The Education Despatch of 1854

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organisation in 1853. At this time a Select Committee of the House
was constituted to carry out a very thorough enquiry into educational
matters in India. On the basis of this enquiry, the court of
honour, and through them, the government, issued their major
Educational Despatch on 13th July 1853. This document, of immense
historical importance, is sometimes referred to as Wood's Education
Despatch because it was probably written under the direction of
Charles Wood, who was then the President of the Board of
Control.
Several education experiments had been tried since the inception of the British rule in India. The need for a uniform policy for the whole country was felt by now. Various policies for action had been proposed and they involved controversial issues which needed careful consideration. It was a time when the best results could be obtained only by holding a thorough and comprehensive review of the past and by prescribing in the light of this review, a detailed policy for educational reconstruction in the future. This was exactly what the Education Despatch of 1854 did.

The occasion for the Despatch was provided by the renewal of the company's charter in 1853. At this time a Select Committee of the House of Commons held a very thorough enquiry into educational developments in India. On the basis of this enquiry, the court of Directors sent down then greatest Educational Despatch on 19th July 1854. This document of immense historical importance is sometimes described as Wood's Education Despatch because it was probably written at the instance of Charles Wood who was then the President of the Board of Control. It is a long document of a hundred paragraphs
and deals with several questions of great educational importance. The paragraphs could be grouped subject-wise under the following heads: (i) machinery for managing the department of education, (ii) establishment of university and (iii) institution of grant-in aid. In the opening paragraphs it laid the following as the objective of the educational policy of the British Indian Government.

Among many subjects of importance, none can have a stronger claim to our attention than that of education. It is one of our most sacred duties, to be the means, as far as in us lies, of conferring upon the natives of India those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge, and which may, under providence, derive from her connection with England...........

"We have, moreover, always looked upon the encouragement of education peculiarly important, because calculated not only to produce a higher degree of intellectual fitness, but to raise the moral character of those who partake of its advantages, and so to supply you with servants to whose probity you may with increased confidence commit offices of trust in India.............
"Nor, while the character of England is deeply, concerned in the success of our efforts for the promotion of education, are her material interests altogether unaffected by the advance of European knowledge in India, this knowledge will teach the natives of India the marvelous results of the employment of labour and capital, rouse them to emulate us in the development of the vast resources of their country, guide them in their efforts, and gradually, but certainly, confer upon them all the advantages which accompany the health increase of wealth and commerce, and at same time, secure to us a large and more certain supply of many articles for our manufacturers and extensively consumed by all classes of our population, as well as in almost inexhaustible demand for a produce of British labour……………….”  

As per the opinion of Lord Dalhousie that Despatch Contained, “a scheme of education for all India, far and wider and more comprehensive than the Local or Supreme Government”. It marked a climate so that “what goes before it leads up to it and what follows flows for it.”

The Despatch started with an emphasis on education having a stronger claim to the attention of the government than many other subjects of importance. The Despatch suggested a scheme of education covering all the aspects of Indian education, right from the primary to
the university stages. It proposed to leave education generally to the private enterprise in India, but at the same time introduced a policy by which the state identified itself with the educational system of the country. It wanted to adopt throughout India those plans which had been carried into successful execution in particular districts of Bengal.³

The Despatch refers to the controversy between the classicists and Anglicists in Bengal. It is worthy of rate that the Despatch does not condemn the view of the oriental party in a summary fashion as Macaulay did. It appreciates the advantages that spring from a study of the classical languages of India and admits that “an acquaintance with the works contained in them is valuable for historical and antiquarian purposes, and knowledge of the languages themselves is required in the study of Hindu and Mohammedan law, and is also of great importance for the critical cultivation and improvement of the vernacular languages of India.” It also mentions “the success of many distinguished oriental scholars in their praise worth endeavors to engraft upon portions of Hindu philosophy the gems of sounder morals and of more advanced science,”........ and “the good effect which has been produced upon the learned classes of India”. Nevertheless, the Despatch agrees with Lord Macaulay and points out that “the system of science and philosophy which form the learning of the East abounds with grave
errors, and Eastern literature is at best very deficient as regards all modern discovery and improvement", and concludes with the following declaration.

"We must emphatically declare that the education which we desire to see extended in India is that which has for its object the diffusion of the improved arts, science, philosophy and literature of Europe, in sort of European knowledge."

The question of the medium of instruction is next dealt with. The despatch first explains how it became necessary in the beginning to use English as a medium of instruction. It admits, however, that one evil result of the measure had been to create a tendency to neglect the study of the "Vernacular languages". The despatch then proceeds to repudiate the suggestion that English was used as a medium of instruction by the company merely to suppress indigenous education or to discourage the study of Indian languages and shows how English and Indian languages together may help to spread proper education in India.

The Despatch states that "In any general system of education, English language should be taught where there is a demand for it; but such instruction should always be combined with careful attention to
the study of the vernacular language of the district, and while the English language continues to be made use of as by far the most perfect medium for the education of those persons who have acquired a sufficient knowledge of it to receive general instruction through it, the vernacular languages must be employed to teach the far larger classes who are ignorant of, or imperfectly acquainted with, English. This can only be done effectually through the instrumentality of masters and professors. At the same time, and as the importance of the vernacular languages become more appreciated, the vernacular literature of India will be gradually enriched by the translations of European books or by the original compositions of men whose minds have been imposed with the spirit of European advancement, so that European knowledge may gradually be placed in this manner within the reach of all classes of the people. We look, therefore, to the English language and to the vernacular languages of India together as the medium for the diffusion of European knowledge."

The Despatch then proceeds to explain the new schemes that were to be introduced. The first of these was the creation of a Department of Public Instruction in each of the five provinces into which the territory of the company were divided at that time, viz., Bengal, Madras, Bombay, the North-Western provinces, and the Punjab.
This department was to be placed under the Director of Public Instruction. He was to be assisted by an adequate number of Inspecting officers and was required to submit to Government an annual report on the progress of education in his province.

The second scheme related to the establishment of universities. The Despatch directs that universities should be established at Calcutta and Bombay and states that the Directors were "ready to sanction the creation of a university of Madras, or any part of India, where a sufficient number of institutions exist, from which properly qualified candidates for degrees could be supplied." All the universities were to be modeled on the London University which was then an examining body. Their senates were to consist of a Chancellor, a Vice-chancellor, and Fellows - all of whom were to be nominated by Government. The functions of the universities were mainly to hold examinations and confer degrees.  

Next, the Despatch proceeds to explain the network of graded schools which the Directors desired to spread all over the country. At one end of this gradation came the university and the affiliated colleges which gave instruction in various branches of art and science. Below these came the high schools which gave instruction either through...
English or through a modern Indian Language, and at the bottom came the indigenous primary schools. Further the Despatch observes that "our attention should now be directed to a consideration if possible, still more important, and on which had been hitherto, we are bound to admit, too much neglected, namely, how useful and practical knowledge, suited to every station of life, may be best conveyed to the great mass of the people, who are utterly incapable of obtaining any education worthy of the name of their own unaided efforts, and we desire to see the active measures of Government more especially directed, for the future, to this objects for the attainment of which we are ready to sanction a considerable increase of expenditures."  

To achieve this purpose, the Directors recommended a multiplication of High Schools. It is not generally understood that the Despatch visualized High Schools which imparted good general education through the Indian languages, but next paragraph will make it clear as "we include these Anglo-vernacular schools in the same, because we are unwilling to maintain the broad line of separation which at present exists between schools in which the media for imparting instruction differ. The knowledge conveyed is no doubt, at present time, must higher in the Anglo-vernacular than in the vernacular schools; but the difference will become less marked, and the
latter more efficient as the gradual enrichment of the vernacular languages in works of education allows their schemes of study to be enlarged, and as a more numerous loss of school masters if raised up, able to impart superior education."

Below the High and Middle schools came the indigenous elementary schools which the Directors proposed to encourage by suitable grant-in-aid. As a connecting link between these various grades of schools, it was proposed to institute scholarships to be given to promising pupils in order to enable them to continue their studies at a higher school or college. As per the Despatch "such a system as this, placed in all its degrees under efficient inspection, beginning with the humblest elementary instruction, and ending with the university."

Test of liberal education, the best students in each class of schools being encouraged by the aid afforded them towards obtaining superior education as the reward of merit, by means of such a system of scholarships as we shall have to describe, would, we firmly believe, impart life and energy to education in India and lead to a gradual, but steady extension of its benefits to all classes of the people."
Since the filtration policy was being given up, the court of Directors considered how best "useful and practical knowledge suited to every station in life" could be made available to the great mass of people. Such expansion was not possible by Government effort alone. Therefore, it was resolved to adopt to the grant-in-aid system which had been so successful adopted in England. The dispatch pointed out that "we have, therefore resolved to adopt in India the system of grant-in-aid which has been carried out in this country with very great success; and we confidently anticipate by drawing support from local resources, in addition to contributions from the state, a far more rapid progress of education than would follow a mere increase of fostering a spirit of reliance upon local exertions and combination for local purposes, which is of no mean importance to the well-being of a nation.

This aid was to be given on the basis of complete religious neutrality to all schools imparting a good secular education under satisfactory local management and Government inspection. The Despatch also decided to levy a fee from the students. The Despatch then observe that "we look forward to the time when any general system of education entirely provided by Government may be discontinued, with gradual advance of the system of grant-in-aid, and
when many of the existing Government institutions, especially those of higher order, may be safely closed, or transferred to the management of local bodies under the control of, and aided by, the state.\textsuperscript{11}

For missions too this grant-in-aid system was of great importance \ldots\ldots. And missionaries like Dr. Duff had a distinct influence in the shaping of the famous Despatch, it was perfectly clear that the main tendency of the new grant-in-aid system was to encourage the various missions to engage in the very congenial work of elementary education to a larger extent than ever before.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, the attitude of the Despatch towards religious instruction is also worthy of note as it shows the official sympathy for missionary effort.

The Despatch then proceeds to consider the question of securing properly qualified teachers for schools, and states that "we can not do better than refer you to the plan which has been adopted in Great Britain for this subject, and which appears to us to be capable of easy adaptation to India. It mainly consists, as you will perceive on to the Minutes of the Committee of Council, copies of which we enclose, in the selection and stipend of pupil teachers \ldots\ldots if they prove worthy, to normal schools, the issue to them of certificates on the completion of their training in those normal schools, and in securing to them a
when many of the existing Government institutions, especially those of higher order, may be safely closed, or transferred to the management of local bodies under the control of, and aided by, the state.\textsuperscript{11}

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sufficient salary when they are afterwards employed as school masters. This system should be carried out in India, both in the Government colleges and schools, and by means of grant-in-aid, in all institutions which are brought under Government inspection ......

With regard to Education and Employment the Despatch states that "we have always been of opinion that the spread of education in India will produce a greater efficiency in all branches of administration by enabling you to obtain the services of intelligent and trustworthy persons in every department of Government, and on the other hand, we believe that the numerous vacancies of different kinds which have constantly to be filled up, may afford a great stimulus to education ....

..... a person who has received a good education, irrespective of the place or manner of the place or manner in which it may have been acquired, should be preferred to one who has not, and that even in lower situations, a man who can read and write be preferred to one who cannot if he is equally eligible in other respects."

Finally, the Despatch offers a few suggestions regarding some other problems of education. For instance, the Despatch points out the necessity of providing suitable school books in Indian Languages, the
importance for vocational instruction and to that end, the need of establishing vocational colleges and schools of industry; and the urgency of spreading education among women. With regard to education of women, the Despatch says that "importance of female education in India cannot be overrated, and we have observed with pleasure the evidence which is now afforded of an increased desire on the part of the natives of India to give a good education to their daughters. By this means a far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people then by the education of men. We have already observed that schools for females are included among those to which grant-in-aid may be given; and we cannot refrain from expressing our cordial sympathy with the efforts which are being made in this direction. Our Governor-General in Council has declared, in a communication to the Government of Bengal, that the Government ought to give to the native female education in India its frank and cordial support, and in this we heartily concur and we especially approve of the bestowal of marks of honour upon such native gentlemen as Rao Bahadur Magahunbhai Karramchand who donated Rs. 20,000 to the foundation of two native female schools in Ahmedabad, as by such means our desire for the extension of female education becomes generally known. 15
The Education Despatch of 1854, described as the "Magna Carta of English Education in India"\textsuperscript{16}, formed a landmark in the Education policy of British India. It affords us an excellent platform from which we can take a retrospective glance at the past and, as M.R. Paranjpe quoted, it enables us "to find out how far we have achieved the educational objectives which the authors of the Despatch had in view, and to put the changes brought about in our educational objectives in the last hundred years, partly by lapse of time and partly by new environment created by the educational progress in the period."\textsuperscript{17}

It is true that the Despatch did not bestow on the Indian people certain rights and privileges in education, but some of the concepts of the Despatch like cultivation of Indian languages, use of the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction at the school stage, institution of university professorships in some subjects including vernaculars and classical languages, Law and Civil Engineering, concept of mass education and that of secular education in a plural society like India were the concepts which are significantly valid in an independent India. The Despatch realized that the goal of education was primarily employment and as such vocational education as well as absorption of qualified Indians in Government services was emphasized. It hoped that private enterprise would gradually replace the Government in
education through grant-in-aid and would help to develop and education rooted in Indian soil. 18

The Government of India did not act upon the many suggestions and recommendations of the Despatch. They totally disregarded some of the suggestions and recommendations. Mass education which was the main theme of the Despatch continued to be neglected for the sake of higher education. It was neither expected nor desired that the state would directly provide schools everywhere. But it was hoped that indigenous schools would be improved through periodical inspection and would receive Government grants. But nothing was done in that direction also. The use of the mother-tongue at the school stage as the medium of instruction was also postponed.19

It is however too much to expect that the Despatch, meant for the education of a colonialized people by an imperial power, would visualize concepts in education which are the products of recent changes in the socio-economics and political structure in the world. As M.R. Paranjpe has observed that “the Despatch does not even refer to the ideal of universal literacy although it expects education to spread over a wider field through the grant-in-aid system. It does not recognize the obligation of the state to educate every child below a certain age. It
does not declare that poverty shall be no bar to the education of describing students; and while it may be admitted that employment in government offices was not the object of English education as visualized in the Despatch, the authors did not aim at education for leadership, education for the industrial regeneration of India, education for the defence of the motherland, in short, education required by the people of a self-government nation.”

Despite its drawback, the Education Despatch of 1854 offers us a platform to measure the changes in education in response to the changes in our society over the years since 1854.

Lord Dalhousie however, did not allow his personal feelings to stand in the way of the implementation of provisions of the Despatch, which opened an era of “Anglo-Vernacular education spoch” in the history of Indian education. He realized that “it contained, a scheme of education for all India far wider and more comprehensive than the local or the Supreme Governments would have ventured to suggest. It left nothing to be desired.” Its implementation indeed would be “a tough job” but he assured Wood that he would have “the cordial exertion of us all.” In the determination of the measures to be taken in execution of the instructions of the court he sought the assistance of those experienced in educational matters such as the Governor of
Bengal, Halliday, the Legislative Council Member, Grant and the President of the Council of Education, Colvile.25

And he did not hope in vain. By the end of 1855 a distinct department for superintendence of education was constituted and a Director of Public Instruction had been appointed in each of the five provinces with inspectors and others appointed in each of them. Provisional rules for regulating grant-in-aid had been sanctioned for the guidance of the local governments. And a committee had been appointed for the purpose of framing a scheme for the establishment of universities at the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

President of the Board of Control which took change of the Government of India on behalf of the crown in 1858 declared the policies of the Government of India that year. The President Lord Ellenborough sent a panicky document written shortly after the 'Mutiny' and he tried to reverse the policies laid down by the despatch of 1854. On the ground that they led to the events of 1857. He instructed that there should not be an compulsion with regard to the education of the masses in India. Hardly had there been any time to act on the recommendations of Ellenborough when the British Government in India changed. By Queen's proclamation of 1858, the power was
transferred from the company to the crown. The post of the President of Board of Control was replaced by the post of the Secretary of State in India who, with his council was made ultimately responsible for the British administration in India.

Another policy document of importance after 1857 was the new educational Despatch that emanated from Lord Stanley, the first secretary of State. This document proposed to review the educational development in India after 1854 and to find out whether education had something to do with the happenings of 1857. The secretary of state also wanted to ascertain whether it would be right for him to pursue the educational policies as laid down in the Despatch of 1854. He was eager to assure the people that the change of Government did not mean a change in the educational policy also and he reaffirmed the earlier policy with but few modifications. He felt that sufficient attention should be devoted to the education of the masses and that the government should directly undertake the responsibility of educating the masses.
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