CHAPTER 4

LIBERAL EDUCATION ‘DISTORTED’:

ANXIETIES OF NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIA

The expectation that the natives would turn to Christianity with the introduction of European literature and sciences marked the field of action in the domain of education in the early nineteenth century. However, while this link was evident to the Europeans, it is interesting to note that for the natives themselves there was no obvious link between European literature and sciences on the one hand and Christianity on the other. While they eagerly made attempts to learn the new knowledge brought in by the Europeans - whether in the realm of literature, sciences or technology - they did not turn Christians as expected. This raises several questions: What did the Indians learn and how did they deviate from the horizon of expectations that defined and provided coherence to the actions of the British? In other words, what was the nature of deflection or refraction that took place in the way the natives learned the goal and was this deflection systematic or ad-hoc?

In order to answer the above question, I examine the effects of secular education on the natives. Firstly, I examine the writings of Raja Rammohun Roy who founded the Brahmo Samaj and also helped establish modern educational institutions. I turn to Roy in order to examine the question of translation of concepts. One of the criticisms often made against the historiography of colonial rule has been that most of these accounts between the colonizer and colonized emphasize the “imposition” model, i.e., they characterize the encounter between the two as one-sided, thereby emphasizing the hegemonic role of the colonizer and

130 This is not to say that the effects of modern education did not shape the expectations. As the third chapter shows, the effects often fed into the assumptions and almost gave a semblance of an anthropological experiment being carried out on a large scale. However, the focus of this chapter is on the reception of modern education, with a focus on how the natives received the learning goals.
denying the agency/free will of the natives. The natives too collaborated, the other argument goes, in the making of this framework and used these concepts in different ways to suit their own contexts. Thus, today it has become an accepted, conventional wisdom to emphasize the “dialogic” nature of the cross-cultural encounter in order to show that the natives too contributed and took an active part in the making of the dominant Western framework, thereby emphasizing the volitional nature of the process. In this way, an attempt is made to restore “agency” and “selfhood” to the natives. However, taking the mere presence of dialogue and discussion to be indicative of “agency” without asking if there is learning and understanding of one’s experience taking place or if our engagement with Western framework is marked by obfuscation due to a hasty borrowal of Western concepts and the unevenness of conceptual planes even from the initial stages of the engagement, would remain a superficial exercise. Instead, through my analysis of Roy, I would like to ask what the conceptual gains and losses in this process of translation have been and to what extent we can even term the encounter as “dialogic.”

In the second half of the chapter, I examine the heightened debates on the observed effects of secular education that take place in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Secular education, which was envisaged as a solution to the immorality of the natives in the early decades of the nineteenth century, comes to be seen as a source of problem. The discourse of the incomplete moral formation of the Indian student and an acute anxiety with regard to moral and cognitive goals that are half learnt, not understood, left unlearnt or are differently learnt comes to haunt the late nineteenth-century debates around education. I examine this debate in order to understand its implications.

131 Thus, Irschick in his Dialogue and History, argues that we can no longer presume that the “Indian society was a product of an “imposition” by the hegemonic colonial power onto a mindless and subordinate colonized society.” He suggests instead, “that changed significations are the heteroglot and dialogic production of all members of any historical situation, though not always in equal measure” (Irschick 1994, 11–12). Also see Bayly (1996), Burton (2003), Inden (1990) for a similar emphasis, even if their targets are different.
4.1 Rammohun Roy, Social Reform and the New Model of the Intellectual

Raja Rammohun Roy has often been regarded as the founding figure of modern India. The first exponent of “Hindu Reformation,” “the Luther of India,” “the father of modern education,” “the father of modern Indian Renaissance,” “the first liberal, scholar and intellectual” – are amongst the epithets showered on him. Rammohun Roy has the distinction of being one of the first Indian thinkers who engaged with the Western framework and therefore is of significant interest to us. Ramachandra Guha, in his *Makers of Modern India*, describes Roy as “unquestionably the first person on the subcontinent to seriously engage with the challenges posed by modernity to traditional social structures and ways of being” (Guha 2010, 25). Sumit Sarkar, on the other hand argues that though Roy’s work does indicate a break from inherited traditions, this break was of “a limited and deeply contradictory kind” constrained by a Hindu-elite and colonial framework (Sarkar 1985, 1). Others like Halbfass see in Roy a forerunner of “Neo-Hinduism,” a term used by Paul Hacker to refer to those who “first adopt Western values and means of orientation and then attempt to find the foreign in the indigenous,” (Halbfass 1988, 220) claiming them to be part of the Hindu tradition. Whatever the ambiguity and the difference in assessing his

132 Allusions to Luther and the Protestant reformation surfaced, with various writers referring to Rammohun as the “Hindoo Reformer” or simply “the Reformer.” The repeated appeal he made to scriptural authority was a factor (Zastoupil 2010, 28–41). That the protestant reformation was consciously employed by Roy himself to envisage a similar reformation in India is made evident in his conversations with Alexander Duff where as a youth, he said to Duff, “I acquired some knowledge of the English language. Having read about the rise and progress of Christianity in apostolic times, and its corruption in succeeding ages, and then of the Christian Reformation which shook off these corruptions and restored it to its primitive purity, I began to think that something similar might have taken place in India, and similar results might follow here from a reformation of the popular idolatry” (Collet 1914, 167).

133 See Partha Chatterjee (1976) for a succinct summation of the assessments of scholars with regard to the contribution of Rammohun Roy in the modernization of India, occasioned by the bicentenary of the birth of Rammohun Roy. Chatterjee’s review is aptly titled “Our Father,” capturing his extraordinary influence which persists till today. Sumit Sarkar’s criticism of Roy is that he remained a “comprador” to the British by being selective and limited about his campaign for social reform (Sarkar 1985). In short, Roy was not reformist enough and restricted his campaigns to the elites and was “a comprador” with the British. However, the underlying categories of social reform, central to which were concepts such as natural religion and monotheism that were seen as constitutive of society are themselves taken as granted by Sarkar.

134 Neo-Hindus like Roy are distinguished from traditionalists “who do not assign it [tradition] any essentially new interpretation oriented primarily around Western models” (Halbfass 1988, 220).
contributions, it is clear that Rammohun Roy represents a model of intellectual as reformer which continues to inspire much of the academia today. What remains under-investigated is the exact nature of the conceptual shift he inaugurated.

Roy’s involvement in demanding institutions of modern education in preference to traditional, indigenous ones is well-known. He provided support to governmental initiatives aimed at introducing higher education along European lines and extended help to missionaries like Alexander Duff in their efforts to set up schools for educating Indian natives in useful knowledge. He actively participated in the establishment of the Hindu college which was one of the first institutions to instruct the natives in Western literature and sciences, two decades before Macaulay’s minute (Zastoupil and Moir 1999; Collet 1914). He wrote a letter to Lord Amherst in 1823, the then Governor General, requesting the encouragement of Western literature and sciences instead of meeting the Orientalist demand for a Sanskrit College. He was also the first Indian who petitioned the Government in 1831 that no Indian be employed in government offices without the knowledge of English (N. Kumar 2001, 85).

What is less known is that he was also the first Indian to use the term “Hinduism” which Roy evidently borrowed from the early generation of Orientalists and missionaries. He was thereby the first native to cast the varied practices of the land as part of a larger whole called the “religion of Hinduism” (Oddie 2006).

While we know Roy as a pioneer of social reform, we are hardly aware that his idea of social reform was deeply tied to religious reform. From the Orientalists, he borrowed the idea that the corruption in the existent religious practices of the Hindus is the result of deviation from

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135 Most works on reformers are either hagiographies or uncritical in their assessment of the effect of reform on ordinary people. That the reformers were looked at with a great deal of scepticism by a majority of the natives and that the natives looked at their own practices very differently than how the reformers did, escapes most histories of reform. See Polly Hazarika (2011) for an assessment of the historiography on social reform and a detailed analysis of Roy’s writings. Also see King (1999), Kopf (1969) and Mani (1998) for Roy and the influence of Orientalism in his writings.
scriptures. The “authoritative” texts - the Vedas, the Vedanta or the Upanishads in particular and the Vedantasutras of Badrayana with the commentary of Sankara – he averred, possessed no justification for the proliferation of idolatry, ritualism, the large scale polytheism and superstitions of Hinduism. However, he asserted that “from its being concealed within the dark curtain of the Sungscrit language, and the Brahmins permitting themselves alone to interpret or even to touch any book of the kind, the Vedant, although perpetually quoted, is little known to the public: and the practice of few Hindoos indeed bears the least accordance with its precepts” (Roy 1901a, I: 4). Roy’s works provide us with a good example of how the framework of Protestant theology makes its way from Orientalists’ writings to the thought processes of the natives in the understanding and evaluation of the practices of their own society.

Roy thus became one of the early Indian protagonists who turned to the Vedanta as an instrument to combat the attack on Hinduism by missionaries. As a result, he misrepresented (or more accurately was circumscribed by the category of religion) the various traditions of the land that were clubbed together under “Hinduism.” Firstly, there were innumerable traditions as part of native culture and the Vedas were by no means central to all.136 Secondly, most traditions were intensely practice-based and the relation between these texts and practices was not significant, let alone one of latter being derived from the former. Drawing attention to the peculiar status of the Vedas, Halbfass remarks:

Louis Renou has characterized the role of the Veda in traditional Hinduism in a memorable and familiar statement: “Even in the most orthodox circles of Hinduism, reverence for the Veda was

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136 For example, it is often noted by Europeans in the early nineteenth century that the Vedas were unknown in Bengal till a rich Kayastha brought a few Brahmins learned in the Vedas from Varanasi in the mid-eighteenth century (Buchanan 1833, 88-89). Also see A. P. Sen (2010, 15) who points out that it was the Bhagavata Purana which was dominant in eighteenth century Bengal rather than the Vedas. Halbfass similarly notes that till about 1800, there were very few pundits in Bengal who had knowledge of the Vedanta and tantric practices played a bigger role (Halbfass 1988, 214–15). When Roy published the Upanishads, it is believed that a local pundit accused him of fabricating the text (cited in unpublished thesis by Gelders, 2009, 9)
nothing more than a "tipping of the hat," a traditional gesture of saluting an "idol" without any further commitment"…There seems to be a blatant contradiction between the proclamations of its sacredness and authority, and its factual neglect by the Hindu tradition. While it is often invoked as the criterion of Hindu "orthodoxy," its actual presence in Indian thought and life seems to be quite limited…The Vedic texts contain no Hindu dogma, no basis for a "creed" of Hinduism, no clear guidelines for the "Hindu way of life." They offer only vague and questionable analogues to those ideas and ways of orientation that have become basic presuppositions of later Hinduism. (Halbfass 1992, 1)

The Orientalists and missionaries had catapulted the Vedas to the centre stage assuming they were revealed texts, with a law-like status, in the sense scriptures like the Quran and the Bible were. The fact that the Vedas were referred to as apauruseya, one which is not authored by any human, was taken to mean that they were revealed and of “non-human origin.” However, the term apauruseya was used only much later to refer to the Vedas (Staal 2008). Moreover, they were addressed to the gods and not revealed by the gods to the seers as was often inferred. The Vedas were called sruti meaning “that which is heard” in the sense that it is transmitted orally from teacher to student and not that they were revealed. Staal points out that even their status as “sacred book” is questionable for more than one reason. They are neither “books nor scriptures,” nor “sacred” in the sense usually understood. They are oral compositions transmitted with a fair degree of accuracy from generation to generation and are not of a piece, with different parts composed by several people over a long period of time. Besides, “the Vedas had no founder or supreme authority, no popes or pontiff and neither were they associated with temples or icons. They refer to a variety of “priests” with distinct ritual tasks…, but no hymns or prayers, English words often met with in translation. There are gods, on earth and in heaven, but they do not dispense grace…They do not expect loving devotion or Bhakti. The Vedas are not a religion in any of the many senses of that widespread

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137 The term Mandala is translated as a “book” when it actually means a “cycle” (Staal 2008, xv). In the preface to the book, Staal dispels many of our myths with regard to the Vedas. To refer to the Vedas as “scriptures” is equally misplaced for they were not revealed, were not doctrinal in nature nor were they written down (even though a variety of written texts existed) till much later.
term” (Staal 2008, xvi). If this is so, why does Roy turn to the *Vedas* with such eagerness, especially when they were not the most common in Bengal?

In order to combat the idolatrous nature of Hinduism which was coming under severe criticism by the missionaries and to simultaneously establish the status of Hinduism as a *religion*, one of the first conceptual moves Roy makes is to establish the concept of one *supreme God* in native traditions. The Orientalists had found glimpses of monotheism in the *Vedas* in its concept of *Brahman*. Roy therefore turns to the *Vedanta* to counter the missionaries who attacked Hinduism for lacking the concept of one true God, a concept necessary for monotheism. The subtitle of his work, not surprisingly then is “To the Believers of One True God” (Roy 1901a, I: 12). It is striking to note that in his preface to the various *Upanishads* Roy translates (in his preface to the translation of the *Isopanishad* and his introduction to the *Kenopanishad*), he states his objective to be one of establishing the unity of God and worshipping “the true supreme being” who is “indeed one and has no second” (Roy 1901a, I: 12). This, claims Roy, is real Hinduism, practiced by his ancestors. Arguing that “the whole body of the Hindu Theology, Law and literature, is contained in the Veds, which are affirmed to be coeval with the creation (13),” Roy claimed to restore the pure

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138 It is likely that Islam and its monotheistic feature too had been influential in Roy’s argument in casting Hinduism as a monotheistic religion. Roy’s first work *Tuhfatul Muwahhidin: A Present to the Believers in One True God* (1803-1804) written in Persian makes a rationalist argument of how there is truth and falsehood in all religions. However, the turn to the *Vedas* to locate the “One true God” as Brahman is not evident here. While the idea of deceivers or leaders who mislead the public is present, the equation with the “priestly caste” is not yet made.

139 H.T. Colebrooke in his essay “On the Vedas,” *Asiatic Researches* 8 (1805), 369-476 had noted: ”Rituals founded on the Puranas and observances borrowed from a worse source, the Tantras, have, in great measure, antiquated the institutions of the Veda” (Colebrooke 1837, I:9–113). Colebrooke finds the “unity of the deity” only in the *Vedas*, with the *puranas* and the rest being seen as corruptions of the philosophical core. We see though Roy is more accommodating of the *tantras and puranas*, he clearly holds the *Vedas* to be superior in the manner of Colebrooke.
doctrines of the *Vedas* and condemned several native practices without scriptural sanction as superstitions.\(^{140}\)

The confrontation here, as is evident, is between precepts/doctrines on the one hand and practice and customs on the other. With Roy, we see the emergence of a new attitude towards practices in native accounts which is best characterized as *hermeneutic*.\(^{141}\) A true practice was derived from doctrines of the faith and was in the adoration of a true deity. Roy was keen to purify Hinduisms of all rites that did not stem from this scriptural source. Roy’s translations of the *Vedas* drive home the monotheism of Hinduism and his objective is to do away with the worship of idols and introduce the One Supreme Being, the One without a Second, and show that the *Vedas* not only taught the existence of such a being but also taught the proper mode of worship: “He who is without any figure, and beyond the limit of description, is the Supreme Being” (Roy 1901a, I: 74). Acknowledging that the *puranas* do declare the divinity of many gods and goddesses as well as sanction certain modes of worship, Roy points out that there is no contradiction since the authors of the book themselves repeatedly affirm that “the directions to worship any figured being are only applicable to those, who are incapable of elevating their minds to the idea of an invisible Supreme Being...and those that are competent for the worship of the invisible God, should disregard the worship of idols” (Roy 1901a, I:74). This led to others conferring on him the epithet, “the discoverer” of the doctrines of the unity of Godhead and “the reformer,” both of which he humbly rejected saying that he is far from being the discoverer or a reformer since our forefathers already held the doctrines to be true and he was only restoring Hinduism to its original ways.

\(^{140}\) The idea of scriptural sanction would play a central role throughout reform movements of nineteenth century. See Oddie (1995) and Mani (1998) for how the question of whether the practice had scriptural sanction or not was crucial in the debates around hook swinging and sati.

\(^{141}\) By *hermeneutic*, I mean an orientation towards practices where they are regarded as texts to be interpreted. One unearths the meaning or belief behind them to understand the actions of a community of people.
Why was Roy so insistent on proving that there was a concept of “One Supreme God” in native traditions, thereby equating the concept of Brahman142 with the monotheistic God like the Orientalists before him had done? It is likely that at this point in history, not to have a concept of One Supreme God meant that the native traditions could not be considered religion at all. To be a religion was to be monotheistic and monotheism was crucially dependent on the doctrine of unity of Godhead. By equating Brahman to the monotheistic God, Roy was making a claim that the native traditions were in fact part of a larger entity called religion. Thus, we see that Roy casts Hinduism along monotheistic, Semitic lines and as a rival religion to Christianity and Islam.

However, in this process of casting the traditions of the land as religious rivals to Christianity, the concept of Brahman itself comes to be equated with the monotheistic God, an equation that does not appear to exist earlier. Orientalists like Colebrooke and William Jones had found in Brahman the Hindu equivalent to God on which everything else rests, and idolatry in Hinduism as being a corruption of this ancient truth. However, Alexander Duff challenged this equivalence forwarded by the Orientalists and by “some natives” by arguing that this concept of “Brahm” defeats his understanding of God.143 While Duff does not

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142 Brahman or “Brahm” (as Duff calls it) is often posited along with atman, as a conceptual pair in Hindu thought. It should not be confused with Brahmanas, which are part of the Vedas, or with Brahmins or with Brahma, the Hindu god. To say what it is, is a more difficult task. Daya Krishna (2011) sees Brahman as inexpressible through language and more in the realm of experience.

143 Duff directed his attack towards the Orientalists though the terms he uses make it clear that he is familiar with Roy on Brahman and disagrees with him on the issue. See Duff (1840, 75–107). The Brahmos would protest against Duff’s writing in Tattwabodhini Patrika, especially his attack that in the Vedantic conception, God had no moral attributes and therefore could not be held up as a moral exemplar (A. P. Sen 2010). The contrast between a theist notion of God and the various gods of the natives is brought out well by Alasdair MacIntyre and might give us a better idea of why the concept came under dispute in these debates: “How am I going to use the word ‘God?’ I will use it as its Hebrew, Greek, or Arabic equivalents were used by Abraham, by Isaiah, and by Job, by John and Paul, and by Muhammad. I am, therefore, not going to use it in the plural, as words translatable by ‘god’ were used by Aeschylus and by Horace, by the author of the Ramayana and by the Mayans. God, as understood by theists, by Jews, Christians, and Muslims, is necessarily One, the one and only God. Were he not such, he would not be God, for, if he exists, there can be no other who can set limits to the exercise of his powers or who can compare with him as an object worthy of our loving devotion. And so the psalmist could speak of God as a great king above all gods... To believe that God, so understood, exists, is very different from believing in several gods, each of whom has limited powers, or from believing in one god whose
explicitly mention Roy, he argues that “Brahm” (“the One without a Second”) is often represented by natives as without qualities or attributes and therefore cannot be considered as “a moral being” at all. How can one worship a God who has no moral attributes, no ethical responsibility towards human beings whatsoever and still hold him as an exemplar?

No: we may lay it down as indisputable, that a god without moral attributes, must be to man in his present state no god at all. Practically the delineation of such a god could only be equivalent to the promulgation of atheism…. “if, through the non-existence of moral attributes, and the absorption or annihilation of the rest, he has neither the power nor the will to do good or evil – to reward the righteous, or punish the wicked: if, bent only on the uninterrupted enjoyment of his own beatitude, he neither sees, nor hears, nor knows, nor cares about any of his creatures:– how is it possible to render to him any act of homage, or devotion, or worship whatsoever? To dream of any positive act of adoration and praise such a being, would be more absurd than the service of the grossest idolater. For the latter, however deluded and irrational, does believe, that the block he worships is either a divinity, or the peculiar habitation of a divinity who sees and hears – a divinity who is able to avenge and mighty to succour. But to attempt to worship Brahm, at the very moment that he is declared to be immersed in a slumber so deep, that it is without dreams – a stupor so profound, that it resembles the sleep of death – were a pre-eminence of phrenzy to which insanity alone could inspire. (Duff 1839, 84)

That such a being without any moral attributes did not evoke any sentiment of worship in human beings, for Duff, is proved by the fact that the Hindus did not have a single temple to honour the supreme incorporeal spirit nor was there performance of any sacred rites in his celebration.\(^\text{144}\) Of course, Duff acknowledges that “Brahm” could be an object of profound meditation, but meditation on such abstractions was out of reach of masses and for them he was almost useless and non-existent:

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\(^{144}\) That “Brahm” or Brahma,” the supreme monotheistic God of the Hindus,” is not worshipped by the Hindus in any temple, is noted with bewilderment in many accounts of the times.
The profession of belief in a god, merely to escape from the imputation of atheism cannot long be the profession of a whole people... Yet it (Brahm) is the highest that has been attained by reason in the East, when unfavoured by the light of revelation; - the reason not of one man but of thousand – thousands, not of savages, but of proud philosophers, many of whom have been endowed with intellects as subtile [sic] and acute as any ever bestowed upon the children of men; intellects not confined to one unhappy age of peculiar mental inertness, but whetted and uninterruptedly exercised through successive ages during the long period of three thousand years! (87)

In questioning the equivalence of Brahman with the concept of One Supreme true God, Duff both recognizes something central to the culture he is engaging with and yet misses it. The view that the Vedas propounded “a pure monotheism,” was disputed by others too. “An abstraction without attributes,” argued the reviewers of “Allen and Morris on the History of India” is “no person and can never be admitted to be the ‘living god’” (The Bombay Quarterly Review 1857, 38). Moreover, monotheism, they maintained, was not a mere abstraction that there is one God; that one expresses faith in a personal sense in that One God and believes his teachings to be true was crucial. Also, God had to have an ethical responsibility towards human beings, guiding their moral conduct through his Law which was an expression of His Will.145 Even if one finds in William Jones translations phrases such as “fixing the mind on God,” a perusal through the Sanskrit texts reveal, they pointed out, that while there is in some cases the word yap (abstraction) and in others sanyas, there is no reference to God at all (39). The ambiguous fate of God in Indian traditions has also been noted in scholarship. Daya Krishna, for example, points out that God was never explicitly

145 The reviewers of the books by Allen and Morris challenge the authors’ description of Hinduism being monotheistic (The Bombay Quarterly Review, 1857, 1–47). They note that even when Brahman appears, the hymns are addressed not to him but to the sun, moon and the earth. This was by no means monotheism. The review also makes note of the description of temples by the authors which do not seem to engage in what they recognize as religious activity: “the temples of India are not built to accommodate assemblies of people like Christian church, as there is no social prayer, nor praise, nor hearing instruction in their worship...it is an abuse of language to call it a religion” (40). Even the idea of God as an author of the universe or the first cause, they note, is plainly absent. The notion that the universe may after all be created, governed and guided by an omniscient power who has a specific ethical relation with his highest form of creation and that there was a personal God who was our father, was absent in native traditions and would constitute the main appeal of Christianity. See, for instance, the account of conversion in Satthianadhan (1998).
posited by any of the schools in Indian traditions and that even the Vedic gods were more “like the 'theoretical constructs' in science which are only instrumental in getting the cognitive work of science 'going' but which are not required to have any independent reference of their own and whose verification is thus neither sought nor done” (Krishna 1996, 48). Even when some similar idea has been floated, he observes, it emphasized not the creator-God or a God who rewards and punishes people according to the moral nature of their actions but gods who are born in this world, live the life of man and strive to establish dharma. Thus, it is unclear how Brahm came to be equated with God. It is even less clear for us today as to what cognitive work the concept of Brahm did in Indian thought.

We see that in the process of translation from one conceptual framework to another, several changes take place. The varied, non-normative traditions of the land get cast as practices derived from “the doctrines of scriptures” which are equated with norms or laws (commanded by God) governing the conduct of the people. Several native concepts such as Brahman, apauruseya, sruti, among others come to be translated differently. The Vedas and the Upanishads come to be seen as “scriptures,” leading to “religious salvation.” Concepts such as “scriptures,” “religion”, “monotheism,” “idolatry” are adopted uncritically in understanding native society, leading to a negative evaluation of people’s everyday actions. Practices which deviate from the “monotheistic” presentation of Hinduism come to be seen as accretions of “false” practices such as idolatry, polytheism and superstitions which get their meaning only within the religious frame. The social ceases to be a site of learning but instead now is an accumulation of false practices.

Roy’s interventions with an emphasis on scriptures that centre on the one true God of Hinduism, instituted a significant change in the way practices are looked upon. This is made most evident in his intervention in the Sati debate where Roy produced several tracts to argue
that Sati was a false practice on the grounds that it did not have any scriptural sanction (Roy 1901b; Majumdar 1941). His opinion resulted in the rapid formation of a group of conservatives who argued against Roy by insisting that Sati could not be banned because it did have scriptural foundation. The group of “orthodox” Hindus established a society called the Dharma Sabha for the protection of their practices and customs from attack and campaigned against Roy’s position (Majumdar 1941, 156-85). Thus the “liberal” versus “orthodox” stance is born. While we today see the “liberal” and the “orthodox” as two sides of the camp, they shared a common assumption that practices have foundations in scriptures and derive from true norms. In other words, practices and actions now derive their meaning from an anterior realm of “Law.” This appears to be a completely new and unfamiliar way to think about practices and settle disputes about them (Mani 1998; Balagangadhara and De Roover 2013). There is a pressure to subject the everyday domain of social existence and all forms of actions to the norm of truth, this time through the active promotion of the natives themselves.

We must also note that there is also a significant departure from the idea of religion espoused by the British. Roy does not argue that there is one true God and that is the God of Hinduism, with all other religions being a corrupt variant of the true religion. Instead his argument is that there is truth and falsehood in every religion and every religion must purify itself by performing only those practices which are sanctioned by scriptures. He thereby divests truth of its normative force. In this way Roy receives Christianity exactly like many other natives do – as one more tradition like his own, impervious to its truth claim as the only true religion.

While Roy’s attempt to “purify” Hinduism drew the ire of “orthodox” Hindus, he was also closely involved in controversial debates with missionaries like Marshman who had attacked
Hinduism. By closely reading the Bible, he challenged the divine nature of Christ and the idea of the Trinity and atonement by finding additional textual evidence that these doctrines were not supported in the scriptures and were therefore irrational (Roy 1824). If the Bible was a harmony of reason and revelation, then surely these practices must be rejected as irrational just as sati and other practices of Hinduism were irrational. Thus, whether Christianity, Islam or Hinduism, each religion had to correct “its errors.” This drew him into the centre of religious controversies in Europe as well.

Two points are worth noting from our discussion of Roy’s interventions. Firstly, as a result of his engagement of Western thought, the liberal Roy makes use of the same Protestant frame used by the missionaries and Orientalists in the denunciation of Hinduism and in his evaluation of the native society. This framework would be subsequently employed and disseminated by modern education and social reformers of the nineteenth century, percolating deeper within the society. Today it is common to criticize the social reform movement because we see it as Brahminical and upper caste in its orientation for it made the Vedas central and was more concerned with the scriptural origin of practices. However, we do not recognize that these very features are part of the derivative frame of Protestant theology used by social reformers like Roy. The description of the Indian society produced by the Orientalists is consolidated as if it were an accurate, scientific description of the native society. While it is understandable that the nineteenth century Orientalists and missionaries interpreted the native society, practices and texts in this manner, it remains puzzling that the many of these features and evaluations persist till today, even in our more recent accounts.  

Secondly, while history has swung in favour of the “liberal” Roy as against the “orthodox” Hindus, we see that both share the same premise: that practices are founded in scriptures and

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146 See Balagangadhara (2012a), particularly the chapter on “Colonialism and Colonial Consciousness” (95-120) which shows that the lines of continuity persist till today and many features of our contemporary description of Indian society continue to rest on these early nineteenth century evaluation of the native society by the British.
true practices ought to be followed. It is likely that before the orthodox group coalesced into one against the liberal Roy, there was no precedent of seeking scriptural sanction for practices.\(^{147}\) What indeed would it mean to ask if a practice is true or false? One could ask if practices or actions were appropriate or not, or if they had been performed correctly, or if they were efficacious.\(^{148}\) As Amiya Sen points out, “an orthodox Sanskrit scholar of Maharashtra once admitted to Chandavarkar that, left to themselves, members of his class would never be able to procure from the Shastras support for the kind of changes being contemplated, for frankly, these simply did not exist” (Sen 2005, 21). Practical reform work ran into frequent trouble because of the lack of consensus on which scripture of a particular reform group held as authoritative, with debates often rendering the unity of reform incoherent and “the idea of scripture” itself as illegitimate:

\[\text{In any case, practical reform work did create fissures beneath this imagined unity. Hindu reformers and publicists disagreed with each other on the constituents of the reformed Hinduism. Major reformist bodies, it would appear, based their reform on perceptibly different traditions or scriptural authorities. The Aryas took reformed Hinduism to be rooted in Vedas, the Brahmos in Upanishads and a host of twentieth-century thinkers in innovative interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita. But even those who claimed to follow a single text were not always in agreement. In the 1880s Swami Dayanand Saraswati was drawn into some controversy with orthodox pundits at Kashi and Calcutta over which components within the Vedas, namely, Samhitas, Aranyakas, or Brahmanas were “authentic” and acceptable to the modern Hindu. The problem of an universal scripture for Hindus became all the more critical with the emergence of new and radical viewpoint, as say, from the leaders of depressed castes or communities. In the 1930s there was a sharp difference of opinion between Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Bhimrao Ambedkar over “representative” texts for Hinduism. (Sen 2005, 4–5)}\]

\(^{147}\) See Polly Hazarika’s unpublished thesis for the controversy over “the idea of scriptures” (Hazarika 2011).

\(^{148}\) For example, during the performance of a ritual, the anxiety is not whether the actions are true or false. These categories do not make sense here. The stress is not on their semantic meaning but on whether the actions have been performed in the correct way. On this point, see Staal (1990).
Rammohun Roy wrote in Bengali and English, for Hindu and European audience. In this process, he was among the first to use English not just as a means of communicating with another culture but as a medium through which he articulates his own self-understanding and re-interprets native traditions. However, in this process of translation, we see how the native’s “self-understanding” is already distorted and circumscribed by the Western conceptual framework which functions against the background of Christian theology.

Many scholars have drawn attention to the fact that many of the social reformers of the nineteenth century came from the educated sections of the society. Almost all of them “were western educated or had imbibed western ideas indirectly” (Oddie 1979, 3). Heimsath points out: “As an intellectual phenomenon, whose behavioural consequences are difficult, if not impossible to measure the social reform movement in the nineteenth century was limited in its avowed leadership and most of its following to educated Indians” (Heimsath 1964, 5). They were members of the new middle class professional elites and included mainly university professors, school teachers, lawyers and civil servants, and shared a “liberal” vision in line with individual liberties and rights. Their western-education and the influence of missionaries were closely linked and many of them were “influenced by the Christian ethic” (Oddie 1979, 3).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ In his account of the reform movement, Oddie points out N. G. Chandavarkar and a few of his associates in the Indian Social Conference, K. T. Telang and M. G. Ranade, all read the Bible regularly. Ranade was also known to have preached from it at the meetings of Prarthana Samaj. Keshub Chandra Sen, who would later part ways with the Brahmo Samaj over issues of reform, was also known to be highly influenced by Christianity and many expected his conversion to be inevitable. Similarly, Jyotiba Govinda Phule, founder of Satya-shodhak Samaj, “which aimed at challenging Brahm man supremacy and emphasized the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, was educated in a mission school where he was deeply influenced by Christian teachings on equality” and Behramji Malabari, a noted Parsi reformer, by his own admission, was deeply influenced by the missionaries of the Irish Presbyterian Mission. However, Oddie also notes that despite the missionary influence, their objectives in reform were not always identical: “But while these men and possibly other reformers were influenced by the Christian ethic, they were (to state the obvious) neither Christians nor Christian missionaries and, partly for this reason, their objectives in reform were not always identical with those of missionaries whose main purpose was to convert non-Christians to Christianity. In fact, because they represented different competing religions, missionaries and Indian reformers were occasionally placed in the ironic position of supporting the same kind of reform but for opposite reasons. For example, both parties attacked rigidities and restrictions within the caste system. The missionaries did this partly because they
The newly emerging educated elites were exposed to a whole range of Western ideas and values through education. They interacted with Europeans in trade, commerce and administration as well as collaborated with them in the task of reconstructing a new social and economic order. The educated class was in the forefront of social reform (which mostly meant religious reform), often being instrumental in the abolitions of various practices such as sati and hook swinging among others.

Most accounts attempting to understand the behaviour of the educated in the reform movement see them as caught between two worlds. For example, Edward Shils (1961) argues that the Western educated, Indian intellectuals were torn between tradition and modernity – rejecting many of the values of their parents’ generation and influenced by a more European view of the world. However, this tells us little about what was the nature of the conceptual change that modern education introduced. What assumptions were made about the nature of the social and in what specific manner did one’s orientation with regard to traditions change?

Central to this conceptual shift was the idea of “truth,” a model of self and the notion of actualizing one’s self through the expression of moral autonomy inherited from modern education. Modern education instituted a new structure of reflexivity where one turned inwards to scrutinize if one’s action was in accord with a prior moral norm or was in violation of it. It involved a certain consciousness where one was aware that one’s practices could be false and one’s actions had to derive from the true norm. To ask if one’s practice was true or false was not merely a moral claim (albeit with the structure of an epistemological claim) but required a certain relation to practices which necessitated a change in the subject and the way the subject related to one’s own actions. If earlier, judgements were formed, debated and shared within the community, now judgements are pushed to the interior domain.
where one had to ascertain if one was “true to oneself.” This meant that the individual had to internalize a scheme of already-given moral truths/values to govern one’s behaviour (or one’s conscience) in the society. Secondly, the moral worth or quality of an action would be determined only through the appreciation of a personal conflict in one’s own life, internal and external. By choosing to act one way or the other, one was willing or choosing between two conflicting ways to act (one representing desires, inclinations or traditions and the other representing Duty/moral law), thereby emerging as morally autonomous. Thus, it is not surprising that the question whether the natives had emerged morally autonomous or not would be central to the debate on the effects of secular education in the latter half of the nineteenth century, which I deal with in the next section.

4.2 Effects of Modern, Secular Education

If the first half of the nineteenth century educational debates were driven by the need to improve the natives morally, then in the second half, it was the effects of secular education that dominated public life. In the previous chapter, we saw that modern, secular education had been introduced partly as a solution to the problem of moral lack of the natives. The source of this immorality was located in the false practices of the religion of Hinduism. Even though Government institutions were supposed to be religiously neutral and not offer any religious education, the instruction offered in them was expected to induce scepticism in the natives with regard to their traditions, make them turn away from false practices and induce in them a search for truth. By 1850s, there were systematic attempts to ascertain the effects of secular education by the British and measure the outcome against their horizons of expectations. J. C Marshman, in his evidence to the Select Committee on Indian Territories (SCIT) of the House of Lords, Great Britain in 1852, notes with satisfaction the progress of education in India:
I think although Christianity is entirely excluded from Government institutions, yet the instruction which is given in them has had the effect of raising the natives infinitely above their own creed. There are few of those who have received a complete education at the Government institutions, who hold the doctrines and principles of Hindooism in the most thorough contempt. And this is easily accounted for; for all those geographical, and astronomical, and historical absurdities which are believed by the Hindoos, are derived entirely from the Shastras. The native obtains his religious creed from the same source as his scientific knowledge, and from the same books which, as Mr. Macaulay mentioned in his Minute on Education, teach him the existence of seas of treacle and seas of clarified butter. Now, when the native finds the existence of those two seas, and indeed all the fact regarding geography and history given in Shastras are entirely fabulous; when his faith is shaken in one portion of the system, it is scarcely possible that it should not be shaken in others. Such has been my experience, that the study of English literature, and the knowledge of European science which is obtained by the natives, although unaccompanied with religious instruction, or instruction, or instruction in the truths of Christianity, has produced the great effect of shaking the fabric of Hindooism to its very foundations; and that the indirect result which has thus followed the exertions of the Government in the cause of education is highly satisfactory. (GBPP 1852-53, 22:28)

However, turning away from one’s traditions and customs was only the first stage of the process. Contrary to expectations, the sequel that once they had rejected their traditions, the secular educated would, of their own accord, turn over to Christianity, never occurred except minimally. On the contrary, many natives who were educated in Government institutions to the highest degree, turned out to be “most strenuous opponents of Christianity.” J. C Marshman’s description of the success of the Brahma Samaj Movement led by Rammohan

150 John Clark Marshman was the son of Joshua Marshman, one of the founders of Serampore College and taught in the same college from 1821 onwards. Marshman deposed in front of the SCIT to give his evidence on the State of Education in India. The object of the committee was to inquire into the progress made in education since the last Act of 1833. The committee examined several witnesses and also recorded “the minutes of evidence taken before them on the subject of the measures to be adopted, and the institutions established and endowed for the promotion of Education in India, and also on the subject of the ecclesiastical provision for the diffusion of Christian Spiritual Instruction.” The officials and missionaries deposing in front of the committee consists of the who’s who of colonial education – Charles Trevelyan, Alexander Duff, John Clark Marshman, H. H Wilson, William Wilberforce, Reverend John Tucker, Edward Thornton and Charles Hay Cameron among other well-known officials. Most questions were on the impact of secular education on native practices and morality. One of the main questions posed to them was if secular education had made the natives more truthful. I deal with this later in this chapter.
Roy is illuminating in the way he holds up the movement as evidence both for what it achieves and for what it does not. If today our assumption is that secular education would be neutral to all religions, from Marshman’s evidence, it becomes clear that secular education in the Indian context results in the active production of religious communities, now organized as rational religion, along the lines of Christianity. The heathen, instead of turning Christian, had emerged as “the Hindu.” If in the debates on Bildung, we saw that the secular idea of formation is the rationalization of the theological picture of man, here we find the process taking place in reverse. The secular notion of formation implicit in modern education appears to induce a reflexivity in the natives that incorporates them into a theological framework where now the pagans see themselves as members of religion. The standard history of the modern education is generally seen as emancipating India from religion and inaugurating a secular age. The assumption is that the latter succeeds the former in a serial, linear manner (Béteille 2008; Guha, Khilnani, and Chaudhuri 2013). However, throughout the nineteenth century debate on education, ‘secular’ and ‘religious’ emerge as mutually constitutive and co-dependent categories rather than the oppositional categories as we expect them to be:

And it is to this circumstance, that is, to the natives having been raised above their own superstitious creed, without embracing Christianity, that we are to attribute the great success which has attended the attempt to establish that sect of Vedantists, originally founded by Ram Mohan Roy. This sect at the present time includes 300 or 400 of the very best educated natives in Calcutta, and no Christian can regard the popular idolatry of the country with feelings of greater contempt than this body of Vedantists, who profess to derive the doctrine of one God from the Vedas. They have established a chapel in Calcutta, where they hold monthly meetings, and where monotheistic hymns from the Vedas are chanted, and some eminent Brahmin connected with their society stands up and repeats some moral sentence from the Vedas, and explains it to the assembled audience, and endeavours to enforce its doctrine upon their consciences. (Marshman, GBPP 1852-53, 22:28)

151 These religious identities would also result in strong assertions of nationhood as well.
Gauri Viswanathan, one of the few to draw attention to this link, argues that the introduction of English literature, had resolved the tension between the need to inculcate the natives into Protestant Christian morality and at the same time maintain a policy of non-interference (1989). This is indeed true, however with two qualifications. Secular education, including literature, historical reasoning and sciences, were considered as aiding in the moral transformation of the natives. Secondly, the issue was only provisionally resolved. The second half of the nineteenth century once again came to be haunted by debates around the lack of moral formation of the natives and their “new” form of immorality, albeit this time, *ironically, caused due to the unanticipated consequences of secular education.*

By the 1850s, observations were made regarding the dramatic unmooring caused due to secular education without the counteracting influence of the true religion in place. In the 1830s Duff had argued that liberal education, even without any religious teaching, was a necessary and primary instrument for teaching the natives to debate the evidences of Christianity, thereby moving them a step closer towards accepting the truth of Christianity. By the 1860s, he notes with alarm that liberal, secular education was producing young, immoral and unanchored Hindus. This state of affairs, he argued in his evidence to the Select Committee (SCIT), was not brought about by the missions and missionaries but by the joint action of the Government and the natives themselves: *“No missionary taught us to forsake the religion of our fathers; it was the Government that did us this service”* (GBPP 1852-53, 25:51).\(^{152}\)

\[152\] Quoting a native editor, Duff notes: “How could a boy continue to worship the sun, when he understood that this luminary was not a devatah (divinity) but a mass of inanimate matter” (GBPP 1852-53, 25:51). It should be noted that in the debates around secular and religious education, there was not much of a difference in the content of the two forms of education itself. Both kinds of institutions - missionary and Government colleges - taught Western literature, philosophy and sciences. The only difference was that based on the principle of religious neutrality, the colonial state refused to introduce the use of the Bible as a class book and forbade any form of inculcation of doctrines of Christianity in the Government-run institutions. In fact, it was often observed that several native students sought out missionary institutions despite the religious instruction for they were considered to be among the best to impart the education required to qualify them for their future livelihood. In
In the second half of the nineteenth century, an acute anxiety gained ground: secular, “godless” education was producing “infidels”, “deists”, “skeptics” and “atheists.” The educated natives had rejected their own traditions and customs but were not turning Christians. Instead, some, as Marshman had observed, had turned their attention to purify their own traditions along religious lines resorting to founding their practices on scriptural sanction. Others had rejected their traditions but not embraced any new one. Many Europeans voiced their apprehension that a void was being created, leaving the students incompletely formed: the students had rejected false beliefs without embracing a true one. Introduction to Western literature and sciences, had achieved only half the goal.

How does one deal with a situation where the natives reject false beliefs but do not embrace a true one? Was a false religion better than not having any religion as far as moral formation was concerned since a false religion at least made possible moral and spiritual improvement? If the educated natives had no religion, what would be their source of morality? These were the new set of questions raised. The centrality of this debate, I would like to argue, was about

some cases, the native student found ingenious and devious ways of avoiding religious instruction in these institutions. For example, in his evidence to the SCIT, T. E. Perry, who thinks that missionary institutions are breeding hypocrisy in the natives notes: “The poor natives send their boys to the missionary schools, which are gratuitous. The Government schools all requiring payment by fees, they send their boys to these schools for the purpose of giving them an English education for nothing; the consequence is, the boys go to school and are taught Church Catechism, or the catechism of whatever denomination the missionary belongs to; they rattle off glibly all the points of the Christian faith; and then they go home and grind their teeth in defiance of all they have heard, and their parents encourage them and join them in doing so; and when the boy leaves the school, the Hindoo father boasts that he has a good bargain; and that he has got his boy educated for nothing, and the boy has not turned Christian” (24).

See Rev W. Wood’s plea for mission schools in Wilder (1861, 118). Rev Wood laments that the rising generation of the land were educated infidels trained in Elphinstone College in Bombay and Poona College in Poona, who were furnishing teachers for schools in Western India. Also see Murdoch (1873, 1881), Tucker (1858), Johnstone (1879).

The Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj tried to imitate the structure of rational religion in the way they organized themselves. Marshman attributes this development to the effects of secular education since most of the members of these organizations were Western educated. That this development came with its distortions, sometimes bordering on the absurd, has been observed by various scholars. See Chapter Four, “The Image of the Archaic” in Prakash (1999, 86–122), for the ridiculous extent to which some native Hindu reformers like Dayanand Saraswati (whose programme of regenerating Vedic Hinduism became popular in the late nineteenth century) went to, by providing reasons for every ritual and every action of the Hindu. The Hindu Right emerged as a variant along the same axis. We can see here the beginnings of both the Hindu Right and the Secularists. See Balagangadhara and De Roover (2013, 111–30) for the emergence of Hindu fundamentalism and how it sustains the colonial transformation of Indian traditions. Also see Nandy (1995).
the native relationship to the learning goal of truth posited by secular education. In Chapter III, we saw secular education is envisaged as a solution to what I called “the problem of truth.” One of the central questions repeatedly asked by the Select Committee (SCIT) in the 1850s to various reputed educators and administrators is whether the natives have become more truthful after receiving secular education and whether they have developed a critical attitude towards their practices. Various administrators and professors depose in front of the committees to testify if college education was creating a new set of natives who were men of greater integrity when compared to the older generation. William Edwards Esq., in his evidence to the SCIT, calls attention to the change in the character and efficiency of the ordinary class of natives employed in the judicial offices with the introduction of liberal education:

I think, although there are of course among them some able and trustworthy men, that they are generally a corrupt class, not to be trusted; of very narrow views, only knowing the rules and regulations and forms of Court; utterly careless of the great interests of truth and justice. But I allude only to the old officials. I think that we are now educating in the Government colleges a very superior class indeed for the public service. I had at the head of my office one of those men who had been a student at the Benares Government College, and he has, I think, shown himself not only highly intelligent, but a person to be depended upon in every way. (GBPP 1852-53, 25:7; italics mine)

W. Edwards would affirm that though the natives “left” their own religion and did not adopt any fixed religion, “as regards moral principle, as to truth-telling and so on, they are far superior to the former class of officials that we had to deal with. I should say they are all Deists, and sincere Deists too, many of them” (8). Similarly, Sir Thomas Erskine Perry, Chief Justice of Supreme court in Bombay from 1847 to 1852 and president of the Indian board of education, replies:
“The main evil in Hindoo morality, which everybody observes on, is the great want of truth that exists among them; and I have no doubt whatever that on many occasions it is not considered criminal by themselves; that, on the contrary, on certain occasions it is considered a great merit in a man to tell lies for his own caste, or for his own family, or against Government. I believe that on such occasions a man is applauded in his own circle; and that, therefore, to expose such a man in Court, as is often done by catching him out in direct falsehoods, does not send a man a bit blackened in character home to his friends, but the contrary. What I have observed of the effect of education is this, that it breaks down that spirit of caste, and it tends to create a public opinion amongst the educated classes and, therefore, any one of them who commits such an offence loses the good opinion of the others; it does, in point of fact, tend to create a new caste – men who live amongst themselves, and who value the good opinion of one another more than they do that of their particular caste….therefore my own opinion …is, that the tendency of education is decidedly to introduce a higher tone of morality. (22)

Sir Thomas Erskine Perry seems to suggest that unlike before, where the individual was accountable to the larger community, family and society that he was part of, now the individual was accountable to an impersonal, universal moral law which transcended caste and community identities. This often introduced a conflict between their older ways of inhabiting the world and the newer commitment to the abstract law, detaching the educated individual from the larger community that they belonged to. Perry casts this as a movement towards a higher morality.

What is the essential element in the higher tone of morality that Sir Thomas Erskine Perry alludes to? The answer, it appears, once again revolves around the formation of conscience.

We can recall here the debates in Chapter III where the British expressed concerns around the native’s lack of conscience. C. E. Trevelyan, the famous British civil servant and colonial administrator who occupied a high post in the British administration in the 1850s now marks an “extraordinary” transformation in the educated native. Comparing the moral effect of the
old system with the new, he connects the fostering of the ethos of truth-telling and the overthrowing of the “absurd beliefs” to *the creation of conscience in the natives*:

> Then comes the important question, *what is the moral effect of this extraordinary change?* That must be solved by a comparison of the moral effect of the old system with the moral effect of the new system...People in this country are apt to say that doctrine is nothing, and practice is everything...In fact, the moral sense is totally perverted. Falsehood and such like conduct, which we regard as vicious, is not habitually so regarded by the Natives of India. Now, the first effect of English education is, as I mentioned, entirely to destroy their faith in Hindooism. *You cannot make them Christians until they become persuaded of the truth of Christianity; but it establishes in their minds a new standard of morality. Knowledge and thought must precede action. Now, European education gives us that knowledge and thought – “The Law is the schoolmaster to lead us to Christ;” and this superior knowledge establishes “the Law” in the minds of the natives. It does not give the effectual motive which a firm belief in Christianity gives; but it creates a conscience. It puts that into their minds which will continually ferment and prick them, until it leads them to a full knowledge of the truth.* (184; italics mine)

Trevelyan characterizes the transformation in specific terms. English education creates a conscience, a prior step to conversion, which is the consciousness of the truths of the moral law. Trevelyan attributes this change to European education, both to the reasoning power cultivated by scientific thinking and more particularly to English literature which according to him breathed the spirit of Christianity.¹⁵⁵

However, a question arises here. What does Trevelyan mean when he says that European education *creates* a conscience? What is the phenomenological change in the educated natives that he is trying to capture? Trevelyan’s concern is of interest to us because it tells us something about what the process of secularization itself involves. Trevelyan observes the

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¹⁵⁵ For details regarding the attempt by Charles Trevelyan, Alexander Duff and W. H Pearce who formed a self-appointed committee to recommend literary texts that would help inculcate respect for the moral law, with the hope of regulating public taste and morals, see Viswanathan (1989).
effects of secular education – the natives had begun to question their practices, new groups such as Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj had emerged to cleanse traditions and demand rational justification for practices, the educated natives were more truthful when compared to the older generation – and explains these changes in terms of formation of conscience. Obviously, it cannot be that the educated natives had developed a new faculty as a result of their education. So what is Trevelyan referring to?

The Western tradition has often referred to conscience as the “voice of God within us,” “a ‘spark’ of the divine mind” which watches over our actions, witnessing, inciting and approving or disapproving our action in cases of personal actions and choices (Strohm 2011; Kirk 2001). There is a suggestion that conscience is not human but implanted by God and is the meeting ground of the human and the divine. Traditions, practices and the present world with its human laws are obstacles in the intimate link between conscience and God which is a part of the inner, spiritual realm where no human laws, traditions or institutions can intervene. Exploring the role of conscience in Western thought, Sarah Claerhout points out: “The conscience is the faculty that incessantly points out the chasm between the acts of sinful human beings on earth and how we ought to act and live, namely in accordance with the will and law of God. Before the fall, human beings would not have been in need of a conscience, because they lived in perfect harmony: they lived in complete accord with the will of God. There was no chasm. After the fall, humanity became sinful and acquired an innate faculty constantly revealing the iniquity of our acts on earth: the conscience. The precondition for the existence of this faculty is the innateness of the law of God. The presence of the law of God in the human mind enables the workings of the conscience (Claerhout 2010, 302).

In Chapter II, we saw that Christianity fostered an examination of one’s conscience, an area anterior to one’s will, in order to determine if one’s actions and thoughts were in accordance
with God’s Law. Thus, when Trevelyan says secular education “does not give the effectual motive which a firm belief in Christianity gives; but it creates a conscience,” we can infer that Trevelyan perhaps refers to a similar kind of interiority requiring an exploration of oneself. However, what is it to develop this interiority? Trevelyan links the development of a conscience to a particular form of reflection or self-examination. He makes several quick moves: a) European education provides a new mode of knowledge and thought in which knowledge and thought necessarily precedes action. b) Knowledge here is knowledge of “the Law” which provides a new standard of morality and is the source of a certain bindingness and normativity, compelling one to act with a view of the moral law. This prior knowledge of the law introduces a constant awareness of the ‘gap between what one is doing and thinking and what one ought to do.’ The world of actions is now cut up into right actions which are in accord with the norm/law and wrong actions which are a violation or transgression of it. c) Conscience approves or condemns your actions based on one’s capacity to shape one’s “will” in accordance with these prior moral norms. The subject is praised or rewarded based on whether the action is in concordance or discordance with the norm. (“It puts that into their minds which will continually ferment and prick them.”)

Let us pause here to understand in greater detail the nature of the transformation that Trevelyan is trying to capture. According to Trevelyan, some educated natives have learned to act differently. They have learnt a form of reflection necessary before acting in the world which involves some form of acquisition of apriori moral truths/principles and applying these principles to actions. Does this mean that the natives acted arbitrarily, without any reflection before they were exposed to European education? This option clearly does not seem possible. For, if any culture has to survive, it has to have developed ways of problem-solving, reflecting on actions and also the means to pass it on to the next generation. It may, of course, appear arbitrary to a person who is unfamiliar with the idiom of a particular community.
Where one sees an absence of logic, there may actually be a different logic at work which is inaccessible or rendered invisible within the categories of the framework of the observer. Once again, we can turn to Foucault’s elucidation of the schools of practical philosophy of ancient Greece which provides us with a counter-point where reflection proceeds without any requirement of conscience understood in Trevelyan’s sense of the term. In the Greek schools, the master did not teach the students moral theories or universal commandments on which one’s conduct has to be based, but prepared the disciple in different ways. The forms of inquiries into notions such as justice and virtue as well as ways to conduct oneself accompanied by practices of the self would enable the disciple to act appropriately in various kinds of circumstances with self-mastery. Foucault gives us an example of the Stoic Seneca’s reflection on “On Anger”:

What could be more beautiful than to conduct an inquest on one's day? What sleep better than that which follows this review of one's actions? How calm it is, deep and free, when the soul has received its portion of praise and blame, and has submitted itself to its own examination, to its own censure. Secretly, it makes the trial of its own conduct. I exercise this authority over myself, and each day I will myself as witness before myself. When my light is lowered and my wife at last is silent, I reason with myself and take the measure of my acts and of my words. I hide nothing from myself; I spare myself nothing. Why, in effect, should I fear anything at all from amongst my errors whilst I can say: "Be vigilant in not beginning it again; today I will forgive you. In a certain discussion you spoke too aggressively or you did not correct the person you were reproaching, you offended him..." (Foucault 1999, 164)

Prima facie, Seneca’s process of self-examination appears similar to the Kantian idea of conscience,\(^{156}\) where something akin to an inner judicial court is set up to examine our

\(^{156}\) For Kant on conscience, see “The Metaphysics of Morals” (Kant [1797]1996b), written two years after Kant’s *Groundwork*. Conscience played an important role in the Kantian conception of moral autonomy. If autonomy was the property of the free will, conscience’s role was to ensure that one’s action (will) was in consonance with rational beliefs. It is through free-will which is in accordance with moral law that we cooperate with God in realizing his kingdom on the earth. Our will, in short, becomes an expression of the divine will itself.
actions. The Kantian exhortation that the first command of all duties to oneself is “know (scrutinize, fathom) yourself” involves the process of self-examination which is primarily the activity of conscience. However, in the Kantian idea, the concept of the autonomous man who wills the universal moral law and therefore must in act in obedience to it intervenes in a crucial way. The process of self-examination involves trying oneself before the inner, judicial court where the subject divides himself into two, as the accused (moral law) and the defence (self-love), judged by the conscience. The “mental event” involves ascertaining if one has formed sound beliefs (considering all available evidence and making a conscientious judgement with regard to the most rational/moral action) and further, whether one wills (or chooses) to base one’s action on it. Conscience is the measure of the deviation of one’s actions in the world (the will) from the norm.

However, Foucault notes that Seneca’s vocabulary, on closer examination, is not a judicial one or of a judge and a criminal but of an administrator of oneself. Seneca is not engaging in self-examination to reward or punish himself for following or not following a universal moral norm. Instead, he is taking a stock of things at the end of the day or the year in order to ensure he has performed the right actions and reflect on how he can better himself. His self-

157 “The Law” that Trevelyan refers to is “God’s commandments” which embodies His will. For medieval scholastics like Aquinas, the moral law is put there by God which all humans are to obey. It would be unthinkable for them that man should be the author of the laws. For the theists, God’s commands ground obligation and anything contrary to God’s commands was an immoral action. However, for the early moderns like Kant, this answer was far from satisfactory. Kant makes it necessary that we posit God, immortality and free will of human beings even if cannot prove them. We cannot know if God exists but it is a postulate that we make. Kant thus pushes the concept of God within oneself. If God is a postulate of practical reason, how then does one account for the experience of the bindingness/obligation to the moral law? In order to account for the experience of obligation to the existing moral domain, several early modern philosophers forwarded various answers. Kant’s solution which became the accepted one is the concept of autonomy. One experiences obligations to follow the laws because these are universal laws willed by oneself. Thus autonomy as a concept, the freedom of the will to choose (or a will under the moral law/categorical imperative), is forwarded as a solution to the problem of experience of obligation and the normativity of the moral law. See Darwall (1995). In either cases, whether in Trevelyan or Kant, conscience would be consciousness of the moral law, where the Kantian moral law is the secularized version of God’s commandments. Thus, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that modern ethical language is an incoherent collection of disordered fragments from an earlier moral system based on the prescriptive vocabulary of Judeo-Christian moral law which made sense within the divine command theory of morality. He contends that modern liberal consciousness is not in a position to make sense of these anymore (MacIntyre 1984).
examination involves a recollection of various forms of advice that he has learned in the past which he has forgotten. Recalling these are acts of remembrance necessary to help him correct his mistakes where necessary. There is no notion of discovering the truth hidden in the subject in order to determine and measure one’s deviation from this law. The self in all these exercises, Foucault points out, “is not considered as a field of subjective data which have to be interpreted.” It, instead, “submits itself to the trial of possible or real action” (Foucault 1999, 166).

However, in Trevelyan’s form of self-examination, European education establishes “the Law” in the minds of the natives. The educated native now, Trevelyan claims, has developed the capacity to judge his action in accordance with the prior knowledge of moral norms or beliefs. We are now in a better position to understand what Trevelyan’s concern is when he says that European education has created a conscience. Conscience then refers to a form of self-consciousness where one’s self emerges as an object for further reflection. Trevelyan brings to bear a certain conception of mind where self-examination involves two layers: it produces moments of reflexivity in one’s mental life where one defines one’s beliefs about right conduct (of the first-order) and judges (chooses or wills) the application of these beliefs to action in the form of a second-order reflection, thereby providing foundations to action.

Conscience then is the bridge between one’s beliefs or principles and one’s actions. It provides directedness to actions, and thereby a structure to rationality that does not make exercising reason a merely cognitive exercise involving judging first-order beliefs as true or false but also makes one’s choice of actions right or wrong based on the true beliefs. Such a correspondence is necessary in order for one to be in accord with one’s own reason and therefore, rational. Here, we have some grasp of the nature of modern education. Modern education in colonial India is an attempt at initiating the natives into a normative framework
of ethics, involving a form of self-conscious, meta-reflection. By normative here, I mean a) a form of reflection which is based on an apprehension of prior norms/principles which are considered not just right but “true” and hence are universally applicable across time and place b) the nature of the norms is prescriptive and action-guiding c) the apprehension of norms carries with it a compelling and binding force of an “ought to,” which is structured like law and possesses a law-like force which directs actions d) violation of the norm is central to recognizing an action as an immoral action. Conscience then would record the deviation or the failure to live up to normative principles, thereby rendering our experience and present as always deficient.

According to Trevelyan, after being educated, the native would find Christianity a natural choice since secular education would equip him to make an unbiased judgement about which religion was rational and true. After all conversion had to be voluntary and internal and not a result of a fiat. Secular education would make such a voluntary act possible by creating a theoretic attitude which would allow the natives to dispassionately compare the truths of religion. It would create the necessary condition for unbiased judgement and moral autonomy:

Those young men who have received English education are notoriously more truthful than the natives are in general. Everybody who knows them will say so. In my time, they were fervent admirers of truth and virtue in the abstract. Their moral state was this – without precisely knowing on what foundations those principles rested, yet they saw the beauty of them, and professed to be enthusiastic followers of them…My first position, is therefore, is this – that even supposing them to remain in that middle state, still they, are very superior to what they were. But they cannot remain in that state. The human being requires the comforts and hopes of religion; he cannot do without them…These Hindus must have some religion…and many circumstance tend to favour their progress to Christianity. In the first place they are put in a position to form an unbiased judgement on the subject …It may be asked, are the educated Natives more likely to prove honest men and more useful public servants than the rest of the
countrymen. I believe they are. The universal impression among themselves is, that they are; and of this distinction they are not a little proud. English principles, are to a certain extent engrafted in their hearts. It is becoming a point of honour with those Natives, who have received a good education to be more truthful and trustworthy than the uneducated classes. A public feeling favourable to integrity is growing up among them. (Trevelyan, GBPP 1852-53, 25: 185-86; italics mine)

On the one hand is the assumption made that the moral law is innate and is inscribed into every human being’s mind. Yet, if the precondition for the presence of this “faculty” is the moral law (or the Law of God) in the human mind, then ironically, in the Indian context, the Law of God in the minds of the natives has to be created through certain external apparatus such as English literature and humanities. In the absence of notions such as a creator God who is perfect and has a purpose for humankind, His moral law which is supposed to guide the actions of humanity as a whole, social institutions that inculcate the moral law in you, the obligation to follow his Will or face the sanction of one’s conscience, the results are bound to be different than expected. In the absence of the necessary conditions to sustain the moral transformation, the conceptual units introduced by the British tend to lose their hold and intelligibility despite the attempts to establish them through secular education. Thus it is not surprising that Trevelyan’s expectations would prove to be unrealistic and many noted the different routes the experiment had already taken. J. C Marshman, we saw earlier, observed that far from converting to Christianity, many educated natives had turned back to their traditions in order to “recover” true doctrines from their scriptures. Alexander Duff, in his evidence to the committee, drew attention to the fact that many educated natives of the Hindu College, without a true belief in place, had begun “sporting some wild opinions, and indulging in sundry extravagant freaks and excesses” (GBPP 1852-53, 25: 50). Reason itself, Duff seemed to suggest, was unmoored without the force of the normative framework within which beliefs acquired their truth or falsity. Even to the Europeans of the nineteenth century,
the results turned out to be rather bizarre with the educated natives questioning everything about their everyday lives:

“They became also very careless, or even reckless too, as to other duties. Wild notions sprang up amongst them as to parental rights and filial disobedience and various other social obligations. Finding this to be the state of things, there was a great anxiety to see what could be done to arrest this rolling tide. They looked upon Christian ministers as in the same category with the Brahmans, that is, as mere pretenders, upholders of priestcraft and imposters.” (51)

On the one hand, instances of native excesses abounded where truth and falsity itself appeared to lose all meaning. On the other, various kinds of intellectual inconsistencies of the educated natives were highlighted. Sir Bampfylde Fuller of the Indian Civil Service noted that “though the educated native appears able to grasp a position intellectually,” he still holds back “from trusting his mind to it” and that an “English man is constantly disconcerted by the extraordinary contradictions which he observes between the words and actions of an educated Indian who seems untouched by inconsistencies which to him appear scandalous” (Fuller 1913, 179). That the natives gave consent to various propositions of equality and freedom in speeches and examination papers but in their everyday life often failed to meet up to the norms was also included within the ambit of immorality. Both these effects were seen as results of an incomplete transition where the natives had rejected their traditions without embracing a true religion. The emergence of the morally autonomous subject who would develop the capacity to ascertain the truth of beliefs with certainty, rule out all contradictions and base one’s actions on the true belief became the axis along which the debate turned. If the assumption was that secular education would make possible the emergence of such a subject,

158Observations similar to the “intellectual inconsistency” that Ballantyne notes in the pundits are made by various people in the second half of the nineteenth century. Observations with regard to scientists consulting astrologers, professors who hold forth on the merits of inductive philosophy as well as Kantian morality and then visit their ancestral shrine, social reformists marrying young girls despite leading struggles against child marriage and campaigning for widow-remarriage, educated natives assenting to principles of equality and liberty but being different in their personal lives and actions were commonplace and were the very stuff of the life of various social reformers. On this point, see McDonald (1966) and Seth (2007, 52-78).
such an assumption gave way to the recognition of the impossibility of the task and an acute concern over the incomplete moral formation of the Indian students took over.

Quite a few defended secular education by going to the extent of saying that one could not make Hindus infidels since they were already infidels. Moreover, to give up on false religion even if one did not believe in true God, was a better state to be in morally than worship false gods.\textsuperscript{159} Some argued that “infidelity takes its colour from the religion from which it is a departure” and that the departure from a false superstition must be estimated differently. One who has given up Hinduism to embrace a rational religion has “simply acted according to the laws of reason and conscience; he has submitted to the plain evidence of facts, and given up a creed which did not stand the test of that evidence” (Miscellanea Critica, 1858, 3:210–11). Others agreed with Trevelyan and pointed out that even if those who had given up on Hinduism had not converted to Christianity, they had emerged morally improved because they were now conscious of an abstract, universal moral law and had internalized certain moral principles according to which they must conduct their lives. Some educated natives too who had learnt to see their traditions as a system of beliefs similarly shared the apprehension of being unable to believe in their own religion and world-view anymore while being unable to fully accept the new moral order (K. C. Sen 1871, 263). The assumption that morality was based on doctrinal truths or norms of religion remained fundamental to the debate. Thus, it is striking how the problem of immorality of the educated native who had moved away from his traditions but had not acquired true belief in its place acquired some dominance in public life.

\textsuperscript{159} For details of the debate, see Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference (1858, 203), Keer (1869, 1–4) and The Indian Crisis [report of] Special General Meeting (1858, 67). For an elaborate account of the “increased immorality” and the “unbridled excesses” of the Indian student, see Murdoch (1873).
4.3 The Question of Religious Neutrality of State in Matters of Education

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the principle of religious neutrality related to matters of education, was the credo of colonial state officials. From the famous educational minute of Mountstuart Elphinstone in which the Governor of Bombay had resolutely maintained that “to the mixture of religion, even in the slightest degree, with our plans of education I must strongly object” (AEIC 1833, 376) and William Bentinck’s address to missionaries in Bengal where he emphasized that “the professed object of your [missionaries] lives and labours is conversion [and] the fundamental principle of British rule, the compact to which the Government stands solemnly pledged, is strict neutrality” (GBPP 1852-53, 25:190) to the Wood’s Despatch which reiterated the policy in no uncertain terms, the principle of religious neutrality was reasserted time and again.

However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the growing concern over the effects of secular education prompted a reflection on whether government neutrality in this matter was possible at all. In the wake of the public discourse on the increasing immorality of Government educated students, the question got frequently debated whether the Government should continue to adhere to the policy of religious neutrality in secular, educational institutions. It is striking that Charles Trevelyan (who is recalled four times to depose in front of the Select Committee and it is obvious that his opinions are held in great regard), who states that the ultimate goal of secular education is to make the natives recognize the true religion of Christianity of their own accord, is also the one who resolutely asserted “the great importance of maintaining inviolate the fundamental principle of our Government in India which is that of complete religious neutrality” (GBPP 1852-33, 25: 189). Clearly, the domain of the spiritual must be a matter between God and man, in which no state could intervene.
For many others, the Government could not be neutral in the domain of education even if it attempted to do so. The principle was flawed for the Government pretended to be agnostic towards religion even while secular education was systematically destroying false religions.

Henry Carre Tucker (Civil Service, Late Governor-general’s Agent and Commissioner, Benares) argued that the very idea of “religious neutrality” was a “pretence” and that if the state wants to be religious neutral, it must abandon education altogether:

> We cannot, even if we wished it, be absolutely “neutral” in dealing with the religions of India; for they are so intimately blended with false science and false morality, that we cannot teach the simplest lessons of true science and true morality, without contradicting the false science and ethics of their religious books, and far proving the religions themselves to be false. We have thus already infringed “neutrality” by the secular instruction in geography, Astronomy, and Physics which has sapped all faith in the native religions. (Tucker 1859, 3)

The role of Western literature and sciences in unmooring the natives and resulting in a certain form of “atheism” and “agnosticism,” led to debates around the kind of care the Government must extend towards the selection process before deciding who is to teach the sciences in these colleges. Was mere knowledge of the subject enough to qualify a person for the professorial role or should the Government ascertain if the science professor also affirmed he was a religious person, with a belief in God?

> “…if Government teach science at all, it must incur the responsibility of the consequences inseparable from the doctrines inculcated by agnostic or materialistic professors, selected and appointed by itself for its own colleges. Non-interference with religion cannot now be maintained without any interference 160

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160 Also see Tucker (1858), Law (1858): “But the “tricky” character of the system is attributable solely to the ostentatious profession of the principle of “neutrality,” which can never be sustained in practice, if an Education is to be given which shall impart the smallest amount of knowledge beyond mere letters and figures. The first lesson of geography, of history, or of any other science, assails and destroys the most prominent and popular reaching of the sacred books of the Hindus; and is, in this respect, as fatal a shock to native notion, as an attack upon any other article of their religion. To supply a knowledge of the elements of science and of moral philosophy, without the corrective of religious culture, is to release the intelligent native mind from the restraints, such as they are, of his own religion, and to the scholar loose to all impulses of a wild infidelity, to launch him too often, it is well known, into the baldest atheism. Well-informed writers have declared this to be a necessary consequence of the government College system of education” (23).
to see no atheistic professor gets in to instil into youthful minds principles opposed to all religion.”

(ECR 1884, 235)

The dilemma for the liberal government, as the debate makes clear, is whether the Government which adheres to the policy of religious neutrality can afford to be indifferent to the truth value of various religions or should it recognize Christianity as a true religion. On the one hand was the assumption that the Government was a secular authority. This meant not that the Government was neutral or indifferent to the very idea of religion but that the State would keep out of the domain of the religious which was absolutely crucial to the spiritual lives of the people it governs. However, by upholding this policy in India, the Government was locked in a peculiar bind. By maintaining the policy of religious neutrality, it was abandoning its concern for the “truth” value of religion. As I have already shown, many of the criticisms levelled at the colonial state to which it was forced to respond to was that the Government, while destroying the “false beliefs” of the natives was indifferent to the task of cultivating in them “true beliefs.” It was thereby failing in its tasks of creating conditions for their religious and moral growth. The state’s indifference was interpreted variously – its refusal to recognize that it was essentially Christian, as erring from its neutral principle by favouring the Hindus against the Christians, as favouring the Christians for they proceeded to educate the Hindus in colleges and schools with a knowledge which could not stand with Hinduism, and sometimes the state as being devious in its design, unlike the more honest missionaries who engaged in no covert activity. Rev. Henry Elliott castigates the colonial state’s dubious policies in an emergency meeting called after mutiny:

“Tell us plainly, ‘if you enter this school, if you imbibe this literature and science, you cannot maintain your religion; understand that this is a school which is intended to strip you of your religion.’ Write such a notice over the portals of the school, and we shall know what we are doing.” I do really think that, on the principle of common honesty and common fairness, the Hindus ought to be told that these are schools, and this is an education, which must destroy their religion. The missionaries pursue a more
open policy. They tell them, at the very instant they enter these schools, “Our intention is to introduce to you a better religion – to introduce to you the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rev. Elliott, 1858, 67)

Paradoxically, the Government identifies the religious domain as universal and essential in all cultures for moral and spiritual growth. However, it is forced to maintain an agnostic stand about true God and true religion. This meant shoring up the various practices of the land as a “religion,” with God. The generic concept of God thus proved to be central in structuring the debates around religious neutrality. That the cardinal point of natural religion, which was assumed to be the underlying idea of all forms of religion, was the faith in the existence of a monotheistic conception of God and even on this the natives were notoriously varied, was exasperatedly noted. A native professor, in his evidence to the education commission of 1884, argues against the move of introducing unsectarian religion and morality in Government institutions to counteract the fear of “godless education” in these institutions. The belief in the existence of God as creator and preserver of Universe as being central to all communities, he observes, would exclude many in the native society:

Many millions of Her Majesty’s subjects in Burma do not admit the existence of God. As Buddhist they hold that every soul is capable of being improved into perfection to become a Buddha; but they repudiate the idea of there being a God who is superior to these perfected souls. Can the Government with its pledge of religious neutrality force the children of Buddhists to believe in a God as the creator and preserver of Universe and teach them that God is greater than Buddha? “I believe primary education in Burma is carried on through the local clericals called Phoungis and I should be surprised indeed if the Government can make the Phoungis renounce the cardinal principle of their faith and teach that there is a God greater than Buddha. …The Jains and Oswals of Northern India, who number between 4 -5 millions do not believe in a God; they have 24 Tirthankaras and expect many human souls in the course of time become Tirthankaras. The followers of the Saukya [sic] system among Hindus do not recognize the existence of God and the lepchas, Bhuteas and other subjects of Her Majesty are also atheists in their belief. And surely these are not to be denied the culture of education
because they are atheists in their belief. Such a denial is not given to atheists and agnostics in Europe...A large body of Hindus representing the followers of adual system of the Vedanta take it to be an insult to the Godhead to attribute to Him special providence. There are many other Hindu sects who cherish the same belief, and Government cannot with any propriety outrage their religious feelings by insisting upon their accepting the theory of providence.” (ECR 1884, 341–42)

While the native professor can only understand the Jain, Buddhists and “adual vedantists” as “atheists,” casting them within available categories, what we see here is that the very concept of “religious neutrality” comes under stress. The debate exposes the limit of the policy of religious neutrality itself. If the Government focussed on the teaching of European sciences and literature without introducing any religious/moral texts, it was creating atheistic, immoral students who were opposed to religions per se thereby causing injury to all religions. This, as many pointed out, was not religious neutrality by any means. If it appointed theistic professors and scientists who acknowledged the existence of religion, and thereby the existence of the creator and governor God, the Supreme Intelligence who guides and directs all things according to a purpose, then it was assuming the existence of a concept which had an ambiguous life amongst the natives. They would then go against the practices of several groups in the native society. Either way, the Government could not remain neutral.

It must be noted that moral formation was not seen to be a problem in religious institutions where morality was taught on the basis of religious doctrines. However, in Government colleges where the policy of religious neutrality had to be maintained, how does one ensure that moral formation is not neglected? Does one interpret religious neutrality to mean not exclusion of religion from secular education but instead facilitate the introduction of various religions and their doctrines? Or should one envisage a distinct form of moral teaching where separate time was allotted to the teaching of moral principles on which to base one’s
conducted? The moral decline of the Indian student was important enough to mandate inquiries. The Hunter Commission of 1882-83 went into great length into the desirability of an education which recognizes that something more is required for formation of the character of student and encouraged the establishment of institutions with religious instruction of different faiths:

…the evidence we have taken shows that in some Provinces there is a deeply-seated and widely spread desire that culture and religion should not be divorced, and that this desire is shared by some representatives of native thought in every Province. In Government institutions this desire cannot be gratified. The declared neutrality of the State forbids its connecting the institutions directly maintained by it with any form of faith; and the other alternative of giving equal facilities in such institutions for the incultation of all forms of faith involves practical difficulties which we believe are insuperable…we have shown we are not insensible to the high value of the moral discipline and the example which Government institutions are able to afford; but we have also shown that we regard something beyond this as desirable for the formation of character and the awakening of thought. To encourage the establishment of institutions of widely different types, in which may be inculcated such forms of faith as various sections of the community may accept, whether side by side with or in succession to government institutions, is one mode in which this difficulty can be practically solved. (RIEC 1883, 459–60)

Different groups offered different solutions to the problem. Some missionaries argued for the introduction of the Bible and Christian education. Certain others, including missionaries, made a case for respective religion-based institutions which would be a source of morals. Liberals argued for introduction of moral texts that proclaimed “neutral” “universally

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161 That a system of education which does not attend to the moral training of students would be unworthy of being called education was declared by the Hunter Commission (RIEC 1883). As a solution, moral teaching based on principles of morality was suggested. For a dissenting view, see particularly K. T. Telang’s objections to a government circular that an attempt be made to introduce a moral text, “based on the fundamental principles of natural religion” and lectures on duties of man and citizen be given in all colleges. See Mahmood (1895, 111–19) for consolidated details on the issue.
applicable moral truths.” Some Hindu reformers started their own institutions with religious education.162

4.4 The Failure of Learning Goals

If the late nineteenth century was haunted by the Indian student’s half-formed morality, it was accompanied by the anxiety around the Indian student’s failure to acquire a certain kind of cognitive ability necessary for the acquisition of modern knowledge. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the British expressed great optimism that the introduction of Western education would infuse into the Indian student a certain kind of an attitude and sensibility that was essential for acquiring scientific and moral knowledge. However, by the turn of the century, this optimism was slowly replaced by the anxiety that Indian students did not understand the value, purpose and principles of modern knowledge and instead largely learnt it by rote, without any understanding. From a narrative of moral decline, the focus shifts to failure of understanding.

While nobody disputed the growing popularity of Western education among the natives, it was observed that the popularity was more due to modern knowledge being an essential pre-requisite for employment, with a vast majority of the university students aiming to secure employment in one or the other form of Government service. It increasingly came to be

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162 The debate led to the formation of Benares Hindu University in 1916 and Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875, renamed Aligarh Muslim University in 1920. The Benares Hindu University is among the first teaching universities in India. The university makes a case for teaching to make possible the formation of character: “the Indian experience of the last fifty years has proved that a system which provides merely for examining students in those subjects to which their aptitude direct them, and does not at the same time compel them to study those subjects systematically under first rate instruction, tends inevitably to accentuate certain characteristic defects of the Indian intellect: the development of the memory out of all proportion to the other faculties of the mind, the incapacity to observe and appreciate facts and the taste for metaphysical and technical distinctions. Besides, a merely examining University can do little to promote the formation of character” Sundaram (1942, 26). The incomplete formation of the “Western educated” native and his “unscholarly” character would continue to dominate the debate even in the beginning of the twentieth century. See, for instance, India Unrest by Valentine Chirol (1910).
lamented that Indian students largely pursued knowledge for instrumentalist reasons and that modern knowledge was valued as a means to an end rather than valued as an end in itself.\footnote{See in particular, Chapter I in Seth (2007, 18–45) where he examines the growing concern with cramming and instrumentalism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India. Interestingly, more or less similar complaints can be heard against the undergraduate student today. However, the explanation forwarded today is that the students are from disadvantaged castes and therefore are not motivated, are less bright and pursue higher education only in order to gain employment. The fact that these concerns were expressed in the beginning of the twentieth century when it was likely that the Indian students were largely upper caste, makes it clear that caste is immaterial to the issue. In this section, in addition to my own archival work, I take up the problem that Seth deals with, in order to push his analysis further.}

By the turn of the century, close to almost a century after the first college was set up in India,\footnote{Standard accounts on higher education trace its beginnings to the establishment of Hindu College in 1817 in Calcutta. By 1853, the number of colleges had risen to 25. The recommendations of Wood’s Despatch in 1854 led to the establishment of three universities in the Presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras in 1857. The main function of these universities was to conduct examinations and award degrees, while teaching work was to be done in the affiliated colleges. This was an adoption of the London University model. With the rapid rise in enrolment, Punjab University at Lahore (1882) and the University of Allahabad (1887) were also established. After this, no new university was set up in the nineteenth century. By 1902, there were five universities and 191 affiliated colleges with a total enrolment of 17,650 students (Kuppusamy 2009, 1 (1), 51–58).} there emerged an overwhelming concern that there was some kind of a failure in the dissemination of modern knowledge. The “pass-man” and “the crammer” almost became synonymous with the Indian student, with the “peculiar” ways of the student emerging sometimes as a source of frustration and sometimes as a target of ridicule.\footnote{The authors of these opinions, as Seth also demonstrates, were British and Indian, official and unofficial, loyalists and nationalists. Thus, when Lord Stanley of Alderley, one of the members of the SCTT asked T. E Perry if the missionary schools require the pupils attending them to profess their religion, T. E Perry underlines the utter pointlessness of the exercise: “Not at all; but they are all taught from the Bible, and they are taught all the Christian evidences, and give answers as if they were young Christians at an examination. A professor told me that at the last examination he went to, he asked a little girl who Jesus Christ was; and the answer was, the Son of God. This gentleman, who was well acquainted with the Hindoo mind, asked her, what God; and the reply was, Shiva, who was the great Hindoo god in that part of the world; showing how little the child understood what she has been taught to say” (GBPP 1852-53, 25:25). That the natives approached instruction in Christianity exactly as they approached other subjects like geography and history, memorizing all kinds of nuances of Christianity, without understanding or having any impact on the native, gained in ground.}

For example, J. N. Farquhar, a professor from London Mission College, who deposed as a witness in front of the Indian Universities Commission in 1902 to discuss the various problems confronting university education in the country from the point of view of effecting a university reform, lamented about the undergraduate student thus: “the duty of an examiner is depressing in the extreme, not only on account of the excessive percentages of candidates who fail but much
more on account of the character of the work of those who pass. In a large proportion of the cases, the books are not really understood, and the candidate passes because he has amassed a sufficient quantity of various information to secure him the required marks.” He complained that a “large class of candidates do not care for knowledge but care for only that piece of paper which has acquired in India a market value never dreamt of by the founders of the universities” (ER 1902, 278). Some also forwarded explanations for this dismal scenario: the cause for this, according to a professor from St. Xavier’s College, Bombay, was “the present character of the people of this country.” As long as young men themselves and their fathers and guardian held a purely utilitarian conception of education, it would be impossible to make education what it ought to be (282). “The Indian student,” a Professor of History, Government College, Lahore rued, “memorizes, passes, and forgets and is entirely content-having gained a degree” (348).

Other professors identified the abundance of “inferior faculties” in Indian students as a cause. R. Scott, Principal, Wilson College, Bombay, observed: “Cram is a name for special effort in committing to memory…It is true that the faculties of acquisition and retention are far inferior to the power of philosophic discussion and original investigation. But the inferior faculties are abundant and the superior are rare. Students must exercise what they possess” (179). Acknowledging that the possession of a powerful memory was desirable in itself, he pointed out that “the evil consists in committing to memory things imperfectly understood which cannot become a part of the student’s permanent mental furniture” (178).

Some went a step ahead and tried to understand cramming as not only an undue exercise of memory but as the lack of (or the insufficient exercise of) the higher faculties of reason. An interesting conversation between Dr. Stein, (PhD, Inspector of Schools, Rawalpindi Circle, who was an educational officer and an Indologist by training) and Mr. Bannerji, one of the
Indian University Commission members (1902), is revealing in this regard and worthy of being quoted at length. In his evidence, Stein observes that the European science and culture which the Indian universities are called upon to diffuse is in reality as foreign to the Indian mind as to the Chinese. He located the greatest obstacle in the “deep-rooted difference in inherited notions and manners of thought which separated the Indian mind and the Western” (343-44). He argued that a form of academic control and reform that confined itself to a mere fixing of courses and conducting exams was grossly insufficient to secure either thoroughness of knowledge or the wide spread of the methods of thought which was more important than the bare knowledge itself. The weakest aspect of the Indian educational system, Stein pointed out, was the complete absence of anything resembling original research, which in his opinion was the only real academic work. Quoting fellow-scholars who occupied Sanskrit chairs in European universities who expressed surprise at the fact that despite the spread of higher learning in India, “there should be such a rarity of contributions by Indian scholars, indicating some measure of original research in the closely allied fields of Indian philology, archaeology and history” (344), Stein argued that for oriental scholars like him who had closely observed the working of the modern educational system in India, this was not surprising at all. The main reason was the failure to develop in the student the faculty of historical reasoning, which in itself was rather foreign to the Indian student and without which no research in any field was possible.

Stein contrasted the case of India with Japan which in a short span of time had managed to achieve greater success than India in building up the Imperial University of Tokyo and did more original research in Sanskrit in twenty years than India had done in the previous hundred years. To account for this, he pointed to the difference in the reasoning faculty between the Indian, Japanese and European mind. When asked by Mr. Bannerji if the methods and processes of human reasoning were not fundamental in their nature and same
across all races of mankind, Stein replied that they were not and that human brain worked differently in different orders of civilization.

When pressed for evidence for his hypothesis about the nature of the Indian student’s mind, Stein mentions three points from his own experience as a teacher and principal of the Oriental College, Lahore: a) unlike the European student “who seeks to prove chronology almost as one would prove a proposition of Euclid and he collects and coordinates the innumerable detached evidences with tireless industry and patience” (344), the Indian mind has an utter disregard for proving anything, uncritically accepts the indigenous chronology taught by ancient books and “is not even sensible of the logical force of evidences when they are produced before him” (344). As instances that demonstrate the above claims, he notes that if pointed out to the Indian student that if one author alludes to another, the author who makes the allusions must have lived in a period subsequent to the author who is alluded to, the student is quite unable to see that this reasoning is persuasive. If the indigenous chronology reverses the respective periods of the two authors, the student’s faith in indigenous chronology is not the least bit shaken b) This does not mean that a European teacher who argues against an inherited doctrine, however convincingly, fails to drive the conclusions into the Indian student’s head. It only meant that the student usually accepts anything from the instructor, not because the force of the argument convinces him but because it is part of his nature to offer least critical resistance. As a teacher, he would rather see a boy deny his teaching intelligently than swallow it unintelligently. Even when he tried to ignite “sparks of reasoning” by putting forth difficult questions and a variety of conflicting opinions and asking them which particular opinion they prefer to adopt, the answer would inevitably be, “What is your opinion, Sir” or “What do you wish us to believe about it, Sir?” (345). In short, he clarifies, it is not that the Indian student cannot exercise the reasoning faculty on logical and critical lines on certain issues but that he does not c) It does not even occur to the student
that he ought to be able give a reason for the faith that is in him. As an example, he points that no Hindu student can give you any reason as to why he believes in the transmigration of souls and the doctrine is accepted uncritically, without reflection. “It is this, I maintain, that marks the essential difference between the Indian boy and the European boy. In this country boys do not start life with the same splendid mental inheritance which gives European boys the advantage. The European habit of coolly and confidently referring to every point to the ultimate arbitrament of the inner judgment is utterly wanting in the Indian” (345). The Indian student, in short, does not display any strength of belief which he then is able to justify through principled reasoning. In fact, his very attitude to the mental state of believing which necessarily involves a propositional attitude and his failure to understand what giving one’s assent to a proposition means seems disconcerting to Stein.

When asked for an explanation for why the Indian student’s mind was so, the cause Stein forwards was the “intellectual self-suppression” that resulted from the unfortunate indigenous system. The system passed on the blind veneration of dogmatic teaching, deeply inculcating in the Indian student an absolute trust in the Guru. The only reform worth attempting according to him was not to tinker with courses and attempt minor reforms, but work towards supplanting the indigenous methods of teaching that are essentially dogmatic and non-logical by Western methods which are essentially inquisitive and reasoning. He would not want this transformation accomplished in a moment, even if such a thing were possible, for “As an archaeologist and an Indologist, it is part of my work to study the surviving relics of ancient civilization, and if the existing system of higher education in India were to pass away very quickly, I should be deprived of some very interesting specimens for my mental museum” (345).
Explanation for the Failure of Learning Goals

One could argue that we have come a long way from 1902 and today it is no longer possible to make a distinction between modern knowledge and indigenous systems since modern, Western methods of knowing the world have come to dominate. It is precisely the above delineated cluster of concerns that Sanjay Seth attempts to forward an explanation for, in his book “Subject Lessons” (Seth 2007). Posing the question of how Western knowledge acquired the current status of being the only mode of knowledge from being one of the many modes of knowing, Seth examines the consumption and reception of this modern, Western knowledge in the Indian context. Locating his analysis along the lines of a Foucauldian project of “the history of knowledge (which) constitutes a privileged point of view for the genealogy of the subject” (4), Seth argues that new knowledges do not just enter the heads of people to permeate it with new ideas but also serve to produce a new subject. Given the conception or the defining feature of modern knowledge is that it creates a knowing subject who is set apart from the objects to be known, he points out that the subject, in this once novel conception of knowledge, was not already present but had to be created through new pedagogic practices and disciplines created by industrialization, capitalism, modern armies and the modern novel. While the process was complex enough even in the West, he argues that it was more so in the Indian context where the instruments for creating the new subjects were “not slowly working away through the centuries of industrialization and the emergence of new disciplinary mechanism of family, prison, school and factory, but were heavily dependent on the violent and coercive agency of colonial rule” (5). Thus, modern, Western knowledge in India served to create a particular subject but failed to fully do so in the Indian context.

The burden of my argument …is that while India was transformed and Western knowledge was an important agent in this transformation, this transformation did not principally occur because education
‘modernized’ those Indians who were subject to it. Even as they engaged with modern institutions, engaged in modern practices, and acquired Western knowledge, Indians often seemed to do so in ways that did not render them modern and that did not accord with the core presumptions of this knowledge.

(12-13)

In delineating his conception of subjectivity, Seth borrows from Heidegger’s “The Age of the World Picture.” In the essay Heidegger ([1938] 2002) reflects on the ‘essence’ of modern science in order to apprehend the metaphysical foundation of the modern age and observes that crucial to apprehending this foundation is the emergence of “Man” as the new subject in which he becomes a relational centre of the world. It is possible for ‘Man’ to become the relational centre of that which is, Heidegger marks, only when the comprehension of the whole changes. This change manifests itself in the world emerging as an object that is now available for study and man emerging as a subject, and grasping the world as a picture - as a system. Heidegger notes that the world picture does not change from an ‘old’ one into a ‘new,’ ‘modern’ one, but rather the fact that the world is conceived as a picture, becomes a picture at all, is what distinguishes the modern age. Seth draws from critical humanists like Michel Foucault, Derrida and others who have continued in the line of Heidegger and Nietzsche to argue that this “Man” who is the subject of historiography, anthropology, sociology and other human sciences is not a transcendental presupposition but himself historically produced by contingent historical events. This means the “value-creating,” “culture-secreting” subject who is considered the source, the origin of all values and meaning cannot be presumed to exist before this period and in other contexts where such a subject has not been created.166

166 Thus Seth notes: “‘The task of the modern era,’ wrote Ludwig Feuerbach, is ‘the humanization of God - the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology.’ The modern era has been steadily discharging that task. Once, to understand men you had to understand God; now, to understand the gods of men you have to understand the men, for their gods are the fantastical creation of their minds. Once the purposes and the acts of gods explained the world of men; now, gods are themselves signs of men, traces from which historians, anthropologists and sociologists can recreate the meanings and purposes with which these men endowed their
Seth thus poses the question – what if modern knowledge failed to produce a subject and ‘the world as picture’ failed to emerge in India. Seth indeed claims that it did not and also suggests that this was because “another subjectivity”, corresponding to ‘indigenous’ modes of relating to knowledge, was diverting and frustrating the impact of modern education (31-45). Seth interprets the long standing complaint against Indian students that they regard Western education more from a utilitarian point of view, often learning by rote, thereby defeating the very purpose of modern education which is premised on the idea that knowledge, for it to be so, must be ‘truly understood,’ as reflecting the anxiety of the failure of modern Western education to produce the subject it posited in the first place. He thus reads the debates on education in India which came to be haunted by a spectre of nominalism, as “perturbations on the surface of this knowledge, half-acknowledgements that the foundational assumptions underpinning and enabling modern knowledge could not in fact be assumed” (195). This failure, he warns, is not to be read as another argument of lack, or incompleteness of modernity but as exposing the limits of modern, Western knowledge and the presuppositions it makes. In other words, his is an attempt to problematize the very knowledge by which we judge absence and incompleteness. To the extent that modern knowledge did not remake Indians, it proved to be ‘inadequate’ in knowing India.

How do we understand Seth’s statement that the modern subject that modern education and knowledge is supposed to forge was never produced in India? Seth’s diagnosis is that the subject who is constantly set apart from the object that he is attempting to know through the protocols of modern knowledge, never really emerges in India. At first glance, the statement bears a close resemblance to the ‘narrative of lack’ which has by now been rehearsed several times in our context and which Seth clearly wants to distance himself from. In the arguments

world. It is not, then, only that the subject of history is Man, but that this subject is a Subject, that is, a meaning and purpose endowing being who objectifies himself in the world, and through whose objectifications we can recreate what sort of men these were, and what sort of world they had created and inhabited” (Seth, 2007, 92-93).
that do make such a claim, the modern subject is marked as the ‘rational,’ ‘secular,’ ‘scientific’ self who is capable of intellectual and moral autonomy and Europe is envisaged as the site and image of modernity where such a subject is produced. Consequently, the history of the non-West typically gets read as lack or incompleteness since it is measured against this normative notion of modernity and then a claim is made for a version of “our modernity.” However, this is to take the self-descriptions of modernity as self-evident, universal truths. In other words, first we misread what goes under the name of European modernity and against this misreading, measure the modernity of the non-West and produce a narrative of lack or a version of our modernity.

Thus, we could ask - was such a subject produced in Europe? Seth does well to anticipate some form of this question and draws from Taylor (2001) and Latour (2012), to suggest that perhaps, the West is not modern either and that “while modern thought has played an important role in constituting modernity, it is not thereby a privileged medium for comprehending it” (194). Seth steers clear of the lament narrative by making the ‘lack’ a product of modern knowledge which cannot ‘adequately’ know India rather than the property of the non-West or its people.

Seth argues that Western knowledge presupposed a corresponding subjectivity thereby indicating the necessary interdependence of modern knowledge and the modern subject. He also argues that in the Indian context, though the dissemination of Western knowledge required a corresponding form of knowing subject, it had failed to produce it. However, despite this failure, he claims that Western knowledge came to occupy the status of being the only mode of knowing among others. As Seth himself points out, it appears that Indians acquired Western knowledge without becoming modern subjects. If the interdependence of modern knowledge and the modern subject is an essential condition for acquiring modern
knowledge, Seth fails to explain how indeed it was possible for Indians to sever this essential link and yet acquire modern knowledge.

One could say that Seth takes the subject to be a sociological-empirical entity with an ontological status that emerged in the Western society rather than see it as a theoretical entity that comes into being within the matrix of intellectual ideas. The subject-object distinction is not always already given but comes into being within the matrix of a particular intellectual practice or a form of engagement with the world that emerged in the West. While Seth attributes the emergence of this “subject” to “industrialization, capitalism, modern armies and the modern novel,” he misses the role of Christianity as a religion and its secularization in creating a particular ethos that generated a specific form of engagement with the world, where the world emerges as a separate entity to be explained. The genealogy of the normative category of the subject then is to be found in the specific structure that religion is.

However, one needs to grant Seth that he is acutely aware of the limitations of his own frame. Though Seth reads the growing concern with the problems of “cram” and “instrumentalism” as signifying the failure of modern knowledge to produce the corresponding form of knowing subject and argues that this could indicate the presence of another subjectivity which frustrates the emergence of another, he self-reflectively points out that his analysis is both made possible and obscured by the concept of “subjectivity.” He is aware that because he is posing the question within already available categories, the conclusion can only be presented as a “different sort of subject’ which can only be represented as an inadequate or unrealized version of the first. In other words, the “different” subject can only be a variation on, or a partially realized form of the normative category of subject, such that all forms of subjectivity ultimately culminate in modern forms of selfhood, “thereby bringing it under a category which erases with one hand the difference which it
writes with the other.” The challenge, he points out, is to “search for forms of thought which allow us to recognize that there have been and are ways of thinking the world other than modern, occidental ones; but also ways of thinking difference without invoking the Subject” (45).

How then do we make the various observations about the Indian student made by people like Stein intelligible? To simply dismiss Stein’s anthropological observations as another instance of the negative evaluation of the Orient or as serving the interests of the imperial power does not explain as much as “explain away” the issue at hand. Simultaneously, how do we understand the student’s attitude and dealings with modern knowledge, such that they are not rendered merely stupid or dull-headed, without slipping into some form of biological determinism?

I would like to suggest that the British diagnosis at the observational level was not wrong even if we disagree with their evaluation of it. At some level, we can note that the reports of education today more or less have similar complaints against the Indian student. The contours of our current narrative of crisis in the university can already be found here. However, Stein seems to have a part diagnosis to offer as well. He locates the problem in the way Indian students learn, structures that form them differently and the weak theoretical attitude they display. Is the notion of formation and learning implicit in modern education interrupted by another conception of education? In the next chapter, I examine the conception of education, the form of knowledge and the question of formation that is fore-grounded by Gandhi and Tagore. It is in their problematization of modern education, I argue, that we find a diagnosis of the crisis.