

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

History Optional Social and Cultural Developments

Paper 2 · Unit 5

Education, the press and the making of an Indian public: 40 marks in four years, and the machinery through which nationalism became possible.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

Social and cultural developments: the state of indigenous education, its dislocation; orientalist-anglicist controversy; the introduction of western education in India; the rise of press, literature and public opinion; the rise of modern vernacular literature; progress of science; the Christian missionary activities in India.

Indigenous education and its dislocation

Named first in the syllabus and almost always skipped. The pre-colonial system was larger than colonial writers admitted, and its collapse is a documented process.

- Pre-colonial education ran through **pathshalas** for Hindu children, **maktabs and madrasas** for Muslim, **tols** for Sanskrit learning in Bengal and **agraharas** in the south.
- **William Adam's reports** on Bengal and Bihar in the 1830s counted roughly one hundred thousand indigenous schools, and although his estimate has been questioned, the order of magnitude indicates a substantial network.
- **Thomas Munro's survey** in Madras and **Leitner's** later work on Punjab produced comparable findings, and Leitner's title, *History of Indigenous Education in the Punjab since Annexation and in 1882*, states his argument in itself.
- Funding came from **rent-free land grants, village contributions and endowments**, and the critical mechanism of collapse was the **resumption of rent-free tenures** under colonial revenue settlements.
- Once the land that supported a school was assessed for revenue, the school lost its endowment, so dislocation followed from revenue policy rather than from any educational decision.
- **Curriculum** in these institutions was practical for the pathshala, covering accounts, letter writing and local arithmetic, and scholarly in the tol and madrasa.
- Access was **restricted by caste and gender**, with the lowest castes largely excluded and girls' education rare, so the indigenous system should not be romanticised.
- **Dharampal's** *The Beautiful Tree* of 1983 collected the colonial survey evidence and made the argument for the system's scale, and it is the standard citation even where its conclusions are contested.

The Orientalist-Anglicist controversy

Asked directly in 2026 as a turning point in shaping colonial educational policy. Both camps agreed on more than they disagreed about, and saying so is the mark of a good answer.

- **Charter Act of 1813** allocated one lakh rupees annually for the revival of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and the ambiguity of that wording produced the dispute.
- **Orientalists**, including **H. T. Prinsep and H. H. Wilson**, argued for funding Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic learning, and their position grew from the Asiatic Society tradition of William Jones and Warren Hastings.
- **Anglicists**, led by **Charles Trevelyan** and given decisive voice by **Macaulay**, argued for English as the medium and European knowledge as the content.

- **Macaulay's Minute of 2 February 1835** is the founding document of the Anglicist position, containing the notorious claim that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.
- Macaulay's stated aim was to form a class Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect, which is the **downward filtration** theory in its clearest expression.
- **Bentinck's resolution of 7 March 1835** accepted the Anglicist position and directed that funds be spent on English education, though existing Oriental institutions were not closed.
- What both sides shared is the point most scripts miss: both assumed **state-directed education for a small elite**, neither proposed mass schooling, and neither consulted Indians.
- **Indian opinion was itself divided**, and **Rammohan Roy's letter to Amherst of 1823** argued against a proposed Sanskrit college and for European science and mathematics, so the demand for English came partly from Indians.
- For the 2026 question, the turning point framing is defensible: 1835 fixed English as the medium, oriented education towards employment in the colonial administration, and created the class that would later lead the national movement against it.

The building of the colonial education system

Policy after 1835 developed through three landmark documents. Know each by name, date and principal provision.

- **Wood's Despatch of 1854**, drafted under Charles Wood and often called the Magna Carta of Indian education, created **departments of public instruction** in each province and a **grant-in-aid system** for private schools.
- It also directed the founding of **universities at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras**, established in 1857, modelled on the University of London as examining rather than teaching bodies.
- Crucially, the Despatch **abandoned downward filtration** in favour of mass education from primary upwards, and equally crucially it was never adequately funded, so the commitment remained rhetorical.
- **Hunter Commission of 1882** under Ripon reviewed progress, emphasised primary and secondary education, and encouraged private and missionary enterprise through grants.
- **Indian Universities Act of 1904** under Curzon tightened government control over universities, reduced the number of affiliated colleges and raised standards, and it was widely read as a political measure against the nationalist-minded educated class.
- **Sadler Commission of 1917** recommended reform of secondary education and the creation of teaching universities, and its report shaped the interwar expansion.
- **Growth figures** matter: literacy stood at roughly six per cent in 1901 and around sixteen per cent at independence, so the system reached a small fraction of the population across a century.
- **Technical and scientific education** lagged badly, with engineering colleges few and industrial research minimal until the Indian Institute of Science was founded at Bangalore in 1909 with Tata funding.
- **Women's education** advanced slowly through missionary and reformer initiative, with Bethune School founded in 1849 and the first Indian women graduating from Calcutta University in 1883.

The press and public opinion

Asked in 2023 on the press as the chief instrument of political propaganda and nationalist ideology, and in 2025 on the tug of war between press freedom and control.

- **Bengal Gazette** of James Augustus Hicky, started in 1780, was the first newspaper in India, and its attacks on Hastings led to its suppression, which set the pattern immediately.
- **Indian-owned press** began with Rammohan Roy's **Sambad Kaumudi** in Bengali from 1821 and **Mirat-ul-Akhbar** in Persian from 1822, and Roy campaigned against the Press Regulation of 1823.
- **Metcalf's Act of 1835** liberalised the press substantially and earned him the title liberator of the Indian press, showing that the colonial state's position genuinely oscillated.
- **Vernacular Press Act of 1878** under Lytton is the crucial measure, since it applied only to Indian language newspapers and not to English ones, which made the discrimination explicit and politically explosive.
- **Amrita Bazar Patrika** famously converted overnight to English publication to escape the Act, which is the most cited instance of the law's absurdity and was repealed under Ripon in 1882.
- Major papers to name are the **Hindoo Patriot** under Harish Chandra Mukherjee, **The Hindu** from 1878, **Kesari and Maratha** under Tilak, **Amrita Bazar Patrika**, **Bengalee** under Surendranath Banerjee and **Al-Hilal** under Azad.
- **Sedition prosecutions** shaped the movement, with Tilak tried in 1897 and 1908 and sentenced to six years' transportation, and his defence that his writing was legitimate criticism became a political event in itself.
- The 2025 question about the tug of war is answered by that oscillation: **Hastings suppressing, Metcalfe liberalising, Lytton restricting, Ripon repealing, and the 1908 and 1910 Acts restricting again**, each swing reflecting whether the state felt secure.
- For the 2023 question, the press was indeed the chief instrument, since it created a **simultaneous national conversation** that no earlier technology allowed, connected provincial grievances into an all-India argument, and trained a generation of leaders who were editors first.

Modern vernacular literature

Named in the syllabus and directly connected to the press, since the newspaper and the novel arrived together and were often produced by the same people.

- **Print** was the enabling technology, and the establishment of vernacular presses from Serampore onwards made a reading public possible for the first time.
- **Bengali** led the way, with **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's** *Durgeshnandini* of 1865 as the first major Bengali novel and **Anandamath** of 1882 containing *Vande Mataram*.
- **Rabindranath Tagore** won the Nobel Prize in 1913 for *Gitanjali*, and his work spans poetry, novel, song, drama and educational thought at Santiniketan.
- **Hindi** developed through **Bharatendu Harishchandra**, regarded as the father of modern Hindi literature, and later **Premchand**, whose *Godan* and *Rangbhoomi* treat rural poverty and caste with unusual directness.

- **Urdu** produced **Ghalib** in the older tradition, and then the reformist novel with **Nazir Ahmad**, the satire of **Akbar Allahabadi**, and the poetry of **Iqbal** whose *Sare Jahan Se Achha* and later Persian work moved from Indian nationalism to Islamic universalism.
- **Marathi** through Vishnushastri Chiplunkar and Hari Narayan Apte, **Tamil** through Subramania Bharati, **Malayalam** through Chandu Menon's *Indulekha*, and **Telugu** through Gurajada Apparao complete the picture.
- **Themes** recur across languages: social reform particularly on widow remarriage and child marriage, the critique of colonial rule, the recovery of a heroic past, and the tension between tradition and modernity.
- **Social reform novels** were often written by men about women's suffering, and the exceptions, including Rashsundari Devi's autobiography **Amar Jiban** of 1876, the first full autobiography in Bengali by a woman, deserve mention.
- **Political effect** was substantial, since *Vande Mataram* became the movement's anthem and literary societies functioned as political spaces when overt organisation was restricted.

Christian missionary activity

Named explicitly in the syllabus. Missionaries were simultaneously agents of colonial culture and, unintentionally, of Indian self-assertion.

- **Charter Act of 1813** opened India to missionaries, whom the Company had previously discouraged for fear of provoking unrest.
- **Serampore trio** of William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, working in Danish territory before 1813, established a press, translated the Bible into dozens of Indian languages and published the first Bengali newspaper.
- Their linguistic work had consequences far beyond religion, since the standardisation of Bengali prose and the printing of vernacular grammars and dictionaries served Indian literature directly.
- **Education** was the principal missionary activity, with **Alexander Duff's** General Assembly's Institution in Calcutta from 1830 combining English education with Christian instruction and attracting large numbers of Hindu students.
- **Medical work** through mission hospitals and dispensaries, and later medical education for women, was a substantial and less contested contribution.
- **Conversion** succeeded chiefly among **tribal and low-caste groups**, in Chotanagpur, the northeast and among Dalits in Punjab and the south, precisely because those groups had least to lose in social status.
- **Mass movements** among Dalits from the 1870s produced the largest conversions, and they were motivated by the search for social dignity as much as by theology.
- **Reaction** was substantial and consequential, since missionary criticism of Hindu practice provoked the defensive reform of the Brahmo, Arya and Ramakrishna movements, and the shuddhi campaign was a direct answer to conversion.
- **Political effect** ran both ways, since missionary criticism of caste supplied ammunition to Indian reformers while missionary association with the colonial state made Christianity politically suspect.

The progress of science

Named in the syllabus and rarely prepared. Colonial science and Indian science are distinct stories that intersect.

- **Colonial science** was surveying and cataloguing first, through the **Great Trigonometrical Survey** from 1802, the Geological Survey from 1851, the Botanical and Zoological Surveys and the Archaeological Survey under Cunningham from 1861.
- Its purpose was administrative and extractive, mapping territory, locating minerals and classifying populations, and Indians were largely employed as subordinates in it.
- **Radhanath Sikdar**, the Indian mathematician who computed the height of Peak XV and identified it as the world's highest, is the standard example of that subordinate but skilled participation.
- **Indian scientific achievement** emerged despite institutional obstacles, and **Jagadish Chandra Bose** did pioneering work on radio waves and plant physiology, presenting to the Royal Institution in 1897.
- **Prafulla Chandra Ray** founded Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works in 1901 and wrote *A History of Hindu Chemistry*, combining scientific research with swadeshi enterprise.
- **C. V. Raman** received the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1930 for the Raman effect, the first Asian to win in a science category, and **Meghnad Saha** and **S. N. Bose** made fundamental contributions in astrophysics and quantum statistics.
- **Institutional development** came late, with the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science founded by Mahendralal Sircar in 1876, the Indian Institute of Science in 1909 and the Indian Science Congress from 1914.
- **Nationalist framing** treated scientific capability as evidence of fitness for self-rule, and Ray's and Bose's work was reported in the nationalist press in exactly those terms.
- The assessment to make: colonial rule brought modern scientific institutions to India while systematically limiting Indian participation in them, and the achievements of this generation were made against that constraint rather than because of it.

Assembling the answers

Three questions in four years, on the press, on the press again, and on the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy. The unit is examined through its institutions.

- Press questions want the **oscillation** of policy across Hastings, Metcalfe, Lytton and Ripon, plus named papers and named editors, and the Vernacular Press Act as the pivot.
- The Orientalist-Anglicist question should note that **both camps agreed on elite state-directed education**, and that Rammohan Roy argued for English, which complicates any simple colonial imposition narrative.
- On education generally, give the **three documents**, meaning Macaulay 1835, Wood 1854 and Hunter 1882, and the literacy figures that show what they actually achieved.
- Indigenous education is worth a paragraph in any education answer, since the resumption of rent-free tenures explains the dislocation and almost no script mentions it.
- Missionary activity should be treated as **double-edged**, contributing linguistic and educational work while provoking the defensive reform movements that shaped modern Hinduism.

Last-mile revision

- Adam's reports 1830s, Munro in Madras, Leitner on Punjab, Dharampal 1983; dislocation through resumption of rent-free tenures.
- Charter Act 1813 with one lakh; Macaulay's Minute 2 February 1835; Bentinck's resolution 7 March 1835; downward filtration.
- Wood's Despatch 1854, universities 1857, Hunter Commission 1882, Universities Act 1904, Sadler 1917; literacy 6 per cent 1901 and about 16 per cent at independence.
- Hicky's Bengal Gazette 1780; Sambad Kaumudi 1821; Metcalfe 1835; Vernacular Press Act 1878 and Amrita Bazar Patrika's switch; repealed 1882.
- Bankim's Anandamath 1882 with Vande Mataram; Tagore Nobel 1913; Bharatendu and Premchand; Rashsundari Devi's Amar Jiban 1876.
- Serampore trio, Alexander Duff 1830, conversions among tribal and Dalit groups, shuddhi as reaction.
- GTS from 1802, ASI under Cunningham 1861, Radhanath Sikdar; J. C. Bose, P. C. Ray, Raman Nobel 1930, Saha and S. N. Bose; IACS 1876, IISc 1909.

Common errors to avoid

- Presenting the Orientalist-Anglicist debate as liberals against reactionaries. Both wanted state-directed elite education and Rammohan Roy argued for English.
- Forgetting indigenous education. Its dislocation through revenue resumption is named in the syllabus and rarely answered.
- Calling Wood's Despatch a success. It abandoned filtration in principle and was never funded to deliver mass education.
- Omitting that the Vernacular Press Act applied only to Indian language papers. That discrimination is the whole political point.
- Treating missionaries as purely destructive. Their linguistic and educational work was substantial and it provoked the reform movements that shaped modern Hinduism.

Mains Practice

“The tug of war between the two principles of freedom and control of the press made its influence felt on the colonial rulers' attitude to the press.”

20 marks · 250 words · 2025

'The Orientalist-Anglicist controversy of the nineteenth century constituted a turning point in shaping colonial educational policy in India.' Examine.

10 marks · 150 words · 2026

To accomplish the aims of education, 'political propaganda and formation as well as propagation of nationalist ideology', the press became the chief instrument. Comment.

10 marks · 150 words · 2023