

# Civilizing the 'Native', Educating the Nation

## Answer in a sentence

1. Define the term 'orientalists.'  
Those with scholarly knowledge of the language and culture of Asia
2. Who setup the Asiatic Society of Bengal?  
William Jones setup the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
3. Why was a Madrasa setup at Calcutta in 1781?  
A madrasa was setup at Calcutta in 1781 to promote the study of Arabic, Persian and Islamic law.
4. What is meant by the term 'vernacular'?  
A term generally used to refer to a local language or dialect as distinct from what is seen as the standard language. In colonial countries like India, the British used the term to mark the difference between the local languages of everyday use and English – the language of the Imperial masters.

## Answer the following

1. What differences existed between the views of Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore with respect to education?  
In many senses Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi thought about education in similar ways. There were some differences, however. Gandhiji was highly critical of Western civilization and its worship of machines and technology. He was against Western education being taught in India, as he said it was enslaving the Indians, making them foreigners in their own land by making them study in English. Tagore on the other hand, wanted to combine elements of modern Western civilization with what he saw as the best within Indian tradition. He emphasized the need to teach science and technology, along with art, music and dance.
2. What was the controversy between the Orientalists and Anglicists scholars?
  - The Orientalists believed that the British ought to promote Indian rather than Western leaning. They felt that the study of ancient Indian texts and Sanskrit and Persian literature and poetry should be encouraged in India.
  - The Anglicists argued that Indians should be taught Western scientific knowledge through the medium of English language.

## Answer in detail

### 1. Who was William Adam? What were the main points of his report on vernacular education?

- In the 1830s, William Adam, a Scottish missionary, toured the districts of Bengal and Bihar. He had been asked by the Company to report on the progress of education in vernacular schools. The report Adam produced is interesting.
- Adam found that there were over 1 lakh pathshalas in Bengal and Bihar. These were small institutions with no more than 20 students each. But the total number of children being taught in these pathshalas was considerable – over 20 lakh. These institutions were setup by wealthy people, or the local community. At times they were started by a teacher (guru).
- The system of education was flexible. In these pathshalas, there were no fixed fee, no printed books, no separate school building, no benches or chairs, no blackboards, no system of separate classes, no roll-call registers, no annual examinations, and no regular timetable. In some places classes were held under a banyan tree, in other places in the corner of a village shop or temple, or at the *guru's* home. Fee depended on the income of the student's parents, if they were poor then they had to pay less fee than if they were rich. Teaching was oral, and the *guru* decided what to teach, in accordance with the needs of the students. Students were not separated out into different classes: all of them sat together in one place. The *guru* interacted separately with groups of children with different levels of learning.
- Adam discovered that this flexible system was suited for local needs. For instance, classes were not held during harvest time, as the children often worked in the fields. The pathshala started once again when the crops had been cut and stored. This meant that even children of peasant families could study.

### 2. What was the Wood's Despatch? What were the practical benefits of Western education according to it?

- In 1854, the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London sent an educational dispatch to the Governor-General in India. Issued by Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the Company, it has come to be known as Wood's Despatch. Outlining the educational policy that was to be followed in India, It emphasized once again the practical benefits of a system of European learning, as opposed to Oriental knowledge.
- One of the practical uses the Despatch pointed to was economic. European learning, it said, would enable Indians to recognize the advantages that flow from the expansion of trade and commerce, and make them see the importance of developing the resource of the country. Introducing them to European ways of life, would change their tastes and desires, and create a demand for British goods, for Indians would begin to appreciate and buy things that were produced in Europe.
- Wood's Despatch also argued that European learning would improve the moral character of Indians. It would make them truthful and honest, and thus supply the Company with civil servants who could be trusted and depended upon. The literature of

the East was not only full of grave errors, it could also not instill in people a sense of duty and a commitment to work, nor could it develop the skills required for administration.

- Following the 1854 Despatch, several measures were introduced by the British. Education departments of the government were setup to extend control over all matters regarding education. Steps were taken to establish a system of university education. In 1857, while the sepoys rose in revolt in Meerut and Delhi, universities were being established in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Attempts were also made to bring about changes within the system of school education.

3. 'After 1854 the Company decided to improve the system of vernacular education.' Explain.

- Up to the mid-nineteenth century, the Company was concerned primarily with higher education. So it allowed the local pathshalas to function without much interference. After 1854 the Company decided to improve the system of vernacular education. It felt that this could be done by introducing order within the system, imposing routines, establishing rules, ensuring regular inspections.
- How was this to be done? What measures did the Company undertake? It appointed a number of government pandits, each in charge of looking after four to five schools. The task of the pandit was to visit the pathshalas and try and improve the standard of teaching. Each *guru* was asked to submit periodic reports and take classes according to a regular timetable. Teaching was now to be based on textbooks and learning was to be tested through a system of annual examination. Students were asked to pay a regular fee, attend regular classes, sit on fixed seats, and obey the new rules of discipline.
- Pathshalas which accepted the new rules were supported through government grants. Those who were unwilling to work within the new system received no government support. Over time *gurus* who wanted to retain their independence found it difficult to complete with the government aided and regulated pathshalas.
- The new rules and routines had another consequence. In the earlier system children from poor peasant families had been able to go to pathshalas, since the timetable was flexible. The discipline of the new system demanded regular attendance, even during harvest time when children of poor families had to work in the fields. Inability to attend school came to be seen as indiscipline, as evidence of the lack of desire to learn.

4. Why did William Jones feel the need to study Indian history, philosophy and law?

- William Jones was a linguist. He could speak a lot of languages. He was also studying deeply Indian heritage and ancient Indian texts, as he and his fellow Company official found them fascinating.
- At Calcutta, he began spending many hours a day with pandits who taught him the subtleties of Sanskrit language, grammar and poetry. Soon he was studying ancient Indian texts on law, philosophy, religion, politics, morality, arithmetic, medicine and the other sciences.
- Jones discovered that his interests were shared by many British officials living in Calcutta at the time. Englishmen like Henry Thomas Colebrooke and Nathaniel Halhed were also busy discovering the ancient Indian heritage, mastering Indian languages and translating

Sanskrit and Persian words into English. Together with them, Jones setup the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and started a journal called *Asiatick Researches*.

- William Jones and Henry Thomas Colebrooke went about discovering ancient texts, understanding their meaning, translating them, and making their findings known to others. This projects, they believed, would not only help the British learn from Indian culture, but it would also help Indians rediscover their own heritage, and understand the lost glories of their past. In this process the British would become the guardians of Indian culture as well as its masters.
  - Influenced by such ideas, many Company officials argues that the British ought to promote Indian rather than Western learning. They felt that institutions should be setup to encourage the study of ancient Indian texts and teach Sanskrit and Persian literature and poetry. The officials also thought that Hindus and Muslims ought to be taught what they were already familiar with, and what they valued and treasured, not subjects that were alien to them. Only then, they believed, could the British hope to win a place in the hearts of the “natives”; only then could the alien rulers expect to be respected by their subjects.
5. Why did James Mill and Thomas Macaulay think that European education as essential in India?
- James Mill argues that the aim of education ought to be to teach what was useful and practical. So, Indians should be made familiar with the scientific technical advances that the West had made, rather than with the poetry and sacred literature of the Orient.
  - Thomas Babington Macaulay saw India as an uncivilized country that needed to be civilized. No branch of Eastern knowledge, according to him could be compared to what England had produced.
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