

Good Subjects: Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, English and the Punjab University

Ali Qadir*

Abstract

Lord Macaulay's Minute of 1835 has often been analysed by colonial historians as indicating the type of 'native' to be created by the imperial education system in British India. However, there has been less analysis of the context of that Minute, for instance the actual form of its implementation through higher education by the Raj. This paper argues that the use of English as a medium of instruction constituted a seminal point in the policy to create 'good' subjects to the Crown. At the same time, it was a point of contestation in the discourse of higher education in British India, as demonstrated by imperial communications surrounding the formation of the Punjab University and by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, recalled today as the leader of an educational movement for Muslims in the Subcontinent and a prime agent in the creation of Pakistan. The Punjab University was the first institution of higher education where the use of the vernacular as medium of instruction was implemented in British India. Drawing upon an analysis of British Indian Educational Policies of 1904 and 1913, as well as communications around the Punjab University, this paper examines the context of the establishment of Punjab University to present some features underlying colonial higher education. Since a stated feature of the Crown's policies was to 'modernise' British India, an investigation in colonial higher education is necessarily an investigation into the construction of 'modernity' in Pakistan, a

* Research Fellow, Center for the Study of Gender & Culture, Lahore

largely un-questioned value today. Furthermore, some cultural implications of these features are elicited for Pakistan today, in a sense how the English were translated into Pakistan.

Introduction

Native American scholars and activists, Yvonne Dion-Buffalo, and, John Mohawk, point out three options before a race subjected to a Western civilisation: ‘They can become “good subjects” of the discourse, accepting the rules of law and morals without much question, they can be “bad subjects” arguing that they have been subjected to alien rules but always revolting within the precepts of those rules, or they can be “non-subjects”, acting and thinking around discourses far removed from and unintelligible to the West.¹ Clearly, colonial rule attempted to create ‘good subjects’, not only by directly exhorting subjection to the Crown but also through mechanisms of ‘normalisation’. While Michel Foucault never explored the construction of identity and ‘micrological’ power in a colonial context, as did Edward Said, the same approach to construction of identity may be followed here. However, there is little attention to excavating those mechanisms of normalisation in the context of Pakistan, beyond general statements of colonial influence.

Education, including higher education, was one such mechanism of normalisation to produce ‘good subjects’. As Progler points out, education by its very nature indicates allegiance not only to types of knowledge, but also to the norms underlying knowledge of a certain type.² Again, there is little explicit appreciation of how exactly higher education aimed to normalise subjects in the British Raj. A stated feature of the Crown’s policies was to ‘modernise’ British India. The creation of a certain type of modernity as the bar, or standard, against which normalcy would

1 Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John C. Mohawk, “Thoughts from an Autochthonous Centre: Post modernism and Cultural Studies”, *Akwe: Kon Journal*, Vol.9, No.4 (1992) pp.16.22, cited in Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, *The Miseducation of the West: How Schools and the Media Distort our Understanding of the Islamic World* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), p.139.

2 Josef Progler, ‘Norms and Allegiance in Muslim Education’, in Shirley R. Steinberg ed., *Multi/Intercultural Conversations: A Reader* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), pp.565-89.

be defined, was therefore a central policy impulse. Higher education served as one outlet of this impulse. The definition of the standard of modernity, and the means of normalising, are initially explored here.

This paper surveys some of the official imperial communication surrounding the creation of the Punjab University, as well as opinions of the leader of ‘modern’ Muslim education Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, to recognise some of the allegiance being constructed. In particular, the use of the English language as a constituent feature of normalisation is explored in the context of the Punjab University. The period of the 1860s and 70s, which this paper analyses, was a critically formative time for India, shortly after the British formally imposed colonial rule, and before the pattern of allegiances was largely crystallised and carried through till ‘Independence’ in 1947. At the same time, a stated objective of the Empire was to ‘modernise’ India, and therefore a more thorough appreciation of the norms being normalised is important in order to understand the type of ‘modernity’ accepted and promoted in Pakistan today, including through higher education. The history and historicity of modernity remain occluded today, one of the legacies of colonial modernity. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to begin unpacking the context of modernity in Pakistan to lead to a better understanding of the nature of that modernity. This is done here by examining an instance — the introduction of higher education in the vernacular at the Punjab University, to demonstrate how the Crown constructed and legitimised a certain type of modernity in history. The instance is opened up by a brief summary of the position of modern ‘native’ intellectuals, including the herald of modern education in India, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan. In this backdrop the institution of the University of the Punjab is reviewed from the language debate, where the argument was the question of whether the native subjects were colonised enough to continue moving toward Europeanisation without the medium of English.

The paper draws primarily on selections of official correspondence surrounding the establishment of the Punjab University (to which further material can be added subsequently). This communication is particularly significant for the historical

period: between Lord Macaulay's famous Minute on education in 1835 and the award of a charter to the Punjab University by the British government in 1882. Both events are part of a larger narrative of contest around the evolution of education, especially higher education, in India. This larger contest, in which the use of English as a medium of instruction was a key theme, was itself one aspect of the sweeping changes between these two dates. As the analysis below indicates, a major change in policy took place between British refusal to accept any language other than English for education in 1835 and chartering a vernacular university in 1882. Politically, these events mark a transition from governance by the Honourable East India Company to direct imperial rule by the British Crown. The significant event between these times was the War for Independence in 1857. This war, culminating in establishment of the British Raj, included not only numerous military engagements but also a decisive shift in the context of intellectual opinion among the British and the Indians, especially Indian Muslims. The leading reformer of Muslim education, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, was especially impacted by the war. In a famous booklet published in 1859, *Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*, Sir Sayyid analysed the causes of the war, rejecting claims of violent leadership by Muslim elite and blaming the Company for aggressive expansionism. It is apparently at this time that Sir Sayyid fully formulated his opinion, which he retained till his death in 1898, that Muslim rule had declined in the region and that the superior technology and power of the British would dominate for a long time to come. The only way for the Muslims, he felt, was to adapt their lost intellectual heritage as "good subjects" of British rule. It is also at this time that Sir Sayyid developed a passionate resolve for "modern" education as the pathway for the Muslim revival.³

The same period also saw parallel trends in Muslim higher education in India. Independent intellectuals like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as well as institutional reformers like Allama Shibli Naumani were also deeply affected by the war but formed opinions

3 For a comprehensive analysis of the formation, early years and vision of the college, see David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

contrary to Sir Sayyid's. Both agreed with the latter that education was important but demanded, to varying degrees, that this education be formulated more on Islamic lines than by adopting British norms. At the same time, a number of *ulama* reacted to the Raj by establishing "traditional" institutions of higher education, the most notable one being the *Darul 'Ulum* at Deoband established in 1860.⁴ These and other developments indicate that this was a formative period for Muslim higher education in India, when contesting visions were being evolved and institutionalised.⁵ The future of Muslim higher education, including in what was to become Pakistan, was shaped by this ideological dynamic. However, analysis into this interplay of visions and their subsequent impact is beyond the scope of this paper. The aim of this study is more modest: to focus on Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan and the formation of the Punjab University in the backdrop of a debate around the use of English as a medium of instruction in Indian higher education.

This debate was not whether cultural allegiance was owed to Britain in order to be "modern" – this was assumed – but whether such allegiance could be effective without English as a medium of instruction. The paper reviews the arguments around this topic, particularly by the 'good' native, Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, in this context when he points out that English language is an integral part of the English culture, which is what India aspires to. Through this one instance, of many, the paper examines the underlying basis of colonial higher education as one of cultural allegiance to (the) English. However, crucially, this allegiance was not to British higher education as such, but to the British as they projected higher education in the colonies. This double displacement, or lag, has established a certain form of modernity which persists in higher education, and hence society at large, in Pakistan today. Some

4 See Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1989).

5 The use of the term "traditional" is debatable, since the stated aims of both Nadwat and Deoband were also to "modernise" Muslim education in the aftermath of the 1857 war. However, the route to modernity was at issue. The construction of "tradition", the framework within which to adapt British norms and systems (if at all), and related elements of this discourse are of great import, but lie beyond the scope of this paper.

implications of this analysis for modernity are indicated at the end of the paper.

The *Allygurh* Association

The move to prove to the colonisers that the Indian Natives were, indeed, capable of appreciating the ‘vast material and moral benefits’ of European higher education began, ironically, with a ‘memorial’ in August, 1867 to the Viceroy and Governor General of India in Council from the British Indian Association of the North-Western Provinces, based at ‘Allygurh’.⁶ The memorial was co-signed by 10 members of the Association, including ‘Syud Ahmud’, and advocated for the British Government of India to establish a system of public education of the highest class, in which the arts, sciences and other branches of literature may be taught through the instrumentality of the vernacular...and that degrees now conferred on English students for proficiency in various departments of knowledge, be like-wise conferred on the students who successfully pass in the same subjects in the vernacular.

The argument was interesting in the narrative it adopted, beginning thus:

We confess that many of the arts and sciences, now prevalent in Asiatic countries whose history and subject-matter are embodied in the works of our most celebrated authors of old, and which have descended to us in their pristine condition, unchanged and un-improved, are founded on principles which the modern advancement of knowledge has proved to be false and erroneous... Hence it is an undisputable fact that a study of those sciences and those languages, which are only prevalent in Asia, is wholly insufficient for the advancement of our knowledge or the enlightenment of our minds, while it is no less certain a fact that to obtain these advantages there is no better way than to study the English language, and through it to gain access to the richest treasures of modern thought and knowledge. And it is for these reasons that we all agree in considering that the Government policy connected with the introduction and diffusion of the English language into this country has been well conceived and should be steadily carried out.⁷

6 Government of India, *Selections from Educational Records of the Government of India*, Vol.II. (Delhi: Government of India, 1963), pp.21-28.

7 *Ibid.*

From this apologetic beginning, the note proceeded to argue the case for introducing the spread of European sciences and literature to the ‘great majority ... [which] has received no enlightenment at all.’ In order to do this effectively, and bring ‘change for the better in the ideas and morals of the people,’ the case was then made for translating major works of Europe into ‘vernacular’ and thus diffusing them widely, including through higher education, for ‘the removal of the mists of error and ignorance from the minds of its [India’s] inhabitants.’ That this bore out the British rhetoric of civilising the East, and thereby legitimised both the project of colonisation of education and the ‘heavy debt of gratitude’ owed by the Natives to the colonisers, is clear throughout the missive. The communication also signalled the first organised and systematically presented attempt at internalizing, or indigenising, the process of modernisation/Westernisation.

Despite, or perhaps because, written by “good subjects of the Crown”, the note implicitly devalued the good subject: the English language. This attempt at introducing the vernacular into higher education threw the first barb at the cultural specificity of the discourse of Enlightenment Modernity to which the Association so fully subscribed. Predictably for the time, the Governor General flatly rejected the appeal, but encouraged the subjects to develop such models on their own in preparation for the time that the Empire could offer its support. In its response, the Government of India through the Secretary of the Home Department in a letter dated September 5, 1867, referred to the 1854 Despatch of the Court of directors of the East India Company, and pointed out that ‘it was stated [in the Despatch] that a knowledge of English, as a key to the literature of Europe, “will always be essential to those Natives of India who aspire to a high order of Education”.’⁸ The response went on to point out that ‘the object of University education is not merely or principally to secure a knowledge of certain specified books, but to prepare and fit the mind for the pursuit of knowledge in the wide sphere of European science and literature, and for some time to come this can probably be carried

8 *Ibid.*, pp.29-32.

on by Natives of India only through the medium of the English language.' The reply, firmly and unequivocally, placed the English language at the centre of Enlightened, and hence 'modern', higher education.

Apparently, the submission by the British Indian Association at Allygurh had challenged a principal basis for colonisation: cultural superiority. By making English the medium of higher instruction, the British had not only linked their culture indelibly with the idea of "modernity", but also ensured that very few could actually reach that level since, as the original memorial noted, a double time was needed to study the foreign language and then the knowledge that it opened up. A gap, a lag, had thus been created. At the level of *realpolitik* the loss of control that vernacular education implied was unprecedented, and the Government could only condone it if it could hand over control over with confidence, for example once enough books had been translated and teachers had been trained.

Colonised Enough?

Sir Sayyid did not refer to his signature on this letter subsequently. In fact, he spent the rest of his professional life fighting passionately for the use of English as a medium of higher instruction. However, the missive was capitalised upon by a momentum in the Punjab, of which the British Lieutenant-Governor was a key part. Building on the memorial from the 'Allygurh Association' and the Government of India's response, the Punjab Government submitted a petition to establish a University at Lahore that would serve the

strong desire ... on the part of a large number of the Chiefs, Nobles, and educated classes of this Province for the establishment of a system of education which shall give greater encouragement to the communication of knowledge through the medium of the Vernacular, to the development of a Vernacular literature, and to the study of Oriental classics ... a thorough acquaintance with the Vernacular shall be made a necessary condition for obtaining any degree, fellowship, or other honour.⁹

The Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab's letter was accompanied by the initiative of collecting almost a lakh of Rupees for the establishment of this institution. The central Government of India

9 *Ibid.*, pp.33-39.

shot back a length reply, politely but firmly rejecting the proposal with numerous reasons. Among other points, the Government of India pointed out that neither is the study of modern sciences and literature in the vernacular possible, nor are there enough materials or examiners, nor enough students enrolled. In point of fact, referring to the oldest university of India (directly under the control of the Governor General in Council) to which Punjab colleges submitted their students for examination, ‘The system of the Calcutta University is in some degree founded on the assumption that true knowledge, in its higher branches, can only be imparted to the people of India through the English language, and that the only literature that has any real value is that of Europe.’¹⁰

But the Punjab Government persisted. Letters were exchanged over the course of the next two years between the Secretaries of the Governments of Punjab and India which seem to indicate that this was an element in a political tussle between Punjab and the Centre, involving the Lieutenant-Governor and the Governor General respectively. However, the central arguments for the debate were the use of English as a medium of instruction and examination, in other words to what extent had the Natives absorbed Western culture. Were they proficient enough in the British and European culture to ensure that the education they would transmit in a vernacular system was sufficiently European, or not?

Finally, a compromise appears to have been reached, with the Government of India sanctioning a Lahore University College which could subsequently, if it demonstrated success, be transformed into a full-fledged University. In the interim, it was to remain attached to the Government Colleges at Lahore and Delhi, but English had to remain the medium of instruction: ‘It is also understood that the study of English shall not only form one of the most prominent features of the teaching in any of the schools or colleges which may be connected with the proposed institution, but that both teaching and examinations in subjects which cannot with advantage be carried on in the vernacular shall be conducted in English.’¹¹ The compromise was to the extent that some subjects

10 *Ibid.*, pp.39-44.

11 Letter from the Secretary to the Government of India to the Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, May 22, 1869 in *Ibid.*, pp.55-58.

could be taught in the vernacular but “nothing should be taught which should interfere with instruction in sound principles of mental and physical sciences, ... teaching which is to be afforded through the medium of the Vernacular languages shall be free even from the patent errors which prevail in ancient and in modern Vernacular literary and scientific works.” In a subsequent letter, the Lieutenant-Governor made it clear that ‘the large infusion of English officials interested in educational subjects will preserve the University from relapsing into those Oriental systems of teaching and modes of thought which would be prejudicial to the interests of high education.¹²

This was a seminal moment. Albeit reluctantly, the central Government not only ceded control to the Local Government of Punjab, but it also allowed a modicum of autonomy to the Natives for the first time in the production and reproduction of knowledge, for there were only a limited number of British to check all the books that would now be translated and the examinations that would now be submitted. In the backdrop of the previous section, it is relatively clear that the Lieutenant-Governor (and the literary associations, Chiefs and Nobles he was acting in partnership with) had no intentions of allowing the native subjects to develop their own culturally specific “modernity”, even if the Subjects were so inclined, for which there is no evidence. Rather, although the motivations may have been related to political manoeuvring, the intellectual debate was whether the Natives were colonised enough to carry forward their own, ongoing colonisation. The Punjab Government thought they were, the Central Government thought otherwise. As an example of the above, a letter from the Secretary of Punjab to the Secretary of India in July 1877 refers to the Lieutenant-Governor pointing out that the University of Calcutta is not really doing such a good job of engendering loyalty amongst its students, and is in fact producing ‘discontented and disloyal members of the community’, a situation which the proposed Punjab University would rectify. The aim for both remained the

12 *Ibid.*

same: ‘the enlistment on the side of liberalism and intelligence of the whole interests and sympathies of the people.’¹³

Eventually, after another flurry of letters and presumably meetings, the Lahore University College was transformed into the Punjab University, chartered in 1882, exactly one hundred years after Warren Hastings founded the Calcutta Madrassa. The University *did* provide degrees in the vernacular. And, as the central Government had warned, it remained long mired in serious questions as to its capability. Thus, the Honourable Sir Edward Clive Bayley, KCSI, Secretary to the Government of India during the protracted debate of opening a Punjab University, with 15 years in the educational Department and six years of experience as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, presented a strongly worded note of dissent in March 1877 to raising the status of the Punjab University College to the status of a University.¹⁴ Bayley not only condemned the growing provincial autonomy as a threat to the rule of the Empire, but also situated higher education as a key component of the centralised control of the Empire. Quoting Sir Henry Maine, ‘I venture, therefore, to express a hope that if this [Punjab] University be established, it will be compelled to give some new name to its grades, and will not be allowed to put into circulation coin, which I will not call base, but which for some time to come will be heavily alloyed, stamped with the same mint-mark as that issued by the Calcutta University.’¹⁵ As to the Punjab University’s pretensions to ‘civilise’ the Natives of Central Asia, Cabul and other countries beyond the borders of the Indian Empire, Bayley said that ‘rude, ignorant and fanatical, these races will long repel any educational influences from outside the border’, a situation presumably not so hopeless within India itself. Another conscientious objector to the proposal for a Punjab University, Sir Arthur Hobhouse asked in 1877, ‘what should prevent the Arts degrees from being conferred for purely Asiatic studies’, given the unthinkable danger that if ‘rich Native gentlemen will come

13 *Ibid.*, p.202.

14 *Ibid.*, pp.219-24.

15 *Ibid.*, p.222.

forward with money, that money is much more likely to be given for Asiatic than for European learning.¹⁶

The question, thus, was whether the natives had the colonial wherewithal to continue their cultural allegiance to the English (as ‘good’ subjects of the Crown) without the use of English (as a ‘good’ language for the allegiance). The agreement, finally, of the Central Government that this could be assumed is evident in the statements in the Educational Policies of 1904 and 1913. The Indian Educational Policy of 1904 concluded with an appeal for help:

Those labours have been undertaken in the hope that they will command the hearty support of the leaders of native thought and of the great body of workers in the field of Indian Education. On them the Governor General in Council relies to carry on and complete a task which the Government can do no more than begin.¹⁷

This conclusion was supported by various calls for native assistance, particularly financial, throughout the Policy’s educational roadmap. The same call was repeated throughout, and particularly at the conclusion of, the next Indian Education Policy in 1913, but with significant narrative difference:

The Governor General in Council trusts that the growing section of the Indian public which is interested in education will join in establishing, under the guidance and with the help of government, those quickening systems of education ... He appeals with confidence to wealthy citizens throughout India to give of their abundance to education ... there is a wide field and a noble opportunity for the exercise on modern lines of that charity and benevolence for which India has been renowned from ancient times.¹⁸

What led to this ‘confidence’ in 1913, from the ‘hope’ in 1904, that the ‘leaders of native thought’ would so wholeheartedly support British education in India? It may not stretch the record to state that between the founding of the Calcutta Madrassa in 1782 and 1913, the British had sufficient evidence as to the ability of

16 *Ibid.*, p.217.

17 Government of India, *Indian Educational Policy, Being a Resolution Issued by the Governor General in Council on the 11th March* (Calcutta: Government Printing Press, India, 1904), pp.50-51.

18 Government of India, *Indian Educational Policy 1913, Being a Resolution Issued by the Governor General in Council on 21st February* (Calcutta: Government Printing Press, India, 1913), p.47.

Natives to ‘carry on and complete’ the task of a hired education. The 15 years of remarkable communications that led to the establishment of Punjab University in Lahore bears this out. A brief glimpse at these is enough to underscore the point that the quest for modernity in the Indian Colony was, more or less, a quest for cultural allegiance to Britain.

Sayyid Ahmed and Cultural Allegiance

Members of the British Empire’s hierarchy were not the only ones to deprecate the nature and standing of the Punjab University. Almost from its beginning, it was criticised as not maintaining the standard of higher education, of undertaking no modern research and harming rather than helping the cause of higher education by relying on the vernacular. Thus, for instance, Sayyid Ahmed Khan, on the matter of opening a University in Allahabad for the North-Western Provinces, ‘the Punjab University is not even reckoned as one of any importance. Therefore, if we are to have a university like that of the Punjab, then I am sorry to say that I shall not agree to such a proposal.’¹⁹ He noted that, while having a university in Allahabad may be a positive step, if it did not employ English as a medium of instruction, it would be as pointless as the Punjab University.

Sayyid Ahmed’s, and others’, objection to Punjab University stemmed from more than its inability to uphold ‘standards’, which in any case could not be defined for the new type of vernacular education. The core of the objection was that there were proposals afoot, as manifested in the new Punjab University, that English not be kept as the medium of instruction. While not stated in this manner, the point was clearly that the teaching of English language opened the doors to culture for the Natives in a manner that the diffusion even of European sciences and literatures in the vernacular, could never do. It was, simply put, a matter of cultural allegiance. To the extent that British encouragement of oriental studies and vernacular education (which Sir Sayyid himself had proposed 18 years ago as a signatory to the missive from the British Indian Association of NWP) was present as a perceived deterrent to the true advancement of Natives of India: ‘I am sorry

19 *Ibid.*, 367.

to say that Government has not perhaps fully realized the strength of the feelings of the natives in thinking that the Government does not like to see them make progress in the study of European sciences and literature.' And, further, to the extent that a self-knowledge of India was only possible through the English language, Orientalism explicit and complete: 'Shall the degrees [of the proposed Allahabad University] be conditional on a critical knowledge of the language, literature and history of the Hindus and Arabs, such as can only be acquired by the under-graduates studying the European literature of the subject?'²⁰

Of course Sayyid Ahmed Khan must have recognised the cultural specificity of using English as a channel for modernisation. His son, Syed Mahmud,²¹ reviewed comprehensively the concerns surrounding the relationship between English for higher education and the imposition of Christianity in India.²² But this did not prevent Sir Sayyid from becoming a "good" Subject, ready to take on the colonisation of India with zeal through the good subject of English, and producing the young Indians foreseen by Sir Charles Trevelyan in 1838: 'Instead of regarding us with dislike, they [young men brought up in our seminaries] court our society, and look upon us as their natural protectors and benefactors: the summit of their ambition is to resemble us.'²³ For Sayyid Ahmed himself, 'the chief aim of this [Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh] is to reconcile the Muhammadans to the study of European sciences and literature

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- 20 Memorandum by E. White, Officiating Director of Public Instruction, North-Western Provinces and Oudh, February 9, 1885. Reproduced in *Ibid.*, pp.362-64.
- 21 Syed Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India, 1781 to 1893* (Aligarh: MAO College, 1895), pp. 111-18, 215-28.
- 22 That this was in fact the case is very obvious from a close reading of the records and resolutions gathered but not seen as such by Mahmood (1895, *ibid.*). The British themselves realised this, as evident in a long treatise in 1797 by the Rt. Honourable Charles Grant, an 'eminent' Director of the East India Company and a 'distinguished' Member of Parliament: 'The grand danger with which the objection alarms us, is that the communication of the Gospel and of European light, may probably be introductory of a popular form of government and the assertion of independence. Upon what grounds is it inferred, that these effects must follow in any case, especially in the most unlikely case of the Hindus?' In *Ibid.*, pp.215-28).
- 23 Sir Charles Trevelyan, *A Treatise on the Education of the People of India*. Extracts quoted in *Ibid.*, pp.231-39.

and to provide a high education for them. The chief object of its founders is to remove the prejudices which the Muhammadans have against the study of European sciences and literature.²⁴

There may be few better supports of this than the following 1838 advocacy for English education by Sir Charles Trevelyan, distinguished Member of the Indian Civil Service, Assistant Resident at Delhi, Member of the Supreme Council of India, Governor of the Presidency of Madras, and married to a sister of Lord Macaulay:

The Arabian or Muhammadan system is based on the exercise of power and the indulgence of passion. Pride, ambition, the love of rule, and of sensual enjoyment, are called in to the aid of religion ... The Hindu system, although less fierce and aggressive than the Muhammadan, is still more exclusive: all who are not Hindus are impure outcasts, fit only for the most degraded employments; and, of course, utterly disqualified for the duties of Government, which are reserved for the Military, under the guidance of the priestly caste ... Happily for us, those principles exist in their full force only in books written in difficult languages, and in the minds of a few learned men; and they are very faintly reflected in the feelings and opinions of the body of the people. But what will be thought of that plan of national education which would revive them and make them popular ...

The spirit of English literature, on the other hand, cannot but be favourable to the English connection. Familiarly acquainted with us by means of our literature, the Indian youth almost cease to regard us as foreigners. They speak of our great men with the same enthusiasm as we do. Educated in the same way, interested in the same objects, engaged in the same pursuits with ourselves, they become more English than Hindus, just as the Roman provincials became more Romans than Gauls or Italians ... Admitted behind the scenes, they become acquainted with the principles which guide our proceedings; ... and from violent opponents, or sullen conformists, they are converted into zealous and intelligent co-operators with us ... they cease to think of violent remedies, because they are convinced that there is no indisposition on our part to satisfy every real want of the country ... the summit of their ambition is, to resemble us ... In the re-establishment of the old native governments, they see only the destruction of their most cherished hopes, and a state of great personal insecurity for themselves.²⁵

This lengthy quote serves to demonstrate the “civilising” mission of colonial higher education in at least three dimensions.

24 Government of India, *Indian Educational Policy*, p.370.

25 *Ibid.*

First, education – especially higher education – is imagined not in isolation from but rather intimately related to both culture and political acceptance. The argument is that “natives” may be assimilated into English culture through the language and hence will accept imperial rule. Second, existing traditional systems of education are correlated closely with caricaturised representations of religious philosophy and thereby degraded. The argument is that the religious philosophy colours the education negatively and that, by contrast, English language opens the door to religiously “neutral” learning. Third, there is another implicit message: the process of cultural assimilation needs a strong intervention by the British in education through institutions that can promote it actively. In other words, the mere presence of and governance by the British is not sufficient.

The Punjab University proved, in its institution as well as the responses it evoked from senior central Government officers and “Natives” such as Sayyid Ahmed, that the purpose of higher education was to ease the transition of cultural invasion by the colonisers in India. That this was possible through the good subject of English was obvious from the dislocation of the vernacular-focused Punjab University. That it was possible through the whole-hearted and active support of good Subjects such as Sayyid Ahmed had not only been foreseen but was one of the aims of introducing modern higher education in the colony.

Equally importantly, the ‘lag’ was introduced at the very outset of the Punjab University, when its vernacular mode of high education was set apart from the Imperially controlled English education at the University of Calcutta in 1877. The Punjab University was a result of a debate on cultural allegiance within the Empire: did the colonised have the European wherewithal to rework a fully English system of instruction into their own culture – as represented by vernacular teaching and its concomitant subjects – not only becoming good Subjects in advance of the eventual physical decolonisation, but also suitably lagged in their relationship to Western modernity?

Translating the English

The institution of the Punjab University as a vehicle for the wide dissemination of Europeanisation highlighted the importance

attached to language, and hence culture. The question before the Crown was never whether English sciences and literature were more advanced – that was assumed – but whether the Natives had the European wherewithal to transmit that culture and allegiance to it in the vernacular. Hence, the argument of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab was in the same vein: yes, the Natives could be trusted to carry out their own Europeanisation more efficiently than the British now could. In other words, the argument was that allegiance had been built sufficiently to the extent that European culture could be disseminated by ‘good subjects’ such as Sir Sayyid.

The Crown relied fundamentally on a discourse of modernity to legitimise the mechanisms of normalisation. The construction of a notion of ‘modern’ as Western being done, the primary concern was to create the systems that could perpetuate that construction, a task amply undertaken through and beyond the creation of Pakistan.²⁶ The garb of modernity, and implicitly the value-in-itself ascribed to modernity, constituted one of the central features of colonisation. Its implications are felt in many dimensions in Pakistan today, over and above the structural form of higher education. It is, perhaps, possible to view the current polarisation of discourse and (violent) action in Pakistan through this construction of modernity: a facing off between the two elements of progressive/modern and reactionary/traditional. In other words, the construction of a certain type of modernity – associated uncritically and historically with Western European form and substance – led quite automatically to the conflation, or clumping together, of various reactions into its perceived opposite-traditionalism. Among Muslims many vehement opponents of the creation of a “modern” Pakistan were religious and feudal elements. The creation of a certain type of “modernity” crystallised and galvanised its other. This and related implications are opened up by such an interrogation of modernity, to no extent near completely covered here.

26 I have attempted to explore one instance of this dissemination in a separate paper:
Ali Qadir. “Hired Education: The Commission on National Education and Modernity in Pakistan” in *The International Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 6, No. 10, (2009), pp.105-14.

For now, it is important to highlight some aspects of this certain type of modernity. Among other features, what has been elicited above is a sense of a lag created through the normalising mechanisms of higher education. Such a lag, conceptually, is akin to the very notion of a translation, which is the same but never quite the same as an original text. There is not only the problem of translating words or concepts which have no equivalent in another language, but also conveying the idiomatic and cultural context the original author intended to convey or construct. In the sense pointed out by Derrida, there is always, already a lag between an original work and its translation. This lag, moreover, always ‘haunts’ both the original oeuvre and its translation as a supplement to the text.

What is true, then, for translation from English (such as into the ‘vernacular’ for the Punjab University textbooks) is true also for translation from the English. The Natives were, in short, the same but never quite the same as the English. Homi Bhabha has referred to this projected construction thus, ‘The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference.’²⁷ In other words, the lag literally created in the domain of higher education (translating existing works from English into the vernacular) was also created in the wider cultural domain of modernity.

A brief comparative review of the debates around higher education in Britain and India at the same time indicates the ‘articulation of forms of difference.’ The very terms of modernity in higher education were being hotly contested, debated and hermeneutically processed in the centre of the Empire (between the elite/classicist model of Oxford-Cambridge on the one hand and the mass/utilitarian model of London University, related to the massive socio-economic upheavals in the country).²⁸ However, these contested terms in Britain were not translated into the

27 H.K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p.67.

28 Robert Young, ‘The Idea of a Crestomathic University’, in R. Rand ed., *Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p.104.

colonial space. Or, rather, they were transposed tangentially, as it were: as decided, settled, uniform. A certain response to higher education was constructed, a responsibility to see higher education in a particular manner and no other. Dissent such as that institutionalised by Allama Shibli Naumani in his *Nadwat al' Ulema*, formed in breakaway reaction to Aligarh, was actively victimised, for instance by withholding of colonial government funds or not equating degrees for entry into coveted government jobs.²⁹ That moment, perhaps, inscribed the terms of a certain hermeneutic process in Pakistan, a contrary ellipse that equated Islamic ‘modernity’ with secular British utilitarianism, and ‘traditionalism’ with theological, indigenous classicism, the former to be officially promoted henceforth, the latter to remain a separated critique.

What emerges from a brief lateral comparison of British universities in Britain and in India in the same period, is that it was not just an allegiance to the West that British policy was attempting to create through higher education. Rather, it was the creation of a certain displacement in the colonies, a two-fold displacement; a double movement.

Allegiance

The first displacement was an allegiance to Western European colonial conceptions of the purpose of education, educational content and pedagogy, and institutional and policy frameworks. References abound regarding the achievements of Western Europe in comparison with those of India; the advanced state of certain types of sciences and scientific thinking, projected as useful, as opposed to other types of sciences and scientific thinking, projected as useless; and the need for development of ‘character’ and ‘morals’ to bring Indian Natives to the level of humanity enjoyed in Britain and Europe. As early as 1821, a Resolution to the management Committee of Benares College for Hindus stated that, ‘it is in the judgment of His Lordship [the Governor-General] in Council, a purpose of much deeper interest [than cultivation of Hindu literature] to seek every practicable means of effecting the gradual diffusion of European knowledge ... [so that they may] be

29 Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*, 1996.

imbued with a taste for the European literature and science'.³⁰ Charles Grant, in a bill, noted that, 'Invention seems wholly torpid among them [Hindus]; in a few things, they have improved by their intercourse with Europeans, of whose immense superiority they are at length convinced.'³¹

The 1835 Minute of Lord Macaulay is suffused with this sense of displacement, for instance in the debate surrounding instruction in English as opposed to the vernacular:

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them ... when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in India ...

The question now before us is simply whether ... we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own, whether ... we shall teach systems [of science] which, by universal confession, wherever they differ from Europe differ for the worse.³²

Lord Macaulay refers to the fact that at the Calcutta Madrassah for Muslims, all 77 students reading Arabic had to be paid by the British Government, totalling 500 rupees a month, while the students reading English paid a total of rupees 103 every month, indicating the 'undisputed fact, that we cannot find in all our vast empire, a single student who will let us teach him those [native] dialects, unless we pay him'. Apologetic acceptance was a feature of many leading Indian intellectual figures in a movement that consolidated the allegiance being created. For instance, in 1867 Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, admitted that,

30 H. Sharp, *Selections from Educational Records – Part I: 1781-1839*. (Calcutta: Government Printing Press, 1920). p.17. [Accessed from records of the Cabinet Division, Government of Pakistan, 2004, and available for reference in the library of the National College of Arts, Lahore].

31 *Ibid.*, p.85.

32 *Ibid.*, pp.109-12.

We confess that many of our arts and sciences... are founded on principles which the modern advancement of knowledge has proved to be false and erroneous ... Hence it is an indisputable fact that a study of those sciences and those languages, which are only prevalent in Asia, is wholly insufficient for the advancement of our knowledge or the enlightenment of our minds, while it is no less certain a fact that to obtain these advantages there is no better way than to study the English language, and through it to gain access to the richest treasures of modern thought and knowledge... we seek only the diffusion of the sciences and arts now prevalent in Europe, since we aim at nothing less than the universal spread of European enlightenment throughout all India.³³

Allegiance to a Projection

The displacement that was disseminated and accepted, one of a cultural difference between India and England, was a component in the allegiance constructed through the system of higher education. At the same time, a second movement of this displacement was the creation of a reliance on a projection of British conceptions of higher education and not on British higher education itself. Thus, the struggles for the place of higher education in society, the upheaval in English politics caused by growing prominence of the middle class, the Truth-Use nature of education, and so on, were kept away from the colonies to the extent that they do not even find mention in the policies, memorials, minutes, and reviews by English and Indian alike.³⁴

A double displacement in higher education in India, then, not only from higher education in Western Europe, but from a projection of that system. A lag was thus created and sustained between an ever-modern Western Europe in general and England in particular. A lag that relied on constructing modernity as inherently Western, from language to sciences to arts to institutional arrangements. A lag, furthermore, that always kept at bay the possibility of a colony ‘catching up’, by displacing the goal and relegating the search to an eternal one. By implication, also, a

33 J. P. Naik, ‘Memorial from the British Indian Association, North-Western Provinces, to the Viceroy and Governor-General of India in Council, 1867’ in J.P. Naik ed. *Selections from Educational Records of the Government of India, Volume II: Development of University Education 1860-87* (Delhi: Government of India, 1963), pp.21-8.

34 A similar interesting comparison may, perhaps, be made of the respective attitudes of British colonial civil servants in England and in India at the same time.

lag that condemned the coloniser to forever projecting uniformity, homogeneity, universality, and totalisation in his own heroic search for a goal that could never be reached: that of normalising and civilising natives. Albert Memmi pointed out that,

The bond between coloniser and colonised is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and recreates the two partners in colonization into coloniser and colonised. One is disfigured into an oppressor, a partial, unpatriotic and treacherous being, worrying only about his privileges and their defense; the other into an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who compromises by his defeat.³⁵

Similarly, Homi Bhabha noted that, ‘The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference’.³⁶ Elaborating on difference in the context of mimicry, Bhabha says, ‘colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ [emphasis original].³⁷ Higher education, in this context, may be seen as attempts to construct ‘authorized versions of otherness’. Relating mimicry to Lacan, Bhabha notes mimicry is like camouflage, that ‘differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically’.³⁸

Such an extension of the discourse of colonisation is useful to pursue in the context of higher education in India. What it can lead us to, here, is a conception of a camouflage, or metonym, of modernity constructed in India. In the historically specific sense pursued above, this was a tangential modernity in that it was situated in a direct relationship with and displacement from modernity. In other words, it forced the construction of an institution of higher education (or, the university) always and already, necessarily, on the edge of modernity as that was experienced in Western Europe. The primary tools of diffusion for this tangential modernity was the ‘good subject’ of English, and

35 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p.89.

36 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p.67.

37 *Ibid.*, p.86.

38 *Ibid.*, p.90.

the ‘good subjects’, or Natives, such as Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan who explicitly professed ‘modernity’.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to present and analyse some lesser-known official communication in British India regarding the use of English language for higher education in the colony. Firstly, there has been above an attempt to demonstrate that this issue was far from being an immediately settled one, as perhaps a cursory glance only at Lord Macaulay’s note would suggest. Rather, it was deeply contested within the British administration and among “native” intellectual leaders such as Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan.

Secondly, the paper also highlights the point that the debate surrounding the use of English was not only a linguistic or a technical one. Instead, the communications above (and others) bear out that the use of English language for higher education in colonial India was a policy matter regarding cultural assimilation. That is, the use of English as a medium of instruction was premised on cultural superiority of the British and aimed on the one hand to extract graduates from local knowledge systems and on the other hand to immerse them in English culture. This aim was political, targeting acceptance of colonial rule by the British.

Thirdly, the above substantiates the well-recognised observation that colonial policies were far from being homogenous affairs imposed by British colonists on an unwilling Indian population. Rather, the argument above has been that the British established an environment which decisively shaped and focussed Indian actions and agency. At least in the case of higher education, it is clear that British policy regarding the use of English for instruction partly shaped conceptions of “modern” and “traditional” education among Indian Muslims. The higher education sector itself was shaped in its present form, for instance in Pakistan, by the reactions to the Raj of Sir Sayyid and other “good subjects” as well as “traditionalists”. This is not to argue that all Indian (or even Muslim Indian) agency must be seen as a response to British impact, but rather that the implications of colonialism may be less direct and more diffused than is typically admitted in understanding present-day systems of education. In particular, one such implication is the construction of a certain

notion of “modernity” which emerged in some sense tangential to the “modernity” of the colonisers. This construction and its implications are areas for future consideration.

Fourthly, the analysis of these communications indicates that British colonisation was not only a military and economic endeavour but also a cultural one. The contestation around the use of English language, with its political arguments, highlights the link between politics and culture of colonialism. Consequently, de-colonisation must also be considered both politically and culturally, and the impact of colonial policies thus needs to be viewed in light of this nexus between culture and politics. This is particularly so for Pakistan, given the strong influence of Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan through the All-India Muslim Educational Movement, the formation of the All-India Muslim League and thence the Pakistan Movement. New research may be needed to better appreciate the cultural implications and continuities of colonialism through these movements and into Pakistan.

Finally, it may be pointed out that these arguments build on a selective slice of British colonial history of higher education, even among Muslims. Not only related developments (such as Shibli Naumani and the *Nadwat-ul-Ulama* or the *Dar-ul-Uloom* at Deoband) but also other communications around the topic have been omitted for lack of space. The huge corpus of Sir Sayyid's writings and correspondence as well as views of the first faculty members of the Lahore University College are all relevant and noteworthy records. One of the objectives of this paper has been to sketch a potential framework within which to read and incorporate these and other archives. It is hoped that inclusion of such data in future research may add to the framework and help provide additional nuance to the analysis of contemporary Pakistani institutions.