The orientation of early human beings towards learning caused prospective changes and movement in their lives. When they started learning the secrets of nature, it was the first step towards building of a civilization. The complex tools evolved in the civilization process caused division of labor, and consequently, surplus production. Variously skilled persons created by virtue of learning were pooled in the cities. One among the skilled personnel were the priests who evolved ideas required for deriving the loyalty of almost every section of the society in correspondence with the demands of the tools. They emerged at the top of the social ladder and remained unquestioned till alternative ideology was offered by the heterodox sects. The role of materialist and secular ideas also contributed in shaping the social configuration. The dialectical process in which these ideas clashed – homogenous in one side and the heterodox and materialist in the other – tended to guide the course of the socio-political life of the people. Nevertheless it was not able to thoroughly dethrone the cultural elite from its position.

The heterodox sects communicated their ideas in the vernacular dialect. The Devabasha status claimed by the language of the cultural elite had its own attraction and even Mahayana form of Buddhism – if not on that count for other reasons – adopted Sanskrit as the medium of communication. The heterodox sects introduced formal kind of education or education of higher level found expression in the formation of universities like Nalanda, Vikramasila and Odantapura and tried their best to democratize it. In places where the heterodox sects did not find following, access to reading and writing was the perquisite of only a few who determined even what others can listen. In such a context and further with the decline of heterodox sects, the question of ‘progressivity’ was but a logical question. Without reading, writing and listening, the shaping up of the demands and expectations of communities and individuals in the broader society cannot be thought about.

As a consequence, a subjective class of people who contributed for the welfare of the society at the cost of their welfare without being conscious of their position in the social order was created. Limitations of these kinds further undermined the coming together of the castes and contributed for the easy entrance of foreign military powers. That in turn contributed for the diversity among the inhabitants of the landscape and provocation of debates pertaining to faith. The second Bhakthi movement and Sufi traditions that evolved in the north provided cushion for the harmonious blending
of the diversity and had wide reach among the common people. The resultant ideas possibly were reflected in the curriculum of the madrasas and vidhyalayas, for the fabric of communal harmony at the level of people remained undisturbed. If the roots of ‘national integration’ could be traced, the location of that was found here.

Paradoxically, while entering into a time period categorized as ‘modern’, the spirit of learning that was offered in the name of ‘scientific education’ not only delinked itself from the diversified nature of the society but also departed from the idea of ‘knowledge for knowledge sake’. A favorable climate that emerged during the Bhakthi movement and the Mughal rule was shattered to pieces. The colonial administration ignored the seeds of the ‘surprise element’ expressed by the agents of colonialism – such as Warren Hastings – who were moved by the plentitude of Madrasas and Vidhyalayas that existed in the landscape of Bengal inhabited by ordinary people prior to their arrival. Once the nation became free from colonial oppression, the democratic republic that was born realized the responsibility of mending the damages caused by the British policy before it.

In such a backdrop, the present study is an attempt to view the dynamics of education within the purview of social history. Since the domain of social history deals more with particular issues than general overview, a broader canvas based on economy has been drawn to place the arguments. Over and above all these, the broader scope of the title allows only handling of certain significant episodes in the history of India to suit the perspective of the present scholar. The limitation insofar such episodes are concerned, pertain to their coming from text book readings than from primary sources or specific inter-disciplinary research on history and education. The central point of the article is ‘India is a country of diversity and a proper system of education or administration of it has to provide adequate space to protect and promote the diversity rather than attempting to bring about uniformity’. The narration of events is made in mono-causal style and a chain of reactions analyzed in linear pattern against forming a web of quantitative data. The treatment of the subject matter may not exactly revolve around the issues linked to higher education; rather it hopes to create an ideal frame within which it can be effectively viewed.

The Betrayal of Modernity

The arrival of the Europeans with the fruits of renaissance was expected to lead a nation like India towards the path of development. Even thinkers like Karl Marx thought that colonial rule would benefit India. Such hypotheses were made on the grounds of the belief that India had been a home of superstitious beliefs and its people knew nothing. In reality the natives projected as ignorant by the colonialists was not true, for as great a missionary like Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg found the natives discussing philosophical issues at par and parallel to the savants of Europe. They lagged behind in areas of science and technology and failed to participate in the global developments of that time. When the motive of the colonialists was only to exploit the nation optimally, their domineering attitude failed to capture the real abilities of the people of the subject nation. Therefore, they used every opportunity including that of providing education for justification of their rule.

As far the education of the natives was concerned that became the responsibility of the colonialist by virtue of collecting taxes and in the initial phase, there were some positive signs in the direction of choosing Indian system of knowledge for the instruction of the natives. The surprise of Warren Hastings, and other colonialists on the intellectual past of the natives was shared by serious scholars of western origin who preferred to call themselves Royal Asiatics – also popularly known as Orientalists. They had a vision plan that would have contributed for the rediscovery of the natives’
history. However in a debate on ‘the themes of education for the purpose of instruction’ at the Governor General’s Council after the introduction of the Charter Act of 1833 that directed to spend one lakh rupees for the education of the natives, the Utilitarian thinkers represented by Thomas Macaulay favored English education and they emerged successful against the Orient lists.

The Utilitarian thinkers had two major motives while espousing their argument in favor of English education – ‘divide and rule’ and ‘infusing European taste’. The latter stood as the logical sequence of the former, for the separation of identities of the religious groups was stressed while the solution of all ills was identified as departing from the flawed identity attributed by religion towards a common identity offered by the British administration through Education. Towing this line of ideology, James Mill wrote the official history of India and justified the British rule.

The learning of occidental ideas through English language brought the privileged section of the society close to the Europeans. The education thus provided better access to political power and economic resources, and thereby, created a class of people who became the first middle class in this nation. The English people and the Indian learned class competed in the same platform for the limited opportunity offered by the government. In outlook it appeared like elevating the meritorious natives at par with the Europeans. In reality it was an attempt to denude the colorful diversity of the country. Sadly the communities benefited by the policies of the British government asserted their identities while believing that their interests are different and they counter pose each other. The partition of the country into India and Pakistan added to the problem

**New Light after Independence**

The rectification of the problems created by the British administration, and the poor financial resources of the state were the chief challenges that appeared before the leaders of free India. Shaped by the course of the national movement, they realized the need to preserve the diversity of the nation. The greatest strength that they had in them was their exposure to international institutions and engagements with contemporary leaders of diverse ideological background. Being sincere learners themselves, they recognized the intellectual attainments of individuals and gave adequate and free space for the think-tanks to put forth their ideas and constantly discussed academic and national issues with them. The personality of the leaders at times stood taller than that of the government itself. They transferred this personality to the educational institutions they founded.

As said already, the leaders were assuming power in a chaotic situation not only characterized by communalism but also by language based separatist movements. The nature of the systems – including that of education – inherited from the British was such that, it reinforced the ugly facets of caste, religion and other divisive factors as rightly pointed out by eminent sociologist M.N. Srinivas as character of Indian modernity. With utmost care and verve, they rectified the defects made in the history curriculum with inputs coming from the ‘Nationalist Historians’ and liberated the medieval period of Indian history from darker projections and placed strong arguments tracing the common cultural roots from the ancient past despite language based differences. At the same time, they did not attempt to redefine the character of minority institutions and in reality provided more scope for their free growth.

Sincere effort in diagnosing the ills of the system was manifested in the appointment of Kothari Commission. While reviewing the educational situation in India, with a critical rigor, it pointed out the policy level inflexibilities. Possibly the commission reflected the Baconian
philosophy of ‘expurgation of the intellect’ for it stressed not much on linking education with market. However, in order to treat the inherent ills, it sought to expand the sphere of education by incorporating ideas such as moral education and social service. This happened to be the starting point of bringing out education from rote learning from text books. The aim was to make the youth realize the prevailing situation of the Indian society. It also introduced the trilingual formula to contain the language based separations thoughts in the country. The National Policy on Education of 1986 also laid great stress on the trilingual formula alongside social justice, gender equity, work culture and etc.

Globalization and Thereafter

Globalization threw another set of challenge to the integrative character of higher education. The man power created at the cost of Indian public fund was expected to serve the needs and demands of the world. It lapsed from the Baconian philosophy and attempted to link higher education with the market. The implementation of globalization in India was not coordinated with adequate institutional support that actually was required for the process. Particularly, the inadequacy of the quantum of premier institutions of science and technology that could boast of having attained global standards underlined the distance yet to be covered. Introspection into the cause of the backwardness when viewed through Indian science curriculum suggested that even at the highest level it reflected the achievements in the field than highlighting the paths of failures. The failures were equally important to be taught and learnt so that mistakes during fresh attempts could be averted. This was not to relegate to the background, the achievements of the Indian Institutes of Technology and other institutions along with their teams of determined scientists and researchers despite these limitations.

The effect of accelerated demand in science and technology caused shock waves in social sciences and humanities. At the first hand, question of whether at all academic pursuit of these would any more be useful for individuals and society was debated. The talented cream of youth that chose between science and social science earlier predominantly shifted to science. In the void that emerged, new interpretations not so much guided by scientific approach emerged in social sciences particularly in the field of history. The global powers that viewed India as a potential market, started showing interest in learning the socio-cultural and political life of the people and for them multiplicity of interpretations only enhanced understanding in depth. Similarly, the scholarly contributions of the Marxist social scientists embarrassed these powers since ideological viewpoints were not compatible with each other. Therefore they were also looking for new interpretations.

Interpretations can be of any type. It is part and parcel of academic freedom. It may also be purposive. An effective democracy has to necessarily provide platform for free expression of one’s viewpoint. But new interpretations and free expression shall not violate the grammar of a discipline. ‘Facts of past’ form the chief domain of history. The new interpretations made by certain scholars fabricated certain facts to suit their ideology of ‘Hindu Reassertion’. Apart from this, academics with leftist orientation were blocked from putting forth their views. When attempts intending to undermine the true spirit of learning and thereby create fissiparous tendencies in the nation, how the nation relates itself to it becomes important. Some developments that occurred in the subsequent periods portray positive gesture from the side of the government.

Social policies with renewed orientation marked the vision of the government. Importantly the observations of RajinderSachar Committee and the recommendations of the National Knowledge Commission both discussed about ‘inclusion’. The former committee identified the backwardness of
Muslims in almost every walk of social life including higher education, whereas the latter expanded the horizon of disparities mainly delinking it from the conventional understandings rooted in caste and religion covering income, gender, region and place of residence\textsuperscript{16}. The National Knowledge Commission discussed also about developing a deprivation index and suggested creation of extensive and well-funded scholarship schemes.\textsuperscript{17} The accessibility of higher education limited to 8 percent of the total population was planned to be expanded in such a volume that, any aspiring student shall be admitted without considering his or her capacity to pay the fees. The aim of these efforts was to stem the prevailing social inequality, and thereby, reduce the economic gap among social groups.

The National Knowledge Commission envisaged the setting up of 1500 universities against the present dim figure of 350. At the minimum setting up of 50 central universities was also part of the agenda. Central universities have successfully reflected the vision of the nation insofar accommodating diversities of various kinds and particularly based on language and region. Every university in India has evolved its own personality and each one is different from the other. They also have had better opportunity to innovate programs to suit the need of time when compared to the affiliated colleges. The expansion of the role of universities in general would possibly help in giving shape to the diversity of the nation.

Conclusion

The effects of the British policy towards education heavily impacted on the native people whose minds were strongly ingrained with internal differences. It could only be an ambitious expectation to ‘expurgate the intellect’in a shorter duration from what was consciously sowed for more than one hundred years. Therefore, in the present it appears like emergence of a paradoxical situation wherein A.K. Ramanujan’s essay on Ramayana was opposed by a section of people while the government open’s the Indian floor for foreign universities to establish their centers. Such unclear situations are only common during a period of transition. But what has to be noted above all is the fact that we have arrived at a time period in which higher education has become an important agenda and matter of socio-economic aspiration of everyman and woman. The common debates on issues pertaining to higher education, their ability to pull attraction of cross section of people and acquire national importance hint at the healthy positioning of it. The determination and commitment of the government to constantly increase the outlay for higher education is also an indicator in that direction. The progresses that have been achieved and remain to be achieved through higher education have parallels to speak about the level of socio-political integration of the nation.

References

2. Ibid.
3. It was believed that in the centuries nearer to the birth of Christ two important centers of learning evolved.
   One was located at Taxila and the other at Banaras. The former was said to have produced scholarship on secular disciplines such as medicine and politics. Arthasasthra and Charakasamhitha were the products of the Taxilaschool.
4. There emerged a clear division between the dvijas meaning twice-borns and others. The Sudra Varna and the untouchables shall only listen to the recitation of the epics and denied access of any kind to the Vedas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads.
5. E. Sreedharan, A Textbook of Historiography 500BC to AD 2000, (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004) pp. 91-100; Rene Descartes states that the existence of a person is confirmed by his ability to think. To its contrast, Vico opines that one’s thinkingis conditioned by how he believes. Thinking and belief are so very important for human life. But in India of the contemporary period of these scholars – as D.D. Kosambi rightly points out – the predominant thinking and beliefs were pivoted around superstition than rationality.


7. S. Viswanathan, Tamilology and a German Quest, Frontline____.


10. G. John Gilbert, Contemporary History of India, p. 43.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p. 44.


14. Scholars like Rajaram, Jha (not D.N. Jha)and MakhanLal are only a few. Rajaram wanted to say that the authors of the Indus Valley Civilization were the Aryans. Therefore he projected one of the seals as having the figure of horse.

15. For example, the ‘Towards Freedom’ project jointly worked by SumitSarkar and K.N. Panikker and supported by the Indian Council of Historical research was blocked.

16. Letter of Sam Pitroda addressed to the Prime Minister dated 29-11-2006.

17. Ibid.