No single act of British policy has had such lasting influence on the evolution of modern Indian thought than its decision in 1835 A.D. to use governmental funds to support education in the English language and to adopt the curriculum prevalent in English schools. The introduction of this system of education had two main results. On the one hand, it greatly accelerated the diffusion of Western ideas and the Western outlook on life among Indian intellectuals. On the other hand, both the rapid penetration of foreign ways and attitudes, and the publication of the Hindu classics in English translation stimulated movements of defending Hinduism or demanding greater political opportunities for Indians — movements whose leaders often wrote, spoke, and thought in English.

Early nineteenth century Calcutta, being the capital of East India Company, was most exposed to the glamour of English culture and lifestyle. Calcutta's upper middle classes and middle class gentry aspired to be like the Britishers in their day to day living, clothing, furniture, articles and finally (and most crucially) the English language and the Western Education. Much earlier than the British government's decision to introduce English education, the Hindu college of Calcutta was established in 1816 A.D. for the same purpose, through private efforts (Devendranath Tagore had a hand in its installation). Soon there was in Calcutta an impressive group of young intellectuals and rationalists. Ram Mohan Roy (who later founded the Brahmo Samaj) was one of them. Ram Mohan Roy (b. 1772), was an outspoken foe of Hindu idolatry and superstition and the Brahmo Samaj was a Hindu theistic reform sect. Another brilliant figure of this intellectual period of Calcutta was, the Christian poet and educator, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809 to 1831 A.D.)

English Education

The unique example of Calcutta gave the English some incentive in introducing its long debated upon plan for providing education to the Indians (the urban populace) in both vernacular and English language. Through education the English hoped (i) to produce for themselves cheaply available labour for the offices of the East India
Company and (ii) to create better Indian support (rather better slaves), for themselves. Lord Macaulay's Minute On Education was accepted as an official policy document by the ruling British government in 1835 AD. The Minute advocated education through the English language, and recommended English literature as a civilising subject in Indian education.

Efforts by the government to introduce education in the English language in Benaras, Agra, Delhi, Bombay, Madras and Poona, did not take off until after the 1840s, either due to a lack of response among the natives or due to indecision and non-implementation by the government's education committee. Cities like Bombay and Delhi had some resourceful rich Indian families who were keen on their sons acquiring an English education and were even eager to send them to England for better education. Another source which contributed significantly to the spread of education in India was the presence of the Christian missionaries. The Church Missionary Society, the Bombay Bible Society and the London Missionary Society, meanwhile had established a good number of schools and colleges in South India and the northern belt of India. Later the American Missionaries also joined them in the task of spreading education in English along with anglicising and spreading, mostly among the lower classes, the Anglican faith. In some cities English medium academies or schools were also set up by some enthusiastic and resourceful Indians; but their ventures were often known to collapse due to a lack of funds in the long run.

Some of the most distinguished editors and writers of Bengal, who were the products of such English academics were, Knsto Das Pal, Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, and Romesh Chandra Dutt. While the new-learning made rapid progress in the southern and eastern India, under the triple drive of government, missionary and native influences, a markedly different pattern was taking shape in the "upper India". Many of the circumstances favouring the study of English in Bengal and the Southern peninsula until Bombay-Poona, had just not existed in the north western provinces of India. Until the first half of the nineteenth century when the railroad had not come, the "upper India" was almost shut off from the European culture and the English language. It did not even have the benefit of being on the coastline which would have exposed its populace to the constant influx of European/English sailors and
foreign commodities. The English language in the “upper India” was dead. However, the few Europeans who lived there had acquired a facility with the vernacular language for the purpose of communicating with the natives.

The scene began to change in the later half of the nineteenth century, after the English education committee made a conscious effort to spread English education in the “upper India.” The coming of the railroad facilitated its efforts. Obviously English education possessed no appeal for the rural masses whose needs the Government tried to meet through the development of vernacular schools. It was therefore no accident that all of the English schools were situated in urban centres of some size and importance. This linguistic difference must have marked the beginning of the wide gap that exists today between Indian villages and cities.

Nationalism

It is a painful bit of evidence that in its historic past, the people of India as a whole had not been seized with a spirit of aggressive nationalism. The state-wise and regional differences of race, and language, and the fact that the country had most often been divided into small kingdoms had perhaps, further conspired against the emergence of the nationalist sentiment. It is not that all sense of nationality and national feelings among the Indians was dead. But Hindu patriotism had never been marked by that narrow, fierce, political grain characteristic of some European nations. Rather it had expressed itself in parochial loyalties, a fond attachment to the ancestral religion and manners. ...Far from being the supreme loyalty, love of country had held third place in the heart of a Hindu, love of religion occupying the first. (McCully English Education And The Origins Of Indian Nationalism 93)

Fortunately for India, foreign influences in the nineteenth century contributed greatly to the genesis of Hindu cultural nationalism. The major twin foreign devices of English education and Christianity had successfully penetrated most districts of the country by the middle of the century. A substantial number of Hindus had been trained under the university system of 1885 A.D. They were a class of rationalist youth who were Hindus at heart and in culture, but neo-British in their thinking and
aspirations The English culture which they absorbed alienated them from their innermost self and tended to produce even in the best of minds a split personality of the person as educated and the person as a Hindu. By the middle of the nineteenth century, English had eventually dislodged Persian from its towering position and completely changed the existing language hierarchy. Resentful of its lost status, the Muslim community adamantly sulked and resisted the privileges of an English education while the Hindus (a majority of them), took full advantage of it. Consequently they got ahead in both material and social terms. In the nationalist movement too it was the educated Hindus who occupied the leading positions. The growing gap between the two communities was to translate into intense resentment and insecurity on the part of the Muslims, and eventually lead to the partition of India. Meanwhile, among the English-literate Indians, common education drew the lower and upper strata of the educated class together, and their mutual dislike of the Anglo Indian bureaucracy, cemented the alliance:

There was another segment of Hindus, who were conservative and brahminical in their thinking. They attacked the study of the English language and accused it of having alienated a whole generation of educated men from all the noble remnants of the ancient Hindu race. They undertook the task of reviving ancient Hindu culture to curb the acceleration of the ‘Europeanisation’ of India. However, the impact of European thought upon the collective mind of the educated class reawakened the spirit of Hindu India, ‘Breath had come into their bones,’ as Sir Auckland Colvin remarked, and ‘they were about to live and stand upon their feet.’ (McCully 242)

The English Language
This in brief is the story of the artificial implanting of English language in the soil of India. It had come sailing to India in the ships of the East India Company as the speech of the shrewd, friendly, white-skinned men, who later took over the entire country. If this foreign language took away from the educated Indians, their originality (of thinking and responding), on the one hand, it gave to them on the other hand, the European sentiment of nationality. As a consequence the country (of the Vedas and Bhakti literature), failed to produce vibrant and great poetry in English (the new language of scholarship and urban communication) But it succeeded in connecting
us with the world, in raising levels of general awareness, and in fanning the sentiments of protest and non-co-operation among the people who thereby earned for us our Independence. As McCully says.

If the hand of the foreigner prepared the country from the reception of nationalist dogma, it also moulded the context of early nationalist thought.... The liberal nationalists of India – the Banerjees, the Naorojis, the Mehtas, the Ghoses, and others – invented little of their own ideology. Their contribution lay in expounding a modified version of doctrines which they had picked up as students. (388-389)

Today, the English language has come a long way. From British English to Pidgin English, we now have our own variety of Indian English, which manages commendably to convey to the reader the scent of rain on the Indian soil and the music of the koel (cuckoo) among ripe mango branches; through its modified syntax and new word coinages. The experiment has just begun, with some Indian novelists like Raja Rao and Salman Rushdie, showing us the way.

The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century saw the pre-independence struggle of India emerge from the grass roots and climb the pinnacle of success. It was an age of great socio-political ferment, of radical thinking and of a process of the self-reckoning of an entire nation that rose to epical dimensions of character and courage. Such times should normally have given us great and heroic poetry as well. And they probably did – in the vernacular languages of India, but not in the English language which our educated class of Indians had so fondly embraced. Even the vernacular languages were irresistibly drawn to associate and involve themselves with the English language and literature. As Sisir Kumar Das writes in A History Of Indian Literature, Volume VIII:

The relative prestige of the Indian languages among themselves was partly determined, by the extent to which they were influenced by English. The concept of modernity in literary history was also related to the relation that each Indian language and literature developed with English. The English educated Indian too, equally scornful of these vernaculars, remained indifferent to them.... (30-31).
The process of colonisation was completed.