

WOODS DESPATCH: THE MAGNA CARTA OF INDIAN EDUCATION

Ashutosh Ranjan

Research Scholar

Department of History

Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, India

Abstract: East India Company had to take orders from the British Parliament after every 20 years and in each order, something was written about the education in India. Therefore, when time for the order of 1853 came, the directors of the company decided to lay down a definite policy in regard to educational matters of India. A parliamentary committee was appointed to survey the educational progress in India. This committee deeply studied Indian education till 1853 and after considering all aspects, they gave its suggestions on Indian education. Based on the suggestions of the committee, the company announced its new education policy in 1854. At that time Sir Charles Wood was the head of the 'Board of Control'. That is why the company published a new charter 'Wood's Despatch' in his name. This was a very long document consisting of 100 paragraphs in which the role of company towards Indian education was explained. After this manifesto, there was immense progress in Indian education. This research paper is a historical review which consists of all the aspects of the Despatch, 1854. The paper deals with the needs of educational changes, challenges, merits, and demerits of Woods Despatch including the development in primary, secondary and higher education which sets milestone for future education of India.

Key Words: Woods Despatch, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education, Magna Carta of Indian Education

Introduction

The education in modern India started to come out from the shadow in the late 18th and in the beginning of 19th century when some ironic decisions were taken by the East India Company (EIC). After acquiring the Diwani powers and the political grip over Bengal, the EIC wanted to prove that they could control the affairs of the government much better than the Nawab. Hence, they paid attention to education to show that they were really interested in public welfare and later in 18th century towards this end, a college was started each at Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai) and Benares (Varanasi). Charles Grant, who was an ordinary officer of the company and later regarded as the father of modern education in India, played an important role to limelight the Indian education. His essay entitled 'Observation', contained a description of the conditions of the Indian people in which he pointed out the deplorable affairs in the educational field. The description given in this essay influenced the British Parliament to ease the further path. Grant has observed that 'light must be brought through education in India. Then the people will learn to behave rightly. So far, they have not been told about the right things. So, education should be given to them for understanding things from the right perspective'.

In 1813, the charter was published which revolutionized the enlightened opinion of India. The charter provisioned that the company should spend at least one lakh rupees per year on education which had a good impact on the Indian people. Educational institutions were opened by many enlightened Indian groups to protect their civilization and culture. The charter made a vast room to expand the education in the country before the next charter was published in 1833. In these 20 years, both modern and indigenous system of education was expanded. In 1834, Lord Macaulay came in India during the Oriental and Occidental controversy. As per the charter of 1833, he was appointed law member of the governor general's council. In 1835, Macaulay put the 'Minutes' on education in which he supported western education through English medium in India.

The Magna Carta of Indian Education, 'Woods Despatch' of 1854 was the first policy statement of the British government and the company on education. It was the result of the parliamentary investigation that preceded the renewal of charter 1853. A parliamentary committee was appointed to survey the educational progress in India. The committee studied the issue thoroughly. It heard the ideas of the persons like Traivelian Pairy Marshaman, Wilson, Halide, Cameron, the Duff, etc. who had thorough knowledge of Indian education. The committee reported that the question of Indian education would not be ignored any longer and its development will not be in any case harmful to British Empire. The suggestions of the committee were favorably considered by the board of Directors. As Charles Wood was the chairman of the board of control, so the declaration was known as 'Wood's Educational Despatch' though it was written by John Stuart.

The recommendations of the Despatch are highlighted in the following heads:

Acceptance of Educational Responsibility: For the first time the Despatch clearly accepted the responsibility of British government for education in India.

The Aim of Education: The aim of education was to raise intellectual fitness and moral character of the learner.

Course of Study: Charles Wood recognized the usefulness of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, and recommended them as subjects of study in regular institutions. Like Macaulay, he also recognized the usefulness of Western knowledge for Indians.

Medium of Instruction: The Despatch pointed out that due to dearth of course books in Indian languages, the medium of education should be English. But this should be used by those people who have proper knowledge of English and are able to understand the European knowledge through this language.

Department of Public Instruction: The Despatch recommended that a department of public instruction should be set up in all the provinces. Its highest official should be designated as the director of public instruction. He should be assisted by deputy educational director, inspectors, and deputy inspectors of schools.

Establishment of Universities: The Despatch suggested for the setting up of the universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and if necessary, at other places too.

Establishment of Regular Institutions: The Despatch emphasized establishment of the graded institutions.

Extension of Public Education: As 'Filtration Theory' failed; Wood emphasized useful education for the public. As the public itself was unable to get such an education, so an increase in the number of primary, middle, and high schools was emphasized. To co-ordinate education at these various levels, it was suggested to implement scholarships and other schemes.

Grant-in-aid system: Wood's Despatch suggested a grant-in-aid system for the institutions which fulfilled certain qualifications. He also suggested that the rules and regulations for Grant-in-aid should be framed on the lines practiced in England.

Training of Teachers: Despatch expressed the desire of opening schools in every province of India. But the teacher training institutions were in England, so they advocated to open teachers training institutions in India so that teaching work may be conducted properly and efficiently.

Education of Women: Despatch threw light on women education and praised the persons engaged in this pious work. It suggested for its further encouragement through Grant-in-aid and other measures. It also approved the declaration of Governor general that government should favorably assist the female education in India. It said, 'the importance of female education in India cannot be over-rated. We cannot repair from repressing cordial sympathy with the efforts which are being made in this direction.'

Muslim Education: About Muslim education, Wood said that Muslims are too backward in education. He suggested that they should be encouraged to gain more education and efforts should be made in this direction.

Vocational Education: The Despatch paid attention to vocational education. It suggested that schools and colleges should be set up at suitable places for vocational education so that people may get such education.

Encouragement to the Oriental Education: The Despatch supported western education through English medium for the Indians. However, it recommended for the development of Indian literature. It suggested that the books of western literature and science should be translated into these languages. Also, original books should be written, and the writers should be rewarded and encouraged.

Employment: About employment Wood laid down basically two principles i.e. while selecting the candidates for government services their academic qualifications should be considered well and academically, highly qualified persons should be preferred than the other for government services.

The recommendations of the Magna Carta of Indian education clearly indicated the upcoming reforms in the Indian education after 1854. After thoroughly studying the Despatch, the scholars and historians found merits as well as demerits in the recommendations of Woods Despatch which are highlighted in the below heads:

Merits

Decision of Educational Policy: Due to the Wood's Despatch, British parliament for the first time decided the educational policy in India and give it a legal form. Before that, the directors of the EIC had not decided the policy about the Indian education.

Aim: Wood's Despatch clearly laid down the aim of education in India.

Government Responsibility: Through this dispatch, it was recognized to be the duty and responsibility of the British government to educate the common people of India.

Rejection of Downward Filtration Theory: Wood's Despatch rejected the downward filtration theory. It was considered totally useless for Indian education. The Despatch took active steps to encourage public education.

Scheme of Education: This dispatch, for the first time, puts up a scheme of education from primary standard to university level. It gave practical suggestions based on the lines functioning in England.

Literature and Culture: The Despatch recognized the importance and value of Indian literature and culture.

Indigenous Language: The Despatch recommended Indian languages and literature for inclusion during study. Unlike Lord Macaulay it appreciated Indian literature and arranged to get books written in Indian languages.

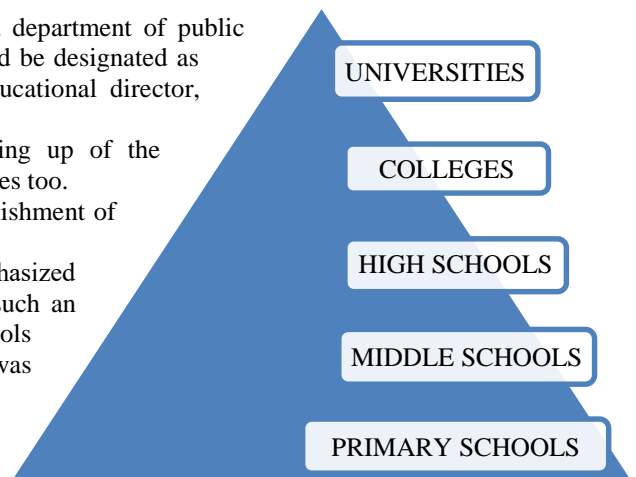
Translation: The dispatch laid stress on the translation of books of western knowledge into Indian languages. It recommended encouragement to the authors for this purpose.

Department of Public Instruction: Wood suggested for setting up a department of public instruction in each province with a director of public instruction, a deputy director, inspector, and deputy inspectors so that educational institutions could be properly inspected, and standards could be maintained. The Despatch also attracted the attention of the government towards the improvement of native educational institutions.

Indian Languages: Wood recognized Indian languages as the media of education along with English.

Universities: The Despatch ordered to establish universities at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and, if necessary, at other places also.

High School and Colleges: The Despatch suggested for increasing the number of high schools and colleges.



Providing Employment: The Despatch paid attention to solving the problem of unemployment by encouraging vocational education.

Women Education: The Despatch recognized the need for development of women education as the duty and responsibility of the government.

Grant-in-aid: The Despatch suggested that the grant-in-aid system as functioning in England should apply to various educational institutions in India as well.

Scholarships: The Despatch provided for the facility of scholarships to the poor and meritorious students to enable them to gain education.

Meritorious Teachers: To encourage general people towards the education system the Despatch suggested preference to highly educated persons in Government services.

Better Pay Scales: The dispatch recommended better pay scales to the teachers to attract many efficient people to the teaching profession.

Demerits

Nominations: All the members of senate of the universities were to be nominated by the government. Hence sometimes the persons ignorant about educational problems became members of the senate.

Government Control: This Despatch puts education under the direct control of the Government. This government control ended the traditional free teaching work in this country.

Foreign Model: The Despatch adopted the model of London university in Indian universities. Thus, the ancient Indian university system was neglected.

Education for Bread Earning: Education has a very vast aim, but its preference of higher education is in government services, as laid down by the Despatch, limited the aim of education and it became only the means of bread earning.

Blow to old Institutions: According to the Despatch, the people educated on western lines and languages were to be given priority in services. Therefore, the old educational institutions began to lose their existence.

Westernization: Wood's Despatch concentrated the attention of the people on western knowledge. Hence Indian literature and knowledge was neglected. A time came when people educated on western lines began to think that everything indigenous was bad, while anything western was good. Improvement of Indian languages was planned by filling them with translations of the western books.

Neglect of Indian Religions: Indian education gave prominent place to Indian religion. The western education system gave prominence to Christianity. Thus, Indian religions were neglected by educated people. They were very much influenced by western religions.

Neglect of Spiritualism: The neglect of religion caused educated Indians forget the Indian spiritualism and disciplined way of life.

Denigration of Indian Languages: Though Wood had recognized the usefulness of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, etc. but the aim of education was declared as the extension and development of western knowledge, science, and literature. Thus, the value of Indian languages was brought down indirectly.

Lack of Flexibility: According to this Despatch, an education department was set up in each province and education went under the direct control of the government. The institutions were only to obey the departmental order. So, they lost their own inspiration resulting in the lack of flexibility in the educational system.

Neglect of Orientalism: The Despatch resulted in the neglect of native education system by the people. It was left without any attraction.

Subservience: Education was proposed not in the interest of Indians, but to create faithfulness towards British Government. Its aim was to make Indians loyal to the British Government.

Mercenary Aim: Educational institutions were established to prepare people fit for government services. Therefore, the aim of education was livelihood only.

Lack of Support to Indigenous Institutions: The government was spending the major portion of money allotted for education in the development and extension of English schools. The indigenous educational institutions had to suffer a step-motherly treatment from the government as well as from the higher classes of the society. Poor people were unable to support them due to the lack of resources. The grant-in-aid was given to those institutions where the public could be at 50 per cent of the expenditure. Therefore, it was also not very helpful for oriental education.

Foreign Medium: As the medium of instruction was English, so the students were bound to study English to understand other subjects like History, Geography, Mathematics, etc. Thus, they had to spend a larger period studying. Still, most of the students could not gain the success that they might have gained through the media of Indian languages.

Examination Centered Education: This system of education destroyed the system of self-study and meditation. The main aim of the students was to pass the examination. They did not care to study the whole course and depended on selected reading examination assumed a very important place and so the whole study became examination minded.

At the time of Wood's Despatch, primary education in the country was in very bad shape due to the reason that the company's attention was primarily diverted towards university education. So, primary education remained neglected. Wood's Despatch urged to give adequate attention to primary education and suggested certain reforms. It made the company responsible for primary education. Even then the situation could not improve, because the rules of the grant-in-aid system were impracticable. Most of the primary schools were not able to fulfill the condition of arranging for at least 50 per cent of the expenditure. So, they could not benefit from the grant-in-aid system. Therefore, institutions of higher learning received the major portion of the grant and primary education continued to be neglected.

But secondary education was in a better position than primary education during this period. Many people in the country were attracted towards western literature and sciences. Hence there was a favorable atmosphere for the development of secondary

education. The government also adopted the policy of encouraging and helping English schools. Hence good progress was achieved in secondary education during this period. Wood's Despatch had encouraged secondary schools, because the cause of the recommendations of the Despatch was that education departments were established in various provinces and Government schools were opened. Private enterprises working for promotion of secondary education were also given Government grants. Before 1854 Despatch, a demand was raised for establishment of universities in India in 1845. Dr. F. J. Mouat, the then secretary of the education committee of Bengal had raised his voice for a university at Calcutta in October 1845. After some time, the same type of demand was raised in Madras also. Again in 1852, Mr. C.H. Cameron, an ex-president of education committee of Bengal raised his voice in the British parliament for opening universities at Agra and in the three presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay when the question of renewal of the Charter of EIC was being considered. Though these efforts failed, but they convinced the British government that the opening of universities in India should not be delayed. It was at this time that Wood's Despatch was realized in which establishment of universities had been recommended. By 1857 the necessary rules and regulations for the universities were framed and the universities in the three presidencies came into existence. Thus, the establishment of universities was the result of Wood's Despatch.

Conclusion

Wood's Despatch had a mixed reception in India. The European administrators in India welcomed it whole-heartedly and termed it as the 'Magna Charta of the Indian Education'; but many others were quick enough to point out the inherent weaknesses in the scheme proposed by Sir Charles. Sir Charles Wood's recommendations were largely instrumental in determining the methods and machinery for the new educational system in India. The Despatch laid out, in precise terms, the objectives of the new educational policy, discussed the necessity of the use of English as a medium of instruction and suggested new schemes such as the establishment of the Education Department. Also, by way of endorsing the demand of the Bombay association, the Despatch recommended incorporation of universities, modeled on the London University, mainly to hold examinations and confer degrees. The large expenditure involved in implementing the establishment of universities or the starting of schools was to be met by a grant-in-aid by the state provided the main initiative and funding came from the Indians. The Despatch also emphasized the training of teachers, something on the lines of earlier normal schools, and the spread of female education, it expected that a higher number of such educated Indians would find employment in the various services of the company.

According to H. R. James – '*The despatch of 1854 is a climax in the History of Indian Education... what goes before leads up to it – what follows flows from it*'.

Similarly, Lord Dalhousie's stated in his minute that '*a scheme of education far wider and more comprehensive than the local or supreme government could have even ventured to suggest*'.

Thus, the ultimate purpose of the Despatch was just another well-guarded attempt to impose western knowledge and learning and English language on the Indian people. However, the Despatch was an important historical document in as much as it began a new era in Indian education by streaming it on a definite track. As a result of this Despatch, three new universities were opened in the country and the grant-in-aid system was introduced in all the provinces. These two features had a salutary effect on the existing conditions. Many other provisions of the Despatch could not be implemented because of the Revolt of 1857 which put the British empire in the country in danger.

References:

1. Woods' Despatch, 1854 (In Original), Preserved in the Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Government of India, New Delhi.
2. Adam, W. Adam's Reports, 1835-8, National Library, Calcutta.
3. Aggarwal, J. C. (7th edition, reprint 2013), 'Landmarks in the History of Modern Indian Education', Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. E-28, Sector-8, Noida-201301
4. Biswas, A. & Agrawal S. P. (1994), Development of Education in India – A Historical Survey of Educational Documents before and after Independence, Concept Publishing Company, N. Delhi.
5. Biswas, Arabinda & Aggarwal, J. C. (1981), Seven Indian Educationists: Including 35 other thinkers on Education in Modern India, Arya Book Depot, New Delhi.
6. Chaurasia, R.S. (2002), History of Modern India; 1707 A.D. to up to 2000 A.D., Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, Vishal Enclave, New Delhi.
7. Ghosh, Suresh C. (2007), 'History of Education in India', Prem Rawat Publications, Satyam Apts, Sector 3, Jawahar Nagar, Jaipur 302004
8. Jayapalan, N (2005), History of Education in India, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
9. Aggarwal, J.C. (2008), 'Development of education system in India', Shipra publications, 115-A, Vikas Marg, Shakarpur, Delhi-110092
10. Banerjee, J.P. (2010), Education in India, Past, Present and Future, Amitava Roy, Central Library, Shyama Charan Dey Street Kolkata
11. Mohanty, Jagannath, (2002), 'Primary and Elementary Education (Policy and Programme, Growth and Development, Organization and Management, Sociological and Psychological Aspects, Democracy and Education)', Deep and Deep Publication PVT. F-159 Rajouri Garden, New Delhi – 110027
12. James, H.R. (1911), Education and Statesmanship in India 1797-1910, London
13. Kochhar, S. K (1981). 'Pivotal Issues In Indian Education', Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi-110016
14. Metcalf, D. Barbara & Metcalf, Thomas R. (2006), A concise History of Modern India, Second Edition, United Kingdom of the University Press, Cambridge, New Delhi
15. Markovits, Claude (2004), A History of Modern India, 1480-1950, Anthem Press, London
16. Nurullah, Syed and Naik, J.P. (1943), History of Education in India During the British Period; Macmillan & Co., Bombay.

17. Banerjee, J.P. (2010), Education in India, Past, Present and Future, Amitava Roy, Central Library, Shyama Charan Dey Street Kolkata
18. Mohanty, Jagannath (2002), 'Primary and Elementary Education (Policy and Programme, Growth and Development, Organization and Management, Sociological and Psychological Aspects, Democracy and Education)', Deep and Deep Publication PVT. F-159 Rajouri Garden, New Delhi – 110027
19. James, H.R. (1911), Education and Statesmanship in India 1797-1910, London
20. Riddic, John F. (2006), The History of British India: A chronology, Praeger, West port, Connecticut, London
21. Sharma, R.N. & Sharma, R.K. (2004), History of Education in India, Atlantic Publication and Distributer, Vishal Enclave, New Delhi.
22. Singh, Dr. V. B. & Pahuja, Sudha (2012), Development of Education System in India, R. Lal Book Depot, Meerut
23. Sharma Rajendra Kumar & Sharma Ram Nath (2004), History of Education in India, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.
24. Sharma, Sita Ram; Rathor, T. N. & Sharma, Kewal Krishna, History and development of Education in Modern India: National Education Movement, Sarup Book Publishers, Darya Gunj, N. Delhi.

