Chapter IV

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE WESTERN TYPE OF EDUCATION AND ITS EFFECTS

One of the most distinctive achievements of the British connection with India, it may be said, was the introduction of the new system of education with the object of spreading the knowledge of Western sciences and literature in this country, which had only its indigenous and traditional system of education, imparting instruction in the three R's at the elementary level and Oriental learning and sacred knowledge at the higher. Though oriental scholarship was admittedly of a very high order, it was through the English education that the Indian mind made its first acquaintance with Western knowledge, which showed the seeds of Renaissance in the varied fields of Indian life and literature.

The birth of a new literature and press in modern India was one of the most important results of this new education and one of the most pleasing features of the Indian Renaissance which followed. This happy result was achieved more or less simultaneously, though in varying degrees, through the agency and pioneering efforts of the Government, the Missionaries and the Indians themselves. The East India Company, which appeared on the Indian scene along with similar other foreign companies in the beginning of the seventeenth century, being primarily a commercial concern did not, understandably, interest itself in the education of the people of India for more than a hundred years. Even later, for a considerable time, it was too preoccupied with its own political problems to devote much serious attention to Indian education beyond opening a few schools here and there. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that the Missionaries started the first printing press in India and probably the first newspaper, besides making a beginning in their work of starting schools and colleges all
over India. They studied the modern Indian languages, compiled dictionaries and prepared Grammar-books. But since their primary object in undertaking educational and allied activities was the spread of Christianity and proselytization, they had obviously no interest in the creation of new Indian literatures or the development of modern Indian languages beyond translating the Bible into them or writing tracts in them and using them as a means to an end they had in view.

The Government through its officers and departments, on the contrary, did valuable work in this direction by extending their patronage to have the books in modern Indian languages written and published. The earliest efforts in this field, in keeping with the requirements of the new educational system, were translations of standard English books or treatises on subjects like history, geography, algebra, geometry etc., which formed parts of the courses of study in the schools. Native School Book Societies were formed in the early years of the nineteenth century for the purpose and after 1855, Education Departments undertook this work on a considerable scale. Subsequently, men educated in the new system of education, feeling the need of the books of this type found in the English language, wrote such books in the modern Indian languages, either individually or collectively. Moreover, they took the lead in the creation of the new literature, which came into existence as a direct result of the impact of English on modern Indian languages.

The Western type of education had also its effect on the social and religious life of India. The Missionaries' early hopes and Indian people's fears that Western education would lead to the spread of Christianity, resulting in conversions of the newly educated to Christianity had both proved to be illusory. It is, however, true that in the early stages, there were a few
conversions to Christian faith and not a few were inclined towards agnosticism and even atheism. But on the whole, the effect of the new education was to set these young men thinking on the unhealthy features of their social organization and religious beliefs and devise ways and means of purging them. Thus, in the field of social reform, men strove to break down caste-barriers, liquidate age-old superstitions, encourage widow-remarriage, prevent early marriages and to promote equality of sexes by awakening the social conscience of the people through the technique of persuasion, propaganda, open defiance and revolt, as required by the exigencies of time and place. In the field of religion, though the new Western education in the early years had turned a few erratic young men into agnostics or atheists, its cumulative effect was to generate a deep religious ferment, which led to religious reforms, the main object of which was to arrest religious decadence and, by purging religious practices and beliefs of their superstitions and unhealthy features, to restore religion to health without damaging its old foundation or its essential fabric. The religious movements of this period, such as the Brahmo Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj, were expressions of the religious ferment or fervour and they were all attempts at reforming, reorganizing or strengthening religion and not attempts at destroying or denying it. Thus, both in the social and the religious fields, the effects of the Western education were neither negative nor destructive, since the efforts of the educated men working in these fields were, on the whole, directed into constructive channels.

Even more positive and productive was the effect of the new education on the political life of the country. In the initial stages, problems of social and religious reform had almost monopolized the attention and energy of the educated individuals. It was through those two channels that the newly educated men strove to serve the country of their birth. But later on, it began to be
realised that without political power, the varied social and economic problems before the country could not be completely solved. Thus, patriotism which in the past was content to express itself in the field of social and religious reform, burst its own banks and overflowed into the political field and led to a great national awakening. The establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885, periodical agitations and demands for increasing share in the governance of the country, political struggles to enforce them and the final insistence on self-government, were all symbolic manifestations and phases of the newly awakened political consciousness, fostered partly at least by Western education. It is true that political awakening and freedom would have been there even if the British had made no attempts to educate the Indian people on their own lines, yet it cannot be gainsaid that the upsurge of nationalism and the demand for self-government through constitutional methods were inspired by the ideals of democracy and self-rule popularized by Western education.

The first flush of enthusiasm for everything Western, accompanied by an indiscriminate condemnation of everything Indian, followed by a short spell of opposition to everything Western and glorification of everything Indian, gradually gave way to an objective appreciation of the finer points of both. Indian Universities, which taught English language and literature and also found an honourable place for the study of ancient Indian classics and languages in their curriculum, created a generation in whom the synthesis of both the cultures had begun to take place. Western scholars who studied some of the Indian classics were full of admiration for them. This, in turn, rehabilitated the Indian people's confidence in their own ancient heritage.

In the early years of the English education, with its attempt to westernize the contents of education, young Indians who received this education were unable to digest the new exotic culture and showed signs of a deep cultural unsettling.
Some of them blindly imitated the English in their dress, speech and manners, even drinking wine and eating beef in the fond belief that they were adopting the best that the West had to offer. They, consequently, developed an undisguised contempt for everything Indian or ancient. It was, in fact, this erratic behaviour of some of the newly educated Indians that had frightened or set thinking a large section of the people of India in whose eyes the cultural traditions of the country were too precious to be wantonly discarded, though the West was not altogether an anathema to them. However, as the emphasis on Westernization abated and as the finer aspects of ancient Indian culture came to be stressed in the country's system of education, a new cultural synthesis began to be worked out. Gokhale had remarked that the greatest work of Western education in India was not so much the encouragement of learning as the liberation of the Indian mind from the thraldom of old-world ideas and the assimilation of all that was highest and best in the life, thought and character of the West.¹ This assimilation was now taking place and with that the earlier symptoms of a deep cultural unsettling were beginning to disappear. The psychological domination of the West was coming to an end and a new era of cultural co-operation was dawning in India. The new generation of University-educated men ceased to think of the East or the West in isolation, but in terms of a synthesis of the best of both for the progressive enrichment of Indian life and literature.

It was in this new cultural climate that the new leadership in India was born by about the end of the nineteenth century, giving a new direction and momentum to the social, political, religious and literary life of the country. The demand for national education, which came to be voiced by the beginning of the nineteenth century had its roots in the increasing sensitiveness and growing discontent against

¹ Vide, Speeches, pp. 234-235.
the intellectual domination of Western thought, even as the upsurge of militant nationalism in the political field symbolized a feeling of revolt against the political domination of England in India. It was felt that the old ideal of spreading Western science and literature, nursed by the Company's Directors and defined in the Wood's Despatch of 1854 was obsolete, especially because it was sought to be realized at the cost of India's own languages and literatures. The attempt to create a new class of persons, who, in Macaulay's words, would be 'Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect', had ostensibly failed since the generation nurtured on University education in India believed in assimilating the best of the West with what was valuable in indigenous culture. English language and literature, of course, retained their importance but lost their domination in the scheme of Indian education, when it acquired a national bias under Indian direction.

The achievements of the Western system of education, for all its shortcomings, however, cannot be ignored or minimized. It was admittedly more efficient, broad-based and comprehensive than the old indigenous one which it ultimately replaced. Its curriculum was broader and liberal. The use of the printed book, its critical and scientific approach, its mental discipline and its accent on secularism were definite assets. Western thought, sciences and literature opened new intellectual horizons before the Indian mind. Young Indians, who had studied some of the finest specimens of English prose and poetry in their courses of study or otherwise, took a lead in creating new literature in modern Indian languages. Young men, who were introduced to Western thought through English, were the pioneers in the field of social and religious reform and those, who had studied the

political history and sciences of the West, were in the forefront of those who
worked for the country's emancipation from foreign rule and sought to plant the
ideals of democracy, imbibed from the West and fostered by a system of education,
which came from the West, as a gift of the English to the people of India over
whom they ruled.

In Gujarat, as elsewhere, the schools of indigenous learning were
gradually replaced by those of the Western conception. The Bombay Native
Education Society, which also catered to the educational needs of Gujarat, had
since 1824 started not only 'Vernacular' schools all over the province, but also
started a special class in the Elphinstone Institute (as it was then called) for
the training of teachers, who were to be put in charge of those schools. The
Society, by 1826, had ten such schools in Gujarat and their number increased in
course of time. It is recorded that 'Lord Bishop Carr of Bombay, in one of his
visits to Gujarat, picked up young Ranchhodbhai at Broach and recommended him to
the Society, which thereupon engaged him for the work of promoting Anglo-vernacular
education in Gujarat'. Thanks to the efforts of Ranchhodbhai, who was the
pioneer of the Western type of education in Gujarat, a number of teachers were
trained at Bombay and subsequently put in charge of the newly opened vernacular
schools in the various districts of Gujarat. He saw to it that suitable text-
books were also prepared. While Col. Jarvis, the Secretary of the Society,
produced a text-book on Arithmetic and Book-keeping, Ranchhodbhai himself wrote
in Gujarati a 'History of British India' as also on Geography and Algebra. There
was a continuous increase in the number of vernacular schools and the pupils

attending them, testifying to the fact that Western type of education through the vernacular had evoked great response from the people. Before long, numerous Higher Secondary Schools were started, to be soon followed by four 'English' Schools, where the medium of instruction was English. Even before the University of Bombay was established in 1857, there were Collegiate Classes attached to the Elphinstone Institute, which later came to be known as Elphinstone College, where poet Narmad, for instance, studied for some time. The medium of instruction in the Colleges was English and the study of the English language and literature was given pride of place. Modern Indian languages were either not considered worthy of serious study or relegated to a secondary position, the result in both cases being that they were neglected by the Universities all over the country for a very long time. Indian classical languages, on the other hand, found an honourable place in their curriculum, though the approach to them had grown critical and scientific. In Bombay State, there were only three colleges when the University of Bombay was established in 1857, but by 1903-04, the number grew to sixteen, of which Gujarat had four, the number going up from time to time. In short, Gujarat had taken enthusiastically to the Western type of education, which was imparted through a network of Primary, Secondary, English Schools and Colleges and its revolutionary effect did not take long to be felt all over the social, cultural and literary life of Gujarat. All the leading poets in modern Gujarati poetry and prose were the beneficiaries of this Western type of education, of whom the most outstanding are Narmad, Navalram, Ramanbhai, Manibhai, Goverdhanram, Anandshankar, Narsinhrao, Kant, Kalapi, Nanalal, K.M. Munshi, Khaberdar, B.K. Thakore and Umashanker Joshi, to say nothing of others who found their self-expression chiefly in the social and the political field, such as Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahatma Gandhi.