

Chapter 7- Civilising the Native , Educating the Nation

Handout (Module 1/2)

Orientalist

Orientalists are people who have scholarly knowledge of the culture and languages of Asia. Orientalists were mainly the British administrator historians who believed in the greatness of the Indian culture and opined that the Indians should be educated in their native and local languages.

Jones and many other contemporary British officials took a keen interest in the ancient Indian law, philosophy, religion, politics, morality, arithmetic, medicine and other sciences. Henry Thomas Colebrooke and Nathaniel Halhed were some other like-minded British officials. Colebrooke, Halhed and Jones set up the Asiatic Society of Bengal and started a journal called Asiatick Researches.

What was the belief of those who attacked the Orientalists ?

But there were many other officials who were highly critical of the Orientalists. They said that the knowledge of the East was faulty and unscientific. They argued that it would be a futile exercise to promote the study of Arabic and Sanskrit language and literature.

James Mills was among the vociferous critics of Orientalism. He argued that the aim of education should be to teach what was useful and practical. He was in favour of making the Indians familiar with the scientific and technical advances that the West had made.

Thomas Babington Macaulay was another prominent critic of Orientalism. He thought that India was an uncivilized country which needed to be civilized. Macaulay emphasized the need to teach the English language.

Wood's Despatch

In 1854, the Court of Directors of the East India Company in London sent an educational despatch to the Governor General in India. It was issued by Charles Wood; the President of the Board of Control of the Company. It came to be known as Wood's Despatch.

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