

A Cultural Project of Control: The Foundation of Calcutta Madrasa and the Benares Sanskrit College in India

*Kültürel Bir Denetim Projesi: Hindistan'da Kalküta Medresesi ve Benares
Sanskrit Koleji'nin Kurulması*

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Abstract

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, British merchants made serious effort for gaining a share from the lucrative commercial activities in India with the help of the British East Indian Company. In the earliest times, the trade was the main activity of the Company's servants but due to the political condition of the subcontinent such as the breakdown of the Mughal authority and political struggle of the local powers, the Company began to appear as a political figure. Subsequently, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Company's servant played considerable role to protect the British presence in Indian subcontinent. Apart from the political and military measures, the first general-governor of Warren Hastings imposed the Orientalist education policy for producing elite corps to keep India as part of the Company. In this sense this paper investigate the Hastings policy in the light of the establishment of two important education centers.

Key words: The Orientalist education policy, Warren Hastings, the Calcutta Madrasa, the Benares Sanskrit College

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Introduction

The roots of the British presence in India can be traced back as early as the seventeenth century. The “Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies” received a royal charter from Queen Elizabeth I on December 31, 1600 and the royal charter was granted a monopoly on all direct sea-borne trade between England and Asia. As a trade company, the most important goal of the British East India Company was that taking share of the lucrative commercial activities. However by the middle of the eighteenth century, the role of the Company began to change and the political atmosphere was the most remarkable causes in this period. The slow breakdown of the Mughal Empire and the increasing French interest in India forced the Company to play an active role in India. Thus as a result of the British-French global competition, the British officers made serious effort to protect their interest and cease the rise of French influence in India.

Nevertheless military organizations, political power, or economic wealth was not only way for the consolidation of the British authority in India (Cohn: 1996: p. IX). Apart from these measures, the governor-general of Bengal, Warren Hastings¹, generated another manner for the strengthening of the British existence in India: education. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, with the special efforts of Hastings who established the Orientalist policy as the official policy of and unofficial mood of British India until the arrival of William Bentinck (1828-1835). (Zastoupil and Moir: 1999:2) As a result of this policy, two chief education centers were founded: Calcutta Madrasa and Benares Sanskrit College.

The Foundation of Calcutta Madrasa

According to the governor-general, in September 1780, a delegation of Calcutta Muslim presented petitions to him to establish a madrasa for the instruction of young Muslim and use his influence to convince a learned man, Muiz-ud-din to become the head of the

1 Warren Hastings (1732-1818) educated at Westminster School and joined the East India Company's civil service in Bengal, 1750.

madrassa. (Gabriel: 1979: 109) Upon the petition and the demands of considerable number of Muslim, Hastings decided to establish a madrassa in Calcutta under the direction of Muiz-ud-din. (Zastoupil and Moir: 1999: 2) He also personally purchased land in Calcutta and the madrassa was built like a traditional madrassa in India. To this end he requested a permanent endowment to the madrassa from the Court of Directors. (Gabriel: 1979: 110)

After the establishment of the Calcutta Madrassa under the control of the Maulavi Muiz-ud-din launched education with ninety students. As stated by Warren Hastings in his Minute in 1781, the students had come from as far away as Kashmir, Gujarat and Karnataka to attend this school. (Zastoupil and Moir: 1999:74) And a stipend was granted for the ninety pupils. The curriculum included natural philosophy, theology, law, religion, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, logic, rhetoric, and grammar and the course extended to seven years. (Nurullah and Naik (ed.):1951: 58) Interestingly, Warren Hasting adopted Dars-i Nizami² as the curriculum for the Calcutta Madrassa and the East India Company expected the staffs according to the standard of the curriculum. (Robinson: 2001: 32) In addition to the director of the madrassa, three under teachers were also appointed in the madrassa. The salary of the director was Rs. 450 per month and for under teachers the salary was Rs. 76 per month. (Gabriel: 1979: 110)

However, following the foundation of the madrassa, a disagreement appeared between the director of the madrassa and the government. Therefore the head of madrassa, Muiz-ud-din was dismissed. The director "was accused of mishandling Company funds, favoritisms in appointments, and losing control over students." (Cohn: 1996: 47) Upon the decision of the government and dismissal of the director, a regulation was imposed and a "Committee for the Superintendence of the Madrassa or Musalman College at Calcutta" was formed to supervise the administration of

2 Dars-i Nizami: the syllabus included the study of logic, philosophy, theology, tafsir, hadith, fiqh and it was a key component of instruction in the Madrassa until present times.

the college. (Gabriel: 1979: 112, Cohn: 1996: 47) After this date the organization of the Madrassa was entrusted the servants of the Company but the curriculum remained and continued in Islamic way. (Cohn: 1996: 47)

The Benares Sanskrit College

The foundation of the Sanskrit College in Benares was another important advancement in terms of the legitimization of the Orientalist Policy. The college was inaugurated by the initiative of Jonathan Duncan. (Kopf: 1969: 30) In this period Jonathan Duncan³ was the Resident at Benares. Like Warren Hastings, Jonathan Duncan explained the details of the foundation of the Sanskrit College in his letter to Earl Cornwallis⁴ dated 1st January 1792. The College was able to open early but due to military needs, the foundation was postponed. However with the initiative efforts of Jonathan Duncan, the College was opened in 28 October 1791. (Gabriel: 1979: 120) After a short time the opening of the College, Jonathan Duncan visited the College with Ali Ibrahim Khan, the Judge and Magistrate of the city and he presented some gift to the pundits such as khil'ats and robes of honour. Jonathan Duncan also determined the curriculum of the College, according to his syllabus: "Vedas, Ayurveda, Gandharvaveda (music, lyrics, and dramatics), Vyakaran (grammar), Jyotish (Astrology and astronomy), Nyaya, Prana (history, ethics, and heroic poetry) were the course. As the Calcutta Madrassa, the college granted the stipends for pundits. He was also organized the administration of the college and the Governor-General was to be the visitor of the college and the resident was to be Deputy Visitor.

3 Jonathan Duncan (1756-1811) joined the East India Company's civil service as a writer in Bengal, 1772; served in various capacities in the Bengal judicial, revenue and public branches before being appointed resident in Benares, 1787; temporarily seconded to Malabar as a commissioner for the territories ceded by Tipu Sultan, 1792; assumed office of governor of Bombay in 1795, which held till his death in 1811. While in Bengal he translated the Code of Judicial Regulations into Bengali (1783) and was a founder member of the Bengal Asiatic Society. See; Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (ed.), p. 338.

4 Earl Cornwallis governor-general in council of Fort William in Bengal.

A Cultural Project of Control: The Orientalist Education Policy

Taken together the foundation of Calcutta Madrassa and the Benares Sanskrit College was the significant improvement for the promotion of native education. Like the previous Turkish dynasties, especially like the Mughals, the British officers paid attention the educational matters in terms of traditional patronage system. Nevertheless analyzing Hastings' Minute and Duncan's letter, the advancement of education was not merely purpose of the British officers. It should be noted that in this period in England, there was no official education policy and the state was not responsible for education. The Church was still the most crucial structure controlling and organizing education matters. As indicated by Gauri Viswanathan *Masks of Conquest Literary Study and British Rule in India*;

“The amazingly young history of English literature as a subject of study (it is less than a hundred and fifty years old) is frequently noted, but less appreciated is the irony that English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long before it was institutionalized in the home country. As early as the 1820s, when the classical curriculum still reigned supreme in England despite the the strenuous efforts of some concerned critics to loosen its hold, English as the study of culture and not simply the study of language had already found a secure place in the British curriculum.”
(Gauri: 1998: 2-3)

Another outstanding point, in this period, the consolidation and the stability of British power in India could not be totally established. The Governor-General Warren Hastings was aware of the fragile bases of British power in India. Hastings had explained for Nathamel Smith, chairman of the Court of Directors, the relation of knowledge regarding the establishment of British rule in India. (Cohn: 1996: 45) According to him;

“Every accumulation of knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful

to the state...It attracts and conciliates distant affections; it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in the subjection; and it imprints on the hearts of the our countryman the sense of obligation and benevolence... Every insistence which brings their real character (i.e. that of the Indians) home to observations will impress us with a more generous sense of feeling for their natural rights, and teach us to estimate them by the measure of our own. But such instances can only be obtained in their writings: and these will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources which once yielded of wealth and power are lost remembrance." (Cohn: 1996: 45, Kopf: 1969: 18)

As stated above for the consolidation and stabilization of British power, not only political and military measures but also "accumulation of knowledge" and "social communication" were very critical instruments. Further the governor had some concerns about the attitudes of the Indian society against the British rule. As indicated above the British East Indian Company was not only 'trade company', it were also playing important role the relations of the local powers. In this sense, the political breakdown of the Mughal Empire especially after the death of Aurangzeb, the last "Great Mogul" in 1707, Afghan invasion in 1748, 1757 and 1760 paved the way for a chaotic atmosphere in India. (Metcalf: 1982: 25) For this reason, the rise of the British power caused the reaction of the Indian society. Consequently, this short quotation informs us regarding the political causes of the Orientalist policy.

In this sense the promotion of education and the upbringing officers from the Muslim and Hindu society through the Madrasa and the College was to play considerable role to conciliate them in the British raj, as stated by Hasting as follows:

"...to conciliate the Mohammedan of Calcutta...to qualify the sons of Mahomedan gentlemen for responsible and lucrative offices in the State, and the produce competent officers for Courts of Justice to which students of the Madrasa on the

production of certificates of qualifications were to be drafted as vacancies occurred..." (Nurullah and Naik (ed.): 1951: 56)

In this point, it should be remember that from the earliest conquest of the Muslims in eight century, Islam was one of the most important cornerstones of the Indian subcontinent. Following the first Arab conquest, the Turkish dynasties founded by Muslim-Turk Sultans in the early thirteenth century and until the end of the Mughal Empire in 1858 India was under the domination of these dynasties. So throughout centuries, Muslims was the leader of the subcontinent and they created Mughal India in terms of not only politically but also culturally. For this reasons their support was so fundamental for the British administration. As indicated by Hastings, *lucrative offices in the State* was one of the way for convince and conciliation the most influential part of the society.

On the other hand not only Warren Hastings, Jonathan Duncan had also some concerns about the future of British dominion in India. Before considering Duncan's statement, it should be clear that he was the one of the most supporters of Hastings and his policy. As stated by Duncan to protect British power in India the conciliation of the Hindu society was the significant solution;

"Two important advantages seemed derivable from such an Establishment, the first to the British name and nation, in its Tendency towards endearing our Government to the native Hindoos, by our exceeding in our attention toward them & their Systems, the Care shewn even by their own native Princes; for altho' Learning has ever been Cultivated at Benares, in numerous private Seminaries...The 2d principal advantage that may be derived from this Institutions will be felt in its effects, more immediately, by the natives, tho'not without being participated in by the British subjects, who are the rule over them, by preserving and disseminating a knowledge of the Hindoo Law, and proving a Nursery of future Doctors and Expounders thereof to assist the European Judge in the due regular, and uniform administration of its genuine Letter and Spirit to the body of the people." (Zastoupil and Moir (ed.): 1999: 78)

On the other hand the Orientalist policy consisted of another important feature: producing of English elite corps. As stated by David Kopf, *in British Orientalism and Bengal Renaissance*, Warren Hastings believed that the effective governance depended on the presence of an elite corps in India. (Evans: 2003: 48) To reconcile Indian society and secure the British power Hastings asserts that: "Indians were to be reconciled to Indians through a true understanding of Indian law, religion, and institutions." (Zastoupil and Moir (ed.): 1999: 4) To this end apart from the Calcutta Madrassa and the Sanskrit College, the Governor-General, Warren Hastings in 1784, founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The society was very significant for the creation of acculturated elite corps for the government posts. The studies on classical language and sacred literature of India increased the knowledge of the officers about the society. As a result, after a short period from the Minute, Warren Hastings actualized the Orientalist policy partly. (Kopf: 1969: 20) However in accordance with the Orientalist policy, another crucial advance was carried out by the successor of Warren Hastings, Governor-General Wellesley. In his period, the most important event was the foundation of Fort William College in 1800. The College was the first and most critical center, which trained the employees for the Company according to the provisions of the Policy. It should also be note that the graduates of the Fort William College were to become a vital part of the educational debate⁵ after 1813 and they were to play a considerable role in the British educational policy in India.

As mentioned above the foundation of the Calcutta Madrassa and the Sanskrit College was the result of Hasting's project to protect the British's presence and he supposed that the British were to

5 The educational debate: after a short time, the efforts of Warren Hastings for the Orientalist policy, some of the British East Company's servants was to rejected his policy. First Charles Grant and then Lord Macaulay made serious efforts against the Orientalist policy. Unlike the Hastings, they advocated that education in India should be in English. This disagreement was named as the Orientalist-Evangelist Controversy.

secure their power by trying to act like Indian rulers. (Zastoupil and Moir (ed.): 1999: 2) Which means not only traditional education but also old-fashioned administrative method of the Mughal Empire was the strategic factor for the legitimization of the British raj. In this sense, as stated above, Jonathan Duncan had visited Sanskrit College and in his visit, some gifts were presented to pundits such as khil'ats and robes of honour. As we know, in the Islamic tradition especially khil'ats has a special meaning in terms of a symbol of legitimization. In this sense, the gifts of Duncan, shows us how the Orientalist policy was a typical example of the previous rulers in India. With these gifts, the founder of the school stressed not only the new-owner of India but also the aims for following the traditional and classical education.

As we have sought to show, the foundation of the Calcutta Madrasa and the Sanskrit College were the most important sign of the Orientalist policy. However another key point in this policy completely purified the Hastings' project. During the earliest period of the Company, the Company's servants and the Court of Directors in London had supported missionary activities in India. What's more the Company's Charter of 1689⁶ was very crucial step for the introduction of missionary activities in India officially. But with the inauguration of the Orientalist policy, the relations of the Company and missionaries began to change due to the nature and purpose of Hastings' policy. It should be stress out that one of the most important aspect of the policy was an opponent either towards governmental or missionary agencies in India because the diffusion of missionary activities could be seen as subversive from Indian society. Therefore in this period the number of missionaries was only fifty and some missionaries was expelled from India due

6 A 'Charter Act' was an act to renew the British East India Company's Crown Charter, the document which defined the Company's rights, privileges, and responsibilities under British law. The Charter always renewed for twenty years, and the periodic renewals were the usual occasion for Parliamentary investigation and reform of the Company. For the story of Company see; C. H. Philips, *The East India Company: 1784-1834*, Manchester: Manchester University, Press, 1968.

their preaching such as John Chamberlain a Baptist missionary.
(Richter: 1908: 131)

Conclusion

In the last quarter of eighteenth century, the British East Indian Company started to emerge as political figure in India. The political atmosphere in India and the rise of the French power not only in India but also in world forced the British officers to protect the interest and presence. For this reason, apart from the political and military actions, the governor-general of Bengal, Warren Hastings imposed the Orientalist education policy to conciliate Indian society against the British domination. As a result of this policy, governor and his followers supported financially and officially the foundation of the education centers not only for Muslim but also Hindus. According to Hastings, the establishment of these paved the way for also producing elite corps, which were skillful on the Indian languages, culture and religion. To this end as a cultural project of control consisted of three main intentions: the first conciliation of both Hindu and Muslim society in British raj, secondly creating an elite corps who acculturated Indian institutions, laws and customs and finally the consolidation of British power and secure it in India.

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