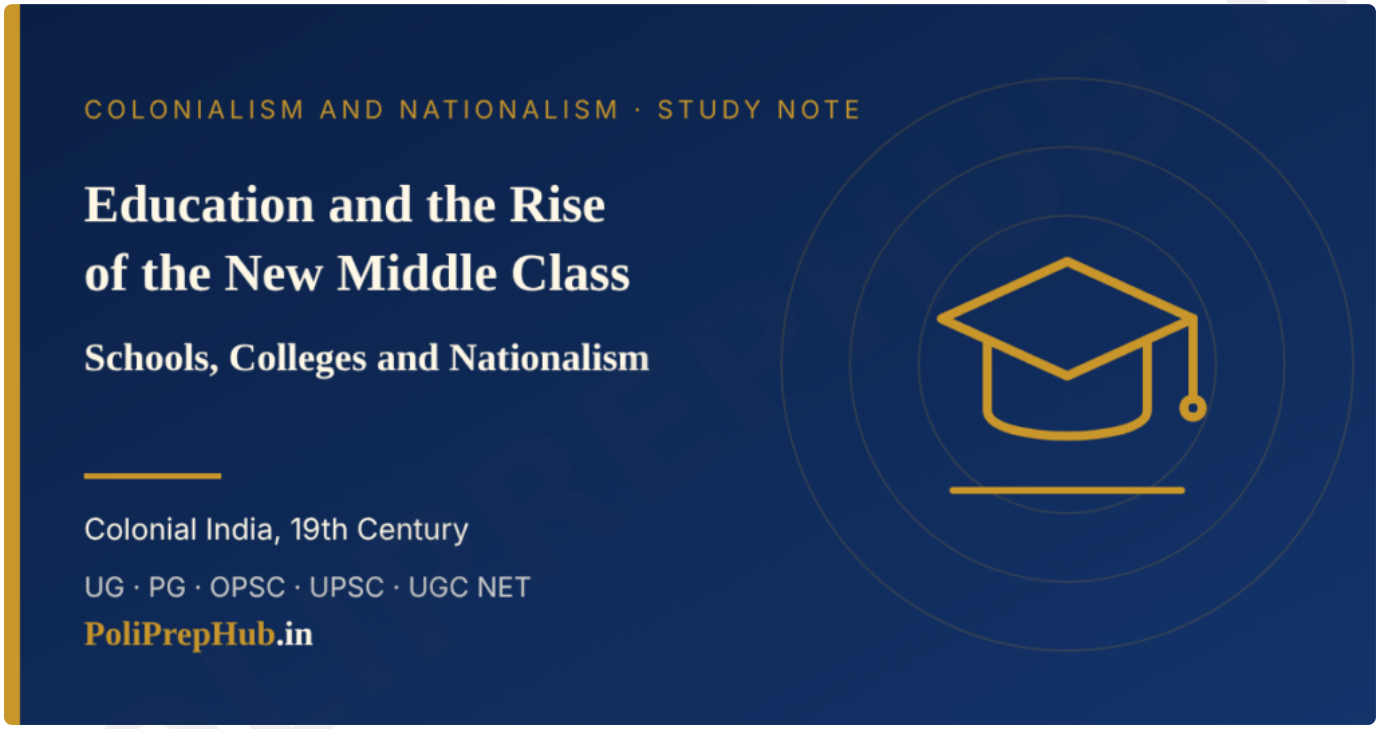
COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM IN INDIA

Education and the Rise of the New Middle Class in Colonial India

By **Brajabandhu Mahanta** • November 9, 2026 • 26 min read



Education was one of the most important means through which colonial rule changed Indian society. The British brought a system of schools, colleges and universities in English, which taught Western science, literature, law and history. The system was meant to serve the needs of the colonial administration, which required clerks, lawyers and officials, and to spread British ideas and values. Yet it had large and often unintended results. It created a new educated class, which learnt the ideas of liberty, equality and nationalism from European books and later turned them against colonial rule itself.

This class is called the new middle class. It consisted of lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists, clerks, government servants and other professionals, who lived in towns and depended on education and not on land or trade. It was small in number, but its influence was very great. It led the social and religious reform movements, formed the first political associations, founded the Indian National Congress in 1885 and supplied most of the leaders of the national movement for many decades. This note studies the development of colonial education policy, the formation and role of the new middle class, the features and limits of both, and the debate among historians on their meaning.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

Table of Contents

01 1. Education before colonial rule and early Company policy 4

02 2. Later policy landmarks and Indian initiatives 6

03 3. The rise and role of the new middle class 10

04 4. Characteristics, importance and limitations 13

05 5. Perspectives, critical analysis and scholars 17

06 6. Practice questions 19

07 7. Key takeaways and further reading 21

POLIPREPHUB.IN

1. Education before colonial rule and early Company policy

Indigenous education. Before British rule, education was given in village schools called *pathshalas* and *tols* for Hindus and in *maktabs* and *madrasas* for Muslims. Pathshalas taught reading, writing, and arithmetic in the local language, and tols and madrasas gave higher learning in Sanskrit and in Arabic and Persian. Teaching was oral and informal, and was supported by local people, landlords and rulers. Access was limited by caste, class and gender. The survey made by William Adam in Bengal and Bihar in 1835–38 found a large number of such schools, though the quality was often low and the education was mostly for upper castes.

Early efforts of the East India Company. In the first phase, the Company took little interest in education and mainly supported oriental learning, to win over the Indian elite and to train court officials.

- **Calcutta Madrasa (1781).** Warren Hastings founded it to teach Arabic and Persian and Islamic law.
- **Sanskrit College at Banaras (1791).** Jonathan Duncan founded it to study Hindu law and learning.
- **Fort William College (1800).** Lord Wellesley set it up to teach Company officials Indian languages and customs.
- **Missionaries and private efforts.** The Baptist missionaries at Serampore (William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward) started schools and Serampore College (1818), and Indians such as Ram Mohan Roy and the European David Hare supported the Hindu College at Calcutta in 1817, which taught English and Western subjects to the sons of the Bengali elite.
- **Charter Act of 1813.** It for the first time directed the Company to spend at least one lakh of rupees a year on education and on the revival of Indian literature and science, and allowed missionaries to work in India.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

The Orientalist–Anglicist controversy. After 1813, a dispute arose on the use of the money.

- **Orientalists.** Led by people such as H. T. Prinsep and H. H. Wilson in the General Committee of Public Instruction (1823), they wished to support education in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, and to teach modern subjects through these languages and the vernaculars.
- **Anglicists.** Led by Thomas Babington Macaulay, Charles Trevelyan and supported by Indian reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy, who in 1823 wrote to Lord Amherst for modern education, they argued that English education should be given, as it opened the way to modern knowledge.
- **Macaulay's Minute (2 February 1835).** Macaulay said that the money should be used for English education, and he described oriental literature as of little worth beside European learning. He wished to form a class of Indians who would be Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect, and who would act as interpreters between the rulers and the masses.
- **Bentinck's decision (7 March 1835).** Governor-General William Bentinck accepted this view, and declared that the funds would be used for English education. English replaced Persian as the language of the courts and administration in 1837.

Filtration theory. The government had little money, and so it held that education given to the upper classes would filter downwards to the masses. Lord Auckland's Minute of 1839 accepted this idea. It meant that mass education was neglected, and the new schools served mainly the higher castes and classes of the towns.

Year	Measure	Person	Main feature
1781	Calcutta Madrasa	Warren Hastings	Islamic learning
1791	Banaras Sanskrit College	Jonathan Duncan	Hindu learning
1800	Fort William College	Lord Wellesley	Training of officials

POLPREPHUB.IN

1813	Charter Act, education grant	British Parliament	Rs 1 lakh yearly for education
1835	Macaulay’s Minute; Bentinck’s resolution	Macaulay, Bentinck	English as medium of higher education
1837	English replaces Persian in courts	Colonial government	Demand for English education
1839	Auckland’s Minute	Lord Auckland	Downward filtration

2. Later policy landmarks and Indian initiatives

Year	Measure	Person or body	Main feature
1854	Wood’s Despatch	Charles Wood	Education departments, universities, grants-in-aid
1857	Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras	Colonial government	Examining universities
1882	Hunter Commission	William Hunter	Primary education to local bodies; private secondary schools
1902	Indian Universities Commission	Thomas Raleigh	Inquiry into universities
1904	Indian Universities Act	Lord Curzon	Greater government control
1911	Gokhale’s Elementary Education Bill	G. K. Gokhale	Compulsory primary education (rejected)
1917–19	Calcutta University Commission	Michael Sadler	Reform of university and secondary education
1929	Hartog Committee	Philip Hartog	Wastage and stagnation in primary education
1937	Wardha Scheme (Basic Education)	Gandhi, Zakir Husain	Education through craft in the mother tongue
1944	Sargent Report	John Sargent	Plan for national education system

POLIPREPHUB.IN

Thomason's scheme and the growth of vernacular education. James Thomason, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces (1843–53), started a system of village schools teaching in the vernacular, supported by a local education tax. He also encouraged the Thomason College of Civil Engineering at Roorkee (1847). His scheme was a model of mass education, but it did not spread widely.

Wood's Despatch (1854).

- **Background.** The Charter Act of 1853 led to the Court of Directors' despatch of 1854, drafted by Sir Charles Wood, President of the Board of Control. It is often called the "Magna Carta of English education in India", because it laid out a complete plan.
- **Main recommendations.** It said that the aim of education was to spread European knowledge, and that English should be the medium for higher education and the vernacular for primary education. It proposed a Department of Public Instruction in each province, universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras on the model of the University of London, a system of graded schools from primary to college, teacher training, the grants-in-aid system for private schools, and the support of female and vocational education.
- **Results.** The three universities were set up in 1857, and education departments began in each province. Grants-in-aid encouraged Indian and missionary effort, and there was a great increase in secondary schools and colleges. But the universities only examined and affiliated colleges, and did not teach themselves, and mass education was still neglected.

Hunter Commission (1882). Appointed by Lord Ripon and chaired by William Hunter, it reviewed the progress since 1854. It recommended that the government should leave secondary education to private effort and concentrate on primary education, which should be handed over to municipal and district boards. It also asked for more schools for girls and for Muslims. The result was a fast growth of private secondary schools and colleges, and the weakening of state support for primary education.

Curzon and the Universities Act (1904). Lord Curzon held the Simla Education Conference of 1901 and appointed the Raleigh Commission in 1902. The Indian Universities Act of 1904 gave universities power to teach, and increased the government's control over

POLIPREPHUB.IN

the Senate and the affiliation of colleges. Indian nationalists saw it as an attempt to control higher education and to check the growth of the educated class, and it was opposed. It is often linked with the partition of Bengal of 1905.

Gokhale’s bill and the Resolution of 1913. G. K. Gokhale moved a bill in 1911 for compulsory primary education, which was rejected by the Imperial Legislative Council. The government’s Resolution of 1913 accepted the policy of the spread of literacy but did not provide for compulsion.

Sadler Commission (1917–19). It examined Calcutta University and recommended a break between school and university stages, the creation of Intermediate colleges, residential and teaching universities and the setting up of a board of secondary education. After this, new universities were opened, such as those at Dacca (1921), Lucknow, Delhi and others.

Dyarchy and education (1919–37). Under the Government of India Act of 1919, education was transferred to Indian ministers in the provinces. Expansion was slow because of lack of money and the priority given to other matters. The Hartog Committee of 1929 found a large wastage and stagnation, with many children leaving school before reaching class four.

Wardha Scheme (1937). Gandhi proposed Basic Education, in which a seven-year course in the mother tongue was to be given around a productive craft such as spinning, to make schools self-supporting and to join work with learning. The Zakir Husain Committee prepared its plan. The Sargent Report of 1944 proposed a plan for a national system of education within forty years.

Technical, medical and legal education. Medical College at Calcutta (1835), Thomason College at Roorkee (1847), the law courses and later engineering colleges prepared Indians for the professions. The Indian Institute of Science at Bangalore (1909), made possible by a gift from Jamsetji Tata, was an important centre of research.

Indian initiatives and national education.

POLPREPHUB.IN

- **Reformers’ schools and colleges.** The Hindu College (1817), the Deccan Education Society (1884) and its Fergusson College at Poona (1885) founded by Tilak, Agarkar and others, the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic schools (1886), the Central Hindu College (1898) and the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (1875) were run by Indians.
- **National education movement.** During the Swadeshi movement, the National Council of Education was formed in 1906 in Bengal, and it set up the Bengal National College and later the Jadavpur University to give education under Indian control. Gurukul Kangri (1902), Visva-Bharati of Rabindranath Tagore (1921), Jamia Millia Islamia (1920), Banaras Hindu University (1916) and Gujarat Vidyapith (1920) were part of this effort.
- **Mass education.** Non-Cooperation leaders asked students to leave government schools and join national schools, though the number who did so was limited.

Education in Odisha. Education in Odisha began slowly. The Zilla School at Cuttack, started in the 1850s, and later the Ravenshaw College (from the 1860s, named after Commissioner T. E. Ravenshaw), became the main centres of higher education. Odisha’s districts were under Bengal, Bihar and Madras, and Odia was often neglected in schools and courts. Madhusudan Das, regarded as the first Odia graduate and the maker of modern Odisha, led the Utkal Sammilani from 1903 to unite the Odia-speaking areas and to protect Odia language and education. Writers such as Fakir Mohan Senapati and Radhanath Ray built modern Odia literature, and Gopabandhu Das started the Satyabadi school at Sakhigopal in 1909, which taught national ideals, service and open-air education. Odisha became a separate province in 1936, and Utkal University was founded in 1943.

Growth of literacy. The effect of education policy remained limited for the mass of the people. Literacy among Indians was less than 10 per cent for most of the early twentieth century, about 12 per cent in 1941, and about 18 per cent at the census of 1951, and among women it was much lower.

POLPREPHUB.IN

3. The rise and role of the new middle class

Meaning and formation. The new middle class was a social group that arose in the nineteenth century out of colonial education, the growth of government service, the professions and the cities. Its members did not depend on land or on traditional trade, but on knowledge, skill and salaried or professional work. They included lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers and professors, journalists, clerks and officials in the government, and some merchants and landlords who took up English education. The group was first large in the three presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, and later in other cities such as Poona, Allahabad, Lahore and Lucknow.

Social composition. The new middle class was drawn mostly from the groups that already had traditions of learning or of service to the state, and could afford English education. In Bengal, the *bhadralok* came from the upper castes of Brahmins, Kayasthas and Baidyas. In Maharashtra, the Chitpavan and other Brahmins, and the Prabhus, formed the main group. In Madras, the Tamil and Telugu Brahmins took the lead. The Parsis and some Gujarati groups in Bombay, and later the Khatris and Aroras in Punjab and the Kayasthas in the north, took to education early. Muslims, the lower castes and most women entered the group later and in smaller numbers. In Odisha, the group was small and grew slowly, and included Karans and Brahmins, among others.

Growth in numbers. The number of students in colleges and universities grew from the three universities of 1857. By the end of the century, there were thousands of graduates every year, and the number of people in the professions rose. The supply of educated people grew faster than the number of jobs, which led to educated unemployment and discontent by the early twentieth century.

Causes of the rise of the new middle class.

1. **English education.** English was the language of government, law and higher learning, and gave access to jobs and status, so it became the road to advancement for those who could take it up.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

2. **Growth of government service.** The colonial administration needed clerks, judges, revenue officers and teachers, and offered fixed salaries and respect, which attracted the educated.
3. **Spread of the legal profession.** The new courts, the Indian High Courts Act of 1861 and the Western model of law created a large demand for lawyers, who became the leading political figures. Many Congress leaders, including Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Motilal Nehru, were lawyers.
4. **Rise of cities and presidency towns.** Colonial trade and administration built large cities with new jobs and institutions, where the educated class could gather and exchange ideas.
5. **Decline of older sources of livelihood.** The fall of Indian courts and of crafts and the loss of patronage drove many from traditional occupations towards education and the professions.
6. **Press and printing.** The press created a public for new ideas and gave journalists and writers a livelihood and an influence.
7. **Medical and technical education.** Medical, engineering and teacher training colleges created the professionals of a modern society.
8. **Reform movements.** The socio-religious reform movements encouraged education and gave moral support to the new ways of life, including education for women.
9. **Economic changes.** The expansion of trade, banking and industry created business, clerical and managerial posts and opportunities for those with training.
10. **Association with the colonial state.** Many of the middle class took to government service and thus gained a stake in the system, which at first made them loyal, but later, when their hopes were disappointed, produced criticism.

Roles of the new middle class.

- **Social and religious reform.** The class gave leaders to the reform movements, from Ram Mohan Roy to Vidyasagar, Ranade and Dayananda, and used the press and associations to spread reforms, as in the campaigns on widow remarriage and women’s

POLPREPHUB.IN

education.

- **Political associations.** The class formed the first political bodies: the Landholders' Society (1837), the British Indian Association (1851), the Bombay Association (1852), the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (1870), the Indian Association (1876) of Surendranath Banerjea, the Madras Mahajana Sabha (1884) and the Bombay Presidency Association (1885). These raised petitions on taxes, civil service and Indian rights.
- **Press and public opinion.** Newspapers such as the *Hindu Patriot*, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *The Hindu* (1878), *Kesari* and *Mahratta* (1881) and *Bengalee* criticised the government. The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 was an attempt to control them, and its repeal in 1882 was a result of public protest.
- **Demands on the civil service and administration.** The class asked for the Indianisation of the Indian Civil Service. Satyendranath Tagore was the first Indian to enter the ICS in 1863, and the lowering of the entry age to 19 in 1876 was protested by Surendranath Banerjea. The agitation over the Ilbert Bill in 1883, in which the Europeans resisted a measure to allow Indian judges to try Europeans, showed the racial attitude of the rulers.
- **Economic nationalism.** Dadabhai Naoroji's theory of the "drain of wealth" in *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901), R. C. Dutt's *Economic History of India* (1901–03), and the writings of Ranade, G. V. Joshi and others criticised the colonial economy and showed that British rule had impoverished India.
- **Formation of the Indian National Congress (1885).** A. O. Hume, a retired civil servant, took the lead, with W. C. Bonnerjee as first president, but the real strength came from the educated middle-class leaders from the presidencies. The early Congress, called the period of the Moderates, asked for modest reforms through petitions and prayers.
- **Leadership of the national movement.** From the Moderates to the Extremists (Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lajpat Rai) and then the Gandhian age, the middle class provided the leaders, and the national movement spoke mostly in its language, though it widened its base over time.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

- **Cultural renaissance.** The class created modern literature in the Indian languages, such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s novels, Tagore’s works, Fakir Mohan Senapati in Odia and Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi, as well as new art and science, and made Indian history a field of study.
- **Development of Indian languages and print.** Modern prose, the novel, the newspaper and the school textbook shaped Indian languages and later regional identity movements, such as the Odia movement under Madhusudan Das.
- **Link between modernity and tradition.** Members of the class tried to join Western ideas with Indian traditions, and some, like Vivekananda and Tagore, tried to make a synthesis.

Changing attitude to colonial rule. At first, the new middle class admired British rule for bringing order, law and modern knowledge, and hoped that Britain would allow Indians a share in government. By the 1880s and 1890s, their hopes were disappointed by the Vernacular Press Act, the lowering of the ICS age, the Ilbert Bill episode and economic policy, and the group turned to a more critical politics. The partition of Bengal of 1905 and the Curzon policy brought a more radical phase, and so the educated middle class that colonial education had created became the main challenger of colonial rule.

4. Characteristics, importance and limitations

Characteristics of colonial education and the new middle class.

1. **Education in the service of the colonial state.** The main aim of the system was to train clerks and officials who could help to run the administration cheaply. The curriculum, examinations and degrees were designed with this in view, and so education was closely linked with jobs.
2. **English as the medium and the key to status.** English was the language of higher education, law and government, and knowledge of English gave rank and income. The vernaculars were given a lower place, and a gap grew between the English-educated and the rest.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

3. **Literary and bookish content.** The syllabus stressed literature, history, law and philosophy, with little place for science, technology and crafts for many decades. Students learnt by memory for examinations.
4. **Downward filtration and neglect of mass education.** Because the government wished to educate the upper classes first, primary education and the education of the poor were neglected, and literacy stayed very low.
5. **Urban and upper-caste bias.** Schools and colleges were in towns, and education was taken up first by upper castes and classes, which gave them a lead that lasted a long time.
6. **Growth of private and missionary effort.** The grants-in-aid system encouraged missionaries and Indians to open schools and colleges, and so a large part of education was run by private bodies.
7. **Control over universities.** The universities were examining bodies that affiliated colleges and followed the pattern laid down by the government, with the Act of 1904 increasing official control.
8. **A new class with a new outlook.** The educated middle class had its own ideas of rights, law, representation and nation, and set itself apart from both the older elite and the masses.
9. **Dependence on government service and professions.** The new class depended on salaried jobs and the professions, and so was sensitive to the policies on jobs, such as the lowering of the ICS age.
10. **Loyalty followed by criticism.** At first, the class was loyal to British rule, but as its hopes of a fair share of power were denied, it moved towards moderate and then radical criticism.
11. **Leadership of reform and nationalism.** The class provided leaders for both social reform and the political movement, and linked the two ideas of social change and national freedom.
12. **Regional variety.** The pace of growth differed from one region to another: Bengal, Bombay and Madras led, while Odisha, Assam and many princely states were far behind,

POLIPREPHUB.IN

and this was a cause of regional inequality.

Importance and contributions.

- **Spread of modern knowledge.** Colonial education introduced science, modern law, history and political ideas, and opened the door to modern thought.
- **Rise of nationalism.** The educated class learnt the ideas of liberty and self-government from European writers, and used them to challenge colonial rule. The Indian National Congress of 1885 was their creation.
- **Social and religious reform.** The class led the reform movements against sati, child marriage and caste, and created a public opinion in favour of change.
- **A modern press and public sphere.** Newspapers, associations and public meetings formed a public space where political and social questions could be debated.
- **Professional development.** Lawyers, doctors, engineers and teachers made new professions in India and gave service in many fields.
- **Growth of Indian languages and literature.** Print and the school system helped modern prose and literature to grow in Bengali, Marathi, Odia, Hindi and other languages.
- **Economic nationalism.** The critique of the drain of wealth by Naoroji, Dutt and others gave the national movement an economic basis.
- **Women’s education and opportunity.** Girls’ schools and colleges opened the way for women’s entry into the professions and public life.
- **Unity across regions.** The use of English, common institutions and shared experience gave the educated class from different regions a way to meet and to form an all-India outlook.
- **Institutions for the future.** Universities, colleges, libraries, laboratories and the civil service were the base of the educational and administrative system of independent India.

Limitations.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

- **Neglect of mass education.** The vast majority of Indians remained illiterate, and the government spent very little on primary education, so education reached only a small part of the population.
- **Education for jobs, not for life.** The system produced clerks and officials rather than scientists, technicians and craftsmen, and led to an excess of graduates without suitable jobs.
- **Educated unemployment.** By the early twentieth century, the supply of graduates was higher than the demand, and many educated youth were without work, which became a cause of unrest.
- **Cultural alienation.** English education set the educated apart from the masses and from their own traditions. Critics, including Gandhi and later writers, said that it created a class of imitators of the West.
- **Unequal access.** Girls, the lower castes, Muslims in some regions, tribals and the rural poor had little access to education, and so education reinforced older inequalities.
- **Narrow social base of the middle class.** The class was small, mostly upper-caste, male and urban, and often did not understand or act for the peasants and workers.
- **Dependence on colonial rule.** The class's rise rested on government jobs and colonial institutions, which made its early politics cautious and moderate, as in the period of petitions and prayers.
- **Neglect of science and technical education.** Technical and vocational education got very little attention, which slowed industrial and scientific growth.
- **Limited use of Indian languages.** Using English for higher studies made learning harder for most students and kept the vernaculars in a lower position.
- **Regional and communal imbalance.** Some regions and communities lagged behind, which later contributed to demands for separate representation and to regional inequalities.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

5. Perspectives, critical analysis and scholars

Perspectives on colonial education and the middle class.

Perspective	View	Representative writers
Colonial and liberal	Education as a civilising gift that spread reason and prepared Indians for self-rule	Macaulay, Charles Trevelyan, Charles Wood
Nationalist	Education as a double-edged tool: it helped awaken Indians, but was meant to serve the empire and neglected the masses	R. C. Dutt, Dadabhai Naoroji, Bipan Chandra
Cambridge	The educated class as a set of competing elites seeking jobs and power through caste and regional connections	Anil Seal, Judith Brown
Marxist	The new middle class as a product of colonial capitalism, with its interests shaping nationalism	A. R. Desai, R. P. Dutt
Colonial discourse and postcolonial	Education as an instrument of cultural power and as a way of making colonial subjects	Gauri Viswanathan, Sanjay Seth, Partha Chatterjee
Gandhian and cultural critique	English education produced cultural alienation and a mental slavery	M. K. Gandhi, Krishna Kumar
Social history	Education and the growth of middle class identities, caste and gender	B. B. Misra, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Sumit Sarkar

Critical analysis. The first question is the intention of colonial education. Macaulay's Minute and Wood's Despatch present it as a plan to spread knowledge, but historians such as Gauri Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest* (1989), argue that the teaching of English literature in India was a means of colonial control, for it taught Indians to accept British values as superior. Others, such as Tapan Raychaudhuri, in *Europe Reconsidered* (1988), show that Bengali intellectuals did not take Western ideas as they were, but questioned and used them for their own purposes. The best view is that the policy was designed to serve colonial needs, but Indians used it in their own ways.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

The second question is whether the middle class was a collaborator or a challenger. At first, it relied on British rule and used the language of loyalty. Historians of the Cambridge school, such as Anil Seal, in *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (1968), stress that the educated elites were mainly seeking jobs and positions, and that early nationalism was an outcome of the competition among them. Nationalist and Marxist writers stress instead the anti-colonial content of their ideas and the economic critique. The class combined both: it sought a share in power, and it built an ideology of freedom.

The third question is the social limits of the class. Its members came mainly from upper castes and towns, and Sumit Sarkar and others point out that it often spoke in the name of the nation while ignoring the peasants, workers and lower castes. The anti-caste movements, such as Phule's, criticised the education system for leaving out the masses, and asked for primary education for all. This criticism helps us to see that the educated class was not the whole nation.

The fourth question is the cultural effect. Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj* (1909), criticised English education as a means of enslaving the mind, and set against it the idea of education through craft and in the mother tongue, as in the Wardha scheme. Later writers such as Krishna Kumar, in *Political Agenda of Education* (1991), argue that colonial education set a pattern of examination-centred, textbook-based schooling that has lasted in independent India.

The fifth question is the effect of the policy on the growth of Indian languages and regional identity. The colonial system brought the printing press and school textbooks in the vernaculars, and these helped the rise of modern literature and of regional movements, as in the Odia movement under Madhusudan Das and Fakir Mohan Senapati. Education therefore shaped regional as well as national identities.

Taken together, education in colonial India was shaped by the needs of the colonial state, yet it created a new middle class that led social reform, formed the first political associations and the Congress, and challenged colonial rule on its own ground. Its limits lay in its neglect of mass education, its urban and upper-caste base and its cultural distance

POLIPREPHUB.IN

from most Indians.

Scholar	Work	Main contribution
Anil Seal	*The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (1968)	Study of educated elites and early nationalism
B. B. Misra	*The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times* (1961)	Standard history of the Indian middle classes
Gauri Viswanathan	*Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1989)	English literature as colonial control
Tapan Raychaudhuri	*Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (1988)	Bengali responses to Western ideas
Krishna Kumar	*Political Agenda of Education* (1991)	Colonial and national ideas in Indian education
Sanjay Seth	*Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (2007)	Western education and the making of the colonial subject
John McGuire	*The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadralok in Calcutta, 1857–1885* (1983)	Study of Calcutta's educated class
Aparna Basu	*Essays in the History of Indian Education* (1982)	Studies of education policy and national education
J. P. Naik and Syed Nurullah	*A History of Education in India during the British Period* (1943)	Standard history of education policy
Dharampal	*The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century* (1983)	Study of indigenous education before colonial rule

POLIPREPHUB.IN

6. Practice questions

Long questions (15–20 marks).

1. Discuss the development of colonial education policy from 1813 to 1854.

2. Examine the Orientalist–Anglicist controversy and the importance of Macaulay’s Minute of 1835.
3. Assess the significance of Wood’s Despatch of 1854 for education in India.
4. Discuss the factors responsible for the rise of the new middle class in colonial India.
5. Examine the role of the new middle class in social reform and the national movement.
6. “Colonial education created the class that later challenged colonial rule.” Discuss.
7. Critically evaluate the achievements and limitations of colonial education policy.
8. Discuss the national education movement and the efforts of Indians to build their own educational institutions.

Medium questions (10 marks).

1. Explain the downward filtration theory and its results.
2. What were the main recommendations of the Hunter Commission of 1882?
3. Discuss the Indian Universities Act of 1904 and the reaction of nationalists.
4. Explain the role of the press in the growth of the new middle class.
5. Discuss the early political associations of the educated middle class.
6. What was the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education?
7. Examine the contribution of Madhusudan Das and the Utkal Sammilani to education and identity in Odisha.
8. Why did educated unemployment become a problem in the early twentieth century?

Short notes (5 marks).

1. Charter Act of 1813 and education
2. Hindu College, Calcutta
3. Thomason’s scheme
4. Sadler Commission
5. Hartog Committee

POLIPREPHUB.IN

6. Bhadralok
7. Aligarh movement and education
8. Gokhale’s Elementary Education Bill, 1911

Very short and objective questions.

1. Who wrote the Minute of 1835 on education?
2. Which despatch is called the Magna Carta of English education in India?
3. In which year were the universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras established?
4. Who was the chairman of the Education Commission of 1882?
5. Which Viceroy was responsible for the Indian Universities Act of 1904?
6. Who founded the Fergusson College at Poona?
7. What was the educational plan proposed by Gandhi in 1937?
8. Who was the first Indian to enter the Indian Civil Service?
9. Who wrote *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*?
10. In which year did Utkal University begin?

Analytical and essay prompts.

1. Was colonial education an instrument of control or of liberation? Discuss with reference to Gauri Viswanathan and Tapan Raychaudhuri.
2. How far was the early Indian National Congress the product of the educated middle class? Discuss with reference to Anil Seal.
3. Examine the relation between English education, language and regional identity in Odisha.

7. Key takeaways and further reading

Key takeaways.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

- Colonial education began with support for oriental learning, and changed to English education after Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 and Wood’s Despatch of 1854.
- The system trained clerks and officials, followed the filtration theory, and neglected mass and technical education.
- It created a new middle class of lawyers, teachers, journalists, clerks and professionals, who formed the first political associations and the Indian National Congress.
- This class led social reform and the national movement, though its base was narrow and mostly urban and upper caste.
- Indian leaders built their own institutions and a national education movement, and the legacy of the colonial system shaped education in independent India.

Twenty books for further reading.

1. Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1968).
2. B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times* (Oxford University Press, 1961).
3. Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (Columbia University Press, 1989).
4. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (Oxford University Press, 1988).
5. Krishna Kumar, *Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas* (Sage, 1991).
6. Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of Colonial India* (Duke University Press, 2007).
7. John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadralok in Calcutta, 1857–1885* (Australian National University, 1983).
8. Aparna Basu, *Essays in the History of Indian Education* (Concept, 1982).

POLIPREPHUB.IN

9. J. P. Naik and Syed Nurullah, *A History of Education in India during the British Period* (Macmillan, 1943).
10. Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century* (Biblia Impex, 1983).
11. Suresh Chandra Ghosh, *The History of Education in Modern India, 1757–2012* (Orient BlackSwan, 2013).
12. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947* (Macmillan).
13. Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence* (Penguin).
14. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition* (Orient BlackSwan).
15. Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (Swan Sonnenschein, 1901).
16. R. C. Dutt, *The Economic History of India* (Kegan Paul, 1901–03).
17. Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India* (Papyrus, 1985).
18. M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1909).
19. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton University Press, 1993).
20. Biswamoy Pati, *Situating Social History: Orissa (1800–1997)* (Orient Longman, 2001).

Frequently asked questions.

1. What did Macaulay's Minute of 1835 say? It argued that the government's education funds should be spent on English education and Western learning, and not on Sanskrit and Arabic. It aimed to create a class of Indians, English in taste and opinion, who would help the British to rule.

2. Why is Wood's Despatch called the Magna Carta of English education in India? It was the first full plan for a national system of education, with education departments, universities, graded schools, grants-in-aid, teacher training and the support of vernacular and female education.

POLIPREPHUB.IN

3. Who formed the new middle class in India? Lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists, clerks and officials, who gained from English education and from jobs in government and the professions, and who were mostly upper-caste and urban.

4. How was the new middle class connected with the Indian National Congress? The early Congress leaders, such as W. C. Bonnerjee, Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjea and G. K. Gokhale, were professionals educated in English, and the Congress grew from the political associations of this class.

5. What was the downward filtration theory? It was the idea that education given to the upper classes would gradually spread to the masses. In practice, mass education was neglected for a long time.

6. What are the best-known national education institutions? Gurukul Kangri, the Bengal National College, Banaras Hindu University, Jamia Millia Islamia, Visva-Bharati and Gujarat Vidyapith, along with the Satyabadi school in Odisha.

Category: Colonialism and Nationalism in India

Tag: Education, New Middle Class

Source: https://poliprephub.in/colonialism-and-nationalism-in-india/education-and-the-rise-of-the-new-middle-class-in-colonial-india/

© PoliPrepHub · Generated on November 9, 2026

POLIPREPHUB.IN