



Educating for National Reconstruction: The Educational Thought of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee and Its Relevance to Contemporary Indian Education

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Abstract

The educational thought of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901–1953) is invoked frequently and examined rarely. Commemorative writing asserts its continuing relevance without demonstrating it; critical historiography, absorbed in his political career, declines to ask the question at all. This paper takes the question seriously and asks what in his educational programme remains usable in Indian education today, and on what basis such a judgement can be made. The study is a qualitative historical enquiry combining contextualist intellectual history with explicit source criticism, tracing the propositions advanced during his vice-chancellorship of the University of Calcutta between 1934 and 1938 into the institutional mechanisms through which they were given effect. Seven propositions are reconstructed, concerning the purpose of the university, the union of cultural and professional education, the capacity of an Indian language to carry higher learning, the generation of knowledge about India, access and welfare, rooted internationalism, and state responsibility. Each is then set against contemporary policy, principally the National Education Policy 2020 and the West Bengal State Education Policy 2023. The paper argues that the correspondences are cases of institutional recurrence rather than of descent, and develops a transferability framework classifying elements of the programme as transferable, adaptable or historically bounded. Its central finding is that the institutional mechanisms travel well because they are least dependent on the politics of their origin, that the conception of national purpose requires reconstruction in constitutional and plural terms, and that the identification of the educational collective with a single cultural community cannot be carried forward. The limits of the study's own documentary base are stated explicitly.

Keywords

Syama Prasad Mookerjee, educational thought, contemporary relevance, National Education Policy 2020, University of Calcutta, educational transferability.

Introduction

Claims about the contemporary relevance of an educational thinker are easy to make and difficult to justify. They are made often about Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee (1901–1953), whose four years as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta are regularly described as anticipating the direction of present-day Indian education. They are almost never justified, because the two bodies of writing that might justify them have each declined the task. Commemorative literature asserts relevance as a conclusion already reached. Critical historiography, occupied with his career in the Hindu Mahasabha and his founding of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, treats his educational activity as a preliminary episode and does not examine it (Chatterji, 1994; Graham, 1990). Between assertion and omission, the question has not been answered.

This paper answers it, or begins to. The question is not whether Mookerjee was an important educationist, which is a matter of reputation, nor whether contemporary policy resembles what he did, which is a matter of description. It is whether specific elements of a programme formulated in colonial Bengal in the 1930s can legitimately be carried into the

educational order of a plural constitutional democracy in the 2020s, and on what grounds such transfers may be authorised or refused. Posed in that form, relevance becomes a researchable question with a determinate method and a determinate answer, rather than a rhetorical gesture.

The question is timely. The National Education Policy 2020 has reopened a series of matters that the 1930s programme also addressed: the medium of instruction, the breadth of undergraduate provision, the relation between professional and cultural education, the place of Indian knowledge traditions in the curriculum, the internationalisation of Indian universities, and the responsibility of the state for financing (Ministry of Education, 2020). The West Bengal State Education Policy 2023 addresses several of the same matters from a different position (Government of West Bengal, 2023). Whenever a policy cycle reopens durable questions, historical programmes that addressed them acquire a practical interest that is not merely commemorative.

Two commitments govern the enquiry. The first is analytical disaggregation. Four objects are held apart: the educational proposition, which may be intellectually defensible or not; the historical practice, which was implemented or not; the political context, which shaped the assumptions of both; and contemporary transferability, which is a distinct normative question. A contested figure cannot be studied usefully without this separation, and the division of the existing literature between commemoration and dismissal is largely a consequence of its absence. The second commitment is transparency about evidence. Much writing on this subject presents secondary reconstruction as though it were archival work; this paper states its documentary base and marks what it could not reach.

The paper accordingly reconstructs the propositions and the practice, examines the points of contact with contemporary policy, and classifies what may be carried forward.

Literature Review

The relevant literature is best organised around the questions it disputes rather than by author.

The first dispute concerns whether Mookerjee is properly studied as a politician or as an educationist. Political historiography answers the first. Chatterji (1994) situates him within the reorientation of the Bengali Hindu *bhadralok* towards communal politics after the constitutional settlement of the 1930s, and Graham (1990) treats him as the founding strategist of the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh*. Neither treats his educational activity as an object of analysis. The contrary answer is given by a commemorative literature, including Roy (2012), Banerjee (2000) and the publications of the Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation, which is empirically rich on university administration and correspondingly weak in critical distance, its purpose being vindictory and its factual claims frequently unreferenced. This paper takes the question to be malformed: the two descriptions are not competitors, and the disaggregation set out above allows both to be held.

The second dispute concerns whether his educational nationalism was pluralist or culturally majoritarian. The evidence is genuinely divided and is examined below rather than resolved here. The institutional record includes the extension of Honours provision to Urdu and the endorsement of a Muslim scholar to a named chair; it also includes a proposal to place explicitly Hindu symbols on the university emblem. Ghosh (2018), writing from the University of Calcutta and drawing on Sinha's institutional history, is the fullest available account of both, and is the source on which much of the factual reconstruction here unavoidably rests.

The third dispute concerns whether his programme was rhetorical or institutional. Educational thinkers are commonly studied through their statements, and the tacit assumption is that a body of thought consists of propositions. The Calcutta case suggests that for this figure the more revealing evidence lies in statutes, regulations, curricular provision and credentialling, and that a study confined to his addresses would miss most of what is distinctive. This methodological disagreement has not been articulated in the existing literature and is addressed directly in the Research Method below.

The fourth dispute concerns what contemporary educational research can be asked to settle about his claims. On language, Cummins (1979) proposed the developmental interdependence and threshold hypotheses concerning the relationship between a bilingual learner's languages, and has since re-examined those constructs and the critiques they attracted, locating them within a broader account of societal power relations rather than treating them as a settled warrant for policy (Cummins, 2021). Mohanty (2019) extends the analysis to Indian conditions, and Ramanathan (2005) shows ethnographically that nominal parity between English-medium and vernacular-medium tracks can coexist with systematic

divergence in resources and destinations. This literature qualifies rather than confirms any straightforward defence of the positions taken in the 1930s, and is used here in that spirit.

The fifth dispute is the one this paper addresses: whether historically situated educational ideas can be transferred across political contexts at all. Kumar (2005) provides the necessary caution. Colonialist and nationalist educational ideas in India were not simple opposites, since nationalist reformers frequently contested the content of colonial education while retaining its administrative and examining structure, and the quest for self-identity sat uneasily beside the quest for equality. Transfer is therefore never wholesale, and the framework developed below is an attempt to make the required discrimination explicit rather than intuitive.

Across these five disputes a gap is visible. No existing study reconstructs this educational programme under a declared source-criticism protocol and then specifies, element by element, what may and may not be carried into a plural constitutional order. This paper addresses that gap, within limits it states openly.

Objectives

1. To reconstruct, from corroborated documentary sources, the principal educational propositions advanced by Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee during his vice-chancellorship of the University of Calcutta.
2. To identify the institutional mechanisms through which those propositions were given effect between 1934 and 1938.
3. To determine what the term “national culture” denoted within that programme, and where its boundaries lay.
4. To examine the points of contact between the historical programme and contemporary Indian and West Bengal education policy, without asserting genealogical continuity.
5. To develop and apply a framework for judging which elements of a historically situated educational programme remain transferable to a plural, multilingual constitutional order.

Research Questions

The study is qualitative, interpretive and historical. It does not examine relationships between measured variables, and no hypotheses are therefore formulated. Four questions organise the enquiry.

- RQ1. What were the principal educational propositions advanced by Mookerjee, and how were they given institutional effect between 1934 and 1938?
- RQ2. What did “national culture” denote within that programme, and how did it bear on the treatment of a plural student body?
- RQ3. Where does the historical programme make contact with the provisions of contemporary Indian and West Bengal education policy, and what is the nature of that correspondence?
- RQ4. Which elements of the programme remain analytically and normatively transferable to a plural, multilingual and constitutional educational order, and which do not?

Research Method

Design

The study is a qualitative historical enquiry operating at three levels. The first is intellectual reconstruction, conducted in the contextualist manner associated with Skinner (1969), who argued that the meaning of a statement in the history of ideas is recovered by asking what its author was doing in making it, within the conventions and controversies then available. Statements made in Bengal in the 1930s are accordingly read as interventions in specific arguments about a colonial examining university, not as timeless educational propositions. The second level traces the translation of each proposition into the institutional mechanism through which it was given effect, on the view set out in the Literature Review that for this figure the mechanisms are the more revealing evidence. The third level is comparison with

contemporary policy instruments, followed by the classification of transferability. No coding of the kind used in interview-based qualitative research was employed, and none would be appropriate to a documentary corpus of this character.

The documentary corpus

Table 1 sets out the documentary layers bearing on this subject and states the position of each in the present study. It is presented in this form because the distinction between material consulted and material identified is routinely obscured in writing on this figure.

Table 1

The documentary corpus: layers identified and their status in this study

Date	Document or record	Occasion or location	Status in this study
1935–1938	Convocation and institutional addresses delivered as Vice-Chancellor	University of Calcutta	Substance known only through institutional history and commemorative reporting; originals not examined
5 Dec 1936	Convocation address	Nagpur University; collected in Educational Speeches (1959)	Cited for a single passage on the purpose of the Indian university; consulted through published quotation
17 Aug 1937	Convocation address	University of Bombay; collected in Educational Speeches (1959)	Identified; consulted through published quotation only
1 Dec 1940	Convocation address	Benares Hindu University; collected in Educational Speeches (1959)	Identified; used to indicate the later development of his position on Western knowledge
1959	Educational Speeches by Dr. Shyamaprasad Mookerjee (A. Mukherjee & Co., Calcutta)	Published collection	The principal primary corpus for this subject; identified and cited, but not analysed in full
n.d.	Syama Prasad Mookerjee personal papers	Archives, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi	Catalogued collection; identified, not consulted
1934–1938	Senate and Syndicate minutes, regulations, calendars	University of Calcutta	Identified, not consulted; several institutional details therefore cannot be specified precisely
1993	Leaves from a Diary (Oxford University Press)	Published diary	Consulted; largely post-1946 and of limited bearing on the vice-chancellorship
2020, 2023	National Education Policy 2020; West Bengal State Education Policy 2023	Government of India; Government of West Bengal	Consulted directly in their official published form

Two consequences follow and are carried through the paper. The reconstruction of the propositions rests principally on institutional history and published quotation rather than on sustained analysis of the original addresses, and is correspondingly provisional. And several institutional details cannot be stated with precision. The phrase “the University

Act of 1935", which recurs in the secondary literature, may compress a statutory amendment, a regulation and one or more Syndicate resolutions; establishing which did what would require the university's governance records.

Source criticism

A factual claim was admitted only where it met one of three conditions: corroboration by the university's published institutional record; corroboration by an independent reference work or peer-reviewed monograph; or attribution within the source to an identifiable document, such as a named and dated address. Claims resting solely on commemorative literature are retained where germane and marked in the text. Comparative superlatives reported by an institution about itself are attributed to that institution rather than asserted, since establishing priority requires a defined comparative universe that the sources do not supply. Evaluative claims in the commemorative literature, in particular the recurring assertion that this university policy furnished a blueprint for later national policy, were excluded from the evidentiary base and treated as reception history.

Limitations

Seven limitations qualify the findings. First, the study works from published compilation and institutional history rather than from the collected addresses, which remain to be examined. Second, the Senate and Syndicate records were not consulted. Third, several statements analysed were originally made in Bengali and are used in translation. Fourth, survival and accessibility of primary material is uneven, and the commemorative literature that dominates the accessible record has declared interests. Fifth, the comparison with contemporary policy is analytic and not causal; no claim of influence is advanced anywhere. Sixth, the reception history of this material, including its recent institutional revival, is not examined and would repay separate study. Seventh, the paper assesses transferability rather than measuring implementation; whether current policy achieves what is described below is an empirical question for later research.

Result and Discussion

The inherited institution and the setting of the 1930s

The University of Calcutta was founded in 1857 on the model of the University of London, as an examining rather than a teaching body, with instruction devolved upon affiliated colleges. The design constrains everything that follows. An examining university controls the conditions of assessment, and those conditions determine what a college may teach, what a candidate may write and what may be credentialled. Reform in such a system is therefore a matter of statute and regulation rather than of advocacy. Asutosh Mookerjee had begun to modify the settlement in the preceding generation by building postgraduate teaching within the university and instituting chairs and departments in Indian history and culture, a separate department of ancient Indian history being formed in 1932 (University of Calcutta, n.d.-b). His son inherited an argument along with an office.

The political setting shaped the programme in ways that must be acknowledged. The Communal Award of 1932 and the Government of India Act 1935 confirmed that in a Muslim-majority province under separate electorates, the Bengali Hindu professional and landholding classes would not again control provincial government (Chatterji, 1994). The university was among the few major provincial institutions in which that class retained effective control. Nothing in the record supports reducing the educational programme to compensation for lost political power. It does mean that it was conducted by a group whose claim to speak for Bengal was at that moment contested, and that questions about whose culture the institution embodied were live rather than academic.

The propositions and their institutional expression

Table 2 sets out seven propositions reconstructed from the record, the educational problem each addressed, and the mechanism through which each was given effect.

Table 2

Educational propositions and their institutional expression, University of Calcutta, 1934–1938

Proposition	Problem addressed	Institutional mechanism recorded, 1934–1938	Domain
The university is an organ of national reconstruction, not a certifying agency	An examining body detached from social and economic purpose	Provision extended to ancient Indian history and culture, Chinese and Tibetan, experimental psychology, communication engineering, applied chemistry for large-scale production, teacher training and home science, developed together rather than in competition	Purpose and curriculum
Cultural and professional education belong together	A curriculum divided between literary study and technical training	Simultaneous expansion of humanities, applied sciences and professional provision within a single institution	Curriculum
An Indian language must be able to carry higher learning	Bengali possessed cultural standing but no institutional authority	Recognition as an approved medium of study under the University Act of 1935; Honours instruction through Bengali, Hindi and Urdu; Assamese at graduation level; a doctoral dissertation in Bengali awarded in 1937; publication and terminology work reported for the period	Medium and credential
Knowledge of India must be generated, not imported	Dependence on metropolitan scholarship for Indian materials	Asutosh Museum of Indian Art founded 1937; university excavation at Bangarh, 1938	Research
Education must reach every stratum of society	Segregated and costly residential provision	Abolition of hostels reserved for students of the so-called backward classes; accommodation in general hostels at reduced seat rents; students' welfare department; proposed employees' provident fund	Access and welfare
Rootedness is compatible with openness	Insularity as the price of cultural self-assertion	Facilities for Chinese and Tibetan studies; invitation to foreign universities to send students to study Indian civilisation and Sanskrit	Internationalisation
The state must extend its support to education	Dependence on endowment and fee income	Argument for public responsibility advanced in the convocation addresses of the period	Financing

Three features of the programme deserve comment before the contemporary comparison is made. The first concerns its governing conception of the university. Addressing the Nagpur convocation in December 1936, Mookerjee described the Indian university as one of the living organs of national reconstruction, and coupled that description with an insistence that it serve its alumni irrespective of caste, creed or sex (Mookerjee, 1959). The measures listed in Table 2 are intelligible as an attempt to make an examining body into something of that kind: an institution with a curriculum broad enough to serve an economy, a research capacity adequate to its own society, and a responsibility for the welfare of those inside it.

The second is that the propositions were pursued through institutional mechanisms rather than exhortation, and this is what distinguishes the case. On language, for example, what is notable is not that Bengali was praised, which it had long been, but that the disabilities attaching to it were removed in sequence: the right to be taught through, to be examined in,

to be credentialled by, and finally to be the language in which new scholarship was composed, a doctoral dissertation in Bengali having been awarded in 1937 (Ghosh, 2018). The same pattern is visible elsewhere. The commitment to generating knowledge about India was expressed not as a curricular aspiration but as a museum and an excavation. The commitment to access was expressed as the abolition of segregated hostels and the reduction of seat rents, though these particular measures rest on the commemorative record alone and are noted as such.

The third is that the programme was additive rather than subtractive. English was not displaced when Indian languages were installed; Hindi and Urdu were admitted on the same footing as Bengali; and the same administration expanded provision in Chinese, Tibetan, engineering and applied chemistry while inviting foreign students to study Indian civilisation. The Asutosh Museum of Indian Art, founded in 1937, is described by the university as the first public museum in an Indian university, and the excavation at Bangarh in 1938 is described in the same institutional sources as the first conducted by an Indian university (Goswami, 2012; University of Calcutta, n.d.-a, n.d.-b); whatever the status of those priority claims, the programme reconfigured the colonial university rather than rejecting it, and it is a misdescription to present it as an early instance of educational decolonisation in the sense that term now carries.

What “national culture” denoted

The third of the five principles enunciated in the convocation address of 1936, as reported by Ghosh (2018), held that teachers should impart education grounded in the national culture. The other four held that education should reach every stratum of society, that cultural and professional education should be properly joined, that education should be directed towards truth and beauty in a free and liberal atmosphere, and that the state should extend its support to education. These principles are reported from a single secondary account and require verification against the published addresses before they can bear further analytical weight.

What the third principle denoted cannot be settled from any single episode, and the evidence points in more than one direction. The curricular record suggests a civilisational rather than confessional referent: ancient Indian history, Sanskritic learning, and the languages and cultures of China and Tibet, alongside an explicit invitation to foreign universities. His later published addresses complain not that Western knowledge was opened to Indians but that it was imported at the cost of an indigenous base, and call for synthesis rather than displacement. Against this stands the emblem episode, in which a proposal to replace the colonial device with a design incorporating a fully bloomed lotus and the auspicious symbol śrī was opposed as sectarian in a Muslim-majority province, and a compromise device was adopted (Ghosh, 2018). And against that episode stands the endorsement of Hassan Suhrawardy's appointment as Bageshwari Professor, defended on the ground that the institution was thereby demonstrating that it was the university “of Bengal and of India” rather than of a single community (Ghosh, 2018).

The record is divided and this paper does not resolve it. What can be stated is structural, and it follows from Kumar (2005): an educational programme built on cultural rootedness must name the collective whose culture is at issue, and in a plural province that naming is contestable. The majoritarian risk attaches to the cultural proposition rather than to the institutional mechanisms, which is why the two must be judged separately, and why the transferability classification below separates them.

Mookerjee among his contemporaries

Assessing relevance requires knowing what position the figure occupies within his own tradition, since a thinker whose contribution duplicates another's has correspondingly less to offer. Table 3 situates Mookerjee among three better-studied contemporaries.

Table 3

Comparative positions of four figures in modern Indian educational thought

Thinker	Position on language	Primary institutional focus	Relation of culture to nation
Gandhi	Mother tongue, tied to a critique of the literary curriculum itself	The village school; productive work as the axis of learning	Ethical and social; suspicious of the modern state as an educational agent

Thinker	Position on language	Primary institutional focus	Relation of culture to nation
Tagore	Bengali as an intellectual medium, within a consciously cosmopolitan frame	An experimental school and university outside state provision	Cultural-humanist; explicitly critical of nationalism as an organising principle
Mookerjee	Indian languages installed alongside English within the existing university	The established metropolitan university and its statutes	Civilisational and national; the university as an organ of national reconstruction
Radhakrishnan	English accepted without difficulty as the medium of university work	The university and the national commission	Philosophical; Indian traditions defended without a change of medium

Two conclusions follow. The first is that positions on language and positions on culture varied independently across these figures, so that an argument about medium cannot be read off an argument about national culture, or the reverse. The 1937 convocation illustrates this directly: Tagore, whose educational philosophy was cosmopolitan and explicitly critical of nationalism as an organising principle, and Mookerjee, whose was national and institutional, agreed about the language of the university and about very little else. The second conclusion is that Mookerjee occupies a position the canon does not otherwise contain. Gandhi and Tagore worked outside the established university and built alternatives to it; Radhakrishnan worked within it and did not disturb its medium or its structure. Mookerjee alone attempted to alter the architecture of the metropolitan university from within, using its own statutes. That is the ground on which a claim for his relevance is strongest, and it is not a claim about his ideas being ahead of their time but about the kind of educational actor he was.

Points of contact with contemporary policy

Six correspondences are visible between the programme in Table 2 and the provisions of the present policy cycle. They should be described before they are interpreted.

On the medium of instruction, paragraph 4.11 of the National Education Policy 2020 provides that, wherever possible, instruction until at least Grade 5 and preferably until Grade 8 and beyond will be in the home language, mother tongue, local language or regional language (Ministry of Education, 2020), and substantial resources are being directed towards textbooks and translation in Indian languages (Ministry of Education, n.d.; Press Information Bureau, 2025). The West Bengal State Education Policy 2023 requires Bengali from Class I to Class XII in schools using other media (Government of West Bengal, 2023). Assessed against the 1930s sequence, however, present provision is substantial at the level of materials and thin at the levels the historical case identifies as decisive: examination, credential, and the language in which new scholarship is composed. A doctoral thesis written in an Indian language remains exceptional in most Indian universities, and the obstacle is not primarily a shortage of textbooks. Contemporary research also counsels against overstating the case, since the relationship between medium and attainment is mediated by treatment conditions rather than settled by medium alone (Cummins, 2021; Ramanathan, 2005).

On curricular breadth, the multidisciplinary intent of the National Education Policy 2020 corresponds closely to the simultaneous expansion of humanities, applied science and professional provision recorded for 1934–1938, and the historical case demonstrates that such breadth is achievable within an existing institution rather than requiring new ones. On research capacity, the present emphasis on Indian knowledge traditions finds its historical counterpart not in curricular content but in the museum and the excavation, which is a materially different proposition: the question is whether institutions are equipped to investigate inherited knowledge or only to celebrate it. On access, the 1930s measures were framed as institutional generosity, whereas contemporary equity operates through rights-based entitlement and constitutional reservation, a difference of legal basis that matters more than the similarity of intent. On internationalisation, the invitation to foreign universities to send students to study Indian civilisation anticipates in form, though not in scale, the present interest in Indian higher education as a destination. On financing, the argument for state responsibility remains, as it was then, an argument rather than an accomplished fact.

These correspondences require interpretation, and three possibilities must be distinguished. Genealogical continuity would mean that later policy consciously inherited these ideas. Conceptual convergence would mean that different actors, separated in time, reached similar formulations independently. Institutional recurrence would mean that a persistent structural feature of the system repeatedly generates similar responses. This paper argues for the third, and by implication the second. It advances no claim of descent, and the assertion in commemorative writing that the university policy of the 1930s furnished a blueprint for national policy is treated as reception history rather than evidence. The persistent structural feature is the one identified at the outset: in a system organised around examination and affiliation, the conditions of assessment govern what may be taught, written and credentialled, and any serious attempt at reform must address the same sequence of institutional disabilities, whether in 1935 or in 2026.

One difference of instrument is worth isolating, because it bears directly on relevance. What was achieved at Calcutta was achieved by statutory change, with examination and appointment following. Much present provision is recommendatory, and a recommendation that does not bind the examination system, the terminology and the teacher cadre is likely to produce declaratory compliance while leaving the burden of adjustment with individual institutions and teachers. This is a criticism of instrument rather than of intention, and it is the single most usable lesson the historical case offers.

Critical transferability

The elements of the programme differ in kind: some are institutional mechanisms, some are conceptions of educational purpose, and some are assumptions about the identity of the educational collective. They cannot therefore be transferred, or refused, together. Table 4 classifies them.

Table 4

Critical transferability of elements of the 1934–1938 programme

Category	Element of the programme	Basis of the judgement
Transferable	Treating educational reform as a statutory, examination and credentialling problem rather than a declaratory one	The mechanism is institutional and normatively neutral; it does not depend on the political assumptions of the 1930s
Transferable	Additive design: adding provision without withdrawing what already serves learners, as when Indian languages were installed without displacing English	Consistent with later Indian experience of subtractive reform, and with contemporary accounts of additive bilingualism
Transferable	Building capacity to generate primary evidence about India within the university, through museums, excavation and area studies	A capacity-building measure with no exclusionary entailment; corresponds to the strongest reading of present interest in Indian knowledge traditions
Transferable	Expanding humanities, applied science and professional provision together within one institution rather than founding separate ones	Directly comparable to the multidisciplinary intent of current policy, and demonstrably achievable within an existing university
Adaptable	The conception of the university as an organ of national reconstruction	Defensible once national reconstruction is specified in constitutional and plural rather than civilisational terms
Adaptable	Curricular rootedness in Indian knowledge traditions	Requires extension to minority, tribal and non-Sanskritic traditions, and separation from arguments about the medium of instruction
Adaptable	Access and welfare provision framed as institutional generosity	Now governed by rights-based entitlement and reservation; the impulse survives, the legal basis does not
Historically bounded	Identification of the educational collective with a single cultural	Incompatible with constitutional guarantees to linguistic and religious minorities; the

Category	Element of the programme	Basis of the judgement
	community	difficulty was recognised in Bengal at the time, as the emblem controversy shows
Historically bounded	Treatment of the major regional literary languages as coextensive with the languages of learners	Leaves untouched the position of speakers of tribal and minoritised languages, for whom different instruments are required

The normative environment is the discriminating variable. The 1930s programme operated under colonial statute, with no constitutional guarantee of linguistic or minority rights; contemporary policy operates within a constitutional order containing explicit protections. An institutional mechanism defensible then is not thereby defensible now, and a cultural assumption that passed then is not available for adoption. Conversely, mechanisms are the elements least dependent on the politics of their origin, which is why they transfer most readily and why the answer to the relevance question is weighted towards them.

One entailment deserves separate statement. The languages admitted in 1935 were the major literary languages of the region and of the north Indian public sphere. Nothing in the accessible record indicates comparable provision for Santali, Kurukh, Mundari or the Rajbanshi speech of northern Bengal, and the programme therefore altered the position of Bengali relative to English while leaving untouched the position of languages below Bengali in the hierarchy (Mohanty, 2019). The same slippage is built into the vocabulary of present policy, which treats home language, mother tongue, local language and regional language as substitutable when in implementation the last of them almost always prevails. For speakers of tribal and minoritised languages, a regional-language policy is not a mother-tongue policy, and the instruments required are different ones. This is a limit of the historical programme that contemporary policy has inherited rather than corrected.

Conclusion

Four propositions summarise what this study establishes. The first is historical: the educational work conducted at the University of Calcutta between 1934 and 1938 was more systematic than its treatment as an episode in a political biography suggests, and is recoverable as an object of educational analysis rather than of commemoration or dismissal.

The second concerns the character of the contribution. Its distinctive feature is not the novelty of the propositions, several of which were widely shared among his contemporaries, but the insistence that educational change is accomplished through statutes, curricula, examinations and credentials rather than through advocacy. Among the major figures of modern Indian educational thought, he alone attempted to alter the architecture of the established metropolitan university from within, using its own instruments.

The third concerns the nature of the correspondence with the present. The points of contact with the National Education Policy 2020 and the West Bengal State Education Policy 2023 reflect institutional recurrence rather than descent, since the same structural features of an examination-governed system continue to generate similar responses. The most usable observation for current practice follows from this: present provision proceeds largely by recommendation where the historical case proceeded by statute, and is substantial at the level of materials while remaining thin at the levels of examination, credential and research.

The fourth is normative, and it is the answer to the question with which the paper began. Relevance here is selective and must be argued element by element. The institutional mechanisms and the additive design are transferable. The conception of national purpose and the commitment to curricular rootedness are adaptable, on condition that the first is specified in constitutional and plural terms and the second extended beyond the classical and Sanskritic traditions. The identification of the educational collective with a single cultural community is historically bounded and cannot be carried forward. Disaggregation of this kind is not evasion of the political question but the condition of learning anything from a contested case.

The study's own limits indicate the next steps. The collected educational addresses, the personal papers held at the Prime Ministers Museum and Library, and the Senate and Syndicate records of the University of Calcutta for the 1930s would

allow this reconstruction to be tested, corrected and made precise, and would settle several questions this paper has had to leave open.

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