

Violence, Resistance and the Birth of a New Literature

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Abstract

When, on 2nd February 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay, then serving on the Supreme Council of India, presented his (in)famous ‘Minute on Indian Education’ to Lord Bentinck to argue for the adoption of English as the teaching medium in Indian institutions from sixth form onwards, he envisaged, through the fruition of his plan, the birth of a class of English-educated native people who would help to ‘lead’ the rest of the native population by their example and through their superiority; people who would be ‘Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’. To this end, he pushed for the teaching of the English language and its literature, methodically discouraged the teaching of both *bhasha* or indigenous Indian languages, such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, and classical languages, such as Sanskrit and Persian. Again and again, he emphasised the moral imperative of the English language and its literature. Yet, despite all his efforts to make the Indian intelligentsia the replica of the English one, his newly-implemented education programme also ended up producing perceptive individuals who utilised what they had learnt to voice out their rights and demands, through the medium that he had himself encouraged them to master.

An important venue where the immediate results of this new education system could be measured was Bengal, then both the administrative and commercial capital of India, where constant interaction between the white rulers and the ‘thousands of people (they) govern(ed)’ was constant and inevitable. As well as those anglicised and pro-British *babus* who saw in their newly-acquired English education the opportunity to ingratiate themselves even further with their colonial rulers, there also emerged a certain type of Bengali who began to wield the English language as a weapon with which to protest against the injustice of colonisation. And it is with the passive revolt initiated by the latter that the article is concerned.

Keywords: India, English language, Macaulay, Bengal, Bengal Renaissance, colonisation, freedom, Sepoy mutiny, nationalism, *chutnification*