

**Strictly for Private Use**

**Course Material**

**Department of English and Modern European Languages**

**Dr S M Mirza**

**B.A. (Hons.) English Semester-IV**

**Paper IV: Literary Criticism (B) (Code: Eng- 404)**

Unit-I: Michele Barrett : *'Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender'*\*

Unit-II: Frantz Fanon : Excerpts from *Black Skin, White Masks* (04 Hours)

Gauri Viswanathan : *'The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India'* *Oxford Literary Study*.\*

---

Dear Students, Hello.

I'm providing below course material for the topics mentioned above that I'm supposed to teach.

In case you have any doubts you can contact me on phone or send queries to my email.

All the best!

---

**Gauri Viswanathan : *'The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India'* *Oxford Literary Study*.\***

---

**Bionote**

Gauri Viswanathan is Class of 1933 Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University. She has published widely on education, religion, and culture; nineteenth-century British and colonial cultural studies; and the history of modern disciplines. She is the author of *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (Columbia, 1989); and *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, 1998), which won the Harry Levin Prize awarded by the American Comparative Literature Association.

---

**Publication**

Gauri Viswanathan: *The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India*, *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1/2, COLONIALISM & other essays (1987), pp. 2-26

Published in *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, by Gauri Viswanathan (1989)

---

## Overview

A classic work in postcolonial studies, *Masks of Conquest* describes the introduction of English studies in India under British rule and illuminates the discipline's transcontinental movements and derivations, showing that the origins of English studies are as diverse and diffuse as its future shape. In her new preface, Gauri Viswanathan argues forcefully that the curricular study of English can no longer be understood innocently of or inattentively to the imperial contexts in which the discipline first articulated its mission.

*The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India* reveals how English studies introduced in India under British rule came to be an effective form of political control abetting voluntary cultural assimilation. The author argues that the literary text functioned as a mirror of the ideal Englishman and became a mask of exploitation that camouflaged the material activities of the colonizing British government.

Gauri Viswanathan carefully studies the ways in which education was used to emphasize British sovereignty in colonial India, and the ways in which the education system imposed by the British continues to influence Indian canon today.

---

## Background, Notes, Analysis

### What is Colonial Education?

The process of colonization involves one nation or territory taking control of another nation or territory either through the use of force or by acquisition. As a byproduct of colonization, the colonizing nation implements its own form of schooling within their colonies. Two scholars on colonial education, Gail P. Kelly and Philip G. Altbach, define the process as an attempt “to assist in the consolidation of foreign rule” (1).

Colonizing governments realize that they gain strength not necessarily through physical control, but through mental control. This mental control is implemented through a central intellectual location, the school system, or what Louis Althusser would call an “ideological state apparatus.”

Colonial education strips the colonized people away from their indigenous learning structures and draws them toward the structures of the colonizers. Colonial education strips the colonized people away from their indigenous learning structures and draws them toward the structures of the colonizers.

Thomas B. Macaulay asserts his viewpoints about British India in an early nineteenth century speech. Macaulay insists that no reader of literature “could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” He continues, stating, “It is no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England.” The ultimate goal of colonial education is this: “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.” While all colonizers may not have shared Macaulay’s lack of respect for the existing systems of the colonized, they do share the idea that education is important in facilitating the assimilation process.

Often, the implementation of a new education system leaves those who are colonized with a limited sense of their past. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. Not only does colonial education eventually create a desire to disassociate with native heritage, but it affects the individual and the sense of self-confidence.

---

#### Work Cited

Macaulay, Thomas B. "Minute on Indian Education."

---

### **Analysis**

-In *The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India* Gauri Viswanathan provides a detailed account of the ideological motivations behind the introduction of English literary education in British India. She studies the shifts in the curriculum and relates such developments to debates over the objectives of English education both among the British administrators, as well as between missionaries and colonial officials.

- In his *Prison Notebooks* Antonio Gramsci argues that a class can exercise its power not merely by the use of military force but by an institutionalized system of moral and intellectual leadership that propogates certain ideas and beliefs. For Gramsci "cultural hegemony" is maintained through the consent of the dominated class which assures the intellectual and material supremacy of the ruling class. In *Masks of Conquest*, Gauri Viswanathan uses this Gramscian model of hegemony to analyze the relationship between British political and commercial interests and the establishment of English Literature as a discipline in India. *The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India* is structured on the framework of Gramsci model, providing an outline of and introduction to later detailed analyses of the subject.

- Viswanathan gives a detailed account of the various debates that influenced the introduction of English literary study in India. she minutely examines the stances of Utilitarians, Anglicists, and missionaries, and the vested interests involved in the stance taken by each.

- Viswanathan argues that British administrators introduced English literary study in India in the early nineteenth century to improve the moral knowledge of Indians. Since Britain professed a policy of religious neutrality, Christian teachings could not be used in India, unlike the situation in Britain. In order to resolve this dilemma, colonial officials prescribed English literature, infused with Christian imagery, for government schools.

- Initially, Indians studied English literature using poetical devices, such as rhyme, alliteration, and reduplication. However, missionaries decried such secular practices and insisted upon a more religious reading of English literature. As a result, between 1830s and the mid-1850s, government schools in India used English literature to explain Christian teachings and emphasize the higher levels of historical progress and moral standards of English society.

-By the end of the 1850s, however, British administrators again changed their stance and advocated a secular reading of English literature to encourage commercial and trade literacy. This reversal of stance occurred as British officials realized that a religious reading of English literature did not provide Indians with the proper knowledge to join the colonial administrative services.

- Besides, after the 1857 Indian revolt against foreign rule, British officials did not wish to adopt policies that might ignite fears of conversion among Hindus and Muslims.

- Viswanathan clearly states that the literary curriculum was introduced in India not to demonstrate the superiority of English culture but to "mask" the economic exploitation of the colonized. The propagation of English literature among the "natives," from the vigorous attempts by the secularized government schools to the more uneasy attempts by the Christian missionary schools, was ultimately carried out to ensure the authority of the British government and to create a stable state in which British mercantile and military interests could flourish.

- Viswanathan cleverly points out the inherent contradictions in the colonial project of creating an educated elite. Aside from developing a dissatisfied class that was denied any suitable employment opportunities, the literary curriculum highlighted the problems of a system which advocated both social control and social advancement.

- In the essay Viswanathan is careful not to oversimplify the British educational objectives in India. Using a variety of resources, she demonstrates the continual modification of the British educational goals which together created the discipline of English studies.

- She writes:

English literature made its inroads in India, albeit gradually and imperceptibly, with a crucial event in Indian educational history: the passing of the Charter Act of 1813. This act, which renewed the East India Company's charter for commercial operations in India, produced two major changes in Britain's role with respect to its Indian subjects: one was the assumption of a new responsibility towards native education, and the other was a relaxation of controls over missionary work in India.

- Her essay changes our way of studying British educational policies in India. Previously, scholars merely studied the transformative effects of British education to understand the historical function of educational policies. Viswanathan ably proves that it is necessary to examine the discourse and the context of the formulation of educational policies to better understand educational history.

- . Viswanathan, therefore, reinforces the fact that it is important to remember that educational systems and curriculum developments must be judged in historical perspective. Viswanathan's intellectual history of British educational practice in India is both a compelling account of the relationship between power and culture and an indictment of the exploitative tendencies of ruling class interests.

- Her essay changes our way of studying British educational policies in India. Previously, scholars merely studied the transformative effects of British education to understand the historical function of educational policies. Viswanathan ably proves that it is necessary to examine the discourse and the context of the formulation of educational policies to better understand educational history.

---

*Read and consider the following passages from 'The Beginnings of English Literary Study in*

**British India'**

This mission to revitalize Indian culture and learning and protect it from the oblivion to which foreign rule might doom it merged with the then current literary vogue of 'Orientalism' and formed the mainstay of that phase of British rule in India known as the 'Orientalist' phase. Orientalism was adopted as an official policy partly out of expediency and caution and partly out of an emergent political sense that an efficient Indian administration rested on an understanding of Indian culture. It grew out of the concern of Warren Hastings, governor-general from 1774 to 1785, that British administrators and merchants in India were not sufficiently responsive to Indian languages and Indian traditions. The distance between ruler and ruled was perceived to be so vast as to evoke the sentiment that 'we rule over them and traffic with them, but they do not understand our character, and we do not penetrate theirs. The consequence is that we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affections'.<sup>5</sup> Hastings' own administration was distinguished by a tolerance for the native customs and by a cultural empathy unusual for its time. Underlying Orientalism was a tacit policy of what one may call reverse acculturation, whose goal was to train British administrators and civil servants to fit into the culture of the ruled and to assimilate them thoroughly into the native way of life. The great scholars produced by eighteenth-century Orientalism — William Jones, Henry T. Colebrooke, Jonathan Halhed, Charles Wilkins — entirely owed their reputations to a happy coincidence of pioneering achievement and official patronage. Their exhaustive research had ambitious goals, ranging from the initiation of the West to the vast literary treasures of the East to the reintroduction of the natives to their own cultural heritage, represented by the Orientalists as being buried under the debris of foreign conquest and depredations.

Yet no matter how benign and productive its general influence might appear, as David Kopf among other historians has insisted to the point of urging it as fact, there is no denying that behind

*6 Oxford Literary Review*

Orientalism's exhaustive inquiries, its immense scholarly achievements and discoveries, lay interests that were far from scholarly. Whether later Orientalists were willing to acknowledge it or not. Warren Hastings clearly understood the driving force of Orientalism to be the doctrine that 'every accumulation of knowledge, and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity'.<sup>6</sup> Hastings' argument of course is an overt and unabashed rationalization of 'the dialectic of information and control' that Edward Said has characterized as the basis of academic Orientalism, though even Said's stridency does not quite prepare one for the programmatic assurance with which Hastings promotes his cultural ideology. Aside from his obviously questionable assumptions about the 'right of conquest', what is most striking about this statement is the intellectual leap it makes from knowledge which is useful to the state to knowledge which becomes the gain of humanity. The relationship of power existing between England and India is certainly one condition

allowing for such a leap, but more to the point is the role of the state in mediating between the worlds of scholarship and politics. For Hastings, it was not merely that the state had a vital interest in the production of knowledge about those whom it rules; more importantly, it also had a role in actively processing and then selectively delivering that knowledge up to mankind in the guise of 'objective knowledge'.

A peculiar logic runs through the argument and it has to be monitored closely if one is to appreciate Hastings' keen understanding of the powerful reinforcing effect of Orientalist scholarship upon state authority. The acquisition of knowledge about those whom it governs is clearly perceived to be of vital importance to the state for purposes of domination and control. But the fact that this knowledge eventually passes into the realm of 'humanistic' scholarship (again through the agency of the state) confers a certain legitimacy upon the quest and, by extension, upon the state which promotes it. In other words, even though 'social communication' may have its roots in the impulse to enforce domination over the natives, as Hastings has no hesitation in acknowledging, its political motivation is nullified by virtue of the fixed body of knowledge it produces and makes available to the rest of mankind. The disinterestedness and objectivity which this now shared and therefore 'true' knowledge purports to represent help to confirm the state's 'right of conquest', which duly acquires the status of the *sine qua non* of knowledge-production. What therefore appears on the surface as a rhetorical leap is in fact the carefully controlled effect of a self-fortifying dialectic.

---

---