

## Wood Dispatch- 'Magna Carta of Pre-Independence English Education in India'

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### Abstract

The Court of Directors implemented Educational Reforms in India from the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. The Board of Directors initiated Educational Reforms to promote a high degree of intellectual fitness of natives, to raise their moral character, to increase the confidence and ultimately trust them with office under the Company. They also attempted to advance the European Science and Literature, to produce marvelous native labourers and in the process, they decided to improve their commerce and establishments.

**Introduction:** The Wood's Despatch was introduced by the President of the Board of Control of the British East India Company, Charles Wood in 1854. It is known as the Magna Carta of English Education in India. The Wood's Despatch was a formal dispatch to Lord Dalhousie the then Governor-General of India from Charles Wood, suggesting a huge shift to English language use within India. It paved the way for using vernacular languages in primary education and the English language in higher education in India.

Charles Wood was the President of the Board of Control of the British East India Company. The Board of Control was introduced in India through Pitt's India Act of 1784. Charles Wood had also been the Secretary of State of India. He played a very important role in introducing the English language to higher education in India.

In an official letter to Lord Dalhousie, the then-Governor-General of India, Sir Charles Wood, the President of the Board of Control of the British East India Company, recommended a fundamental change to the way English was used across India. Sir Charles supported the use of regional languages in primary education, the Anglo-vernacular in secondary education, and English as the primary language of teaching in higher education. This is known as Wood's dispatch informally and also known as the "Magna Carta of English Education in India".

The Charter Act of 1813 in British India commenced the modern education on India officially by the British East India Company, though the Christian missionaries had started spreading modern education in India before that. The Charter Act decided to issue a fiscal support of Rs. One Hundred Thousand to the existing indigenous educational institutions in India. The Britishers took a decision to review the Charter Act within a period of twenty years in a regular basis. Though there was another charter Act in 1817, it was not an exclusive report given by a specially formed committee as a part of the predetermined review of the Charter Act of 1817. It was a declaration of the modified Charter Act to enlarge the amount from Rs. One Hundred Thousand to Rs. Two Hundred Thousand. Actually the real revision of the Charter Action had to be done in 1833.

It was during this point of time that the **Oriental-Occidental Controversy** emerged. The **Oriental-Occidental Controversy** made some confusion among the educationists and administrators during the time. As a result the review of the Charter Act was constrained to solve the Oriental-Occidental Controversy, as it created a sort of dilemma in the field of education. As a result, Macaulay submitted a report known as **Macaulay's Minutes**. The **Macaulay's Minutes** was not a comprehensive review of the Charter Act on account of the above mentioned restriction in term of reference. More over it created more chaos in the field of education because of its illogical and narrow minded recommendations. As the decision taken during the first Charter Act of 1813, a review and renewal of the decisions implemented by following the **Macaulay's Minutes** had to be done in 1853. The company assigned the duty of the review to Charles Wood. He was asked to make a comprehensive study on the existing educational system and to submit a report which could not only eradicate the chaotic atmosphere created by Macaulay's Minutes but also could put forth some innovative recommendations for the multi-

sided progress of the educational system in India. He submitted his report in 1855, and it is known as 'Wood's Dispatch of 1855.

Wood's Dispatch (1854) Hunter Education Commission (1882-83)

Wood's Dispatch Comprehensive education system and organizational structure :You have seen as to how Macaulay's Minute influenced educational policy of Lord William Bentinck, which was in force for next 40 years.

In 1853, when renewal of the Company charter again came for the consideration, the British Parliament examined the progress of education in India. The observations and suggested reforms were issued as a Charter of Education, known as Wood's Dispatch of 1854.

Wood's Dispatch is considered to be the "Magna Carta of Education" in India. The Dispatch is a comprehensive important educational document and holds a unique place in the history of Indian education. It placed the responsibility of education of the Indian people fully on the company and made it quite clear that it must never be neglected. The Dispatch gave new direction to education in India and which has its impact on today's education in the country.

The aim of education was stated as diffusion of European Arts, Science, Philosophy and Literature through English. Promotion of Indian languages was also to be encouraged. "Creation of a class of public servants", was the important objective. For this purpose, expansion of mass education was given priority.

The Wood's Dispatch, for the first time, recommended the creation of a Department of Public Instruction in each of the five provinces of Bengal, Bombay, Madras, Punjab and the North Western province.

For higher education, a scheme to establish universities was formulated along with total organizational set up. They were to conduct examinations and offer degrees in various subjects and languages. This led to the establishment of the first three universities in 1857, at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

The Dispatch made important recommendations on most of the aspects of education like establishing network of graded schools all over the country such as elementary schools, high schools, intermediate, colleges and university, etc., grant in aid system for financial support to schools, provision for women education, training and professional development of teachers, establishment of medical, engineering law and other institutes of professional education to develop vocational efficiency of people.

The importance of wood's dispatch was in a number of valuable and fundamental recommendations for future educational development in India. It gave new direction to issues like gradation of education, medium of instruction and proposed new schemes for future educational development in India with far reaching consequences.

The main provisions of the document were of great historical importance. It provided a boost to secondary education and to some extent to primary education also.

It was however observed that some of the most important recommendations of the Dispatch were not carried out for a long time and some were given effect in a distorted form.

During the first thirty years after the Dispatch, government institutions gradually increased, but except the Christian Missionaries, other private efforts were not encouraged.

Plans to spread mass education were not realized nor were vernacular high schools established. It did not sincerely promote universal literacy. The Dispatch could not visualize the progress of Indian aspirations even after a century.

As you know soon after 1857 revolt, the East India Company was dissolved and the government came directly under the British Crown. As a consequence, efforts were made to consolidate the empire and education was somewhat neglected.

Hunter Commission Vocationalization of Education: Hunter Commission was appointed in 1882 to examine the implementation of the Dispatch of 1854, which tried to streamline school

education into two streams of high school: one leading to the university education and the other to the commercial, vocational and technical education.

This was the first attempt to diversify school curriculum and introduce vocational education. However, despite the specific recommendations and emphasis of the Hunter Commission on commercial, vocational or non-literary education, neither the public nor the Govt. appreciated the value of this practical suggestion and the recommendations were totally ignored.

### **Impact in Madras**

As per the Wood's Despatch, the University of Madras was established in 1857. This institution, like the sister institution at Calcutta and Bombay, was established on the model of the University of London. Its function, in fact, was to hold examination for degree and honours in the several faculties like Arts, Law, Medicine and Civil Engineering. During this period, limited number of students studied from the chief town of each Presidency. Hence the plan of affiliation was not adopted.

### **HISTORICAL EVENTS LEADING TO THE DESPATCH**

The East India Company had to renew its Charter after every twenty years. Accordingly while renewing the Charter in 1833 the British Parliament increased the sum of money to one million yearly from the Rs-100000 in 1813 to be sent on education in India. When the time for renewal came in 1853, education in India had come to suffer numerous problems. The directors of the company decided to lay down a definite policy for education in India. Therefore, it became necessary to make a comprehensive survey of the entire field of education. As such, a Selection Committee of the British Parliament was set up in order to institute an inquiry into the measures for their reforms. The Committee studied the issue thoroughly and reported that the question of the Indian education should not be ignored and its development will not be in any case harmful to the British Empire. The suggestions of the Committee were favorably considered by the Board of Directors. Sir Charles Wood was the president of the Board of Control. It is said that the Dispatch was written by the famous thinker John Stuart Mill, a clerk of the company at that time. Before renewing the Charter in 1853, the British Parliament constitutes a Selection Committee to inquiry into the Progress of education in India and suggests reform. The suggestions of the Committee were issued as a Charter of Education on July 19, 1854. Charles Wood was the president of the Board of Control. So this is known as Wood's Dispatch of 1854.

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### **Merits of Wood's Dispatch:**

**Educational Policy:** Through Wood's Dispatch, British Parliament, for the first time made an attempt to decide the educational policy of India and made it constitutional. Before this, there was no policy of education for Indians. Through this Dispatch they decided for the first time their policy about education system in India. Wood's Dispatch started a new era in Indian

education system by clearly defining objectives of education. It made the Government realize the importance of education for the people and presented a comprehensive scheme of education embracing primary, secondary and higher education.

**Grant-in-aid system:** By the grant-in-aid system many schools were benefited, the quality of education improved, and private organisations were encouraged to open new schools.

**Educational Responsibility:** This Dispatch brought about a revolutionary change in the educational policy of the British Government. It declared that Indian education was the duty and responsibility of the British government. The Dispatch recommended scholarship for the poor and deserving students.

**Importance of Indian literature and culture:** The Dispatch recognized the importance and utility of Indian literature, culture and knowledge. It recommended the inclusion of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian language and literature in the curriculum along with the western knowledge.

**Indian languages as medium of instruction:** Charles Wood also recognized Indian languages as the medium of instruction along with English. Wood's Dispatch encouraged Language teaching. As a result, regional languages and classical languages were taught in the schools.

**Department of Public Instruction:** It recommended the creation of a separate Department of Public Instruction in five provinces and appointment of a Director to head the Department To run properly the education schemes of India, the Dispatch suggested for setting up Department of Public Instruction in each province with the Director of Public Instruction, Deputy Directors etc. Thus it prepared an administrative set up for education.

**Establishment of Universities:** The Dispatch encouraged higher education by recommending the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras and emphasized on the necessity of vocational education. Thus education got a good stride.

**Expansion of Mass Education:** The principle of Downward Filtration Theory was discarded by the Wood's Dispatch and it encouraged the promotion of mass education. It recommended the establishment of indigenous schools. By giving a universal character to education, the Dispatch abolished the filtration theory. Thus education was not confined to higher class of people alone, instead its doors was opened for all.

**Solution of unemployment:** Wood's Dispatch also paid attention to solve the problem of unemployment by encouraging vocational education. Arrangements for vocational education were made. Thus the public got an opportunity for becoming self-dependent.

**Training of teachers:** The Dispatch recommended the training of teachers The Despatch recommended the importance of establishing teacher-training institutes to improve the quality of teachers and their conditions of salaries.

**Responsibility of women education:** The Dispatch revived and recognized the need of development of women education as the duty and responsibility.

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