

# The Contribution of the Christian Missionaries to the Genesis of Education in Darjeeling Hills (1813-1947).

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## Abstract:

The Western education in India and in Darjeeling hills came as a part of missionary activity and as a part of Western governing mentality. The missionary activities in nineteenth-century colonial India had spread along with the consolidation of British Empire. Darjeeling, a colonial enclave, more like a private domain to the ruling race then, turned out to be a hunting ground for the missionaries, who, among other activities, played a lead role in spreading Western education which continued to shape post-colonial education not only in Darjeeling but in the rest of India. The present paper gives a sketchy account of how missionaries played a pivotal role in spreading Western education in Darjeeling hills as a part of missionary their agenda. In a sense, it was the Christian missionary organizations which took initiatives in meeting primary educational needs of the native people.

**Keywords:** Education, Native, Christian Missionary, Colonial, Post colonial

## Introduction

The early history of Darjeeling is shrouded in obscurity. Its known history dates back to the early years of the 19th century when it was the part of the dominions of the Rajah of Sikkim. Towards the close of the 18th century Sikkim was being assailed frequently by the Gurkhas of Nepal, who had advanced as far east as the Tista and beyond (Sharma, 1915). The Nepalese aggression on the Northern frontiers of the India brought the East India Company in direct conflict with Nepal and led to the War of 1814. Following the Treaty of Segaulie, 1816, which marked the close of this Indo-Nepal war, the tract which the Nepalese had wrested from Sikkim was ceded and the Rajah of Sikkim who had been driven out from his dominions were reinstated; his sovereignty being guaranteed by the Company (O'Malley, 1907). Some ten years later, disputes having arisen between Nepal and Sikkim, Captain Lloyd was deputed in 1828 along with Mr. J. W. Grant to bring about a settlement and to prevent all possibilities of further aggrandizement by the Gurkhas. Proceeding through unknown mountain region, they discovered the old Gurkha Station called 'Darjeeling' which they visited for six days. In course of their journey they were

much impressed with the possibilities of the station as the sanatorium for its cool and bracing climate. Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor-General, appreciating these views, deputed Captain J.D. Herbert and Mr. Grant to survey the area. Their report was promptly approved by the Court of Directors. Lloyd was directed to open negotiations with the Rajah of Sikkim for cession of Darjeeling hill in return either for an equivalent in money or land. This transfer was successfully

accomplished in February 1835. By a deed of grant, the King of Sikkim made over a strip of hill territory, 24 miles long and about 5 to 6 miles wide (138 square miles approx.) which included the villages of Darjeeling and Kurseong (Ojha,1997).

### **A Brief History of the Missionaries:**

The general policy of East India Company till 1813 was non- interference in the socio-religious belief of the people living in Company's territories. The obvious instruction to the Governor General was to restrain to the mission from Proselytizing activities. The Charter Act of 1813 struck a different note when it lifted all restriction of the entry of missionaries in India.

In the initial phase, all was interested, only in the education of the domiciled European children; the 'native' children of the hill tract were excluded from this enterprise. It was only with the initiative of a former Church of England some independent Baptists were sent to India and one of them Rev. William Start started the Moravian mission in the year 1841. Rev. Start is believed to be the first Christian Missionary to come to Darjeeling. With the help of Gossner, Rev. Start under his own expense brought more than twenty German missionaries. They even translated and published some biblical books in Lepcha and Nepali, and distributed them among the natives. A school for the Lepchas was started at Takvar in Darjeeling. After some preliminary ground work Rev. Start retired and went back to England in 1852. C.G. Neibel followed up the missionary activities in Darjeeling hills until his death on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1865. Christianity and its influence grew with the growing size of European population in the years to follow. To serve this population mostly the cantonment, Anglican English medium church, namely St. Andrew's Church, was built in the year 1843. In the mean time a new sanatorium was established in the hills namely the Eden sanatorium. Here again, good schools in European model were required for educating the children of Government servants or of those classes which could not meet the expenses of the education of the children in their native land (Perry,1997).

In 1846, the Vicar Apostolic of Bengal Dr. Carew sent some Loreto nuns to establish a Convent school in the hills for the children of the European families. This school was later named Loreto Convent (a Roman Catholic institution for girls. The schools set high standard since the Europeans wanted to give their children same quality of education as they had back in England in their growing stage (Dewan, 1991). Another missionary group, namely, the Church of Scotland Missionary Society came to the hills by the closing decade of the nineteen century. Unlike some of the earlier Roman Catholic Missions, they had taken up the mission of educating the 'natives' of the hills. Rev. W. Macfarlane led this group of missionaries. It was because of his painstaking endeavour that the Eastern Himalayan mission (EHM) of the Church of Scotland spread its network and activities in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong, Terrai, Bengal Duars, and Sikkim and also to neighboring countries like Nepal and Bhutan. He had a mission to integrate the natives into Western civilization en route Christianity and Western education (Sharma, 2015).

It is from 1870 only a notable movement in the widespread dissemination of elementary education among the native hill people was started by a pioneer missionary, Rev. W. Macfarlane, of the Church of Scotland Mission (Dash, J.A., 1947). Macfarlane first opened a Normal school at Darjeeling with the intension to train and groom teachers and preachers for the elementary schools to be opened in the villages and in the tea gardens. His system had been so successful in the district that in 1873 there were 25 primary schools with 615 boys and girls receiving education. The Normal School was later transferred to Kalimpong in 1886 from where he planned to expand his educational and missionary activities. Some of Macfarlane's successors to work in the field chosen by him were W.S. Sutherland, A. Turnbull, R. Kilgore and J.A. Graham (Dozey, 1922).

As Dewan has observed: ‘... ever since the advent of the missionaries, they had chosen the pen rather than sword in proselytizing and in disseminating education’ (Dewan, 1991). Looking at the situation in Darjeeling hills now one can conveniently say that it is primarily because of the Christian missionaries that Western education and Christianity have spread in a big way among the ‘native’ people in the region.

#### **Establishment of Missionary Schools:**

Owing to the suitability of the Darjeeling climate to the growing children, Darjeeling became a centre of education for the children of the Anglo-Indian and the domiciled European communities ever since the hill station, as a health resort for government servants, was opened. The first of such school was the Loreto Convent for girls founded in 1840 at Darjeeling. The other was St Paul's for boys, established in 1864 (Dash, J.A., 1947). The efforts of the Christian missionaries indeed filled in the gaps which were deficient in that of the Government. There was only one high school of the Government Enterprise. It was built at Darjeeling in 1891 by amalgamating Zilla School (1872-73) with Bhutia Boarding School (1871-72).

There was one Middle English school (Anglo-Vernacular) of the Scottish Universities' Mission at Kalimpong along with a Teachers' Training School for men and one such for girls opened in 1891 by the Ladies Guild of Scotland Mission. In Darjeeling a Girls' Boarding School for Nepali girls was opened with a Female Teachers' Training school in 1890. St. Robert's School for boys in 1934 at Darjeeling and St. Joseph's Girls' School in 1938 at Kurseong. St. George's School for boys at Pedong was upgraded to Middle English school in 1911 and to a Junior high school level in 1935. The Industrial Training schools for boys and girls were separately established at Kalimpong. A few night schools were also being run by these missionaries in some villages (Pradhan, & Pain, 2020).

The number of primary schools in the district in 1896 was 95 with 2,731 boys and 466 girls under instruction. The percentages of boys and girls in school-going age were 38.2 and 5.9 respectively. Although Nepali was by far the tongue of the natives, Macfarlane and his successors preferred Hindi for medium for instructions. The text books in Nepali were not sufficiently available except a few written by Ganga Prasad Pradhan, a well known teacher and preacher of those days (Pradhan, & Pradhan, 1997).

In Darjeeling hills the Protestant Missions had then-priority right. Owing to their opposition the other mission of the Roman Catholic denomination could not thrive in the field of education for the native people except that it explored a possibility of doing something at Pedong, where St. George's School was begun in 1883 and in Kurseong, St. Alphonsus School was established in 1888 and St. Alphonsus' School for boys at Kurseong was raised to the status of high school in 1936.

Fear of conversion by the Christian missionaries prevented most of the parents from sending their children to receive the knowledge of even the fundamental three R's (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). In some cases they had to be coaxed with some monetary rewards to come to schools for learning. Attendance was irregular for various reasons. However, those with eagerness to learn used to assemble in the verandah or in the corners of ordinary village dwellings made of bamboo and mud to crowd round a few copies of the Primers (Minto, 1990). The Report on Public instruction in Bengal 1901-02, shows that in altogether 49 districts of Bengal, Darjeeling occupied the 39th position in respect of the percentage of the boys at school to boys of school-going age. Such a progress as achieved by Darjeeling district in so short a period of last three decades only is any way remarkable.

The Government up to this year expended all grants of primary education in the hills through the agency of the Scottish Mission. All these combined efforts brought the benefits of at least elementary education within the reach of the hill people. Consequently they were prepared to move towards the twentieth century with some foundational base. A phenomenal expansion was well attained during the pre independence period of the twentieth century. This expansion may well be due to the progressive educational policies of the government formulated from time to time to fulfill the socio-economic and cultural urges of the people with adequate quantitative and qualitative base of education. The missionaries of the Roman Catholic denomination established St. Teresa's Girls' School in 1923 at Darjeeling.

The missionary dominance of Kalimpong's social spaces was particularly marked in comparison to Darjeeling, the summer capital of Bengal and a tea industry hub where British official and planter landmarks, such as the Bengal Governor's summer residence and the Planter's Club, were more prominent than its manses. William McGovern, a flamboyant American traveler on his way to Tibet in disguise and allegedly the inspiration for the filmic Indiana Jones, remarked that "The senior missionaries form the local aristocracy, overawing even the British-Indian officials; and Dr. Graham, the head of the mission, is the uncrowned king of Kalimpong, the arbiter and dispenser of justice even to those not inside the Christian fold" (Mission, 2018). In *The Three Closed Lands*, Graham dispatched his fictional Guild visitor to visit the Daling estate manager and Lepcha Buddhist chief Tenduk and his Bhutia wife. Raja Tenduk, the reader was informed, was a powerful landowner recently honored for his services to the British state vis-à-vis Bhutan. The polite tone of this encounter with a local chief was an ecumenical gesture rare in the genre of missionary writing, a sign of Graham's evolving eclecticism, which became most visible in his civic activities in the locality.

John Graham's towering stature in the contact zone might seem to stem from his missionary rank and charismatic personality, but in reality, owed much to his transcultural alliances with non-European and non-Christian neighbors. One such ally was the cloth merchant, banker, and contractor Ramchandra Mintri, whose father and uncle arrived in the Himalayas during the 1850s as migrant traders from Churu in Rajasthan (personal communication, Benu Mintri, March 2013). Mintri's conservative Marwari Community usually restricted charitable activities to religious and caste kin, but a mutually beneficial association with Graham allowed both to transcend sectarian ties. This association started with a local campaign to endow a Victoria Memorial, where Graham supplemented Mintri's generous monetary contribution with humble one-anna contributions solicited from ordinary citizens.

The Memorial took the form of the late Queen-Empress Victoria's bust placed within a fountain enclosure carved and painted by Sikkim lamas in Tibetan and Newar-inspired motifs designed by the Calcutta School of Art Principal Ernest Havell, a vocal champion of local artisanal crafts. At the inauguration of the Memorial by Sir John Woodburn, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, he and Graham departed from standard protocol when they made their ceremonial remarks in Hindustani, a deferential gesture toward the local citizens and the vernacular civic spirit which made the Memorial possible (Sharma, and Marcus, 2017). Mintri had already funded a Coronation dispensary near the Kalimpong Bazaar at a cost of Rs 2,500 that acted as a field extension of the Charteris hospital (Manuel 1914,). Later, he donated a water system to the Homes. Another Memorial donor, Raja Gongzim Ugyen Dorji, Bhutan's representative at Kalimpong and a major landowner, became a financial benefactor of the hospital and the Homes and instrumental in creating a long-standing relationship for Graham with Bhutanese noble families (Sharma, and Marcus, 2017). Until recently, the latter sent their sons to the Homes, an intriguing choice given its subaltern character compared to the prestige of other European-style public schools in India.

The foundation of Roman Catholic Mission in Kalimpong took place only in the year 1920. Fr. Douenel then helping to Fr Desgodins in Pedong wanted to open a Mission in Kalimpong. So he convinced the Cluny Sisters of Chandannagar to open a Convent at Kalimpong. In 1923 A convent was established in Kalimpong. A small school was established in 1927 in the name of St. Philomena's Girls' School. (Bagchi, 1998.)

Until Scottish Universities Mission Institution was a recognized as a full-fledged high school in 1922 by Calcutta University it was only the Government High School of Darjeeling that provided education up to Matriculation level to the boys of the hills. For collegiate education they had to go to Calcutta. A college of at least Intermediate level was the of the hour need. One such college grew out of the Mission High School (SUMI) of Kalimpong which was affiliated to the University of Calcutta in 1933 (Mukhia, Anmol, 2021).

By 1944, there were five high schools for boys and eight Middle English schools for them in the hills. For girls there were four high schools and three M.E. schools. In the whole district in 1944 there were 290 primary schools for boys and 19 for girls of which 120 were run by the Scottish Mission, 10 by the Roman Catholic Mission, 3 by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama and 4 by the Buddhist Mission.

### Conclusion:

The Christian missionaries had come to Darjeeling hills firstly to serve the children of the European administrators. But in their mission of direct and indirect proselytisation they consciously opened up education to reach out to the natives and pose as their liberators. Some of the missionaries might have done who were living with a range of ontological problems. But, the natives turned out to not only to be the passive recipients of ruling culture but had actively participated in it. In course of time the European Missionary groups could produce a class of indigenous missionaries who would carry their mission further even after they had left. The end result has been Indianisation of western education and Christianity – a process that continues not only in post-colonial Darjeeling hills but also in other parts of India.

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