

ISSN: 2456-9550
JMC
November 2020

Book Review

BEYOND MACAULAY: EDUCATION IN INDIA, 1780–1860

by Parimala V. Rao, Routledge, South Asia, 2020, pp. x+260, ₹995,
ISBN 9780367463878

Reviewed by:

SAM NESAMONY

Email: samnesamony@gmail.com
New Delhi

Volume 4, 2020

THE JMC REVIEW

*An Interdisciplinary Social Science Journal of Criticism,
Practice and Theory*

<http://www.jmc.ac.in/the-jmc-review/content/>

**JESUS AND MARY COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
NEW DELHI-110021**

Beyond Macaulay: Education in India, 1780–1860 by Parimala V. Rao, Routledge, South Asia, 2020, pp. x+260, ₹995, ISBN 9780367463878.

Reviewed by: Sam Nesamony, Independent Researcher, New Delhi.

Beyond Macaulay: Education in India, 1780–1860 brings out some of the impending and compelling debates on Indian educational history and historiography, particularly the introduction of English education in India through Macaulay’s Minute on Indian Education in 1835. As a seasoned historian of education, Parimala Rao enunciates the educational policies and programmes initiated by the East India Company (EIC) government during 1780–1860, taking a cursory look at the multiple layers of education. Commenting on Macaulay’s Minute, the author argues that though it has an all-pervasive influence, there is little expostulation from Macaulay’s side to the minutes from his contemporaries, which appear to have agreed with him without any admonition. This well-researched archival work (Macaulay’s Minute) is a part of educational historiography. Parimala Rao’s book deals primarily with the crucial era of the policy implementation of education in India, and engages with the debates taking place during the EIC regime. Affixing her stance in historical facts, Rao hasn’t left any stone unturned in contending and refuting some of the apparently prominent historians, who reject ‘proper history’ but themselves leap into ‘ideological history’ (p.4). The manuscript diligently unearths some of the fascinating issues of Macaulay’s Minute and its overhaul by Lord Auckland within a mere span of four years.

Rao’s report on various schools, representing all Presidencies of India, categorically deplores the popular assumption that indigenous education in India benefitted only Brahmins and upper castes as the education system favoured them. The readers are informed that the traditional schools were not necessarily conducted at the designated places; rather, a large number of schools were run either in the temple yards or in mosques. Contrary to the popular perception that education in the indigenous schools was oral, informal, and Brahmin-centric, it is argued that they were written, formal, and egalitarian (p.25). A wide range of indigenous schools, particularly Sanskrit schools, and other higher education institutions like Calcutta Madrasah and Banaras Sanskrit College have been discussed from the late eighteenth century till the end of the EIC rule. The author maintains that India had a diverse and thriving indigenous system of education, which included both sacred and secular. Most notably, the Sanskrit schools taught literature and sacred texts in most cases exclusively to Brahmin boys, the Madrasas taught Arabic language and Islamic literature to Muslim boys, the Persian schools taught Persian literature, and finally, the Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Bengali schools taught their respective languages, including reading, writing, arithmetic and so on in their respective schools (p.14). The indigenous Sanskrit schools, usually called *tols* in Bengal and *pathshalas* in other parts were run by a single teacher, admitted mostly Brahmin boys, and were supported through the endowments of the rulers. In these schools teaching was free, and twelve to thirteen years of learning was offered in a residential set up. Comprehending the relationship between the local administration and the indigenous vernacular schools was virtually non-existent (p.25), it is opined that the Sanskrit pundits taught the Vedas, *shastras*, Puranas, *gyotish*, *vaidya*, *mimansa*, *dharmashastras*, logic, grammar, poetry and so on, and metaphysics was especially taught in the Malabar school, where girls were also admitted. The Arabic schools, Madrasas—mostly attached to large mosques—and Persian schools, which taught Persian language, grammar, and literature, had school buildings across India, where majority of

the teachers were Muslims, but Hindu students were also admitted. The colonial government, which was handicapped in establishing primary and elementary schools, incorporated a select few schools which were flourishing, including mission schools, and peremptorily abolished thousands of other schools. The British had a well-thought out policy to conveniently deny teaching positions to non-Brahmins; while incorporating the indigenous schools, they privileged Brahmin teachers over others, and as a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, most of the sanctioned and approved teachers were Brahmins.

Arguing that the EIC officials showed a ‘cold-hearted’ attitude towards education of the Indian people, Rao’s study demonstrates that though it was indispensable for the British merchants to adopt the culture, there were officers like Cornwallis, who expressed condemnatory attitudes like ‘no Indian is worthy of trust’ and also proclaimed that ‘every native Hindustan is corrupt.’ When the British aristocracy was at its peak, the EIC became a sanctuary for achieving material benefits from commercial enterprises to empire building, whereby, to make their means, the EIC officials contributed over a million rupees a year to Hindu temples and institutions. Meanwhile, there were officials like Warren Hastings, who not only had an intellectual fascination for Indian culture during his stay in India, but also established the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781, and even influenced the British to establish a professorship of Persian language and literature at Oxford University. Jonathan Duncan at Banaras started a Sanskrit college in 1791. Even though it was Charles Grant who advocated the introduction of modern education in English as the medium of instruction (p.50) through his publication of ‘The Observations ...’ in 1792, his ideas were not given due consideration. Rao examines the history of Macaulay, illustrates perspicuously his background, and tells us about his father and abolitionist Zachary Macaulay, who came from a Scotland family, but went on to become a staunch supporter of English education for the commons. Excellent in academics, Macaulay’s secular outlook influenced English writers, including historians and even social reformers like Rammohan Roy. His views led him to be made an MP in his thirties, and gain popularity during debates on the Charter Act in 1833. Having reached Madras in 1834, he became president of the GCPI soon after and plunged himself into educational debates in India. He was instrumental in establishing English language in India along with the teaching of vernaculars. He wrote and published his *Minute with mental and verbal dexterity* in 1835, but opposed the Oriental policy of education exclusively to Brahmins and upper castes, and left India in 1838. Macaulay opposed the divide between the educated English and the rest, but strongly supported the teaching of vernaculars in the schools established by the government, even though H.T. Prinsep, the EIC officer, argued that the Indian vernaculars were not fit to be taught there.

Since the late eighteenth century, colonialists, missionaries and individuals established modern schools in Bengal, Madras and Bombay Presidencies, and also Punjab and other Provinces, where English, reading, writing, arithmetic, astrology, geography, modern science and Indian languages, and a few foreign languages were taught. The inception of Bengal Renaissance started ever since the Asiatic Society of Bengal was established in Calcutta in 1784 by William Jones to raise Anglo-Oriental scholarship. Rao indicates that the triangular collaboration between Fort William College, Royal Asiatic Society and Serampore Mission unscrupulously posed for the EIC officials an unwarranted situation, and without wasting time they established Haileybury College in England in 1807. The growing demand for English education in India evident at the Hindu College, Calcutta and other institutions reveals that there was a deeper and vital interest among the people to acquire English, which unmasked the conventional interpretation that English was a colonial imposition.

The history of Indian education, particularly English education, appears to be the leitmotif of historians of education in India. Rao's study indicates that the indigenous vernacular schools, which admitted lower-caste poor students, were far more progressive than the colonial state that openly opposed admission of poor and lower-caste children. The colonial state consciously thwarted and strictly classified Indians on the basis of caste and religion, and actively favoured the privileged Brahmins and elite Muslims over the other sections of the Indian population (p.238). Expressing contentment about the crucial work done by Scottish men and missionaries, the author underlines that it was the Scots in the EIC who advocated modern education and helped Indians, as they themselves belonged to artisan and peasant families and understood the value of these things. Rao posits that English education not only produced clerks, but also appeared to be instrumental in equipping capable Indian officers at higher echelons, helped along by officials like Thomas Munro and Macaulay who began the process of appointing Indians to higher administrative positions. Rao's study suggests that historically the colonial state had no project of imposing the English language on India. On the contrary, the English language could be identified as an Indian project to improve and modernise India (p.242). Even though the book incorporates much of the educational policies and programmes of the EIC, the ways in which missionaries established modern colleges in various parts of the country during that period, have not been dealt with adequately though these institutions are known widely in India for their inclusive nature.