in a thematic format, which enables in-systemic analysis of various sources, which are comparable in dimensions. Thematic analysis is highly appropriate to historical policy studies as it allows synthesis between periods and different documents as well as being sensitive to contextual diversity. The study uses four dimensions of analysis, which are interconnected:

- **Policy Objectives**

This dimension reviews the explicit and unspoken objectives of policies governing colonial education such as administrative efficiency, cultural assimilation, political control and economic utility. The specific focus is on the way in education was placed as the instrument of creating mindful subjects and a switch neutral elite instead of mass empowerment.

- **Institutional Structures**

The theme examines the institution structures that were introduced during the colonial regime, which included graded school systems, Universities, examination systems, and teacher training systems. It has been analyzed in terms of how these structures standardized education and at the same time gave more strength to hierarchy, centralization, and credentialism.

- **Language and Curriculum**

The language policy is analyzed as a vital current of power. The paper examines the privileging of the English language over native languages, the focus of the curriculum on Western knowledge and the relegation of local epistemology. Another dimension that examines the long-term consequences of linguistic hierarchy regarding access, identity, and social mobility concerns access, identity and social mobility.

- **Access and Social Impact**

In this dimension, we assess those who were the beneficiaries of the colonial education and those who were not. This discussion centers on inequalities in terms of classes, caste, gender and geographical areas and how the colonial education initially benefited a select elite at the expense of large part of the population.

This was done manually through coding documents under these themes and trends discovered through comparative reading of policy periods. Both the diachronic (across time) and the synchronic (across themes) analysis is possible with the help of this framework.

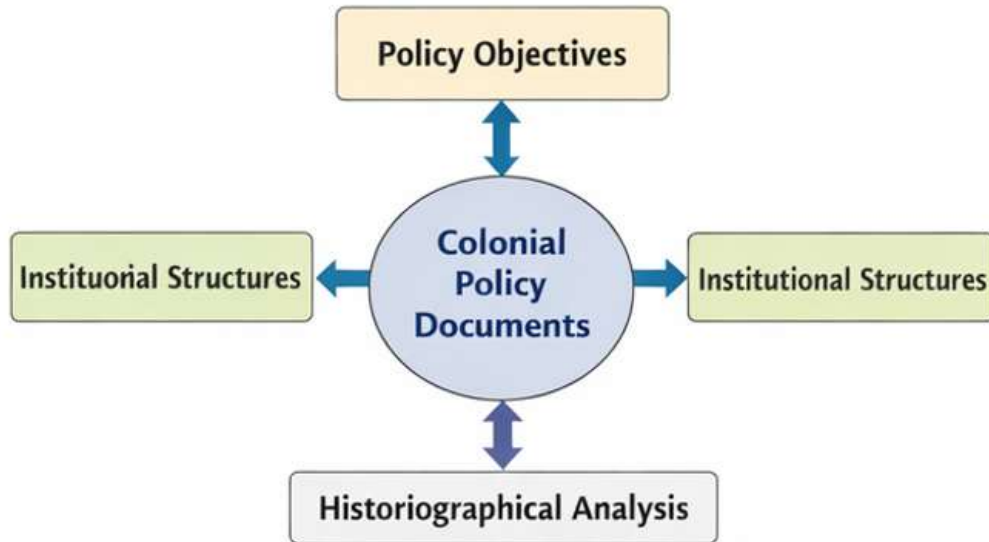


Figure 1. Analytical Framework for Examining Colonial Education Policies

Table 1 Analytical Dimensions and Key Indicators Used in the Study

Analytical Dimension	Indicators Examined	Source Type
Policy Objectives	Stated aims, governance rationale	Policy documents
Institutional Structures	Universities, exams, administration	Commission reports
Language & Curriculum	Medium of instruction, content	Policy + secondary
Access & Social Impact	Class, caste, gender reach	Historical analyses

Validity and Limitations

In order to increase the validity and reliability, the research makes use of triangulation of various kinds of sources such as official policy reports, reports of commissions and critiques by scholarly thinkers. Comparing the colonial writings with postcolonial historiography contributes to reducing the risk that people may accept the narratives of colonialism as they are and to play with the guidance of the official narratives provided. Interpretive credibility is also enhanced through the use of well established secondary resources.



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Nevertheless, the research is limited in a number of ways. To begin with, it is based only on written sources and excludes any archival fieldwork, oral history, and ethnographic evidence that would allow the voices of the colonized people to be heard. By this means, the life experiences of students and teachers of the colonial education are indirectly explained with references to the text of policies and history. Second, the large time frame (1813-1944) defines the need to draw a selective focus, which can potentially restrict regional comparisons.

Notwithstanding these, historical-analytical approach taken in this research paper is the best choice available to answer the research questions. Through a critical analysis of colonial policies of education and the long lasting consequences of education, the approach gives a solid background of the structural legacies of colonial as compared to modern education of India.

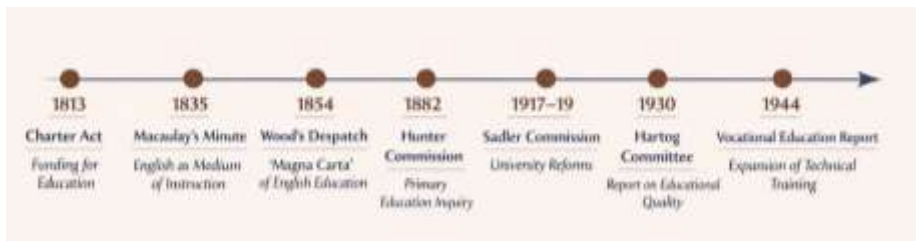


Figure 2. Timeline of Major British Education Policies in India

IV. Results

Policy Objectives and Administrative Needs

The British educational policy in India was highly synchronized with the administrative and ideological demands of the empire. Enlightenment on a large scale was not the main aim but the production of a small and reliable group of English-educated Indians that would be cost-effective in assisting in governance. This was best expressed by Minute on Indian Education by Thomas Babington Macaulay (1835), which suggested the education of a group of intermediaries, who could serve as the interpreters between the colonial masters and the Indians. English language higher education was to create clerks, teachers, and small officials to man the ever-growing colonial bureaucracy effectively (Basu, 1974; Macaulay, 1835/1978).

Administratively, the teaching of English had various purposes. It encouraged the economic savings of having to employ huge numbers of British employees, promoted standardisation in judicial and bureaucracy and contributed to the instillation of values that were congruent with colonial authority, including faithfulness, drill and obedience to authority. Education also turned into a state-of-the-art economical technology of rule enabling the colonial state to rule a huge and diverse population with a comparatively small administrative machine (Kumar, 2005). Notably, there was a very selective access to this education making sure that the advantages of English schooling and social mobility it guaranteed were confined to a small segment of society.



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In the long term, the occurrence of this policy in the formation of a stratified educational system was formed. With the English education at a high level in terms of the attention and the prestige, elementary and mass education became undermined and underfinanced. The commissions like Hunter (1882) recognised the necessity of primary education but did not allocate resources to make them accessible to all people. Consequently, colonial education further cemented in place the social disparities that were entrenched, and caused the urban, upper-caste, and upper-class communities to inherit an upper hand in exploiting English schooling (Nurullah and Naik, 1951).

Institutional Transformation

There were also major institutional changes concerning education in India during the time of the colonial rule. In 1857 the British had introduced universities modelled after the University of London starting with Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. These universities were basically an examining institution as opposed to an institution that taught and focused on standardized curricula, formal syllabi and centralized examiners. This system brought about efficiency of administration and comparability of credentials in one area to others and this was vital in bureaucratic recruitment (Aggarwal, 2009).

Establishment of graded schooling, that is, primary, secondary and higher education, developed a homogenous system which continues up to date in India. Nonetheless, this system valued certifications and exam results more than all-encompassing learning and questioning. The process of teaching orientation was shifted to the rote memorisation and the achievement of exams, the certificates being the primary tool into the government job and the social advancement. It also focused too much on exams hence limiting the curricular endpoints, marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems, vocational skills and creative forms of learning (Kumar, 2005).

Although the changes in these institutions brought about an aspect of modernity e.g. standardized administration, professional qualifications and secular curricula, they were incorporated in a logic of colonization, which appreciated efficiency and authority more than intellectual freedom. The universities were not the sites of independent knowledge production and their role was to control access to elite roles. However, the unintended outcomes were also created by these institutions. Western political thought, history, and philosophy facilitated the scrutiny of westerners by some of the educated elite, as well as, the expression of nationalist desires. In this way, the colonial institutions, at the same time, supported imperial governance and the intellectual sources of anti-colonial struggle (Basu, 1974).

Altogether, the policies of colonial education were defined by the administrative needs and led to serious institutional changes. Although they established timeless foundations of contemporary education, they introduced schools of learning that were assessment-oriented and social disparity, a legacy that has remained in the Indian education system up to date.



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Table 2 Key Colonial Education Policies and Their Impacts

Policy / Commission	Year	Core Focus	Long-term Impact
Charter Act	1813	State role in education	Government intervention
Macaulay's Minute	1835	English education	Language hierarchy
Wood's Despatch	1854	School-college system	Institutional framework
Hunter Commission	1882	Primary education	Local bodies
Sadler Commission	1919	University reform	Autonomy debates

Language and Curriculum

The language policy was at the core of the colonial education in India and a determinant in curriculum, access and social stratification. Based on the direction of the policy of Thomas Babington Macaulay in the Minute on Indian Education (1835), English was firmly established as the language of higher education and administration. The proficiency in English turned into the initial tool of entry in the sought-after government, law, education, and eventually the professions jobs. Consequently, language served not only as an instrument of teaching but also as a social and cultural capital device which was a strong indicator of social position (Kumar, 2005).

This hierarchy was supported through colonial curriculum planning. The English education stressed on Western literature, philosophy, history and science that were often portrayed as universal and superior knowledge. Knowledge systems native to the Indians, which were Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and local wisdom, were either completely sidelined or remained outside the formal school curriculum. Vernacular languages were mostly limited to secondary education, and were considered preparatory or lesser, only able to deal with elementary literacy and not intellectual development (Basu, 1974). This separation produced a very acute language and educational divide between those who had access to English education and those who did not.

The curriculum was also not based on the needs of the locals, it was colonialist in nature. The education was geared towards literature and clerical skills that could help in administrative studies, therefore, technical, vocational and agricultural training was not given a lot of attention. These forms of curriculum were in line with the colonial economy that needed clerks and intermediaries and not an educated populace able to innovate or ask questions on their own. In the long run, the language-curriculum nexus



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embedded an elite group both the social mobility and power of which depended on a good command of English (Nurullah & Naik, 1951).

Table 3 Colonial Education Institutions and Their Target Groups

Institution Type	Medium	Intended Beneficiaries
Universities	English	Urban elite
Government schools	English/Vernacular	Clerical class
Missionary schools	Vernacular/English	Women, converts
Indigenous schools	Local languages	Community-based

Figure 3. Language Hierarchy in Colonial Education System



Access and Inequality

Although the number of educational institutions increased amid the colonial rule, the right to education was very unequal. The policies of colonial education were blatantly elitist in nature with quality privilege to the few ahead of quantity prevailing to the majority. Most of the rural population in India that made up the majority population was somewhat neglected because there was little investment into primary schooling and infrastructure. Schools were placed within the cities and semi-city regions, which drove rural-urban gap in the education rates (Aggarwal, 2009).

The education was also limited to women. Despite the missionary projects and social reform movements activities, which encouraged female education, the state support was not effective and fair. The colonial rulers were fond of using the low investment in female education as a way of appeasing themselves to existing social norms which consolidated the entire system of patriarchy instead of anti-patriarchy. Consequently, the literacy rates of females were very low during colonialist years and the chronic effects were on gender equality in education and employment (Forbes, 1996).

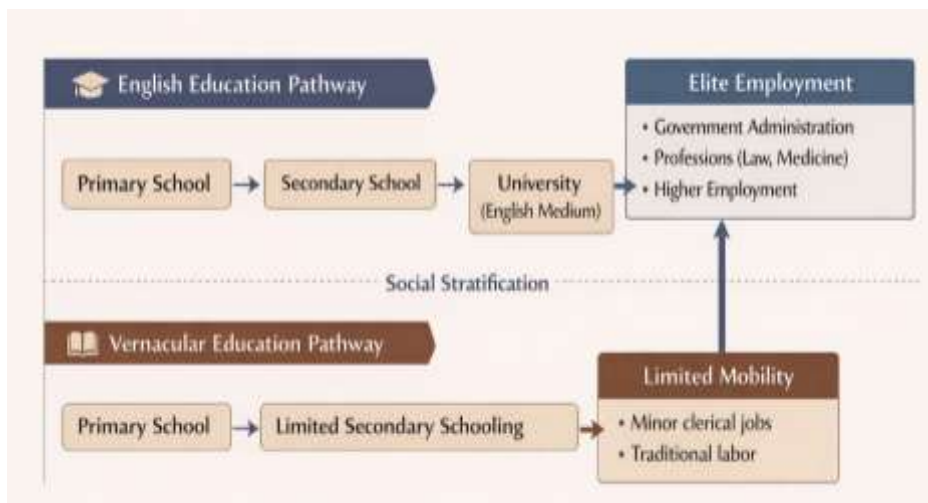


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There were structural obstacles to the access of education by marginalized communities lower castes, tribal groups and religious minorities. Their involvement in formal schooling was stifled by economic poverty, lack of access or denial of social spaces, language and discrimination. These groups were also disadvantaged by the English-centered system since they had fewer chances to discover the resources and social networks to obtain an education in English. Therefore, the colonial education would not only mirror the inequalities but would be reproduced and institutionalized (Kumar, 2005).

The fact that these inequalities impeded into the postcolonial era underscores several decades of colonial education legacy. The modern differences in literacy, language skills, and higher education opportunities are firmly based on the colonial exclusion practices. Although learning has seen much done by the independent India to increase access and enhance equity, evidence still indicates how the structural imbalances established during the colonial rule are still influencing results. The role of the language and access in colonial education is hence important in modern issues of inclusion and social justice in Indian education.

Figure 4. Colonial Education Pathway and Social Stratification



V. Discussion & Conclusion

The legacy created by British colonial education policies was full of contradictions, and to date has influenced the nature, content as well as the social meaning of education in India. On the one hand, the colonial rule brought forth institutional modes that are commonly regarded as the indicators of contemporary education presence of universities, standardized curricula, professional training and exposure to the world bodies of knowledge. These trends enabled the growth of a contemporary intelligentsia, increase in administrative strength and the integration of India into the global intellectual culture. Conversely, the very policies also anchored inequalities on



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language, knowledge, and access that replicated social inequalities and dislike of indigenous epistemologies.

Domination of English is one of the greatest colonial legacies. Although the English education meant entry into the knowledge frameworks across the globe and the freedom to move professionally, it also served as a sort of a gate-keeping process. Elite status, higher education and job opportunities were closely linked to fluency in the English language which strengthened the stratification of classes and caste (Kumar, 2005). This language hierarchy in post-independence India was inherited to a great deal. Instead of destroying it, the state was modifying English to meet national requirements, maintaining it as an associate official language, and one of the major languages in higher education. Such continuity demonstrates a practical value of the English language, as well as the impossibility to reverse the colonial educational system without dismantling the existing power framework.

Equally, the test-based and assess-focused schooling approach demonstrates the colonialism focus on administrative effectiveness rather than integrated education. Colonial universities were essentially examining institutions and the most important social mobility medium became the passing of exams. Independent India not only expanded access to education but also kept the same model and ended up with continued focus on rote learning, high-stakes testing, and credentialism. Critics put forward that this legacy holds innovation, critical thinking, and the ambience in schooling (Aggarwal, 2009).

Colonial education also disadvantaged the native knowledge systems by treating the western epistemologies as scientific and universal. Despite the challenges posed by nationalist minds, this hierarchy was still widely followed in the post colonial teaching programs with only slight achievements in terms of local histories, languages, and intellectual traditions. This marginalization is not only associated with cultural identity but also with epistemic justice since cultural identity limits the knowledge that is legitimate among formal education (Basu, 1974).

Simultaneously, it should be remembered that colonial education had side effects which led to the struggle of India towards freedom. The encounter with liberal political ideas, the fashion of contemporary legal laws, and the ideas of rights as experienced by educated Indians, allowed them to criticize the colonial empire and set out alternative perspectives of the society. Accordingly, colonial education offered a tool of oppression and a means of resistance all at once, which makes it a characteristic of its historical role.

Recent state development policies can be said to be a product of continued efforts to bargain over this legacy. The theme of policies favoring multilingual education, curricular reform with a focus on critical thought, and the efforts to democratize access are indicative of the wish to leave the colonial perimeters. The reforms however work within frames that have been constructed under the colonial history, which curtail the degree of reform. Critical perception of colonial education is therefore highly necessary in not only in historical affairs but also in education reform. This tackling up of colonial



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past in language policies and in curriculum and institutional design can help India shift towards a more inclusive, equitable, and socially based education system.

Figure 5. Continuities from Colonial to Post-Independence Education

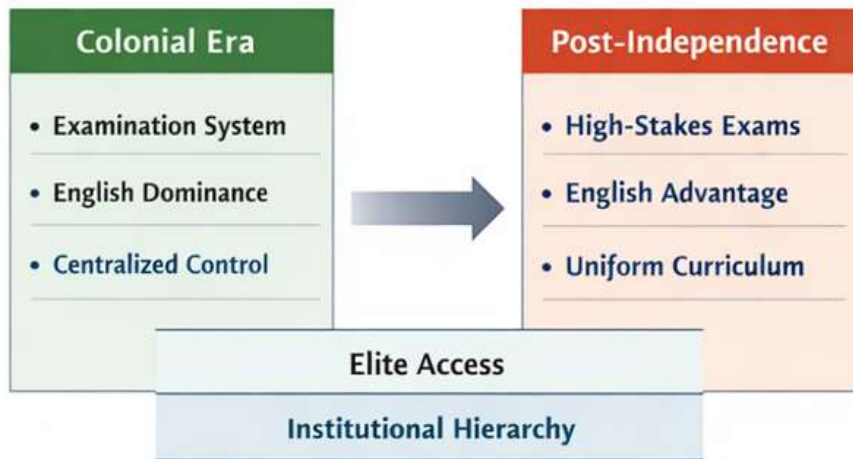


Table 4 Key Colonial Legacies in Contemporary Indian Education

Colonial Feature	Contemporary Manifestation
Examination focus	High-stakes testing
English dominance	Employability advantage
Centralized control	Uniform curricula
Elite access	Institutional stratification

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