The emergence of India as one political unit under the British Rule marked the beginning of a new era in the history of India and signalled the death-knell of the centrifugal forces of the medieval period. Never before India could be said to have been one unit in a political sense, because the feeling of nationalism, that vital cementing force, was missing. It is, of course, true that once or twice in her history India was brought under one central authority. But even then that unity was an approximation rather than an accomplished fact, let alone what should be called the national unity. The administrative unity of India achieved under the British rule, found afterwards its solid and permanent basis on the cementing force of Indian nationalism.

Political unity, in the true sense of the term, is a precondition for the establishment of law and order which make for political stability. The British Rule substituted a state of peace and order in place of chaos and disorder which bedevilled the political and social life of India. This was one of the main factors which added to its popularity. Nevertheless, political stability cannot be an end in itself. It has a value only in so far as it ensures all-round progress in the life of a people, both material and spiritual. Hence, Sisirkumar looked at the British power as an agency for laying
the foundation of India's progress and advancement. It was only when he became convinced of the British reluctance to act on the promises held out before his countrymen that he came out as a sharp critic of the administration. But his criticism, however uncompromising, must not be taken to mean that, for him, all the options for securing the rights of the "natives" by democratic means were closed and he began thinking in terms of other method. As a matter of fact, he considered criticism and agitation as indefeasible democratic means to generate moral pressure upon the Government.

In the beginning, the British rule raised great expectations in the bosom of Sisirkumar. He had no doubt in the sincerity of the British when they declared that it was the object of the British rule in India to work for the good of her people. His initial optimism must be traced to the great liberal tradition of England rooted deep in her past, and sustaining her from antiquity.

The introduction of English education with grants-in-aid by the State confirmed his faith in the goodwill of the British for the Indian people. In fact, he considered it the only act which they ever did for India disinterestedly. It was through this English education that the Indians came into contact with the western mind, its ideas and modes of thinking. Thus began the process of emancipation of the Indian mind from the crippling effect of the medieval dogma and superstition. This new consciousness gained through this contact resulted in
the spurt of intellectual activity in every sphere of life—social, moral and political. In a word, this renaissance owed its origin to the spread of English education. It was for this reason that he was a staunch advocate of higher education. The spread of higher education had brought into being a new class of thinkers informed by a new political consciousness, the intelligentsia, which was the symbol of Indian renaissance. Therefore, Sisirkumar wanted the Government to play its part in promoting and enlarging the scope of higher education to ensure the future progress of India. To initiate any move which was prejudicial to the cause of higher education would be to strike at the root of Indian progress. He was shocked by the retrograde move set afoot by the Government to withdraw state-grant for higher education in Bengal during the Viceroyalty of Lord Mayo. He interpreted the move as an act of betrayal by the British Government towards its subjects. He remarked:

"... We write from the bottom of our soul and if every native were to unbosom his heart, you would see their distrust and desperation stamped with indelible character. There was a time when we felt positive pleasure in contemplating the future prospects of our country, when we pictured to ourselves a country thoroughly civilized, educated, and enriched with numerous literary and scientific associations, with newspapers, railways, canals, and roads, with Parliament of our own with a population black and white, nevertheless united by an undying brotherly feeling ..."
"After all is it a sound policy to convince India and the world that England is selfish, that she would enslave two hundred millions to ensure her comfort, admitting for argument's sake that she does suffer some loss by educating India? Does, in accordance with present system of English policy, the bad and good opinion of a whole nation go for nothing? What else has Britain brought them (the Indians) but her science and literature and along with it despotism of the worst shape? They have forgotten the latter for the sake of former. They deeply thank for the boon though so dearly bought. It is not generous to deprive them of such a boon, it is not politic."

This passage correctly expressed the hopes and fear of a people awakened to a new sense of destiny. It also documented the unlimited trust which Sisirkumar placed on the goodwill of the British. He could not just reconcile these two things — the British nation with its liberal political tradition and the contemplated move of the British Government in India to sever the country from its spring of spiritual regeneration. He concluded his article with the following words:

"Our destiny is interwoven with that of Britain or, more correctly, our destiny is in the hands of British people. We rise or fall at their will. They saved us from the hands of the tyrannical Mahomedans, they have all along cheered us..."

* Emphasis added.
with hopes and promises, they have already done a portion of
duty by opening to our wonderous eyes the magnificent works
of western minds. It is indeed a strange mystery how the
same people can now have the heartlessness of undoing all
that they have done ... "  

Sisirkumar looked upon the middle class as the natural
leader of the country. Of the three major classes, - the
landed gentry or the zemindars, the middle class, and the
peasantry — it was the men belonging to the second category
who were better equipped than other two classes to provide the
effective leadership to the country by virtue of their educa-
tion, enterprise and a wide sympathy for the general masses
of the people. The zemindars, he thought, were by nature
indolent, corrupt and selfish, and as such could have no
claim to represent those who were their victims of oppression
and exploitation. As for the ryots, they were steeped in
ignorance. So the question of their leadership did not arise.
Thus, Sisirkumar believed that the middle class, the creation
of higher education, was destined to play an epoch-making role
in the political affairs of the country as the vanguard. The
Government, afraid of its growing influence, was out to suppress
the middle class. Indeed, he saw in the policy of the Govern-
ment (that is, to absolve itself from the responsibility of
patronizing higher education at the state expense) a clear
but shrewd attempt in this direction.
But Sisirkumar was not a man to let pass such a sinister move without a challenge. The future destiny of India was inseparably linked with the question of higher education. His faith in the good intention of the British nation was shaken but that did not make him inclined to pessimism as regards the predicament which was about to befall his country. He was like a man who would not give an inch without a fight. He believed that everything has two sides — one good and the other bad. The contemplated move of the Government to abolish higher education brought no doubt an evil omen to his countrymen. But this menace to higher education, on his view, might turn out to be a blessing in disguise because it was sure to move the apathetic Bengalis to "great actions", as if by a shock. He observed:

"... We fear the suppression of high education, which the Government intends, is another false step which is destined to revolutionise the whole policy of British Indian administration. The apathetic Bengallees, people who were so very ignorant of politics, who never liked and appreciated it, who had long since ceased to cry, do feel something within them which prompts them to great actions ... The fright of the intended blow (i.e. the move to abolish higher education) has appalled and stunned us. To take the Government of a foreign country by force into one's hand is cruel and inhuman; to deprive, again, the inhabitants of all political power and then to incapacitate them of any further progress is dia-
It was the crusade of the British India Government against higher education in Bengal during 1870 that created a wide-spread discontent among the educated sections and generated a popular movement for the second time after the Indigo campaign of 1859-60. It stirred up the same fighting spirit in Sisirkumar as in 1859-60, and he organized an effective public opinion against the ill-advised and retrograde move. He gave a clarion call to his countrymen to rise to the occasion like one man and to resist it at any price, and with a total sense of dedication. Indeed, his fight for higher education may be said to have been an aspect of the contribution he made to the rise and growth of Indian nationalism. He addressed his countrymen in the following words:

"... We must remain prepared for great things and great sacrifices. Money, health, labour, even life is nothing in comparison to the value we have at stake. We must give our lives, if needs be, in such a cause as this. Bengal can spend and ought to spend a million or, if necessary, ten times the amount to preserve her from such a dreadful calamity..." 4

The Bengali intelligentsia had been the most vocal against any wrong or injustice under the British regime since the days of indigo agitation. The politically conscious intelligentsia of Calcutta took the cause of the ryots in 1859-60 as its own and spearheaded the indigo movement. It
gave the cause of the ryots a moral force which the Government could not afford to withstand. The victory of this superior moral force was manifest in the appointment of the Royal Indigo Commission for inquiry into the atrocities committed by the European planters. It is a matter of opinion whether or not this deference to the public opinion should be taken to be an instance of the much-talked-about British sense of justice, though much delayed. At any rate, the Government must have read into the event the signs of the time. Had not the authorities a premonition of the shape of things to come? If one keeps in view this background it will not be difficult for one to understand what had motivated the Government to contemplate the withdrawal of state-grant for higher education. This policy symbolized the fear and apprehension of the Government at the developing democratic consciousness of the middle class. Subsequently, this fear of a particular section was diffused and transformed into a fear of the Bengalis as a whole. Here was the origin of the Bengali-phobia which the Europeans developed, particularly, in the nineteenth century.*

But the authorities would not admit any such development. Whatever might have been their ulterior motive, outwardly they tried to "rationalize" it, consciously or unconsciously, by ascribing the move to financial difficulty. The Government contended that it was only to tide over the financial difficulty. It may be remembered that One English newspaper compared the Bengalis with English matches. Opp. cit., P.176.
that it decided to withhold the grants-in-aid. But Sisirkumar was not to be taken in by the official explanation. He came at once to the point and exposed the hollowness and hypocrisy of the Government in the following words:

"You talk of mass education, financial pressure and other subjects. You show a feeling for the poor and thus argue that a stop ought to be put to higher education. Such round-about-way of doing things makes the case worse; for to try to impose on a whole people such transparent policy is to indirectly call them asses. Why not at once boldly declare that you look with a suspicious eye at our progress, that you don't feel at all comfortable when natives proceed to England to complete their education and compete for the civil service? This would be at least in keeping with one part of your character-frankness."

A government might sometimes run into financial difficulty. In that event, no one, not even Sisirkumar, could withhold his sympathy for such a government. Indeed, Sisirkumar would have no cause for grievance had the British India Government been honest and straightforward as regard the question of higher education. This would have allayed much of the anxiety and suspicion which assailed the mind of the intelligentsia, and would have precluded any scope for misunderstanding between the rulers and the ruled.

As Sisirkumar pointed out:

"There are Europeans, good souls, who pretend or
try to believe that the present attitude of Government towards High Education is to be attributed to the present state of finance. That Government, however zealous in the cause of education, is really without the means of supporting it in a scale it has all along done. If Government had given such an assurance it would have saved us much discontent, alarm and anxiety. But Government had adopted a quite different course. The Government of Lord Lawrence (a former Viceroy) had the pleasure to announce to the civilized world ... that education was quite the people's concern and Government is not bound to support it. Lord Mayo's Government has done something more ludicrous and alarming. It has suspended the State Scholarships, which cost a trifle only to the State because, a Bill was introduced which, if passed, would do away with a part of their necessity ... It has no longer made any secret of its policy of encouraging the education of the masses at the expense of high education. Such are some of the facts which induce us to believe that it is not the Deficit but some other demon which must be at the bottom of this inhuman policy". 6

Sisirkumar argued that money raised in India must be spent in India for the good of her people. He considered the deficit in the budget artificial because, as he pointed out again and again, it could be adequately met up by pruning its own "extravagance" had the Government any real concern for the welfare of the country. His contention was that the British had so far done nothing substantive towards public
good so as to render the deficit credible in the eye of the people. He showed that the bulk of the Government revenue was spent to ensure the security of the Indian Empire. But the military department was something with which the Indian people had no concern. Did the security of an Empire matter anything to a subject people which was steeped in poverty and ignorance? Sisirkumar's sole emphasis was on education. According to him, it was education with which the people had any real concern and, as such, it must get the top priority over all others. As he remarked:

"It is the education department alone with which the people has any real concern. Cease to administer justice, some may complain, but other will be really grateful; do away with public works department, we believe nobody will mourn its loss, reduce the army, people will thank you; in short, if the Government were to stop all payment, withdraw its support from all departments for which it spends 50 crores every year, it is the British people who will suffer much more than the natives of the soil." 7

Some may feel surprised at the indifference shown by Sisirkumar to the system of justice and the department of public works under the British India Government. But this would be to misunderstand the spirit of his criticism. This oblique reference to the judiciary or to the public works department was directed to the perfunctory manner in which it was made to work in India. As such, India could do without
them but to strike at the base of higher education was to take the wind out of the process of her regeneration.

The decision of the Government to discontinue its aid to higher education created an unprecedented commotion throughout the length and breadth of Bengal. The conscious sections of Bengal were at once roused to the impending danger which the official decision meant for them. The withdrawal of state grant was the same as virtual abolition of higher education because the middle class, the real beneficiary of it, could ill-afford to provide education to their children on their own and without subsidy from the state. As usual, Calcutta, the centre of Indian politics, took the leading part in organizing popular grievances against the move. The politically conscious sections of Calcutta rallied behind the British Indian Association which convened a protest meeting in the Town Hall on 2nd July, 1870. Sisirkumar, who had already started a crusade against what should be called a Government conspiracy through the columns of his paper, gave his unstinted support to the popular demonstration engineered by the Association and endorsed its leadership in the matter. Some questioned the competence of the Association to represent the country. He had also some reservations about it. But considering the danger which was about to fall upon his countrymen, and considering also the fact that it was the only political organization in existence in the
country, he appealed to his countrymen to sink their differences and to rise like one man against the ill-conceived policy of the Government. The following article which he wrote on this occasion is an important document as to the love of his motherland and his selfless devotion to her cause which does not fail to move and inspire one even to-day. He observed:

"The 2nd July is destined to be a remarkable day for the Natives of Bengal. We shall prove on that day that as a nation we live. We shall prove that we have a heart to feel and a head to think. We have taken a deep slumber, we must now rub our eyes and look around us.

"We have a fine country, and she is worth every sacrifice at our hands... We are oppressed, there is no doubt of that, need we not be even thankful for it? Oppression imparts a political life to the oppressed, it sharpens and rouses their highest feelings, and unites the stragglers into one common band. If our Government had all along adopted the policy of obliging the Natives by favours and goodness approved by the wisest thinkers of England, the progress of India would have been thrown centuries behind ...

"... To cry against high education is to toll the death-knell of Native advancement, and is it possible that Natives will tamely submit to such an inhuman treatment? Government may succeed now because it is strong in bayonets but the deep mortification and indignation of the Natives now
compressed into their hearts by spasmodic efforts may at a future period burst forth like a volcano. But will Government succeed? We hope, both for our and Government's sake, not. We hope that our paternal Government will not be allowed to succeed by a Higher Authority to soil its hands by the murder of its children.

"... We must show by a satisfactory demonstration that the feeling of disapprobation and indignation is not only universal but strong. The intended blow has been aimed at the most tender and vital part of the nation, and we must show how the whole nation has been alarmed and moved." 8

The protest meeting of the 2nd July, 1870, was a landmark in the history of Calcutta. It was a memorable gathering marked by a great enthusiasm and a feeling of solidarity. Sisirkumar described his unforgettable experience in the following characteristic manner:

"Persons who feel really and deeply do not attempt at display and that was clearly exemplified on that day when the two thousand men finished the proceedings of the day silently and mournfully. The members seemed more like mourners than an enthusiastic and indignant band. We need not repeat that such a meeting was never before held in our country, and we feel deeply grateful to the British Government, for to its fostering care must be attributed these legitimate political commotions which infuse vitality into the veins of the whole nation. We believe the meeting will prove a death-
blow to the anti-education policy or we fear it will prove the hollowness, the evil motives and selfishness of our Government. We believe our Government will not be befooled into the insane policy of doing things in opposition to the dearest wishes of the whole nation, for the inevitable result of such an action will be to sow sedition amongst the most peaceful and loyal nation. That the whole nation has spoken on that day, that the present education policy of Government has deeply alarmed the whole country there is no mistake, and we shall here give this timely warning to our Government that it is better to yield before it is compelled to yield, for, be it known that the Natives of Bengal do not look to the Indian Ministry as the final authority. If Government persists in its cruel policy the Natives must go to Parliament and we leave our own Rulers to determine what would be the political result of such a step."

The popular resentment was not confined to Calcutta alone. It is true, Calcutta led the movement but the district towns did not lag behind. The extent of the popular feeling can be appreciated from the fact that forty three meetings were organized in the district towns which sent nineteen delegates to the Central Committee of Calcutta. As Sisirkumar reported:

"There were some gratifying features which we must not omit to mention. Forty three district meetings were held and nineteen delegates sent to the central committee. Thus
the British Indian Association may now fairly claim to be the Parliament if not of India but of Bengal, and we dare say another impolitic step of Government will still more augment the power of that body and of the nation.... The Cuttack meeting has agreeably surprised us, and we must heartily thank those high-minded and disinterested European officials who so fearlessly stood against the present Educational Policy of Government. Dacca, though late, has done nobly as also Burrisal, Patna, Birbhum and Berhampore ....

From the Town Hall Meeting of 2nd July 1870 a memorial was sent to the Government of India. It appealed to the Government not to give effect to the proposed education policy which would have certainly brought the country's progress to a halt. According to Sisirkumar, the memorial was a "masterly document" but there was yet scope for improvement on it. As he observed:

"The memorial is a masterly document but we believe the condition of the middle class men, the only sufferers, have not been fully and faithfully described. However tempting "the material advantages" of an English education might be, the poor people of Bengal have not the means of educating their children without state-aid. The profits of the land belong to the Zemindars, the Service has been monopolised by our Rulers, trade is the business of foreigners and half-civilized low-caste men of countrymen, it is to Keraneeship, Teachership,
and Pleadership that our middle class men depend for their means of subsistence. We do not see any reason to suppose that the class has improved in condition, but we clearly see that prices of provision, living and the necessaries of life have increased fourfold, tax upon tax have been imposed and the population is gradually increasing. This is a point which, in our opinion, ought to have been clearly set forth in the memorial."

From the above passage it is evident that the condition of middle class in those days was not better than to-day. It was the worst sufferer in the existing state of economy. And it was because it had nothing to gain and, as such, nothing to lose from the establishment that it was restless and impatient for change. Thus the contingent existence of the middle class made it the most progressive of all the classes in the society. However, Sisirkumar's espousal with the cause of higher education was prompted by a desire to bring about changes in the political condition of his countrymen. To him, higher education was a means by which they would be initiated into forms and ideas of western politics. He knew that without an increased political awareness there would hardly be any improvement in the political status of the country. The greater the scope of higher education in the country, the greater would be the extent of political awareness of its people. Therefore, he wanted the middle class to take maximum benefit from higher
education. To him, higher education meant political education of the middle class which, as pioneer, in the field of intellect, would shape the future destiny of India.

When the Government raised the slogan of mass education he grew suspicious of the real motive behind the idea of mass education. What did the Government actually mean by mass education? Did it mean a little reading and a little writing for the general masses of people who were half-clad and half-fed, and who toiled hard on the fields from sunrise to sunset to put off death? Therefore, he was not far from the truth when he saw in the move to introduce mass education at the expense of higher education a subtle and shrewd conspiracy to put the clock of Indian progress back. Indeed, at the surface, this might appear a most innocent-looking affair to which the Government was driven by a genuine feeling for the downtrodden ryots. But it was in reality a sinister device to subvert the greater interest of the country. It was planned not only to stall the "native" advancement by abolishing higher education but to drive a wedge between the intelligentsia and the peasantry, and thus to sow the seeds of dissension between the two by showing favour to one at the neglect of other. Thus it was calculated to wean away the ryots from the influence of the middle class in whose estimate the general interest of the country was not separate from, and independent of, the interest of the ryots and who always espoused their cause whenever they found themselves in a difficulty.
It is interesting to note what Sisirkumar thought of the idea of mass education. He once observed:

"Now let us once look into the face of this well-varnished and catching word, mass education. Certainly education is next to our heart and topmost in our estimation. The word "mass" also carries our most heart-felt sympathies and feelings. Nothing could be more cheering than solid improvement of the people at large, nothing is more blessed than real education. But we cannot approve of the mass education as it seems to be contemplated. We would be zealous advocates both for the mass and education but we could not help decrying mass education. What is contemplated by the word mass education seems to amount to a mere teaching to the generality of the people how to read and write. Otherwise why should it be made to stand in antagonism to our present schools and colleges which in fact provide but or a little more than simple reading and writing. Now we cannot but question the desirability of such a mass education..."

Thus the plea of mass education, on his view, was not only absurd but positively mischievous. He argued that the ryots and labourers were economically most depressed. Moreover, they were condemned to the perpetual oppression of the zemindars, indigo planters and the tea-planters. So it would be absurd to give them general education without taking any

* Emphasis added.
positive steps to change their material condition and to protect them from such maltreatment and oppression. However, he had his own idea about what kind of education would be appropriate for the general masses of people.

What emerges from Sisirkumar's attitude is that he was not opposed to the idea of mass education as such. But he was against the idea if by mass education was meant general education for the ryots and artisans which would do nothing to change the condition they were in. What he advocated for them was a technical knowledge which would promote and increase their skill in their respective vocations. Only such a kind of education was sure to benefit the country at large in the long run. For example, an improved art of cultivation would increase the productive capacity of the land. 13

Nevertheless, he had nothing to say if the Government had taken the fancy to the idea that a superficial knowledge would do good to the general masses. But he must put up a strong opposition to the mass education being introduced as an alternative to higher education. Criticizing an article published in an English paper, he observed:

"The Daily Examiner has a most temperate article on the subject of mass education. The article has one rare merit, - it deals in arguments and not vituperations; however, we must say that in our humble opinion the writer takes a very
shallow and one-sided view of the question. The writer begins with a misrepresentation and takes it for granted that the upper classes are opposed to the education of the lower. We shall be glad to know where the writer got this idea, for, we believe, it was never uttered by a Bengalee. The most important point at issue the writer ignores and dares not meddle with; he assumes a supposition and then very easily comes to a conclusion agreeable to his notion. The real point at issue is not whether the education of the lower classes is desirable or not, there is but one opinion on this point, but whether it is desirable to extend lower education at the expense of the higher. The Bengalees contend that it is not; let the writer prove it is. " 

The article in the Daily Examiner argued that the English education, that is, higher education, without proving a panacea in any way for the middle class, would only aggravate the evil of unemployment among them. But the lower classes, if imparted vernacular education, would be in a position to support such men as authors of vernacular works, doctors and lawyers. Indeed, the article further argued that the spread of higher education would only increase the poverty and discontent of its recipients. To this the reply of Sisirkumar was:

"Let the writer first give a satisfactory answer to this question: If the spread of English education amongst the
upper classes can only increase poverty and discontent, why will the effect be otherwise upon the masses educated in the vernacular? It is well known that the partially educated chasha grumbles as much to hold the plough as the educated Native to serve as a Kermanee. But let that pass. The writer to prove his position ought to have proved first of all that elementary education is wealth ...  

"... We are very curious to know ... how men with a knowledge of the rotundity of the earth, and the proper spelling of words, can be metamorphosed so as to be able to pay for newspapers, books, European medicines, educated doctors and lawyers.

"The appointment to posts now exclusively enjoyed by Europeans may not be a panacea to all our evils, but may certainly remove them to a great extent. Bengal is groaning under poverty and shall continue to do so as long as a stop is not put to that drainage of money, occasioned by the Civil Service system. If the 848 Civilians serving in this country and the large number who have retired with pensions, had resided in this country and spent their earnings here, India would not have lost 5 millions of sterling annually. This system of absenteeism forces us to part annually with a sum which is ten times the amount allotted in the Budget for educational purposes. It is certainly very unselfish and generous to advise the Natives after keeping them aloof from all posts of emolument, civil and military, destroying their indigenous manufactures and
trade by superior machinery, superior wealth and unjust and one-sided laws, to smother their healthy aspirations and go down to the level of the lowest class of society, - it is no doubt very humane to tell them not to improve, lest they claim a share to advantages now enjoyed by Europeans only; but it seems the hard-hearted and unimpressible Natives do not prefer to be influenced by such disinterested counsels.  

It is evident from the arguments offered by the writer of the article in the Daily Examiner that the proposal to introduce mass education was politically motivated. Indeed, the article unwittingly betrayed the real motive of the ruling class in decrying higher education in India. It was apprehensive of the spectacle of increasing number of educated youths in the country not from any humanitarian ground. With the progress of time the English education would continue to swell not only the rank of the educated but educated unemployed, and in them the ruling class saw a positive danger to the future of the British Empire in India. Sisirkumar had insight enough to perceive this. As he commented:

"... The adoption of this policy (anti-education policy) secured to Government a considerable advantage no doubt, it saved some money for the benefit of other favourite departments and put a stop to the increase of a class of

* Emphasis added.
people who threatened to prove most formidable adversaries to those Englishmen who intended to serve in the Indian Empire. Indeed, the rapid increase of educated men in this country and their encroachments upon the privileges which were hitherto only enjoyed by the ruling race was not only not agreeable to the Government but was thought positively unsafe to the permanence of the British rule in India..."  

Sisirkumar was indefatigable in his efforts to make the Government see reason as regards the education policy which was inimical to the interest of the country. After all, his appeal was to the British sense of justice. He tried to bring the authorities back to the realization that the anti-education policy would only widen a breach between the rulers and the ruled which was already there for various causes. As he pointed out:

"... The anti-education policy first created a suspicion in their (the Bengalis') minds, it stunned them and at last roused them into activity. It was an evil day for India, that day when the anti-education resolution was penned. That resolution acted as a wedge and severed the tie of affection and confidence with which both the aliens and Natives were kept together ... The confidence in the English people, at least those who were in India, was shaken. Be it remembered that it was upon this mutual good-will between the two races that the continuance and permanence of the British India Government must depend; and that if
English people were to retain India by mere brute force, it would require the soldiery of half the globe to do it effectually, the proportion of the Europeans to Natives in this country being only one to thirteen hundred. No price can be therefore higher for this mutual confidence, which was bartered for some advantages ...." 17*

At one stage the Government went so far as to make a grant of Rupees Fifty thousands for mass education. It seemed that the Government was bent upon promoting mass education at the expense of higher education in total disregard of the sentiment of the intelligentsia in Bengal and also in repudiation of its earlier promises. This made Sisirkumar raise some fundamental questions for answer from the Government. Let the Government answer these questions honestly and with an open mind so that the people would have no illusion about its real object in future. He observed:

"The Natives urge that mass education must not be extended at the expense of high education ... Is the British India Government bound to further the prosperity of India? Is the British India Government bound to do for the people of India what other civilized Governments do for their people? If yes, the point may be easily settled; if no, the point may be easily settled too. If no, let only the Government declare it and the public shall cease grumbling. If yes, then let the Government just ponder on the following point that we

* Emphasis added.
humbly take the liberty to put below. Taking all the circum-
tances together, is India heavily or lightly taxed in compari-
son with other rich and civilized countries? Is it not a
fact that all the revenues of India are not spent on the
country? Does not this annual drain upon India impoverish the
country? Is not India a poor country, perhaps the poorest
country in the world? Does subjection to a foreign and
despotic Government foster public spirit? Have the Natives
sufficient organization and public spirit amongst themselves
so as to be able to help themselves without any help of all-
powerful Government under which they live? ... Is the British
India Government doing for the educational wants of its people
what other civilized Governments are doing for their people?
Now let the honest, independent and generous Briton answer
the above questions in his mind, and then judge whether or no
England means to perpetrate a great wrong upon the people of
India. Indeed, if our rulers do not see or do not choose to
see the justice of our complaint we cannot help it but the
complaint will remain whether they see any justice in it or
not ..." 18

The extraordinary zeal with which the British India
Government pursued its anti-education policy lent credence to
the thesis that it was actually perturbed by the spectacle of
unprecedented political awakening among the educated middle
class in Bengal. It grew suspicious of the habit of free-
thinking and rational criticism which the intelligentsia
displayed towards political questions. This oppressed the
Government like a nightmare and so it decided to strike at
the very base of high education. Its anti-education policy
took its first toll in the Krishnagar and Berhampore Colleges
which were soon abolished, while the Sanskrit College and
the Patna College were threatened with closure. Sisirkumar
started a vigorous campaign against such retrograde steps
and his writings were responsible to a great extent for
innumerable protest meetings organized throughout Bengal.
Indeed, the movement gained such a momentum that the Govern­
ment was compelled to give in to the moral pressure generated
by it. During the Lieutenant Governorship of Sir Richard
Temple, who replaced Sir George Campbell in 1875, there was
a thaw in the cold and stiff attitude of the Government towards
high education. Sir Richard took step to revive the colleges
abolished. But this should not be attributed so much to the
highmindedness of the Government as to the popular sentiment
expressed through agitations and movements started by the
intelligentsia and some of the newspapers like the Amrita
Bazar Patrika. However, Sisirkumar was grateful that good
sense at last prevailed upon the Government and it had done
something which did credit to the political tradition of the
British.

Sisirkumar valued higher education more than anything
else mainly because he wanted the educated middle class to
work for the improvement of the country's political status.
But he thought that side by side with higher education (that is,
general education) there must be facilities for technical education. So he was one of the earliest advocates of technical education in India. For the improvement of political status of a country must be backed by an improved material condition which could be achieved only by technology and science. He knew that without economic development India would fail to sustain herself in her political struggle. He also knew that the process of industrialization would be the foundation of India's future progress.

The Prince of Wales * visited India during 1875-76. The British Indian Association which represented the landholding class made arrangements to give a grand reception to the Royal personage to celebrate his visit of Calcutta. But it is interesting to note that the Indian League under the leadership of Sisirkumar made quite a different move to commemorate the occasion. He wanted to do something which would be endurable and patriotic at the same time, and which would benefit the country as a whole. He approached the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Richard Temple, to help him establish an industrial school in Calcutta after the name of Prince Albert. Persuaded by him, the Governor consented to write to three renowned Zemindars of the time,- Harish Chandra Roy of Mymensingh, Dhanapat and Lakshmipat Singh of Murshidabad, for contributions (while the former contributed Rs. 45,000, the

* Later, King Edward VII.
latter two Rs. 40,000/- each). Wayfarer, one of the biographers of Sisirkumar, remarked:

"On the 25th December, 1875, a public meeting was held in the premises of the National Theatre presided over by Sir Richard to thank the donors for their generous contributions and to invite public support to the cause of technical education. Sisirkumar's efforts were crowned with success to the utter dismay of his opponents. The institution was inaugurated as the "Albert Temple of Science" and obtained a yearly subsidy of Rs. 8,000/- from the Government. 19

Today, after about twenty four years of India's political independence, the truth has dawned upon our political leaders that India must be made to pass through a phase of economic independence for her political independence to have any meaning for the general masses of the people. But Sisirkumar perceived this about a century ago. What he wanted in the context of his time was to link the country's productivity with its political development. In the following passage he outlined a scheme to utilize natural resources of the country by applying modern technique following the European example. For this purpose he wanted to train young men in mechanical engineering:

"Our indigenous manufactures are all fast dying out on account of the great advantages possessed by European manufacturers in their use of machinery. For the revival of
productive industry in the country and for the development
generally of its great natural resources we want nothing so
much as a number of men trained in the country who would not
only be able to work, repair and construct machinery of the
kind at present in use in Europe, but also to adapt them to
the circumstances of the country, which differ greatly from
those of England and other European countries. ... In fact
there are a thousand ways in which mechanical engineers* of
real skill and devoted to the service of the country may
benefit it by the development of its productive industry.

"For all engineering operations carried on by
Government or by private capitalists, where practical mechani­
cal engineering is at all necessary, engineers have to be
imported on very high pay who, not being at all attached to
the country, do their work in the most perfunctory and care­
less fashion... their only aim being to amass some money and
go back to England as quickly as possible. These considera­
tions will show how greatly a college for the education and
practical training of natives as Mechanical Engineers is
wanted." ... 20 **

* Evidently, by mechanical engineering, Sisirkumar meant
all kinds of Engineering knowledge.

** It is very much interesting to note the syllabus he
prescribed for the "mechanical engineering" student.
According to him, he should have a five years' course of
study. Of these five years 3 years were allotted by him
for theoretical study in the class and the remaining 2 years
for practical training in the workshop. The syllabus is as
But what strikes one as extraordinary and original of Sisirkumar was his advocacy of the vernacular as the medium of higher education. Even before Rabindra Nath who in his famous article, "Viswavidvalayer Roop" * argued for the introduction of the vernacular at the university stage as a medium of instruction, Sisirkumar proved his unusual foresight by championing the cause of vernacular. The arguments put forward by Sisirkumar were essentially similar to those of Rabindranath.

It is true, Sisirkumar put up a stiff fight against the Government policy of abolishing higher, that is, English education. So his advocacy of the vernacular as the medium of higher education might appear somewhat puzzling. But actually he did not espouse so much the cause of English education as that of higher education itself. It was purely an historical accident that the British conquered India and introduced higher education through their own language. Besides, he perhaps thought that the system of English education was only a temporary phase and must be substituted by the vernacular in the long run.

However, his main arguments against education being imparted through the English medium may be summarized as follows: (i) Mathematics and Arithmetics (Algebra upto Logarithms : Euclid etc.) (ii) Drawing (Geometrical, Mechanical etc.) (iii) Natural philosophy, Statics. (iv) Natural and Experimental Science. (v) Mechanism. (vi) Workshop processes and appliances. (vii) Manufacturing process and machinery.

"An Institution is urgently wanted" :(Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 2, 1875.)

* The lecture delivered in the University of Calcutta in 1339 B.S. (Published in a book form in 1933).
follows: Education imparted through English did not help the mind of an average learner to reach the subject matter. Here the foreign language itself stands in the way of assimilation. Secondly, the English medium tended to make learning the monopoly of a few only. It helped to form a "new caste full of pedantry and superficial ideas" and completely cut-off from the people. It was "ruinous" to the nation as it prevented knowledge from taking root in the national mind. He was not, however, opposed to the cultivation of the English language. Students should study it "as a subject in itself", just as people of other countries studied languages foreign to them.

Sisirkumar's idea of education was not only modern but revolutionary in its effects and, for that matter, was astonishing, when one considers the fact that he formulated it at a time when India was reduced to a colony. Though the English education was chiefly designed to produce "docile executants of the English will", it also stimulated the democratic consciousness of the people. The system of education became, quite contrary to the intention of the rulers, a

* The expression "docile executants of the English Will" has been borrowed from R. Palm Dutt. According to him, the "object of Macaulay in introducing English education had been to" train up a stratum of docile executants of the English will, cut off from every line of contact with their people. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to implant the seeds of democracy. On that question his views were emphatic. It was Macaulay who declared: "We know that India can not have a free Government. But she may have the next best thing - a firm and impartial despotism". (Dutt, R. Palm, India Today, Bombay, 1949, P. 283).
channel for the spread of democratic and free-thinking ideas among the colonial people. The rulers then came to realize the damage they had unwittingly done to the interest of England by introducing English education. They tried to mend the mistake by abolishing higher education altogether. Rightly Sisirkumar saw in that move a conspiracy to stop the movement of India towards progress. It was the impact of Western ideas which had brought about Indian regeneration. To him, the higher education was a national issue. It would have been a real national calamity if the authorities were successful in cutting off the Indian mind from the democratic ideas of the West. Sisirkumar was one of the important forces who started a powerful campaign against the proposed education policy of the British Government and, as such, was responsible, to a certain extent, for the education movement on a national scale.

The most significant factor which emerges from the study of his scheme of education is the singular emphasis he put on its practical side. Like a pragmatist's his arguments implied that the taste of education was ultimately the utility it had for improving the material condition of the society. According to him, education must be made purposeful for the society as whole so that it could bring about the agricultural and industrial development of the country through the exploitation of its natural resources.

Last but not the least, his advocacy of the vernacular
as a medium of instruction deserves special mention. It spoke for his unusual foresight. The English education was introduced at a time when India was a colony of England and the most of the Indian dialects were in a primitive stage. In that context, English as the language of a superior nation had a definite part to play in India. But still it was a foreign language and its utility was confined to a limited sphere. Besides, ideas learnt through an alien language are difficult to assimilate. The bulk of population had no use for it. Indeed, only the vernacular as accepted by free India can make ideas effective and fruitful in the life of the people as a whole.
References


2. Ibid.


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., February 24, 1870.


7. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


13. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


17. Ibid.


21. Ibid., March 27, 1884.